



The Qur'anic Exegesis as a Medium of Islamic Education in Indonesia: A Discourse Analysis of Tafsir Rahmat by H. Oemar Bakry

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine Tafsir Rahmat by H. Oemar Bakri as a representative work of the Nusantara exegetical tradition with a pedagogical orientation, functioning as a medium of Islamic education in the early twentieth century. The work emerged amid the dynamic efforts of Indonesian Muslims to balance the spirit of modernity with Islamic traditional values. Through communicative Malay and a simple interpretive style, Oemar Bakri presented tafsir as a means of da'wah and moral education, particularly for the younger generation. Employing critical discourse analysis and contextual hermeneutics, this study explores the linguistic, ideological, and social dimensions embedded in the text. The findings reveal that Tafsir Rahmat not only interprets Qur'anic verses but also instills Islamic educational values emphasizing moral development, social responsibility, and religious character. Its pedagogical tone highlights the role of tafsir as a living educational discourse within the social and cultural context of Indonesian Muslim society.

INTRODUCTION

The historical development of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia not only records the intellectual and religious dynamics of its time but also signifies the emergence of Islamic educational consciousness rooted in the nation's social context (Gusmian, 2015). Throughout the twentieth century, Qur'anic interpretation in the archipelago evolved beyond a mere endeavor to explain sacred texts; it became a vehicle for moral cultivation, character formation, and intellectual enlightenment of the Muslim community (Ari, 2019; Jamarudin et al., 2022). Among the significant works in the history of Indonesian exegesis is *Tafsir Rahmat* by H. Oemar Bakri Indonesian tafsir that reflects the spirit of da'wah and education during the transitional period from colonialism to independence. (Daiyan, 2021)



Oemar Bakri was a prominent scholar deeply concerned with the field of education (Hidayat, 2023). His *Tafsir Rahmat* was not written exclusively for academics but for the broader Muslim public—especially students in madrasahs and pesantrens—so they could understand the Qur'an in simple, accessible language enriched with moral and pedagogical values. In this sense, *Tafsir Rahmat* can be read as a form of *educational exegesis*, in which the meanings of the Qur'an are articulated not merely for theological contemplation but as guidance for nurturing knowledgeable, ethical, and virtuous Muslims. (Ghozali, 2021)

The idea of tafsir as a medium of education is not new within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Since the classical era, Qur'anic commentary has served as a fundamental instrument in the transmission of Islamic knowledge. However, within the Nusantara context, the pedagogical function of tafsir assumes a distinctive character contextual, communicative, and oriented toward moral awareness (Anam, 2020). As Azyumardi Azra (2013) observes, the exegetical styles in Indonesia have been shaped not only by global Islamic intellectual currents but also by the educational and social needs of Muslims striving to construct their modern national identity. In this light, *Tafsir Rahmat* stands as a part of that tradition—a text that not only explains revelation but also educates its readers to think, believe, and act ethically within the consciousness of nationhood. (Jamarudin et al., 2022)

Methodologically, the pedagogical character of *Tafsir Rahmat* is reflected in several aspects: its use of communicative language, thematic arrangement aligned with the values of *tarbiyah*, and its explanatory style that leads readers toward spiritual development and social ethics (Anisa Nilam Cahya, 2023). As Howard Federspiel noted in (Tamam, 2018) local Indonesian tafsir during this period often served as a medium of *moral education* as a form of Qur'an-based character formation deeply connected to the social realities of the ummah. Therefore, examining *Tafsir Rahmat* is crucial to understanding how Islamic educational reasoning in the early twentieth century was articulated through exegesis.

Previous studies have explored H. Oemar Bakri's tafsir from various perspectives. Scholars such as Anisa Nilam Cahya (2023), Ghozali (2021), and Rahmat et al. (2024) focus on Bakri's adaptation to the developments in science and technology in his exegetical thought. Others, including Daiyan (2021), Anwar & Hasanudin (2022), and Ismail et al. (2024), examine how *Tafsir Rahmat* responds to social, political, and local cultural dynamics—reflecting the influence of the exegete's socio-historical background. However, viewing *Tafsir*

Rahmat from a pedagogical lens offers a fresh and insightful approach. Through this perspective, the work may be read as an intellectual effort that affirms the Qur'an's role as a "teacher of civilization," instilling ethics of life, love of knowledge, and social responsibility.

