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Practice-Based Tafsir Laboratory: An Experiential Learning Innovation in a Tahfidz Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the development, experiential learning benefits, character practice spaces, and contemporary contextual engagement of the Tafsir Laboratory at Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrohman Islamic Boarding School, Wagir, Malang—addressing initial instruction that prioritized textual transmission over critical interpretive practice. Employing a qualitative action research design, the university fieldwork practicum (PKL) team served as practitioner-researchers during a one-month implementation. Data were collected via participatory observation, semi-structured interviews with the caregiver, instructor, and students, alongside module, syllabus, and reference documentation. Findings reveal that the laboratory integrates Ulumul Qur'an—specifically *ashil wa dakhil fi tafsir* (critique of authentic versus infiltrated exegesis)—with three thematic practice models: Tafsir Book Battle, Tafsir Book Review, and Thematic Tafsir Seminars across eight contemporary themes. The



implementation (a) supported students' analytical and communicative development through experiential learning, (b) cultivated a practice space for responsibility, discipline, and openness, and (c) enabled scholarly engagement with pressing social, youth, and environmental issues. Ultimately, this study contributes an integrative model combining Ulumul Qur'an epistemology, dakhil critique, and structured thematic practice within a unified laboratory ecosystem, extending existing discourse on pesantren tafsir pedagogy.

Keyword

Ashil wa dakhil, character practice, practice-based learning, Tafsir Laboratory, thematic tafsir

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengembangan, manfaat pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman, ruang praktik karakter, serta keterlibatan kontekstual kontemporer dari Laboratorium Tafsir di Pondok Pesantren Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrohman, Wagir, Malang—sebagai upaya merespons pembelajaran awal yang berfokus pada transmisi tekstual ketimbang praktik penafsiran kritis. Menggunakan desain penelitian tindakan kualitatif, tim Praktik Kerja Lapangan (PKL) universitas bertindak sebagai peneliti-praktisi selama satu bulan implementasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan pengasuh, pengajar, dan santri, serta dokumentasi modul, silabus, dan referensi tafsir. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa laboratorium ini mengintegrasikan Ulumul Qur'an—khususnya kritik ashil wa dakhil fi tafsir (unsur shahih vs. infiltratif dalam eksegesis)—dengan tiga model praktik tematik: Tafsir Book Battle, Tafsir Book Review, dan Seminar Tafsir Tematik yang mencakup delapan tema kontemporer. Implementasi program ini (a) mendukung perkembangan kemampuan analitis dan komunikatif santri melalui siklus pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman, (b) menyediakan ruang praktik bagi nilai tanggung jawab, kedisiplinan, dan keterbukaan, serta (c) memungkinkan keterlibatan akademis dengan isu-isu sosial, remaja, dan lingkungan yang mendesak. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menyumbangkan sebuah model integratif yang menggabungkan epistemologi Ulumul Qur'an, kritik dakhil, dan praktik tematik terstruktur dalam satu ekosistem laboratorium yang padu, sekaligus memperluas diskusi mengenai pedagogi tafsir di pesantren.

Kata Kunci

Ashil wa dakhil, Laboratorium Tafsir, pembelajaran berbasis praktik, praktik karakter, tafsir tematik

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) are among the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and play a strategic role in transmitting religious values and teachings, both through formal and non-formal educational pathways. (Muthohar, 2007, pp. 15–20). Among the two broad institutional orientations of pesantren, *salaf* (classical) pesantren, which focus on the study of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), and *tahfidz pesantren*, which direct students toward memorizing the Qur'an, *tahfidz pesantren* face a distinct methodological challenge: the ability to memorize the Qur'an does not automatically entail the ability to understand the content of the memorized verses, so that students risk becoming memorizers of text without internalizing meaning (Muthohar, 2007, pp. 15–20).

Research by Nasyirudin and Al-Kattani affirms this concern, arguing that tafsir instruction is needed as a counterbalance between memorization competence and comprehension competence, so that students do not stop at the ability to read and memorize, but also comprehend the content of verses holistically and are able to practice them in daily life (Muthohar, 2007, pp. 430–432).

In practice, *tahfidz pesantren* generally instill an understanding of tafsir through the study of classical exegetical works using the sorogan method, the ustadz reads and explains a tafsir text while students take notes phrase by phrase. This approach has strengths in introducing the linguistic meaning of verses and conveying values in broad strokes, but it has not provided adequate space for students to actively engage in reading, comparing, discussing, and connecting interpretation with contemporary life issues. Izzan and Oktaviani's study on the application of the sorogan and wetonan methods to students' critical thinking ability in pesantren further confirms this tendency: such one-directional transmission methods correlate with limited space for students to independently develop critical reasoning. (Anwar, Patima, & Khairullah, 2024, pp. 123–135). It is precisely this gap between available learning models and the demand for contextualization that drives the need for innovation in tafsir teaching methods within the pesantren environment, as also emphasized by Anwar, Patima, and Khairullah in their study on the development of tafsir teaching methods in pesantren (Izzan & Oktaviani, 2022).

