

ABDULLAH SAEED'S CONTEXTUAL APPROACH TO QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION: EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CONCEPTUAL MAPPING

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Abstract: *This study explores the epistemological foundations of Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics within contemporary Qur'anic studies. In the twenty-first century, the growing demand to relate the Qur'an to changing social, ethical, and legal realities has made context-sensitive interpretation an important scholarly concern. Building upon and extending Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory, Saeed introduces a contextual connector through a structured hierarchy of values that mediates between the historical meaning of the text and its contemporary application. This research employs a systematic conceptual mapping of Saeed's interpretive framework, with primary reference to *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* and *Reading the Qur'an in the 21st Century*. The findings indicate that Saeed offers several significant theoretical contributions, including refining interpretive stages, articulating ideal moral values, and classifying Qur'anic values hierarchically to guide contextual reasoning. This study reconstructs Saeed's four-stage interpretive process into a simplified and integrative conceptual model that clarifies the epistemological relationship among text, interpreter, context, and application. Overall, Saeed's framework reflects a coherent epistemological architecture that integrates sources of knowledge, methodological principles, and criteria of interpretive validity to support responsible and contextually grounded Qur'anic interpretation in contemporary Muslim societies. The coherence of the four stages of contextual interpretation constitutes a central element of Saeed's epistemological validity; the omission of any stage would undermine the internal consistency of the method and consequently weaken its interpretive legitimacy. This study also identifies a reconstructed interpretive framework presented as a conceptual map.*

Keywords: *Abdullah Saeed, Conceptual Mapping, Contextual Qur'anic Interpretation, Epistemology.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini merupakan upaya mengkaji fondasi epistemologi hermeneutika

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kontekstual Abdullah Saeed dalam kerangka studi Al-Qur'an kontemporer. Pada abad ke-21, meningkatnya kebutuhan untuk mengaitkan Al-Qur'an dengan dinamika sosial, etika, dan hukum modern menjadikan penafsiran yang sensitif terhadap konteks sebagai perhatian penting dalam kajian akademik. Dengan merekonstruksi ulang serta mengembangkan teori *double movement* Fazlur Rahman, Saeed berhasil menghasilkan kerangka baru yang lebih rinci dalam interpretasi Al-Qur'an. Ia menghadirkan penghubung kontekstual melalui penyusunan hierarki nilai yang berfungsi menjembatani antara makna historis teks dan penerapannya dalam konteks kekinian. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode pemetaan konseptual sistematis terhadap kerangka penafsiran Saeed dengan merujuk pada *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* dan *Reading the Qur'an in the 21st Century*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Saeed memberikan sejumlah kontribusi teoretis penting, antara lain penyempurnaan tahapan penafsiran, perumusan nilai moral ideal secara eksplisit, serta klasifikasi hierarkis nilai-nilai Al-Qur'an sebagai pedoman dalam penalaran kontekstual. Penelitian ini juga berupaya merekonstruksi model penafsiran empat tahap Saeed ke dalam skema konseptual yang lebih sederhana dan integratif sehingga memperjelas hubungan epistemologis antara teks, penafsir, konteks, dan penerapan. Secara keseluruhan, kerangka Saeed menunjukkan arsitektur epistemologi yang koheren yang mencakup sumber pengetahuan, metode, serta validitas penafsiran yang mendukung pemahaman Al-Qur'an yang bertanggung jawab dan relevan dengan realitas kontemporer. Selain itu, koherensi empat langkah tafsir kontekstual menjadi aspek validitas epistemologis Saeed. Jika salah satu dari keempat langkah ini dihilangkan, maka akan membuat metode tafsir kontekstual Saeed kehilangan koherensi yang berimplikasi pada hilangnya validitas tafsir. Penelitian ini juga menghasilkan peta konsep untuk memudahkan bagaimana tahapan penafsiran bisa digambarkan.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Abdullah Saeed, Epistemologi, Interpretasi Al-Qur'an Kontekstual, Peta Konseptual.*

Introduction

Interpretation, as a process of understanding and constructing meaning, is shaped by diverse epistemological orientations and methodological configurations.¹ In engaging a text, an interpreter may draw upon textual and linguistic modes of knowledge (*bayānī*); at other times, intuitive and experiential insight (*'irfānī*); and at yet other moments, rational reasoning (*burhānī*) in analyzing contextual realities.² These epistemic instruments are used to negotiate the relationship between emerging issues and changing circumstances,³ including considerations of time, place, patterns of thought, social structures, political conditions, and other interrelated factors in a holistic manner.⁴

Among the diverse modes of interpretation, contextual interpretation occupies a prominent and comprehensive position in addressing the complexities

1 Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran* (London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 7.

2 Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, *Bunyah al-'Aql al-'Arabī: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah Naqdīyyah li-Naẓmi Ma'rifati fī Thaqaḥ al-'Arabīyyah* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsah al-Waḥdat al-'Arabīyyah, 2009), 250.

3 Hadi Yasin, "Mengenal Metode Penafsiran al-Quran," *Tahdzib Al-Akblaq: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 1 (2020): 34–51, <https://doi.org/10.34005/tahdzib.v3i1.826>.

4 Muhammad Barir, "Peta Maqashid Asy-Syariah dalam Hermeneutika Kontekstual Abid Al Jabiri," *Rausyan Fikri Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023): 84–103, <https://doi.org/10.62283/rjij.v1i2.7>. 85.

of contemporary society and its multifaceted realities.⁵ This significance has contributed to the widespread adoption, further development, and critical examination of contextual interpretive models proposed by scholars such as Fazlur Rahman and Abdullah Saeed.⁶ A substantial body of scholarship has employed Rahman's double-movement method to identify ideal moral values, conceptualized as *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*.⁷ This method has continued to evolve, most notably through the work of Abdullah Saeed, who further systematized and reformulated Rahman's approach.⁸ In this process of development, Rahman's method, as rearticulated by Saeed, undergoes notable shifts in both paradigmatic orientation and epistemological structure.⁹

Abdullah Saeed also adopted and further developed a key emphasis found in the thought of Naṣr Ḥamed Abū Zayd. He is likewise a significant figure in contemporary Qur'anic studies.¹⁰ Abu Zayd popularized the concept of *maghza*, which serves as a foundational framework for uncovering the text's contextual meaning.¹¹

As a branch of the philosophy of knowledge, epistemology is essential for understanding the historical variability of interpretive practices.¹² By focusing on sources of knowledge, methodological reasoning, and standards of validity, epistemology offers insight into both the intellectual disposition of interpreters and the broader traditions within which interpretations are produced.¹³ As articulated in *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, epistemology is understood as the architecture of knowledge, encompassing the identification of foundational sources, the deployment of inductive and deductive

5 Muhammad Hatta, "Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Restructures of The Qur'an," *International Journal of Islamic Thought and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2023): 47–55, <https://doi.org/10.54298/ijith.v2i1.56>. 47.

6 Sun Choirol Ummah, "Metode Tafsir Kontemporer Abdullah Saeed," *Humanika* 18, no. 2 (2019): 126–42, <https://doi.org/10.21831/hum.v18i2.29241>. 133.

7 Kharis Nugroho et al., "The Influence of Hermeneutics in Double Movement Theory: Critical Analysis of Fazlurrahman's Interpretation Methodology," *QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies* 2, no. 3 (2023): 275–89, <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v2i3.2531>.

8 Nugroho et al., "The Influence of Hermeneutics in Double Movement Theory: Critical Analysis of Fazlurrahman's Interpretation Methodology," 275–89.

9 Abdul Mustaqim, *Epistemologi Tafsir Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2007).

10 Muhammad Saekul Mujahidin, "Hermeneutika Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd dalam Metode Perkembangan Tafsir Modern," *Jurnal Al-Mubarak: Jurnal Kajian Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 8, no. 1 (2023): 25–42, <https://doi.org/10.47435/al-mubarak.v8i1.1791>.

11 Muhammad Yaufi Nur Mutiullah, "Seeing Islam as a Social Fact: Hermeneutic Approach to the Quran in Abu Zayd's Thought," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 12, no. 1 (2023): 41–56, <https://doi.org/10.15408/quhas.v12i1.31372>.