Moreover, a pedagogical reading of *Tafsir Rahmat* opens space for reflection on contemporary Islamic education. In an age when education often becomes overly cognitive and detached from its spiritual essence, this tafsir offers a holistic *tarbiyah* paradigm that integrates knowledge, faith, and righteous action. Such a model reinforces the view that education in Islam is not merely an intellectual process but also the internalization of values and the formation of a Qur'anic personality (Ulum & Hasan, 2024). Thus, studying *Tafsir Rahmat* from a pedagogical perspective is not only of historical value but also offers conceptual inspiration for the renewal of Islamic education in the modern era.

Accordingly, this study seeks to trace the pedagogical character of *Tafsir Rahmat* and to map how Oemar Bakri positioned tafsir as a medium of Islamic education in early twentieth-century Indonesia. Through a historical-hermeneutical approach, this research aims to reveal the interconnections between exegetical texts, educational praxis, and the socio-religious dynamics of the period. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the discourse on the development of Nusantara exegesis and the enrichment of Islamic educational thought grounded in contextual.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach that combines contextual hermeneutics and discourse analysis. The integration of these two approaches is intended to interpret *Tafsir Rahmat* not merely as a work of religious exegesis, but as a form of Islamic educational discourse embedded in the socio-cultural context of early twentieth-century Indonesia. This approach views tafsir not simply as an individual intellectual product but as the outcome of a dialogue between the Qur'anic text, the exegete's social experience, and the realities of the society in which the interpretation emerged.

The contextual hermeneutical approach rests on the assumption that the meaning of a text cannot be detached from the social, cultural, and historical context of its interpreter (Saeed, 2016) (Rahmatullah, 2017). In this regard, *Tafsir Rahmat* is examined as the result of Oemar Bakri's engagement with the realities of Islamic education during the colonial period

a time when Indonesian Muslims sought an educational model consistent with Qur'anic values yet responsive to the demands of modernity.

Through this approach, the research seeks to uncover the *horizon of meaning* that shapes the tafsir: how Oemar Bakri interprets Qur'anic verses on knowledge, ethics, and morality within the framework of a transforming Muslim society. The analysis focuses on identifying the pedagogical motivations behind his interpretations and the educational values implicitly embedded in his exegetical discourse.

Contextual hermeneutics enables the researcher to read *Tafsir Rahmat* as a dialogue between divine revelation and colonial social reality, where tafsir functions as an instrument for cultivating both religious and national consciousness. As Gadamer argues, understanding is not a solitary act of an individual mind but a historical process that involves an encounter between past traditions and present contexts (Judhananto & Sitorus, 2025). Accordingly, the analysis does not stop at textual explanation but traces the meanings that emerge from the interaction between the text, the interpreter, and the community. (Rahmatullah, 2017)

Meanwhile, discourse analysis is employed to examine how Oemar Bakri constructs a narrative of Islamic education through the language of his tafsir. Discourse here is understood as a form of social practice—a means through which tafsir produces and disseminates particular values within society (Hamad, 2007).

The analysis focuses on linguistic structures, writing style, lexical choices, and rhetorical devices used by Oemar Bakri to communicate his educational message. For instance, expressions such as *ajaran* (teachings), *akhlak mulia* (noble character), *amal saleh* (righteous deeds), and *ilmu yang bermanfaat* (useful knowledge) are not only religious in meaning but also convey pedagogical and ethical values intended to shape readers' moral awareness.