This complexity cannot be separated from a broader epistemological debate in contemporary Qur'anic studies. First, at the methodological level, tafsir studies in both academic and pesantren settings often become trapped within an ivory tower of scholarship, such that the resulting interpretive products lack reach and relevance to the actual problems faced by the community (Rahman, 1982, pp. 5–6). Fazlur Rahman argues that the Qur'an was not revealed merely as a static normative text, but as guidance for life (*hudan li al-nas*) that continuously engages in dialogue with a changing social reality, so that the act of interpretation must be understood as a dialectical process rather than the inheritance of a frozen meaning (Rahman, 1982, pp. 6–8). Farid Esack reinforces this argument through the notion of a hermeneutics of liberation, which holds that authentic interpretation is always born from the dialectic between the text and the social context of its reader (Esack, 1997, pp. 63–70). Second, at the pedagogical level, Kolb's framework of experiential learning shows that meaningful learning only occurs when theoretical knowledge (abstract conceptualization) is tested and reflected upon through concrete experience and active experimentation, a cycle that is absent in the conventional, one-directional sorogan model (Kolb, 2015, pp. 51–58).

Third, at the level of tafsir methodology itself, the need for students' critical capacity has become increasingly urgent given the rampant spread of religious information in digital spaces, which frequently contains dakhil elements, interpretive insertions that infiltrate exegesis through weak or fabricated reports, or through reasoning that deviates from sound methodological rules (Al-Dhahabi, 1990, pp. 15–22). Muhammad Ulinnuha argues that the ability to distinguish ashil (authentic interpretation) from dakhil (foreign insertions) in tafsir is not merely a matter of historical study, but an essential methodological competence for anyone engaging with exegetical literature amid the current torrent of information (Ulinnuha, 2019, pp. 1–1). Meanwhile, Jalaluddin al-Suyuthi, in *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*,

asserts that tafsir is the noblest of the religious sciences because its object of study is the speech of God, yet this nobility can only be attained through a thorough mastery of the methodological apparatus of Ulumul Qur'an, not through partial interpretation detached from established rules (Al-Suyuti, 2010, pp. 4–6). The complexity of these three levels, methodological, pedagogical, and epistemological-critical, indicates that the problem of tafsir learning in *tahfidz pesantren* cannot be resolved simply by replacing one method with another, but requires a learning model that systematically integrates all these dimensions.

Existing literature has explored various approaches to improving tafsir instruction across pesantren and higher education contexts. Mubarak and Romelah (2024), for instance, illustrated the potential of thematic (maudhu'i) interpretation to connect Qur'anic texts with local socio-economic realities at Ma'had Baitul Qur'an Malang, though their focus remained restricted to a single thematic issue rather than a multi-theme, sustained instructional framework. Similarly, Maya et al. (2023) highlighted thematic tafsir as a vehicle for character development using specialized textbooks in higher education; however, their instructional structure differed significantly from practice-based exegesis in a *tahfidz pesantren* requiring direct student engagement across multiple sources. Furthermore, while studies by Anwar et al. (2024) and Nasyirudin and Al-Kattani (2022) emphasized the general principles and developmental needs of pesantren tafsir curricula, they paid limited attention to how these principles translate into structured, reflective practices within actual classroom settings. Taken together, while current scholarship confirms the value of thematic and contextual learning, a noticeable pedagogical gap remains regarding how foundational Ulumul Qur'an knowledge and the critical examination of *ashil wa dakhil fi tafsir* (authentic vs. infiltrated exegesis) can be systematically connected with source comparison, analytical discussion, and public presentation within an integrated, practice-based framework.

This study addresses this gap by examining the development and implementation of a "Tafsir Laboratory" at Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrohman Islamic Boarding School, Wagir, Malang. Rather than treating contextual issues as isolated topics, the model organizes thematic exegesis across eight major domains—including theology, economics, women's status, and environmental ethics—operationalized through sixteen diverse tafsir references and three core activities: Tafsir Book Battle, Tafsir Book Review, and Thematic Tafsir Seminars. The primary contribution of this research lies not in claiming absolute novelty for these individual components, but in investigating their operational synthesis within a single laboratory-based ecosystem in a *tahfidz pesantren*. Employing a qualitative action research design, this study specifically aims to: (1) analyze the integration of Ulumul Qur'an epistemology and *dakhil* critique with practice-based thematic interpretation; (2) evaluate the emerging analytical, communicative, and source-comparison competencies among students (*santri*); and (3) explore how this collaborative framework fosters character practices—such as responsibility, discipline, and intellectual openness—while bridging classical text interpretation with pressing contemporary issues.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a reflective action research design, a variant of Participatory Action Research (PAR) that emphasizes a cycle of reflection on actions already undertaken as the basis for the reconstruction of knowledge (Siswadi & Syaifuddin,