12 Hasiolan, "Epistemologi Hermeneutika dalam Wacana Tafsir," *El-Adabi: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 1 (2023): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.59166/el-adabi.v2i1.17>.

13 Moh. Nor Ichwan and Auwal Salisu, "Reevaluating Qur'anic Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis Between Classical Tafsir and Modern Hermeneutical Approaches," *Kalam* 18, no. 2 (2024): 107–26, <https://doi.org/10.24042/kalam.v18i2.24213>.

methods, and justificatory strategies for assessing truth claims within the limitations of human cognition. Coherent justification,¹⁴ supported by evidential reasoning, constitutes one of the most widely employed approaches.¹⁵

The relevance of epistemology to Qur'anic interpretation arises from the distinction between the Qur'an as divine revelation and tafsir as a human intellectual endeavor.¹⁶ As a product of human reasoning, tafsir is inevitably shaped by the cultural, temporal, and spatial contexts in which it is produced.¹⁷ Several studies have explored the epistemology of Qur'anic interpretation, including Murtadha Muthahhari's *Mas'ale-ye Shenokht* and Abdul Mustaqim's doctoral research on epistemological shifts in contemporary tafsir, as well as subsequent studies by Kerwanto and Abd. Aziz Faiz.

Abdul Mustaqim's *Pergeseran Epistemologi Tafsir* adopts a comparative study of Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Shahrur to outline the defining features of contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. The study argues that interpretive change unfolds through a paradigmatic shift from formative and affirmative stages to a reformative phase, accompanied by a movement from quasi-critical and ideological reasoning toward a critical mode of interpretation.¹⁸

Subsequently, Kerwanto's study, entitled *Epistemology of Mullā Ṣadrā's Qur'anic Interpretation*, highlights the distinctive character of Islamic epistemology, particularly in relation to the interpretation of its sacred text. In contrast to dominant strands of Western epistemology, which tend to privilege rationality, Mullā Ṣadrā's epistemological framework integrates multiple sources and instruments of knowledge, including nature, reason, textual authority, and intuitive insight guided by the heart.¹⁹

Finally, Abd. Aziz Faiz examines Abdullah Saeed's contextual Qur'anic interpretation in his study entitled *The Epistemology of Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Interpretation of the Qur'an within Contemporary Socio-Cultural Change*. This research seeks to trace and interpret the four stages of meaning-making proposed by Abdullah Saeed, situating them within the dynamics of contemporary social and cultural transformation.²⁰

14 Mahammad Ayvazov, "Toward a Phase Epistemology: Coherence, Response and the Vector of Mutual Uncertainty," SSRN Scholarly Paper no. 5250197 (Social Science Research Network, April 22, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5250197>.

15 Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002), 317.

16 Thoriq Aziz Jayana, "Model Interpretasi Alquran dalam Pendekatan Tafsir Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed," *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 3, no. 1 (2019): 37, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v3i1.612>. 41.

17 Nuraini Nuraini et al., "From Textual to Contextual: Contemporary Islamic Thinker Abdullah Saeed on Qur'anic Exegesis," *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu'ashirah* 21, no. 1 (2024): 32, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jim.v21i1.19639>. 46.

18 Mustaqim, *Epistemologi Tafsir Kontemporer*, 41–69.

19 Kerwanto Kerwanto, "Epistemologi Tafsir Mulla Ṣadrā," *Jurnal Theologia* 30, no. 1 (2019): 23–50, <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2019.30.1.3238>. 47.

20 Abd Aziz Faiz, "Epistemologi Tafsir Al-Qur'an Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed dalam

While previous studies have addressed epistemology in Qur'anic interpretation, and Abd. Aziz Faiz has specifically examined the epistemology of Abdullah Saeed's contextual tafsir. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to construct a conceptual mapping of Saeed's interpretive framework. Rather than limiting itself to a surface-level analysis of the interpretive stages outlined in Saeed's two major works, this research traces the epistemological presuppositions underlying his hermeneutics to account for the formulation of these stages systematically.

Building on this body of scholarship, the originality of the present study lies in its effort to formulate a conceptual map of Abdullah Saeed's contextual Qur'anic interpretation, grounded in epistemological analysis. Rather than limiting the discussion to a surface reading of the interpretive stages outlined in Saeed's two major works, this study traces the epistemological presuppositions that shape his hermeneutical reasoning. One of the principal contributions of this research is the systematic construction of a conceptual map, which will be elaborated in the findings section, illustrating how Saeed's four stages of contextual interpretation are formulated, interconnected, and theoretically justified within his epistemological framework. Abdullah Saeed has exerted a significant influence in interpreting the Qur'an for contemporary global contexts, bridging the gap between tradition and modernity through a systematic contextual connector.²¹

This study employs a qualitative library-based research design, in which written texts constitute the primary data for analysis. The research focuses on reconstructing epistemological arguments through critical reading, comparison, and coherence analysis of primary and secondary sources. Accordingly, the analytical process moves from textual description toward conceptual grounded knowledge claims through systematic interpretation and critical evaluation. The process of library-based inquiry follows a hierarchical structure of knowledge production, moving from raw data to information, opinion, and finally knowledge.²²

The primary data sources of this research consist of Abdullah Saeed's major works on Qur'anic interpretation, particularly *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* and *Reading the Qur'an in the 21st Century*.²³ These texts are treated as the main corpus for reconstructing Saeed's epistemological assumptions and interpretive framework. Secondary data include scholarly works on epistemology, hermeneutics, and contemporary Qur'anic studies, which function as comparative and contextual references.

The processes of data exploration and formulation outlined above are employed

Arus Perubahan Sosial-Budaya Masyarakat Kontemporer," *Empirisma: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Kebudayaan Islam* 33, no. 2 (2024): 271–90, <https://doi.org/10.30762/empirisma.v33i2.2019.280>.

21 Nabila Fajriyanti Muhyin, "The Concepts of Contextual Interpretation of the Qur'an Abdullah Saeed," *Tanzil: Jurnal Studi Al-Quran* 6, no. 1 (2023): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.20871/tjsq.v6i1.289>.

22 Thomas Mann, *The Oxford Guide to Library Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xix.

23 Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1.

as the analytical framework for examining Abdullah Saeed's epistemology of contextual hermeneutics. In operational terms, this study focuses on three interrelated domains that constitute the core scope of epistemological inquiry. As articulated in *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, epistemology—conceived as the architecture of knowledge—encompasses, first, the identification of original grounds or foundational sources of knowledge. Second, it involves employing inductive or deductive methods, along with the systematic development of their analytical steps. Third, it addresses the problem of justification, namely, how truth claims are validated under the inherent limitations of human knowledge. One significant mode of epistemic justification emphasized in this study is coherence reasoning, supported by evidentiary consistency and intertextual corroboration.²⁴

This study employs an epistemological analytical framework to examine Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics of the Qur'an. The framework is developed through systematic library research and is designed to reconstruct the epistemic foundations underlying Saeed's interpretive model, rather than merely describing its procedural stages. Accordingly, the analysis operates across three interrelated epistemological domains.

First, the framework investigates the original grounds of knowledge that inform Saeed's hermeneutical approach, including his assumptions about the nature of revelation, meaning, and historical context. This dimension seeks to uncover the pre-understandings and intellectual traditions that shape Saeed's interpretive orientation.

Second, the framework analyzes the methodological dimension of Saeed's hermeneutics, focusing on the use of inductive and deductive reasoning and how these modes are operationalized in the interpretive process. This includes examining how textual analysis, historical contextualization, and ethical reasoning are systematically integrated within his interpretive stages.

Third, the framework addresses the justificatory dimension of knowledge, namely, how interpretive conclusions are validated within the limits of human understanding. In this regard, epistemic justification is examined through a coherence lens, emphasizing consistency between textual evidence, contextual analysis, and normative-ethical considerations.

By integrating these three dimensions, the analytical framework enables a conceptual mapping of Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics. This mapping constitutes one of the primary contributions and novelties of the present study and will be elaborated further in the findings section.