Through this dual approach, the research traces how tafsir operates as a discursive practice that constructs the collective consciousness of Muslims regarding the importance of education and moral cultivation. In other words, discourse analysis helps reveal the performative function of tafsir how the exegetical text teaches, advises, and guides society through its rhetorical power.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Tafsir Rahmat in the Landscape of Early 20th Century Islamic Education

The Tafsir Rahmat by H. Oemar Bakry emerged during a period when the discourse on Islamic education in Indonesia particularly in West Sumatra was undergoing a fundamental transformation (Qadafi et al., 2024). The early twentieth century marked an era of intellectual awakening and nationalism, during which Islamic educational institutions such as *pesantren*, *madrasah*, and *surau* began to reform their teaching methods and curricula (Rahman, 2015). At that time, Islamic education in Indonesia was experiencing a significant phase of transition and modernization. The traditional *pesantren* system, which had long dominated, still employed classical teaching methods such as *sorogan* and *bandongan*, focusing primarily on the study of the Qur'an, *fiqh*, *nahwu*, *sharaf*, and *tasawwuf* without integrating general sciences. However, this period also witnessed the rise of modern *madrasah* institutions that adopted an integrative curriculum combining religious and secular knowledge.

This development coincided with the emergence of religious organizations that emphasized educational reform, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah (Drajat, 2018). Within this context, Oemar Bakry's work functioned not merely as a religious exegesis but also as an educational instrument aimed at shaping a rational, moral, and contextual Islamic worldview.

Historically, *Tafsir Rahmat* appeared in a Muslim society striving to balance modernity and tradition (Ghozali, 2021). Through its simple and communicative language, Oemar Bakry presented tafsir as a medium of da'wah and learning for ordinary Muslims, particularly the younger generation (Hidayat et al., 2023). His interpretive style reflected a desire to make the Qur'an a living text of moral education within society. He approached Qur'anic verses in a pedagogical manner that emphasized ethics, social responsibility, and character formation.

In this regard, *Tafsir Rahmat* reinforces the view that Islamic education is not merely a transfer of knowledge but a holistic process of *insān kāmil*. This aligns with Syamsuddin's (2020) assertion that the Qur'an and its commentaries in the Indonesian archipelago often embody a pedagogical function, where the exegete acts as a *mu'allim* (educator) guiding society to understand the Qur'an's moral message within their social context. It was within such a social and intellectual milieu that Oemar Bakry composed *Tafsir Rahmat*, a work that seeks to bridge Qur'anic values with the educational needs of a community undergoing cultural and intellectual transition. Through his simple and accessible style, Bakry presented

tafsir not only as a theological text but also as an instrument of moral education and *da'wah*, particularly for the youth as the future of the Muslim ummah.

One of the distinctive features of *Tafsir Rahmat* is its pedagogical character, which integrates cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions in each verse interpretation. Bakry did not merely explain the lexical meaning of the Qur'anic text but also conveyed moral lessons applicable to daily life. His style of exposition was dialogical resembling a teacher conversing with students or congregants.

For instance, in his interpretation of Surah al-Baqarah (2:3):

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

"Who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them".

Bakry (1984) emphasizes the importance of moral education and self-restraint, rooted in faith in the unseen belief in God, angels, the Day of Judgment, heaven, and hell. Proper worship, such as sincere prayer (*ṣalāh*), fosters strong moral character and noble conduct (*akhlāq karīmah*) that manifest in familial and social relations. He argues that faith without moral education leads to superficial piety, while education without a foundation of faith loses its spiritual direction. This illustrates the integration of spiritual and ethical dimensions characteristic of Islamic education in the Indonesian world.

Moreover, Bakry's tafsir demonstrates a rational tendency. He encouraged readers to approach the Qur'an through logical and reflective reasoning. This attitude reflects the influence of Islamic reformist thought, notably that of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, whose ideas reached Indonesia through transnational intellectual networks. Bakry's admiration for Abduh is explicitly stated in the preface of *Tafsir Rahmat*, where he credits Abduh through *Tafsir al-Manar* with awakening the Muslim world to its dignity by returning to the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Bakry, 1984). Abduh's intellectual movement sought to break the stagnation of Islamic thought through broader *ijtihād*, extending beyond mere nostalgia for past Islamic glory (Muliati et al., 2020). Thus, *Tafsir Rahmat* can be regarded as an early representation of an educational model of tafsir, emphasizing the harmony between faith and reason.