2024). This design was chosen because the study emerged from the direct involvement of the Fieldwork Practicum (PKL) team from the Qur'anic Studies and Tafsir Program at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang in teaching Ulumul Qur'an and thematic tafsir practice for one month at the Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrohman Islamic Boarding School, Wagir, Malang, such that the researchers were positioned not as external observers but as active participants (insider-researchers) within the learning process itself (Burnes & Bargal, 2017, pp. 1–18).

The research procedure followed the four stages of PAR: (1) Planning, developing the module and thematic syllabus together with the pesantren's caregiver and the field supervisor, with primary references being *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* by al-Suyuthi, *Mawarid al-Bayan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* by Afifuddin Dimyathi, and *Metode Kritik Ad-Dakhil fit-Tafsir* by Ulinnuha, together with a compilation of sixteen classical to contemporary tafsir works in digital form as discussion material for students; (2) Acting, implementing the teaching-learning process for one month, comprising classical instruction in Ulumul Qur'an I and II and thematic tafsir practice through three learning models (Tafsir Book Battle, Tafsir Book Review, and Thematic Tafsir Presentation/Seminar); (3) Observing, participatory observation by the PKL team of classroom dynamics, student responses, and competency achievement throughout the process; and (4) Reflecting, collective post-program reflection together with the caregiver, the instructor, and the students to evaluate the entire process (Burnes & Bargal, 2017, pp. 5–8).

Data were collected through three techniques. First, participatory observation conducted throughout the implementation of the teaching-learning process, focusing on student interaction during discussion sessions, the quality of group presentations, and the dynamics of verse verification together with the tafsir instructor. Second, semi-structured interviews conducted after the program's completion (post-hoc retrospective interviews) with four purposively selected informants: the pesantren's caregiver (Ustadz Hadi Suprpto, S.H.) as the key informant on institutional policy and vision, the tafsir instructor (Kyai Muhammad Syafi' Abdillah) as the key informant on pedagogical-methodological aspects, and two students who were selected to represent variation across thematic groups and levels of participation. This retrospective interview approach is methodologically consistent with the reflecting stage of the PAR cycle, which is oriented toward the reconstruction of meaning from experiences already undergone. To mitigate recall bias, the interview process was strengthened through technique triangulation against contemporaneous documentation produced during the program's implementation. Third, documentation study of the Learning Module for Ulumul Qur'an and Thematic Tafsir Practice compiled by the PKL team together with the caregiver and ratified by the Field Supervisor (Ali Hamdan, M.A., Ph.D.), the eight-theme thematic tafsir syllabus, the list of sixteen digital tafsir works, photographic documentation of activities, and the code of conduct and operational guidelines of the Tafsir Laboratory.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), comprising data condensation (reducing interview transcripts and observation notes into thematic categories corresponding to the three research questions), data display (a cross-informant thematic matrix and syllabus table), and conclusion drawing and verification. The trustworthiness of the data was maintained through two forms of triangulation: source triangulation, by comparing the perspectives of the caregiver, the instructor, and the students on the same issue; and technique triangulation, by cross-checking interview results against participatory observation notes and instructional documents. In

addition, informal member checking was conducted, whereby summaries of interview results were confirmed with informants to ensure the accuracy of the representation of their views. The choice of this analytical method was grounded in its appropriateness to the realities of the Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrohman Islamic Boarding School as the focus of the Tafsir Laboratory program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Developing the Tafsir Laboratory as a Learning Innovation

The Qur'anic Tafsir Laboratory of the Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrohman Islamic Boarding School is a program that began operating in 2026, housed in the Mauritania Building, which is envisioned as a Qur'anic Studies and Language Laboratory serving as a center for the development of Qur'anic and language learning. The idea behind its establishment stemmed from a concern long felt by the pesantren's caregiver. As expressed by Ustadz Hadi Suprpto, S.H.:

"I have long wanted to build a Tafsir Laboratory for the Qur'an, so that the children would not merely memorize the Qur'an in terms of its wording, but also its meaning and interpretation, in line with the pesantren's vision and mission, with the hope that they would be able to contribute to society in strengthening spirituality and solving problems based on the Qur'an." (H. Suprpto, personal communication, 2026).