The Epistemological Foundations of Abdullah Saeed's Qur'anic Interpretation

Epistemology encompasses the study of sources, methods, and validity. In the study of exegetical thought, epistemology can capture the distinctive character of

²⁴ Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 317.

an interpreter.²⁵ One way to do this is to analyze exegetical works using these three fundamental frameworks. In his interpretation of the Qur'an, Abdullah Saeed grounds his hermeneutical approach in contextual analysis that is closely linked to linguistic and social theories.²⁶

***Burbānī* as a Source of Knowledge in Abdullah Saeed's Epistemology**

Employing al-Jābirī's epistemological typology, Saeed's interpretive orientation is predominantly *burbānī*,²⁷ particularly evident in his effort to formulate a hierarchy of values encompassing social moral values, enduring universal values,²⁸ and context-specific applied values. This rational-analytical orientation reflects Saeed's systematic attempt to derive ethical meaning through reasoned engagement with both text and context.²⁹ At the same time, drawing on Murtaḍha Muthahhari's epistemological perspective,³⁰ Saeed incorporates historical knowledge as a significant source of interpretation.³¹ He integrates contemporary contexts with historical circumstances of revelation, thereby treating historical events not merely as background information but as epistemic resources that actively inform the interpretive process. This integration demonstrates that Saeed's epistemology is not confined to rational analysis but is enriched by historical consciousness, bridging past and present contexts.³²

Historical knowledge constitutes a robust foundational source for Saeed's epistemology. This perspective aligns with his understanding of the Qur'an, which he asserts encompasses significant historical dimensions.³³ Consistently, Saeed identifies four general thematic orientations of the Qur'an: addressing transcendent matters (*ghayb*); focusing on historical records; conveying lessons

25 Muhammad Alwi Hs, "Epistemologi Tafsir: Mengurai Relasi Filsafat dengan Al-Qur'an," *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 21, no. 1 (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.22373/substantia.v21i1.4687>.

26 Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006), 126.

27 Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri, *The Formation of Arab Reason: Text, Tradition and the Construction of Modernity in the Arab World* (London: I. B. Tauris and Co, 2011), 159.

28 M. Solahudin, "Membincang Pendekatan Kontekstualis Abdullah Saeed dalam Memahami al-Qur'an," *QOF 2*, no. 1 (2018): 50–64, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v2i1.499>. 52.

29 Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 126.

30 Murtaḍha Muthahhari, *Teori Pengetahuan: Catatan Kritis atas Berbagai Isu Kontemporer*, trans. Muhammad Jawad Bafaqih (Jakarta: Sadra Press, 2019), 68.

31 Ridhoul Wahidi, "Aplikasi Hermeneutika Kontekstual al-Qur'an Aabdullah Saeed," *AL ITQAN: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 2, no. 1 (2016): 19–36, <https://doi.org/10.47454/itqan.v2i1.17>. 35.

32 Rifqatul Husna and M. Rofiqur Rahman, "Dari Struktur Bahasa ke Makna Kontekstual: Analisis Struktural-Linguistik atas Metodologi Tafsir Abdullah Saeed," *Jurnal Keislaman* 8, no. 2 (2025): 546–61, <https://doi.org/10.54298/jk.v8i2.688>.

33 Abdullah Saeed, "Some Reflections on the Contextualist Approach to Ethico-Legal Texts of the Quran," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 71, no. 2 (2008): 221–37, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X08000517>.

through parables; and guiding beliefs, values, and practices in everyday life.³⁴ Although not all major themes of the Qur'an are directly human-centered—such as those related to law and social relations—and many verses address transcendent and metaphysical subjects, Saeed is more inclined to focus on their adaptability to changing contexts. Through his approach, he connects Qur'anic meaning to socio-historical realities, allowing both normative and transcendent themes to be understood in relation to the evolving conditions of human life. For this reason, Saeed holds a distinct perspective on several concepts within *'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, such as *nāsikh* and *mansūkh*.³⁵ He argues that the presence of *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* reinforces the view that God provides facilitation (*taysīr*) for humanity through changing contexts.³⁶

Departing from the aforementioned arguments, three primary foundations elucidate the *burhānī* epistemological framework within Abdullah Saeed's school of thought:

First is rational-analytic grounding, in which Abdullah Saeed explicitly explains how to position the relationship between the *kalamullāh* (the Word of God) and its interpretation. According to him, the interpretations of the Companions, the Successors (*tābi'ūn*), and early Muslim scholars are distinct from revelation itself. As such, they remain open to critical dialectical engagement and should not be treated as absolute or final meanings. It is at this point that the rational dimension of exegetical critique becomes evident: interpretation is subject to ongoing critical evaluation so that its meanings may remain dynamically relevant across changing contexts.³⁷

The second is socio-historical grounding, in which Abdullah Saeed places particular emphasis on the role of socio-historical contexts in interpretation. He argues that a socio-historical grounding is vital to both explaining and contextualizing the emergence of revelation in the 7th-century Hijaz. This process has undergone various social shifts over time, leading to new interpretations within the contemporary context. For Saeed, the study of socio-historical aspects is the key to understanding the relationship between revelation and the dynamics of an ever-changing societal reality.³⁸

The third is ethical grounding (hierarchy of values), an epistemological

34 Wildan Imaduddin Muhammad and Yusuf Rahman, "The Quran and Muslim Minority Scholar's Perspective: A Comparative Study of Abdullah Saeed and Farid Esack," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 23, no. 2 (2022): 347–72, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v23i2.3277>. 351.

35 Siti Nurhidayati et al., "Analisis Epistemologis Terhadap Kriteria Mufassir: Telaah atas Sumber, Metode dan Validitas Ilmu dalam Perspektif Ushul Al-Tafsir," *AT-TAISIR: Journal of Indonesian Tafsir Studies* 6, no. 1 (2025): 129–45, <https://doi.org/10.51875/attaisir.v6i1.628>.

36 Aavi Lailaa Kholily, "Pandangan Abdullah Saeed Pada Konsep Nasikh Mansukh," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 4, no. 1 (2019): 159–78, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v4i1.39>. 176.

37 Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 5–6.

38 Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 116–17.

foundation that is central to constructing Abdullah Saeed's interpretative framework. Saeed posits that even specific verses considered firmly established are inherently linked to ethical values. At times, the ethical considerations required to fulfill a verse's underlying objective can shift its meaning from a literal interpretation to a more substantive one. In his work, Saeed illustrates this through the actions of 'Umar bin Khattāb, a figure who adopted a hierarchy of values—particularly in his interpretation of Q.S. At-Tawbah [9]: 60, regarding the categories of zakat recipients. 'Umar contended that zakat should not invariably be distributed among all eight categories, such as tribal leaders classified as *mu'allaf* (those whose hearts are to be reconciled), due to the consideration of others in greater need. During 'Umar's era, the primary focus shifted toward the impoverished and the vulnerable. Consequently, this hierarchy of values is inextricably linked to the principles of *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law).³⁹

Another example can be found in the ethics of warfare, where Abdullah Saeed restricts the interpretation of the jihad verses⁴⁰ through a hierarchy of values such as compassion, humanity, and the principle of not transgressing limits.⁴¹ In economic terms, Abdullah Saeed places significant emphasis on protecting the poor, particularly regarding the impact of bank interest rates. Banks should serve as a reference point for community self-sufficiency. In this context, Islamic philanthropy's values lead to a redefinition of bank interest, distinguishing it from *ribā*.⁴²

The Methodological Dimension of Saeed's Hermeneutics

In his interpretive practice, Abdullah Saeed places strong emphasis on an inductive methodological approach. Rather than deriving meaning directly from the text in isolation, interpretation begins with an examination of concrete socio-historical problems or contemporary issues.⁴³ This orientation is explicitly articulated in the introductory section of *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, where Saeed acknowledges Fazlur Rahman's influence, particularly the use of socio-historical analysis as a means of constructing a progressive interpretation of the Qur'an.⁴⁴ The dominance of this inductive model is further evident in Saeed's hermeneutics as a continuation and development of Rahman's *double movement* theory,⁴⁵ which is grounded in the systematic

39 Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 126.

40 Cristiana Cianitto, "Human Rights and Islam," in *Freedom of Religion, Security and the Law*, ed. Natascia Marchei and Daniela Milani (London: Routledge, 2024).

