

Artificial Intelligence and Qur'anic Interpretation: A Critical Comparative Study of ChatGPT and Classical Tafsir

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the accuracy and feasibility of using ChatGPT in interpreting the Qur'an by comparing its interpretations with those of classical tafsir. The research employed a qualitative comparative analytical design using a library-based approach. Three Qur'anic verses, namely Surah Yunus: 26, Ali 'Imran: 130, and Yunus: 89, were analyzed across three dimensions: linguistic accuracy, contextual understanding, and depth of interpretation. The results indicate that while ChatGPT provides coherent and accessible explanations, it lacks the methodological rigor and contextual depth characteristic of traditional tafsir. This study provides an initial mapping of the strengths and limitations of artificial intelligence in Qur'anic interpretation and emphasizes the need to develop an integrative methodological framework to ensure that AI-based tafsir remains consistent with scholarly and Sharia principles. Future research is recommended to explore other AI models and to develop tafsir-based filters to enhance interpretive validity.

Artificial Intelligence, Al-Qur'an, ChatGPT, Interpretation

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi ketepatan dan kelayakan penggunaan ChatGPT dalam menafsirkan Al-Qur'an dengan membandingkan hasil tafsirnya dengan tafsir klasik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain komparatif analitis berbasis studi kepustakaan. Tiga ayat Al-Qur'an yang dianalisis adalah Surah Yunus ayat 26, Ali 'Imran ayat 130, dan Yunus ayat 89. Analisis dilakukan melalui tiga dimensi, yaitu ketepatan bahasa, pemahaman kontekstual, dan kedalaman penafsiran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun ChatGPT mampu memberikan penjelasan yang koheren dan mudah dipahami, penafsirannya masih kurang dalam ketelitian metodologis dan kedalaman konteks sebagaimana terdapat dalam tafsir klasik. Penelitian ini memberikan pemetaan awal mengenai kekuatan dan keterbatasan kecerdasan buatan dalam penafsiran Al-Qur'an, serta menekankan pentingnya pengembangan kerangka metodologis yang integratif agar tafsir berbasis AI tetap selaras dengan prinsip-prinsip keilmuan dan syariah. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan untuk mengeksplorasi model AI lainnya serta mengembangkan filter berbasis tafsir klasik guna meningkatkan validitas penafsiran.

Kata Kunci: Tafsir, Al-Qur'an, Kecerdasan Buatan, ChatGPT

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the intersection between artificial intelligence (AI) and the study of religion has attracted growing academic attention. AI technologies, particularly those based on natural language processing, have been increasingly used to analyze, summarize, and interpret religious texts (Assa'aidi & Laila, 2023; Bingaman, 2023). This development reflects a broader digital transformation in the humanities, where computational tools are being employed to assist in

understanding sacred scriptures, theology, and religious discourse. As technology continues to shape human interaction with knowledge, questions arise about how AI can contribute to, or potentially disrupt, traditional religious scholarship.

Within Islamic studies, the interpretation of the Quran (tafsir) occupies a central and sensitive position, demanding rigorous linguistic, contextual, and theological understanding (Al-Qaysi, 2008; Bender et al., 2021). Over the centuries, classical scholars such as Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, and Al-Sa'di developed comprehensive methodologies grounded in linguistic precision and contextual reasoning. However, with the emergence of AI-based tools like ChatGPT, a new phenomenon has appeared in which machines attempt to explain divine texts using probabilistic language models (Berliana et al., 2025; Ichwan et al., 2024). This raises essential questions about epistemic authority, interpretive reliability, and methodological soundness when machines engage with sacred knowledge.

Several studies have examined the use of AI in religious and ethical domains, highlighting both opportunities and risks. Research on AI in religion (Assa'aidi & Laila, 2023) generally explores the ethical implications of automation in spiritual contexts, while studies on digital tafsir (Ichwan et al., 2024; Yensi et al., 2025) focus on how technology can enhance access to Quranic interpretation. Meanwhile, AI criticism (Bingaman, 2023; Resky & Suharyat, 2024) emphasizes concerns about bias, contextual misunderstanding, and the absence of moral accountability in machine reasoning. Despite these contributions, little attention has been given to critically examining the interpretive accuracy of AI-generated Quranic exegesis when compared with classical tafsir traditions.

This gap forms the basis of the present study. While previous works have discussed the potential of AI in religious studies, none have systematically compared ChatGPT's interpretive performance with classical tafsir across key dimensions such as linguistic accuracy, contextual understanding, and jurisprudential reasoning. Hence, the present research addresses the question: To what extent is ChatGPT capable of producing Quranic interpretations that are comparable to those of classical commentators in terms of accuracy, contextual awareness, and methodological coherence? This question serves as the central focus of the study and guides its analytical framework.

Accordingly, the objective of this research is to analyze the capabilities and limitations of ChatGPT in interpreting selected Quranic verses drawn from theological, legal, and narrative domains. By comparing ChatGPT's outputs with interpretations from classical exegetes Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, and Al-Sa'di this study aims to assess the degree to which AI-generated interpretations align with established hermeneutical principles. Furthermore, it investigates the epistemological implications of entrusting interpretive authority to artificial systems that lack consciousness or spiritual accountability.