This statement affirms that the Tafsir Laboratory is not merely a technical response to the limitations of the sorogan method, but the embodiment of the pesantren's institutional vision to produce "cadres of leaders for the ummah" who are broadly knowledgeable and devoted to serving society (H. Suprpto, personal communication, 2026). The caregiver's methodological unease with the limitations of the sorogan method was likewise confirmed by the tafsir instructor, Kyai Muhammad Syafi' Abdillah, who explained that tafsir instruction in the pesantren has thus far been based on the sorogan method using the Tafsir al-Jalalain by Imam as-Suyuthi, and acknowledged that this involves "rather ineffective transmission of knowledge," because "the exposition of interpretation through the ijmal/global method tends to be monotonous, inducing drowsiness." (M. S. Abdillah, personal communication, 2026). This admission is methodologically significant, as it comes from the very party who has long implemented the conventional method, rather than from an outside party assessing it from a distance, thereby strengthening the validity of the need for pedagogical innovation.

When asked about the considerations behind selecting the maudhu'i (thematic) tafsir method as the basis for the Tafsir Laboratory, Ustadz Hadi Suprpto explained:

"Because the sorogan method using Tafsir al-Jalalain (ijmal) has thus far left the children unable to fully grasp tafsir, the PKL team's suggestion, if the aim is to help students understand tafsir and sharpen their critical reasoning in the contemporary era, was that the most relevant approach would be the thematic (maudhu'i) tafsir method. With this thematic method, students are confronted with a range of themes and problems that reflect the realities existing in society." (H. Suprpto, personal communication, 2026).

This choice of the maudhu'i method is consistent with the theoretical framework of Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawi, who explains that maudhu'i tafsir studies the Qur'an on the basis of

a particular theme by gathering the relevant verses and then discussing them comprehensively so as to arrive at a holistic understanding of the Qur'an's perspective on a given issue, an approach that is structurally more open to dialogue between text and context than either the tahlili (analytical, verse-by-verse) or ijmalī (global) methods (Al-Farmawī, 2005, pp. 61–66).

The curriculum development process did not proceed linearly according to the initial plan. Ustadz Hadi Suprpto confirmed that adjustments were made: "The initial plan reported to me underwent some changes as the learning process progressed, in order to accommodate the students' capacity," which subsequently led to the determination of seven foundational Ulumul Qur'an topics forming the basis of the Tafsir Laboratory: the meaning and distinction between translation, tafsir, and ta'wil; the historical development of exegesis; the significance and merits of tafsir; the classification of tafsir (by source, method, and school); the qualifications of a mufasssir (exegete); Makki-Madani (Meccan and Medinan revelation); Muhkam-Mutashabih (clear and ambiguous verses); Asbab an-Nuzul (occasions of revelation); Nasikh-Mansukh (abrogating and abrogated verses); 'Am-Khas (general and specific expressions); and Ashil wa Dakhil fi Tafsir (authentic versus infiltrated elements in exegesis) (H. Suprpto, personal communication, 2026; Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrohman Islamic Boarding School, 2026). This body of material was subsequently formalized in the Learning Module for Ulumul Qur'an and Thematic Tafsir Practice, ratified by the Field Supervisor, Ali Hamdan, M.A., Ph.D., on 3 August 2026, and now serves as the operational reference for the ongoing implementation of the Tafsir Laboratory.

The inclusion of Ashil wa Dakhil fi Tafsir as a dedicated unit of instruction represents a significant methodological decision and stands as one of the markers of this study's novelty. Unlike thematic tafsir learning models in general, which move directly into interpretive practice without first equipping students with a methodological instrument of critique, the Tafsir Laboratory deliberately places the ability to distinguish sound narrations from insertions of Israiliyyat, fabricated hadith, or interpretations influenced by sectarian bias as a prerequisite before students proceed to maudhu'i tafsir practice (Tafsir Laboratory Development Team, 2026, pp. 41–44). This responds to the increasingly urgent need for digital religious literacy, given the rapid circulation of religious content on social media whose methodological grounding is not always verified.

Overall, the findings at this stage affirm that the development of the Tafsir Laboratory is the result of synergy among three parties, the caregiver, as the holder of institutional vision; the tafsir instructor, as the party who understands the limitations of the existing method; and the PKL team, as the provider of an academic methodological framework, the entirety of which is documented in a formal instructional module, rather than remaining a merely conceptual idea without operational realization.

Practice-Based Learning as the Distinctive Strength of the Tafsir Laboratory

Tafsir instruction within the pesantren environment has long been characterized by a teacher-centered approach oriented toward the transfer of textual knowledge. This condition gives rise to an epistemological gap between knowledge about tafsir and the ability to interpret and practice it reflectively, a gap that Anwar, Patima, and Khairullah identify as a fundamental problem of tafsir instruction in pesantren generally (Anwar et al., 2024, pp. 123–

135). The Tafsir Laboratory addresses this problem by shifting the learning paradigm from the mere inheritance of texts toward the formation of measurable practical competence through direct experience, in line with Kolb's experiential learning framework: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 2015, pp. 51–58).