41 Dody Sulistio et al., "Etika Perang dalam Islam: Pemikiran Hermeneutika Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed," *Staatsrecht: Jurnal Hukum Kenegaraan dan Politik Islam* 5, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.14421/staatsrecht.v5i2.4530>.

42 Mardian Suryani et al., "Analisis Pemikiran Abdullah Saeed Tentang Riba dan Bunga Bank dalam Perspektif Ekonomi Islam," *Jurnal Ilmiah Raflesia Akuntansi* 10, no. 2 (2024): 611–18, <https://doi.org/10.53494/jira.v10i2.568>.

43 Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 150.

44 Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 3.

45 Rahman, Fazlur, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*

exploration of historical contexts across different temporal and cultural traditions.⁴⁶

Building upon this inductive orientation, Saeed structures the interpretive process into a series of analytical stages. These stages form a coherent methodological framework consisting of four interrelated steps: First, identifying relevant Qur'anic texts in relation to contemporary issues; Second, critical textual analysis; Third, exploring the meaning for the first recipients; Fourth, exploring the meaning for contemporary recipients.⁴⁷

1. Identifying Relevant Texts

This stage begins after a particular social, ethical, or legal problem has been identified. The process of locating relevant Qur'anic verses may be conducted through predefined keyword lists or by referring to the major thematic classifications of the Qur'an. The objective of this stage is to ensure that the selected texts are directly relevant to the issue under investigation.

2. Critical Analysis

Once the relevant verses have been identified and compiled, the next step involves textual analysis. This includes examining the literal meaning of the text, inter-verse relationships (*munāsabah*), and supporting linguistic disciplines such as semantics, semiotics, and stylistics, as well as other relevant tools of textual analysis. At this stage, the focus remains on the text's internal structure and linguistic dimensions.

3. Exploring the Meaning for the First Recipients

After establishing the text's basic linguistic meaning, the interpretive process moves toward reconstructing the context in which the verses were first revealed. This includes the socio-historical context of the prophetic period in the Arabian Peninsula during the sixth and seventh centuries, as well as earlier historical contexts in which the Qur'an addresses events predating the Prophet Muhammad, such as narratives about Pharaoh or earlier prophets. At this point, interpretation no longer operates solely within a double-movement framework but rather evolves into a triple movement: from the present context to the prophetic context, and further back to earlier historical contexts where relevant.

4. Exploring the Meaning for Contemporary Recipients

Having reconstructed the meaning for the first recipients, the interpreter then seeks to derive what Saeed conceptualizes as a hierarchy of values, consisting of social moral values, universal and enduring values, and specific applied values. This hierarchy represents a development of Fazlur Rahman's notion of ideal moral⁴⁸ and is conceptually aligned with Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's concept of *maghẓā*

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 7.

46 Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought* (London: Routledge, 2006).

47 Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 150.

48 Fazlur, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, 17.

(significance).⁴⁹ These values form the basis for meaningfully applying Qur'anic guidance in contemporary contexts.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the essence of the universal values articulated by Abdullah Saeed converges with the objectives of Islamic law (*maqāsid al-sbarī'ah*).⁵¹

Abdullah Saeed's stage-based interpretive framework shows a clear methodological affinity with Fazlur Rahman's theory of the double movement, although the two differ in the level of procedural elaboration.⁵² Rahman proposes a two-directional hermeneutical movement: the first movement seeks to reconstruct the historical meaning of the Qur'anic text by situating it within its socio-historical context. In contrast, the second movement derives general moral principles from that context and reapplies them to contemporary circumstances.⁵³ This approach emphasizes the extraction of ethical universals as the bridge between text and modern reality.⁵⁴

Saeed's method reflects a similar epistemological logic but develops it into a more operational sequence.⁵⁵ His stages—identifying relevant texts, conducting critical textual analysis, reconstructing the meaning for the first recipients, and rearticulating the meaning for contemporary audiences—function as a procedural expansion of Rahman's two movements. The third stage corresponds to Rahman's historical reconstruction, whereas the fourth stage parallels the application of general principles to present contexts. However, unlike Rahman, who focuses primarily on deriving overarching moral values, Saeed provides a more detailed analytical structure and integrates textual criticism, contextual analysis, and value hierarchy within a single methodological framework.

Thus, while Rahman offers the philosophical foundation for contextualist interpretation, Saeed translates this foundation into a more systematic,

49 Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Maḥbūm al-Naṣ: Dirāsah fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Beirūt: Al Markaz al-Thaqafī al-'Arabī, 2014), 6.

50 Sheyla Nichlatus Sovia, "Interpretasi Kontekstual (Studi Pemikiran Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Abdullah Saeed)," *Dialogia* 13, no. 1 (2016): 51–64, <https://doi.org/10.21154/dialogia.v13i1.282>. 47.

51 Raka Malik Azid, "Pandangan Abdullah Saeed Tentang Riba: Teks dan Konteks Ekonomi Islam," *Al-Muzdahib: Jurnal Ekonomi Syariah* 6, no. 1 (2024): 20–31, <https://doi.org/10.55352/ekis.v6i1.662>. 29.

52 Nurcahyati Nurcahyati and Haqiqi Haqiqi, "Transformation of Traditional Tafsir to Modern Perspective of Fazlur Rahman's Hermeneutics," *Al Muhafidz: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 5, no. 1 (2025): 143–60, <https://doi.org/10.57163/almuhafidz.v5i1.177>.

53 Nurcahyati and Haqiqi, "Transformation of Traditional Tafsir to Modern Perspective of Fazlur Rahman's Hermeneutics," 143–60.

54 Rahmawati Rahmawati and Muhtolib Muhtolib, "Melacak Jejak Hermeneutika Fazlur Rahman dalam Wacana Teori Tafsir: Perspektif Historis dan Epistemologis," *Adh Dhiya | Journal of The Quran and Tafseer Studies* 2, no. 1 (2024): 53–65, <https://doi.org/10.53038/adhy.v2i1.297>.

55 Yessi Handriyani and Muhamad Azhar, "Menyelami Kearifan Kontekstual: Pemahaman Mendalam Terhadap Metode dan Teori Penafsiran Pemikiran Abdullah Saeed," *Al-Mikraj Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 4, no. 1 (2023): 440–54, <https://doi.org/10.37680/almikraj.v4i1.3881>.

practitioner-oriented hermeneutical model. Both approaches share the same normative goal—maintaining the ethical relevance of the Qur’an across changing socio-historical contexts—but differ in their degree of methodological specification and operational clarity.

In his work *Reading the Qur’an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, Abdullah Saeed develops his interpretive model into more detailed stages. He explicates this refinement particularly in the fourth stage, which he designates as “*Relating the Interpretation of the Text to the Present Context*.” At this stage, the key to establishing coherence across contexts lies in what he terms “understanding the connector context,” namely, the interpretive process that mediates between the text’s original context and the contemporary situation.⁵⁶

The Justificatory Dimension of Knowledge (Validity)

In examining the validity of Qur’anic interpretation, specific epistemic criteria are required, particularly given the inherent limitations of human reasoning.⁵⁷ Interpretive validity serves to delineate the boundaries within which an interpretation may be regarded as epistemically sound. Among the commonly employed criteria are coherence,⁵⁸ correspondence with reality, and pragmatic usefulness. A valid interpretation, from a pragmatic perspective, demonstrates tangible relevance and impact within lived social contexts.⁵⁹

In *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, an additional criterion of validity is introduced, namely the minimalist and redundancy accounts of truth.⁶⁰ This perspective suggests that the degree of validity increases insofar as an explanation provides a clear, economical, and non-redundant account of truth. Simplicity and explanatory efficiency thus function as indicators of epistemic validity.

Within this framework, the most relevant criterion for assessing the validity of Abdullah Saeed’s contextual hermeneutics is coherence. Saeed’s interpretive model, which is structured into clearly defined stages, lends itself particularly well to coherence-based evaluation.⁶¹ The validity of the interpretation can be examined by assessing whether each interpretive stage aligns consistently with the subsequent one. This involves testing whether the initial textual analysis coheres with the critical linguistic examination, whether the critical analysis aligns with the

56 Saeed, *Reading the Qur’an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, 95.

57 Eko Nani Fitriono, “Epistemologi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an: Kajian Historis atas Dinamika Penafsiran di Dunia Islam,” *Al-Mikraj Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 5, no. 2 (2025): 64–83, <https://doi.org/10.37680/almikraj.v5i2.6730>.