For example, when explaining Surah al-Baqarah (2:29):

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا

“It is He who created for you all that is on earth”. Bakry notes that the world was created for humankind, especially for those who believe and are pious. Therefore, Muslims must enhance their scientific and technological capacities to optimize the blessings of the earth. He urges Muslims to become pioneers of progress, recalling the era when Islamic civilization served as a teacher to the West. This, he asserts, should inspire Muslims to reclaim their historical greatness (Bakry, 1984).

Furthermore, Bakry underscores the scientific dimension of the Qur’an, arguing that Islam commands intellectual and technological literacy. Interpreting Surah al-Baqarah (2:30–34), he highlights the Qur’anic narrative of Adam’s creation as evidence of the centrality of knowledge: Adam’s ability to name things granted him superiority over the angels. Thus, he concludes that nations mastering knowledge will inevitably lead the world (Bakry, 1984).

The pedagogical nature of this tafsir is also evident in its illustrative style. Bakry frequently employs familiar social proverbs such as *“a wolf in sheep’s clothing”* or *“an enemy within”* to explain the characteristics of hypocrites mentioned in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:8–16) (Bakry, 1984). This rhetorical strategy reveals his understanding of tafsir not merely as a theological discourse but as a practical educational medium that resonates with the everyday lives of ordinary Muslims.

Tafsir as a Medium of Islamic Education and Character Formation

Oemar Bakry viewed the Qur’an as an eternal book of education. Through *Tafsir Rahmat*, he emphasized that true education must be rooted in divine values with the aim of shaping knowledgeable and virtuous human beings. He asserted that knowledge without ethics leads to arrogance, while ethics without knowledge results in the loss of intellectual direction.

In the colonial context, this idea carried profound significance. Islamic education during that period was not merely a means of transmitting knowledge but also a form of cultural resistance against Western hegemony, which separated knowledge from moral values. By positioning tafsir as an educational medium, Oemar Bakry reaffirmed the Qur’an’s role as a source of national character formation grounded in Islamic spirituality and ethics.

When interpreting verse 15 of *Surat al-Nisā’*:

وَالَّذَانِ يَأْتِيَنَّهَا مِنْكُمْ فَادَّوْهُمَا فَإِنْ تَابَا وَأَصْلَحَا فَأَعْرَضُوا عَنْهُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا

“And those women who commit lewd acts (fornication or homosexuality), summon four witnesses among you. If they testify, confine them to their houses until death takes them or Allah ordains another way”.

Bakry explained that this verse addresses the punishment for immoral acts such as fornication and homosexuality, which, he observed, were becoming increasingly widespread. He connected this with *Surat al-Isrā'* (17:32), which explicitly forbids approaching adultery, emphasizing that all acts leading toward such immorality must be avoided.

Bakry attributed the normalization of illicit relationships and immoral conduct to the pervasive influence of Western culture, which promoted a lifestyle contrary to Eastern and Islamic values. He cited data from *Berita Buana* (February 5, 1983), reporting that 70% of young women had given birth before marriage and that divorce rates nearly equaled marriage rates with California recording 111,162 divorces out of 173,653 marriages. (Bakry, 1984)

For this reason, Bakry underscored that Islam serves to protect believers from moral degradation and warned Muslims not to be swept away by Western cultural currents. Interestingly, he also noted that some Westerners, weary of moral decay, had begun to turn toward Islam in search of its noble values. (Bakry, 1984)

Furthermore, the pedagogical approach developed in *Tafsir Rahmat* demonstrates that Islamic education cannot be separated from its social context. (Ismail et al., 2024) Oemar Bakry positioned the exegete as a community educator whose duty is to guide the faithful toward balanced religious and social awareness. This educational orientation makes *Tafsir Rahmat* not merely a religious commentary, but also a living archive of Islamic educational thought within Indonesia's intellectual history.