The implementation of practice-based learning in the Tafsir Laboratory is operationally embodied in three learning models set out in the Learning Module for Ulumul Qur'an and Thematic Tafsir Practice. First, Tafsir Book Battle, a comparative discussion model in which a single verse or theme is examined through several different tafsir works by different groups, then presented and compared in terms of the methods, orientations, and evidentiary bases employed. Second, Tafsir Book Review, an in-depth study of a single tafsir work in its entirety, covering its interpretive method, structural organization, the author's characteristics, and its sources. Third, Thematic Tafsir Presentation and Seminar, in which the facilitator provides only a theme, not a verse, so that participants themselves must identify and verify the relevant verses, thereby training independence in the process of verse searching and verification (Tafsir Laboratory Development Team, 2026, pp. 45–46). These three models are implemented on the condition that each tafsir work is studied by a minimum of one and a maximum of five participants, and that each session is led by a facilitator who acts as a moderator rather than as the primary source of content, a design that structurally shifts the locus of control in learning from the instructor to the participants.

To support these three practice models, the Tafsir Laboratory provides sixteen tafsir works in digital form, accessible to students via Google Drive. These sixteen works were deliberately selected to represent a diversity of sources, methods, and interpretive orientations, as presented in Table 1.

Category (Source/Orientation)	Tafsir Works Provided
Bi al-ma'thur (narration-based), classical	Tafsir al-Tabari (Arabic text and translation), Tafsir Ibn Kathir (translation), Tafsir al-Qurtubi (translation), Tafsir al-Baghawi
Fiqhi (legal)	Tafsir Fath al-Qadir (translation), al-Tafsir al-Munir by Wahbah al-Zuhayli (translation)
Adabi-ijtima'i (literary-social/modern)	Fi Zilal al-Qur'an by Sayyid Qutb (translation), Tafsir al-Manar by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, Tafsir al-Maraghi
Indonesian/contemporary	Tafsir Al-Mishbah by M. Quraish Shihab (translation), Tafsir Al-Azhar by Buya Hamka (translation), Tafsir Hidayatul Insan, Tafsir An-Nur
Modern tahlili (analytical)	Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir by Ibn 'Ashur
Kalami (theological)	Tafsir al-Baydawi

This diversity of works directly supports the practice of Tafsir Book Battle, in which students are presented with comparative interpretations across schools of thought and across historical periods, from classical bi al-ma'thur tafsir to contemporary Indonesian tafsir, so that learning is not confined to a single perspective, unlike the limitations of the

sorogan method with Tafsir al-Jalalain that the pesantren had previously relied upon.

The eight themes of thematic tafsir that constitute the material for Thematic Tafsir Practice were jointly developed by the Tafsir Team Coordinators (PJ) of the PKL program, the caregiver, and the tafsir instructor, as presented in Table 2.

Thematic Tafsir Theme	Number of Sub-Themes	Representative Example Verses	Session Allocation
I. Creed and Morality	11 sub-themes (gentleness and restraint from anger, trustworthiness, honesty, justice, etc.)	Q.S. Ali 'Imran 3:134; Q.S. Ash-Shura 42:37 (gentleness and restraint from anger)	1–3 sessions/sub-theme
II. Social Community Life	11 sub-themes (narratives of prophets and messengers, the social order of earlier peoples)	Q.S. Al-An'am 6:84–86 (stories of the prophets in social context)	1–3 sessions/sub-theme
III. Transactions and Economics	13 sub-themes (human resources, natural resources, business ethics, zakat and endowment, etc.)	Q.S. Al-Baqarah 2:30 (humankind and resources); Q.S. An-Nisa 4:29 (business ethics)	2 sessions/sub-theme
IV. Personal and Family Law	11 sub-themes (marriage, tranquil family life, inheritance, etc.)	Q.S. Ar-Rum 30:21 (a tranquil family built on love and mercy)	1–3 sessions/sub-theme
V. Moderate Islam	14 sub-themes (Muslim–non-Muslim relations, tolerance, jihad, etc.)	Q.S. Al-Baqarah 2:143 (moderation as a defining trait of the Qur'an)	1–3 sessions/sub-theme
VI. Interfaith Relations	9 sub-themes (tolerance, the right to build places of worship, communal harmony)	Q.S. Al-Baqarah 2:256 (religious tolerance)	1–3 sessions/sub-theme
VII. The Position and Role of Women	13 sub-themes (creation, equality, inheritance, marital discord, etc.)	Q.S. An-Nisa 4:1 (the creation of women)	1–3 sessions/sub-theme
VIII. The Environment and Ecology	5 sub-themes (stewardship of the earth, the prohibition of corruption, ecological balance)	Q.S. Al-Baqarah 2:30; Q.S. Al-An'am 6:165 (humankind as steward of the earth)	1–3 sessions/sub-theme

Source: compiled from the Learning Module for Ulumul Qur'an and Thematic Tafsir Practice, Tafsir Laboratory of the Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrahman Islamic Boarding School (2026).