58 Laurence Bonjour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 177.

59 Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 238.

60 Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 210.

61 Mayadina Rohmi Musfiroh and Sahiron Syamsuddin, “Contextualization of Qiwamah Meaning: Reflection on Abdullah Saeed, Application and Consistency,” *Palastren: Jurnal Studi Gender* 13, no. 2 (2020): 321, <https://doi.org/10.21043/palastren.v13i2.7191>. 326.

reconstruction of meaning for the first recipients, and whether this reconstructed meaning remains consistent with the interpretive conclusions drawn for contemporary contexts.

From the perspective of Saeed's contextual hermeneutics, the most critical point of evaluation lies in the intersection between textual meaning and social moral values. When approached through a strictly textualist lens, Saeed's interpretive conclusions may appear paradoxical, particularly in cases where Qur'anic verses seem to conflict with contemporary ethical principles, such as verses suggesting an apparent asymmetry between men and women.⁶² Within Saeed's framework, however, such tensions are resolved through contextual analysis. He demonstrates that socio-cultural conditions in the Hijaz, including security concerns, tribal warfare, and prevailing social norms, restricted women's participation in public life.⁶³ Consequently, textual formulations that appear unequal are reinterpreted as reflecting contextual responsibilities rather than inherent moral hierarchies.⁶⁴

In this sense, Saeed's contextual hermeneutics reveals its epistemic strength by uncovering the substantive ethical rationale underlying verses that initially appear paradoxical.⁶⁵ Through contextual explanation, the interpretation achieves coherence between textual meaning, historical circumstances, and contemporary moral values. This capacity to reconcile apparent contradictions constitutes a central justification of Saeed's epistemological framework.⁶⁶

From a coherence-based perspective, the substantive truth of the Qur'an does not contradict historical reality, nor does it conflict with the principles of human justice. Accordingly, coherence provides an appropriate evaluative criterion for assessing whether the structural integration of Saeed's four interpretive stages successfully produces an interpretation that remains consistent with the divine intent articulated in the sacred text.

Operationally, coherence is tested at each stage of Saeed's methodological framework. In the first stage (identifying relevant texts), coherence is assessed through thematic alignment between the selected verses, the contemporary issue under consideration, and other relevant Qur'anic passages. In the second stage (critical textual analysis), consistency is examined through linguistic analysis,

62 Muhamad Nur, "Hermeneutika Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed dan Aplikasinya dalam Relasi Gender," *Halaqah: Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2024): 223–48, <https://doi.org/10.62509/hjis.v1i2.150>.

63 Nurjannah Nurjannah, "Implementation of the Value of Moderation in Education: Study of Term al-Wasath in Surah al-Baqarah verse 143 with Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Hermeneutics Approach," *Al Quds: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 7, no. 1 (2023): 137, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v7i1.6730>.

64 Muhamad Yoga Firdaus and Khader Ahmad, "Telaah atas Hermeneutika Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed," *Mashadiruna Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 3, no. 1 (2024): 31–40, <https://doi.org/10.15575/mjiat.v3i1.34045>.

65 Rafikah Marhani Hsb et al., "Mengkaji Metode Tafsir oleh Abdullah Saeed," *Al-Tarbiyah: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 2 (2025): 244–57, <https://doi.org/10.59059/al-tarbiyah.v3i2.2483>.

66 Saeed, *Interpreting the Quran*, 119–20.

discourse structure, and intra-textual relationships within the Qur'an. In the third stage (reconstructing the meaning for the first recipients), coherence is evaluated by ensuring that the proposed meaning corresponds to the socio-historical context of the initial audience and reflects the moral intent of the text. In the fourth stage (rearticulating meaning for contemporary contexts), coherence is tested by ensuring that the new interpretation remains aligned with general ethical principles and the hierarchy of Qur'anic values, while also addressing present realities without generating normative contradictions. Through this process, validity is established not by a single point of correspondence or by practical utility alone, but by the consistent integration of text, values, and context throughout the entire interpretive process.

The epistemic validity of Saeed's framework ultimately depends on the coherence of its four interpretive stages as an integrated whole. Each stage—text identification, critical linguistic analysis, reconstruction of meaning for the first recipients, and contextual application for contemporary audiences—functions as an internal control for the others. When one or more stages are neglected, the interpretive process risks becoming overly flexible and insufficiently disciplined.

For example, when the stage of critical linguistic analysis is bypassed or minimized, interpretation loses its grounding in the text's basic and relational meanings, including the semantic range of key terms, their syntactic structure, and their intra-textual relationships within the Qur'an. As a result, interpreters may construct alternative meanings that are no longer anchored in the text's lexical and relational framework. In such cases, meaning is no longer derived from within the text but projected onto it from external assumptions, without adequate textual justification. Under these conditions, the contemporary context may become disproportionately dominant, producing conclusions that exceed the semantic boundaries and moral orientation of the Qur'anic discourse.

The breakdown of coherence across the interpretive stages, therefore, weakens the criterion of validity in contextual interpretation, since the internal safeguards that ensure methodological discipline are compromised. Without structured coherence, contextualization risks becoming subjective adaptation, in which contemporary concerns overshadow—or even displace—the original meaning of the Qur'anic text.

In his work *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, Abdullah Saeed develops his interpretive model into more detailed stages. He explicates this refinement particularly in the fourth stage, which he designates as "*Relating the Interpretation of the Text to the Present Context*." At this stage, the key to establishing coherence across contexts lies in what he terms "understanding the connector context," namely, the interpretive process that mediates between the text's original context and the contemporary situation.⁶⁷

In general terms, summarizing the epistemology of Abdullah Saeed's Qur'anic interpretation, it can be stated that his contextual hermeneutics represents

67 Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, 95.

an epistemological framework that focuses on three interrelated dimensions: the sources of knowledge (original grounds), methodological procedures, and justificatory criteria of interpretive validity. Taken together, these dimensions form a coherent epistemological architecture that underpins Saeed's approach to contemporary Qur'anic interpretation.

First, epistemologically, Saeed's hermeneutics is rooted in a rational-analytical (*burhāni*) orientation that integrates linguistic, social, and historical sources of knowledge. His formulation of a hierarchy of values—comprising social moral values, enduring universal values, and context-specific applied values—demonstrates a systematic attempt to bridge textual meaning and ethical reasoning.⁶⁸ Historical consciousness serves as a key epistemic resource, enabling Saeed to connect contemporary concerns with both the socio-historical context of revelation and earlier historical narratives in the Qur'an.

Second, methodologically, Saeed employs a predominantly inductive approach, beginning interpretation with contemporary socio-historical problems rather than with isolated textual analysis. This inductive orientation develops Fazlur Rahman's double movement.⁶⁹ Into a structured, multi-stage interpretive process consisting of textual identification, critical linguistic analysis, reconstruction of meaning for the first recipients, and contextualization for contemporary audiences. In certain cases, this process extends into a triple movement, incorporating deeper historical layers within Qur'anic discourse.⁷⁰ These stages constitute a systematic method that consistently and transparently operationalize contextual hermeneutics.

Third, regarding justificatory validity, Saeed's interpretive model relies primarily on coherence as the central criterion of epistemic justification. Interpretations are considered valid when they demonstrate consistency between textual evidence, historical context, ethical objectives, and contemporary social realities. This coherence-based justification allows Saeed to address verses that appear paradoxical from a literalist perspective by uncovering their substantive ethical rationale through contextual explanation. Interpretive validity is thus achieved not through absolute certainty, but through reasoned, ethically plausible, and contextually responsive conclusions that remain open to revision.