The Pedagogical Relevance of *Tafsir Rahmat* for Contemporary Islamic Education

In the context of modern Islamic education, Oemar Bakry's ideas remain profoundly relevant. His principle of maintaining balance between reason and faith, as well as between knowledge and morality, serves as a vital foundation for building a humanistic Islamic education system oriented toward character formation. As with Muhammad Abduh whose reformist thought deeply influenced Bakry's intellectual framework renewal (*tajdid*) in all dimensions of Islamic life was deemed essential, especially during the late nineteenth century when much of the Muslim world was still under colonial rule. (Usman & Umar, 2021)

Modern Islamic education, therefore, must integrate the spiritual values of the Qur'an with the needs of contemporary society. As Jaelani (Jaelani, 2023) notes, modern

communities require a spirit of modernization in religious behavior, including within Islamic education itself. In this regard, *Tafsir Rahmat* offers valuable inspiration for designing value-based Islamic curricula, as it embodies a systematic effort to connect knowledge, morality, and humanity.

Moreover, in the context of twenty-first century education where critical thinking is a defining characteristic of learning—there is a pressing need to cultivate such intellectual capacity in a manner that is both accessible and meaningful. (Halim, 2022) Critical thinkers, according to Bailin et al. (1999) possess intellectual resources such as background knowledge, operational understanding of standards, mastery of key concepts, effective heuristics, and vital habits of thought.

On the other hand, Musthofa and Ali (2021) emphasize that the culture of Islamic education consists of beliefs, values, deep reflections, understandings, and expectations drawn from the essence of Islamic teachings serving as a guide for behavior and for solving internal and external challenges. In this light, H. Oemar Bakry, through his tafsir, sought to demonstrate how Muslims must employ critical reasoning in all aspects of life not only in social and intellectual matters, but also in their religious understanding.

The pedagogical orientation of *Tafsir Rahmat* further highlights the importance of a communicative approach in education, where teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge but facilitators of self-awareness and social responsibility among learners. This represents a pedagogical model of tafsir that revitalizes the Qur'anic spirit within the educational sphere.

CONCLUSION

The study of *Tafsir Rahmat* by H. Oemar Bakry reveals that this work is not merely a religious text intended to explain the meanings of Qur'anic verses, but also a significant medium of Islamic education that played a crucial role in shaping the religious consciousness of Indonesian Muslims in the early twentieth century. Through a communicative, narrative, and morally infused interpretive style, Oemar Bakry presents tafsir as a pedagogical tool for instilling ethical values, moral virtues, and social responsibility.

In its historical context, the emergence of *Tafsir Rahmat* represents the creative endeavor of the Nusantara scholars in bridging the normative teachings of the Qur'an with the educational realities of a postcolonial society undergoing transformation. Oemar Bakry's

interpretations demonstrate a deep awareness of the importance of education as an instrument of both social and spiritual transformation. This is evident in his emphasis on the values of knowledge, righteous deeds, and morality, as well as his conviction that learning constitutes both an act of worship and a means toward the realization of the *insān kāmil* (the complete human being).

This research shows that local tafsirs such as *Tafsir Rahmat* played an essential role in shaping the landscape of Islamic education in Indonesia. The tafsir reflects the intellectual dynamism of the Nusantara *ulama* who sought to present the Qur'an as a contextual and grounded guide for life. From a pedagogical perspective, *Tafsir Rahmat* affirms that Islamic education does not occur solely within formal institutions, but also through religious texts that guide readers to understand, internalize, and embody the values of the Qur'an.

Looking ahead, further studies on *Tafsir Rahmat* could be expanded by comparing its pedagogical characteristics with other contemporary works such as *Tafsir al-Azhar* by Hamka or *Tafsir an-Nur* by Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy to trace the continuity of the educational tafsir tradition in Indonesia. Additionally, more in-depth research on public reception of this tafsir would be valuable to understand the extent to which its educational values influenced the religious practices of Muslims during that period.

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