This eight-theme structure demonstrates a broad scope, ranging from the personal domain (creed and morality) to the structural domain (moderation, interfaith relations, the environment), which is methodologically consistent with the principle of *maudhu'i* tafsir as an approach specifically designed to produce a comprehensive view of the Qur'an on a given issue (Al-Farmawi, 2005, pp. 61–66). Compared with the study of thematic tafsir learning at Ma'had Baitul Qur'an Malang, which focuses on a single theme (Q.S. Al-Hasyr 59:2–5 on socio-economic conditions), the Tafsir Laboratory presents a far broader thematic scale, structured into a sustainable curriculum rather than a standalone single-theme study

From the perspective of tafsir scholarship, this practice-based approach is rooted in

the tradition of tafsir tathbiqui (applied exegesis), which holds that understanding of the Qur'an must not stop at the linguistic-historical level, but must extend to an applied-transformative dimension (Mustaqim, 2010, pp. 88–92). The impact of this approach is felt directly by the students. Tasya, one of the participating students, remarked:

"I find it much easier to understand how tafsir works compared to the sorogan method I experienced before, it turns out there are many tafsir works besides Tafsir al-Jalalain, so I can compare the views of one work with another." (Tasya, personal communication, 2026).

Sigit, another student, emphasized the communicative dimension of this learning model: "We are given the space to express our own views on the content of a tafsir in our own words, so it's not only about understanding the content of the tafsir but also about sharpening our public speaking skills and building the confidence to speak in front of the class." (Sigit, personal communication, 2026). Both testimonies indicate that the comparative advantage of the Tafsir Laboratory lies not only in mastery of tafsir content, but also in the development of generic skills (communication, argumentation, self-confidence) that cannot be achieved through the sorogan method.

Kyai Muhammad Syafi' Abdillah, from the instructor's perspective, confirmed a gradual developmental curve: "In the first week, the discussion in the practice sessions did not run very well; many of the children were still hesitant in presenting their tafsir work. But in the final few weeks, the children's presentations became bolder, and they began to argue with reference to the literature." (M. S. Abdillah, personal communication, 2026). Nevertheless, he also offered an important critical note bearing on the credibility of this finding: "It is still at the learning stage, the presentations remain descriptive rather than analytical, so further improvement is needed both in delivery, in the depth of sources explored, and in the courage to challenge an opposing view." (M. S. Abdillah, personal communication, 2026). This note affirms that the improvement in students' competence is gradual and had not yet reached a mature level of critical analysis within the span of one month's implementation, meaning that the continuity of the program is an important prerequisite for fully achieving the learning objectives, a finding that is both honest and important for the academic credibility of this study, given that an idealized portrayal of success without acknowledging its limitations would risk reducing the complexity of the field reality.

The strength of this model can also be explained through constructivist learning theory, which holds that knowledge is actively built by the learner through interaction with the environment, rather than being passively transferred from the instructor (Abdullah, 2006, pp. 112–115). Within this framework, the Tafsir Laboratory functions as scaffolding that enables students to construct their understanding of tafsir gradually, contextually, and meaningfully, while simultaneously closing the gap between classroom study of tafsir and the dynamic social reality of the ummah

The Tafsir Laboratory as a Space for Character Formation

Character in Islamic education is closely tied to akhlak (moral character), which cannot be adequately formed merely through the delivery of knowledge about good and bad,

but requires a process of habituation, exemplary modeling, internalization, and application in life (Kosasih, Fahrullah, & Mahdi, 2023). The *maudhu'i* method holds great potential for character formation, because the themes studied can be tailored to the real-life concerns of students, such that a verse does not remain merely as material for study but becomes a basis for reflecting on one's own behavior (Mustaqim, 2010, pp. 88–92).

The impact of this character formation is clearly reflected in the students' personal experiences. Tasya recounted the process of value internalization she experienced after studying the theme of creed and morality:

"After learning, through the interpretation of the phrase al-kazimin al-ghayz [those who restrain their anger] in Surah Ali 'Imran, verse 134, in Tafsir Al-Mishbah, that feeling anger is an inevitable part of human nature, and that what one is commanded to restrain is the expression of that anger, such as striking, insulting, or cursing, after reading this interpretation I began trying to hold back my anger whenever it arose." (Tasya, personal communication, 2026).