Conceptually, these three epistemological dimensions converge to form a comprehensive mapping of Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics. This conceptual mapping constitutes the primary contribution and novelty of the present study, offering a structured framework for understanding how epistemic

68 M. Ulil Abshor, "Pendekatan Kontekstualis dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an (The Study of Abdullah Saeed's Qur'anic Interpretation)," *Al-Adabiya: Jurnal Kebudayaan dan Keagamaan* 13, no. 02 (2018): 238–59, <https://doi.org/10.37680/adabiya.v13i02.25>. 23-24.

69 Lien Iffah Naf'atu Fina, "Interpretasi Kontekstual: Studi Pemikiran Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Abdullah Saeed," *Esensia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 12, no. 1 (2011): 159–80, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v12i1.707>. 161.

70 Jul Hendri, "Contemporary Interpretation Methodology: Comparative Study of the Thought of Fazlur Rahman and Sahiron Syamsuddin," *Al Quds: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 8, no. 3 (2024): 533–40, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v8i3.9671>.

foundations, methodological stages, and justificatory principles interact within Saeed’s interpretive project. By articulating this epistemological architecture, the study not only clarifies Saeed’s hermeneutical model but also provides a transferable analytical framework for future research on contextual Qur’anic interpretation.

Conceptual Reconstruction and Mapping of Abdullah Saeed’s Interpretive Stages

Abdullah Saeed formulates Qur’anic interpretation through a structured, stage-based approach.⁷¹ His contextual hermeneutical model consists of four interrelated stages:⁷²

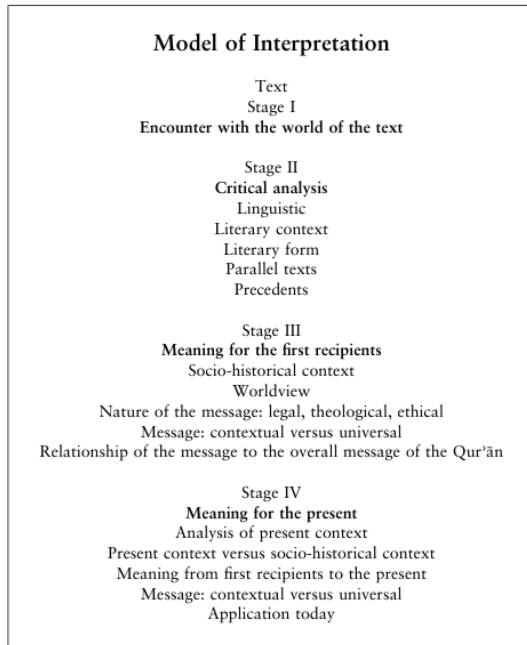


Figure 1: The Four Stages of Abdullah Saeed’s Contextual Hermeneutics (Saeed 2006, 150).

To elucidate the four stages of Qur’anic interpretation outlined above, Abdullah Saeed describes four interpretive conditions that correspond to each stage of interpretation.⁷³ The first is an encounter with the text itself. The second involves careful attention to what the text articulates about its own meaning. The third stage consists of relating the text to the context of its revelation. The fourth stage entails connecting the text with the contemporary context.⁷⁴

71 Choirur Rois et al., “Islamic Hierarchy of Value: Abdullah Saeed’s Progressive Interpretation of the Qur’an,” *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 205, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1125>. 209.

72 Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur’an: Towards a Contemporary Approach*, 150.

73 M. K. Ridwan, “Metodologi Penafsiran Kontekstual; Analisis Gagasan dan Prinsip Kunci Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed,” *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v1i1.1-22>. 2.

74 Miftahur Rahman, “Uli al-Amr dalam Alquran: Sebuah Aplikasi Teori Kontekstual

Table 1. Reconstructing Saeed's Model as a Multi-Layered Epistemic Filtering Structure.

Stage	Description of the Stage	Function as an Epistemic Filtering Layer	Coherence Across Stages
Stage I Encounter with the World of the Text	Initial engagement with the text through close reading and identification of its basic meanings.	Layer 1: Linguistic Filtering – Screens possible meanings based on linguistic structure, vocabulary, and internal textual coherence.	Serves as the foundational grounding for all subsequent stages; without textual anchoring, interpretation loses evidential legitimacy.
Stage II Critical Analysis	Linguistic and literary analysis, examination of parallel texts, and consideration of historical and textual precedents.	Layer 2: Historical and Analytical Filtering – Screens meaning through linguistic context and socio-historical background.	Strengthens and tests the results of Stage I to prevent literalism and anachronistic interpretation.
Stage III Meaning for the First Recipients	Reconstruction of meaning for the original audience, including legal, theological, and ethical dimensions.	Layer 3: Normative Filtering – Extracts and refines underlying moral values from the historical context.	Functions as a bridge between historically specific meaning and transferable moral principles.
Stage IV Meaning for the Present	Recontextualization of meaning within contemporary socio-cultural realities.	Layer 4: Contextual Filtering – Applies moral ideals to present-day conditions.	Ensures relevance while maintaining consistency with the textual, historical, and normative foundations established in previous stages.

The coherence of this model lies in the interconnection among its layers. Each stage does not operate independently but depends upon the preceding one. If any stage is omitted, the structure of interpretive validity becomes incomplete.

The reconstruction presented above moves beyond a procedural reading of Saeed's four interpretive stages. Rather than treating them as a chronological sequence of steps, this study conceptualizes them as interdependent epistemic layers that collectively regulate the production of meaning. This reconstruction demonstrates that Saeed's model operates not as a linear progression but as a layered epistemic architecture in which each stage functions as a structural condition for interpretive validity. Each layer imposes specific constraints upon interpretive reasoning: linguistic grounding limits semantic arbitrariness; historical mediation prevents anachronism; normative abstraction regulates moral generalization; and

contextual application ensures contemporary relevance without detaching from prior epistemic commitments.

Understanding the model in this architectural sense clarifies how interpretive validity is generated. The legitimacy of interpretation does not derive from any single stage in isolation but from the coherence established across all filtering layers. The textual layer anchors meaning evidentially; the historical layer situates it plausibly; the normative layer abstracts transferable moral ideals; and the contextual layer actualizes those ideals within contemporary realities. The omission of any layer destabilizes the model's justificatory structure, resulting in textual reductionism, historical literalism, moral relativism, or contextual arbitrariness. Epistemic coherence, therefore, constitutes the central principle that binds the architecture together.

In this respect, the present study advances beyond descriptive accounts of Saeed's methodology. While previous studies have described Saeed's four stages, this study reconstructs the model as an integrated epistemic architecture, thereby clarifying its justificatory structure and internal coherence. By articulating the structural interdependence among the layers, this reconstruction reveals the implicit epistemological logic underlying Saeed's contextual hermeneutics. The model thus emerges not merely as a contextual, interpretive approach but as a coherence-based epistemological system designed to navigate the dynamic relationship among revelation, historical consciousness, moral reasoning, and contemporary application.

Through this reconstruction, Saeed's contextual hermeneutics can be understood as a multi-layered epistemic filtering architecture in which meaning is progressively refined and normatively validated. The contribution of this study lies in making explicit this underlying structure and demonstrating how its coherence functions as the primary mechanism of interpretive justification.