Sigit offered a similar testimony, though drawing on a different source of tafsir and with a different emphasis of meaning, illustrating the authentic diversity in the process of value internalization among students:

"After reading the interpretation of Surah Ash-Shura, verse 37, in Ibn Kathir's tafsir, it became easier for me to control my anger, because according to Ibn Kathir, human nature responds to anger in one of two ways: forgiving or seeking revenge... so this verse has made it easier for me to forgive my friends when I am angry." (Sigit, personal communication, 2026).

Both testimonies illustrate a mechanism of character formation consistent with the concept of Living Qur'an, which positions the Qur'an not merely as a text that is read and interpreted, but as something present in daily life through various forms of practice and response to it (Junaedi, 2015, pp. 169–190). Within the pesantren context, the values of the Qur'an can become part of students' habits and culture of daily life, such that the Tafsir Laboratory becomes one stage that connects textual understanding with the process of bringing those values to life in behavior, as affirmed by Junaedi in his study on the typology of Qur'anic reception in pesantren (Khusna, 2021, pp. 1–12).

Ustadz Hadi Suprpto confirmed the improvement in students' communicative character at the institutional level: "Some students have shown quite significant improvement in their communication skills in conveying the meaning contained in the Qur'an," (H. Suprpto, personal communication, 2026) while Kyai Syafi' Abdillah highlighted a transformation in participatory character: "Whereas the children used to be passive during question-and-answer sessions, they have become more active and more open to tafsir literature beyond Tafsir al-Jalalain." (M. S. Abdillah, personal communication, 2026). Habituation to discussion has become one significant pathway for character formation, because in discussion, students confront differing understandings and learn to build an attitude of openness and mutual respect for those differences, they are not required to hold the same opinion, but must learn to express their views based on clear sources and reasoning.

The division of tasks within groups likewise cultivates the character of cooperation, as explained by Tasya: *"Since my group consisted of four members, I divided the tasks evenly.*

One person took notes, another studied the tafsir and the rulings it contained, another searched for supporting evidence... and another presented the results of our discussion." (Tasya, personal communication, 2026). This division indirectly trains individual responsibility along with the awareness that the quality of the group's study depends on every member carrying out their respective task. Religious character is built through the awareness of taking the Qur'an as a guide; the character of responsibility is formed through the habit of completing study tasks; discipline is trained through the process of following the stages of study in an orderly manner; while social character grows through discussion, group work, and the ability to convey ideas without demeaning others, a formulation consistent with the findings of Badiana, Wahyuningsih, and Ananda on the implementation of Qur'anic education in the formation of student character (Badiana, Wahyuningsih, & Ananda, 2025).

Nevertheless, character formation cannot be attributed solely to the Tafsir Laboratory's activities; it is more accurately viewed as one of several spaces that support this process. Character is more readily formed when the values studied in tafsir are also encountered in daily life, reinforced through the exemplary conduct of instructors and the culture of the pesantren, in line with the findings of Kosasih, Fahrullah, and Mahdi on the strengthening of character education in traditional West Javanese pesantren (Kosasih et al., 2023). Kyai Syafi' Abdillah affirmed this through his reflective note that the program's success depends on continuity of mentorship, not merely on a single cycle of instruction: "What needs to be improved is the competence of the instructors, because the available human resources become insufficient once the PKL team leaves the pesantren." (M. S. Abdillah, personal communication, 2026). This concern was likewise voiced directly by the students. Sigit conveyed a closing message affirming the need for continuity: "Please do not leave us entirely without supervision, because we still need a facilitator, someone to spark discussion, and someone to correct our understanding." (Sigit, personal communication, 2026). These messages constitute an important finding, affirming that character formation through the Tafsir Laboratory is processual in nature and vulnerable to stalling without ongoing mentorship, a critical note rarely made explicit in previous studies of tafsir learning innovation, and one of the reflective contributions of this study.

The Tafsir Laboratory as a Response to Contemporary Communal Issues

One fundamental critique directed at tafsir studies in both academic and pesantren settings is their tendency to become trapped within an ivory tower of scholarship, such that the resulting interpretive products lack reach with respect to the actual problems faced by the ummah (Rahman, 1982, pp. 5–8). The notion of tafsir as a medium of social response has its epistemological roots in the tradition of social tafsir (al-tafsir al-ijtima'i) pioneered by Muhammad Abduh through Tafsir al-Manar, one of the very works available in the Tafsir Laboratory's digital collection, which emphasizes that Qur'anic exegesis must be able to answer the real needs of society, rather than remaining a merely philological study detached from life (Shihab, 2002; Abduh & Rida, 1935.). M. Quraish Shihab, through Tafsir Al-Mishbah, which is also one of the primary references used by students as mentioned by Tasya above, affirms the importance of contextualizing the Qur'an's message so that it remains relevant in addressing the issues of the age without reducing the authenticity of its meaning (Shihab, 2013, pp. 55–60).