In his work *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, Abdullah Saeed develops his interpretive model into more detailed stages. He explicates this refinement particularly in the fourth stage, which he designates as "Relating the Interpretation of the Text to the Present Context." At this stage, the key to establishing coherence across contexts lies in what he terms "understanding the connector context," namely, the interpretive process that mediates between the text's original context and the contemporary situation.⁷⁵

75 Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*,

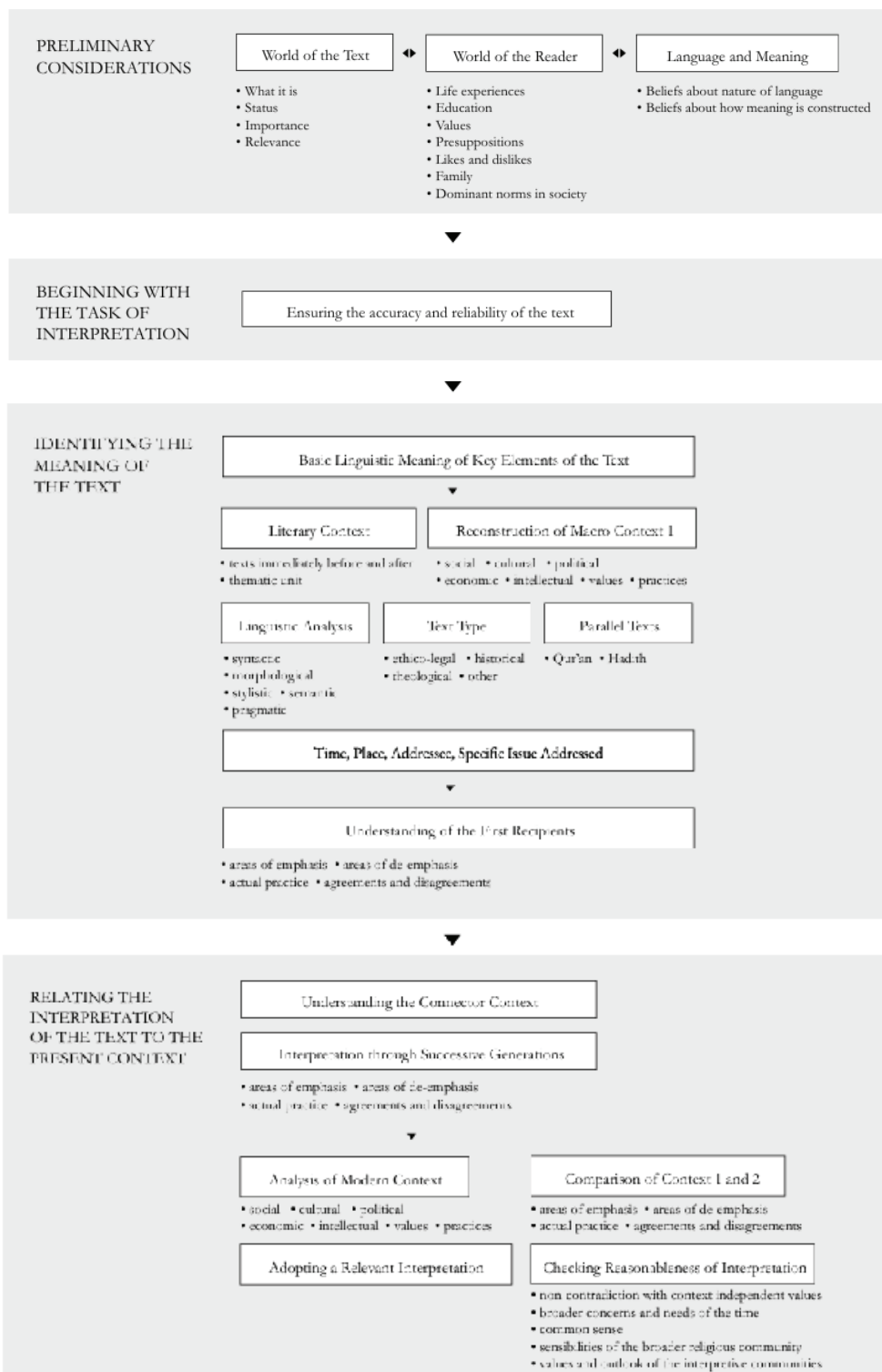


Figure 2: Reconstruction and Development of the Stages of Interpretation (Saeed 2014, 95).

1. Abdullah Saeed’s First Model in *Interpreting the Qur’ān*

From a broader perspective, Saeed’s method can also be understood through three interpretive perspectives on texts. The first is the world within the text, which focuses on textual meaning. The second is the world behind the text, which refers to the historical and sociocultural background that shaped it. The third is the world in front of the text, which concerns the meaning constructed by readers who continually engage with the text in changing contexts.⁷⁶ By integrating Abdullah Saeed’s four stages of interpretation with these three textual perspectives, a conceptual mapping of contextual hermeneutics can be formulated, as illustrated in Figure 3:

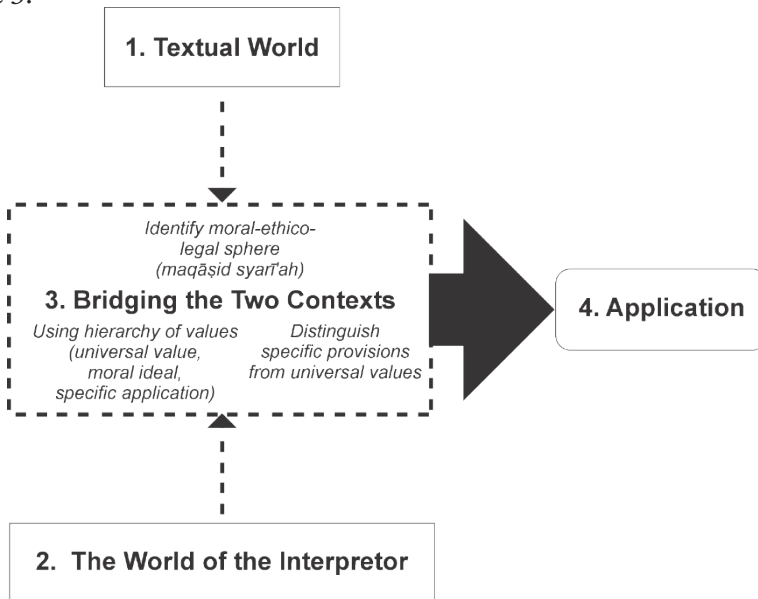


Figure 3. Reconstruction of the Conceptual Mapping of Abdullah Saeed’s Contextual Hermeneutics.

This conceptual map does not intend to replace Abdullah Saeed’s original formulation, but rather to synthesize his epistemological framework, stages of interpretation, and textual perspectives into an analytical model for explanatory purposes. This study proposes a reconstructed conceptual map of Abdullah Saeed’s contextual hermeneutics by synthesizing his epistemological assumptions, stages of interpretation, and hierarchy of values into an integrated analytical framework.

In this mapping, the textual world represents the world within the text, while the world of the interpreter corresponds to the world outside the text. The process of bridging the two contexts represents the effort to uncover the world behind the text. The entire interpretive process reaches its practical and ethical culmination when it successfully produces a hierarchy of values. It is this hierarchy of values that

⁷⁶ Nurkholis Hauqola, “Hermeneutika Hadis: Upaya Memecah Kebekuan Teks,” *Jurnal Theologia* 24, no. 1 (2016): 261–84, <https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2013.24.1.324>. 261.

ultimately becomes the basis for application in contemporary socio-humanitarian contexts.⁷⁷ Based on this conceptual map, the contextual method of Qur'anic interpretation can be applied in the following areas, such as gender⁷⁸ relations,⁷⁹ human rights,⁸⁰ environmental ethics, religious diversity and tolerance,⁸¹ area studies of the Islamic world⁸² or Islamic world studies,⁸³ or economic justice,⁸⁴ to assess its analytical robustness and ethical effectiveness across diverse socio-cultural contexts.

Rather than merely organizing Saeed's ideas into a structured summary, the conceptual mapping developed in this study demonstrates that his contextual hermeneutics operates as an integrated epistemic system characterized by a specific logic of interaction among three dimensions: epistemic foundations, methodological procedures, and justificatory principles. The analytical significance of this mapping lies in revealing that these dimensions are not independent components, but function interdependently within a coherence-based interpretive model.

First, the mapping shows that Saeed's hierarchy of values is not simply an ethical classification but rather a mechanism of mediating epistemic sources and contemporary application. Linguistic analysis and historical reconstruction generate a range of possible meanings, while the hierarchy of values functions as a normative filter that prioritizes meanings aligned with overarching ethical objectives. In this sense, ethical reasoning is structurally embedded within the epistemological process, rather than added at the stage of application.

77 Anas Rolli Muchlisin, "Penafsiran Kontekstual: Studi Atas Konsep Hierarki Nilai Abdullah Saeed," *Maghza: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (2016): 19–30, <https://doi.org/10.24090/maghza.v1i1.693>. 26.

78 Afriadi Putra, "Isu Gender dalam Al-Qur'an: Studi Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed Terhadap Ayat-ayat Warisan," *Kafa'ah: Journal of Gender Studies* 7, no. 2 (2017): 209, <https://doi.org/10.15548/jk.v7i2.176>. 209.