At least four domains of contemporary communal issues are addressed through the

eight themes of Thematic Tafsir Practice. First, religious issues, encompassing religious moderation and digital religious literacy, addressed through the themes of Moderate Islam and Interfaith Relations, and further reinforced by the material on *Ashil wa Dakhil fi Tafsir* as an instrument of counter-narrative against literal-textual interpretations that risk producing exclusivist or radical attitudes (Kementrian Agama RI, 2019, pp. 40–45). Second, socio-economic issues, addressed through the themes of Social Community Life and Transactions and Economics, in which students are trained to extract Qur'anic values relevant to the distribution of welfare and social solidarity based on the principle of social justice (*al-'adalah al-ijtima'iyah*) (Engineer, 1992, pp. 55–60). Third, family and gender issues, addressed through the themes of Personal/Family Law and the Position and Role of Women, which train students to understand family and gender relations through contextual interpretation, rather than a literalist reading that risks patriarchal bias. Fourth, environmental issues, addressed through the theme of the Environment and Ecology, which explores ecological ethics in the Qur'an (*fiqh al-bi'ah*), including the concept of *khalifah fi al-ardh* (stewardship of the earth) and the prohibition of causing corruption (*fasad*) upon it (Izzi Dien, 2000, pp. 18–27).

Operationally, the Tafsir Laboratory's mechanism for responding to communal issues can be described through the following workflow: identification of a contextual theme → verification and identification of relevant verses → comparative study across tafsir works (Tafsir Book Battle/Tafsir Book Review) → discussion and formulation of study findings → dissemination through da'wah practice or the Thematic Tafsir Presentation/Seminar. This working model positions the Tafsir Laboratory as a node connecting the three core functions of higher education, teaching, research, and community service (*tri dharma*), within a single integrated working ecosystem, in line with the notion of engaged scholarship, which holds that knowledge should not stop at the production of theory but must extend to tangible contributions to society (Boyer, 1996, pp. 11–20).

Compared with the previous studies mapped in the introduction, the distinctive position of the Tafsir Laboratory can be summarized as follows. The study of thematic tafsir learning at Ma'had Baitul Qur'an Malang demonstrates the effectiveness of the *maudhu'i* method for a single specific theme linked to socio-economic conditions (Boyer, 1996, pp. 11–20), but does not produce an institutionalized, multi-theme curriculum structure. The study on the implementation of the Tafsir Tarbawi textbook at STAI Al-Hidayah Bogor demonstrates the feasibility of character-education thematic tafsir as an academic reference (Maya, Herman, Aisyah, & Alfarisi, 2023), but its context is limited to a university course rather than a field-based learning ecosystem within a *tahfidz pesantren*. The study by Izzan and Oktaviani confirms the problem posed by the sorogan-wetonan method for students' critical reasoning, but does not offer a tested operational alternative model (Izzan & Oktaviani, 2022).

The Tafsir Laboratory of the Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrohman Islamic Boarding School bridges these three gaps simultaneously: it produces an eight-theme curriculum structure institutionalized in a formal instructional module (not merely a single theme), implemented directly within the ecosystem of a *tahfidz pesantren* through reflective action research (not a conceptual study conducted in a university classroom), and offers a concrete operational model comprising three named practice methods along with sixteen structured tafsir references (not merely a diagnosis of the problem without a tested solution). In this way, the

Tafsir Laboratory positions itself as a methodological bridge between the textual study of the Qur'an and the problematic realities of the contemporary ummah, while also serving as a model for transforming the role of tafsir scholarship in pesantren, from a merely normative discipline into one that is applied, responsive, critical of dakhil elements, and oriented toward the welfare of the ummah.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the implementation of the Tafsir Laboratory at Ihyaul Qur'an Nururrohman Islamic Boarding School, Wagir, Malang, as a practice-based innovation in Qur'anic interpretation learning. By integrating *Ulumul Qur'an*, particularly *ashil wa dakhil fi tafsir*, with three thematic practices—Tafsir Book Battle, Tafsir Book Review, and Thematic Tafsir Seminars—the model provided opportunities for students to move from predominantly passive text reception toward active interpretive engagement. The findings indicate that structured source comparison, argument analysis, and thematic presentations supported the emergence of students' analytical and communicative abilities, while providing opportunities to practice responsibility, discipline, and intellectual openness. The use of contemporary social, youth, and environmental issues also enabled students to connect Qur'anic interpretation with contexts beyond the classroom. However, given the limited one-month implementation period, the findings reflect emerging competencies rather than mature critical-interpretive mastery or sustained character development. Continued implementation and mentorship are therefore needed to consolidate the competencies initiated through the Tafsir Laboratory. Future research may examine the model over a longer period using systematic evidence to explore changes in interpretive competence, learning participation, and engagement with contemporary issues.

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