79 Abdus Shomad, "Otoritas Laki-Laki dan Perempuan: Studi Penafsiran Kontekstual Abdullah Saeed terhadap Qs. an-Nisa 4: 34," *Alif Lam: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.51700/aliflam.v3i1.432>. 18.

80 Siti Asiah and Imraatus Shalihah, "Analysis of Abdullah Saeed's Contextual Interpretation in QS. Ali Imran Verse 159 Concerning Parenting Patterns for Children," *Alif Lam: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 4, no. 02 (2024): 33–48, <https://doi.org/10.51700/aliflam.v4i02.702>. 33.

81 Muhammad Khoirul Anwar et al., "Dimensi Pluralisme Agama dalam Islam Perspektif Pemikiran Abdullah Saeed; Sebuah Analisa Teks Kontekstual," *Nahnu: Journal of Nahdlatul Ulama and Contemporary Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2023): 93–106, <https://doi.org/10.63875/nahnu.v1i1.25>. 93.

82 Abdullah Saeed ed., *Approaches to the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesia* (US: Oxford University Press Inc and Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005), 1.

83 Ali Akbar and Abdullah Saeed, "Interpretation and Mutability: Socio-Legal Texts of the Quran; Three Accounts from Contemporary Iran," *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, no. 3 (2018): 442–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2018.1426569>.

84 Abdullah Saeed and Ali Akbar, "Contextualist Approaches and the Interpretation of the Qur'an," *Religions* 12, no. 7 (2021): 527, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12070527>. 527.

Second, the conceptual structure clarifies the direction of epistemic movement in Saeed’s model. Interpretation does not move linearly from text to context but operates through a controlled circular process: textual meaning → historical understanding → ethical abstraction → contextual reapplication → coherence testing. This circularity indicates that contextualization in Saeed’s framework is methodologically constrained rather than interpretively arbitrary.

Third, the mapping reveals that coherence functions as the central regulatory principle that stabilizes the relationship between text and context. Interpretive validity is achieved when four elements remain aligned: linguistic evidence, historical plausibility, ethical objectives, and contemporary relevance. This finding demonstrates that Saeed’s approach represents a form of coherence epistemology, rather than a purely contextual or pragmatic model.

Fourth, the analytical reconstruction highlights the boundary mechanism within contextual interpretation. The hierarchy of values does not expand interpretive freedom indefinitely; instead, it establishes a graded structure that distinguishes between universal ethical norms and context-bound applications. This structure serves as a safeguard against relativism by limiting contextual adaptation to meanings anchored in the Qur’an’s moral trajectory.

Finally, conceptual mapping contributes theoretically by positioning Saeed’s hermeneutics as a model of ethically regulated contextual rationality. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that Saeed’s project is best understood not merely as contextual interpretation but as a coherence-based epistemic framework that integrates rational analysis, historical consciousness, and ethical prioritization within a single interpretive architecture.

2. Abdullah Saeed’s Second Model in *Reading the Qur’an in the Twenty-First Century*

Subsequently, in the interpretive model developed by Abdullah Saeed in *Reading the Qur’an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach*, the structure of interpretation can be mapped as illustrated in the conceptual framework below:

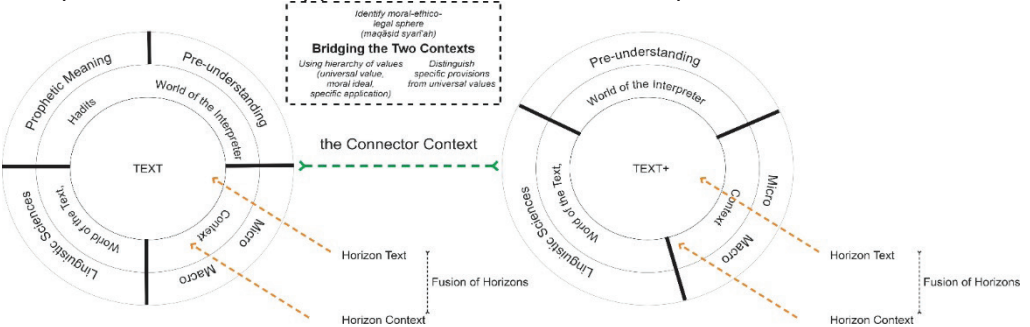


Figure 4. Reconstruction of the Conceptual Mapping of Abdullah Saeed’s Contextual Hermeneutics.

In this model, interpretation generally continues to consider two historical periods, following the original dual-context idea adopted by Saeed. Each period can further be divided into the horizon of the text and the horizon of the context.

Within the period of revelation, the text is closely connected to the Prophet as the bearer of revelation, who also possessed interpretive authority in his lived practice—later preserved in the form of hadith. In addition, the text is related to the micro-context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*, or specific occasions of revelation), as well as the macro-context, which includes the surrounding social, cultural, political, and economic conditions and other dynamic circumstances of that time.

In the twenty-first century, however, the text becomes what may be described as “text+.” This indicates that the text has passed through a long historical process, meaning it is no longer encountered in the same way as when it was first conveyed by the Prophet. In the contemporary period, the text+ maintains similar contextual relationships as in the period of revelation—except for the direct presence of hadith as a living interpretive authority. Since the Prophet is no longer present, he cannot directly provide interpretive clarification as part of lived guidance.

The relationship between these two historical moments must therefore be connected. This is what Abdullah Saeed refers to as the search for the “connector context.” Through this connector context, the guidance of divine revelation can be grounded meaningfully within contemporary realities.

Conclusion

This study has examined Abdullah Saeed’s contextual hermeneutics through an explicitly epistemological lens, focusing on the foundational sources of knowledge, methodological procedures, and criteria of interpretive validity that structure his approach. The analysis demonstrates that Saeed’s model operates within a coherence-based epistemological framework in which interpretive claims are justified through the interrelation of textual grounding, historical mediation, moral abstraction, and contextual application. Interpretive validity, therefore, does not derive from isolated textual reference or contextual reasoning alone, but from the structural coherence established across multiple epistemic domains. Building upon this epistemological examination, the study reconstructs Saeed’s four-stage method into a conceptual mapping that reveals its underlying architecture. Rather than treating the stages as a linear procedural sequence, the reconstruction conceptualizes them as a multi-layered epistemic filtering structure in which each stage functions as a structural condition for the next. This mapping clarifies the interdependence among the stages and makes explicit the justificatory logic that sustains the interpretive process.

The significance of this reconstruction lies in demonstrating that Saeed’s contextual approach is not merely a methodological adaptation to modern circumstances but an integrated epistemic system capable of negotiating the dynamic relationship between revelation, historical consciousness, moral reasoning, and contemporary realities. By articulating the coherence and layered structure of the model, this study strengthens its theoretical legitimacy and

contributes to the broader development of contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics. Based on these findings, several recommendations may be proposed for future research in Qur'anic interpretation and Islamic studies. First, further studies may apply the reconstructed conceptual mapping of contextual hermeneutics to specific thematic domains, such as gender relations, human rights, environmental ethics, religious diversity and tolerance, or economic justice, to assess its analytical robustness and ethical effectiveness across diverse socio-cultural contexts. Such applications would allow for a more concrete evaluation of the pragmatic validity of Saeed's interpretive framework.

Second, comparative epistemological studies between Abdullah Saeed and other contemporary Qur'anic interpreters—such as Fazlur Rahman, Naşr Hamed Abū Zayd, or Khaled Abou El Fadl—would contribute to a deeper understanding of the diversity and convergence of contextual approaches within modern Islamic thought. This would further illuminate how differing epistemological assumptions shape interpretive outcomes.

Finally, to address the risk of overly expansive interpretation arising from the flexible use of the hierarchy of values, scholars should develop clearer operational guidelines. This may include defining objective criteria for distinguishing universal values from context-specific applications. Requiring strong textual and historical evidence before reclassifying a ruling as context bound. Implementing systematic coherence testing across all interpretive stages. Such safeguards would prevent pragmatic selectivity and ensure that contextual adaptation remains anchored in the Qur'an's moral structure.

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