Methodologically, this study employs a comparative qualitative approach. Data are collected from ChatGPT's responses to selected Quranic verses and analyzed against authoritative tafsir works according to criteria of linguistic precision, contextual accuracy, and jurisprudential depth. Through this comparison, the study identifies patterns of interpretive strength and weakness within AI outputs, highlighting both the potential utility and the critical risks of relying on machine-generated exegesis in religious scholarship.

In essence, this study contributes to the growing discourse on digital hermeneutics by offering an empirical evaluation of AI's interpretive capacity in the context of Quranic studies. It aims to provide a balanced perspective that neither overestimates nor dismisses AI's role in religious scholarship, but rather situates it within a framework of critical engagement. The findings are expected to inform future discussions on integrating technology into Islamic education and research, while preserving the integrity of classical interpretive traditions.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative comparative analytical design with a library-based approach to critically examine the interpretive outcomes of ChatGPT against classical Qur'anic exegesis. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of textual meaning and interpretive methods without quantitative measurement, aiming to identify both the potential and limitations of artificial intelligence in Qur'anic interpretation.

The study specifically focused on three selected verses of the Qur'an as the primary inspiration for analysis, namely Surah Yūnus verse 26, Āli 'Imrān verse 130, and Yūnus verse 89. These verses were chosen to represent theological (*'aqidah*), legal (*aḥkām*), and narrative (*qaṣaṣ*) themes, providing a balanced foundation for assessing the interpretive capacity of ChatGPT in different dimensions of Qur'anic discourse.

The data sources consist of two main components: (1) AI-generated interpretations of selected Qur'anic verses produced by ChatGPT (GPT-4) through structured prompts, and (2) classical tafsir texts, including Jāmi' al-Bayān (Al-Tabarī, 2022), Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'an (Al-Qurtubī, 1964), Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Aẓīm (Ibn Kathīr, 1999) and Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān (Al-Sa'dī, 2000). These works were chosen for their representative linguistic, legal, and theological perspectives.

The unit of analysis was centered on these three verses and examined across three analytical dimensions: linguistic accuracy, historical-contextual understanding, and depth of exegetical reasoning. The data analysis employed thematic content and comparative methods. First, the interpretations were coded based on the three analytical dimensions. Second, a comparative examination identified similarities and divergences between AI interpretations and classical exegesis. Finally, the findings were synthesized into a critical evaluation of ChatGPT's interpretive performance within the framework of Islamic hermeneutics. To ensure validity and credibility, source triangulation was carried out by cross-referencing multiple tafsir texts and verifying terminological consistency. This process guaranteed that the conclusions remained objective, rigorous, and aligned with scholarly standards in Qur'anic studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Critical Analytical Study of ChatGPT's Performance in Interpreting the Qur'an

This section outlines the core focus of the study, which is to critically examine ChatGPT's interpretive performance in relation to selected Qur'anic verses. The analysis is structured around key thematic domains that reflect the diversity of Qur'anic discourse. By examining theological, legal, and narrative aspects, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how AI

processes and conveys different layers of meaning found in the Qur'an. This thematic division also allows for a more systematic comparison between AI-generated interpretations and classical tafsir.

a. Theological Aspect ('*Aqīdah*): Interpretation of al-Ḥusnā and az-Ziyādah

This verse highlights one of the central theological principles in Islam, namely the boundless generosity of Allah toward those who perform righteous deeds. It affirms the concept of ultimate reward in the Hereafter, emphasizing that believers will not only receive Paradise as their recompense but also an additional, unparalleled blessing. This theological foundation is crucial because it reflects both divine mercy and the special honor bestowed upon the righteous.

لِّلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا الْحُسْنَىٰ وَزِيَادَةٌ وَلَا يَرْهَقُ وُجُوهُهُمْ قَتَرٌ وَلَا ذِلَّةٌ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

“For those who have done good is the best reward and even more. No darkness and no humiliation will cover their faces. Those are the companions of Paradise; they will abide therein forever” [Yunus: 26]

The following discussion will focus on the interpretation of الحُسْنَى a term that carries profound theological meaning. *Al-ḥusnā* literally means “the best” or “the most beautiful,” while *az-ziyādah* denotes “an increase” or “something extra.” Classical scholars unanimously interpret *al-ḥusnā* as Paradise (*al-jannah*) and *az-ziyādah* as the additional blessing of beholding the Divine Presence (*ru'yatullah*), a meaning confirmed by numerous authentic prophetic traditions. This interpretation underscores the depth of divine generosity and the ultimate spiritual honor awaiting the righteous in the Hereafter.

According to al-Ṭabarī (2022), the most accurate opinion regarding this verse is that Allah has promised His righteous servants *al-ḥusnā* the best reward by granting them Paradise as recompense for their obedience and righteousness. Beyond that, He has promised them *az-ziyādah*, an addition encompassing all forms of divine bounty, including the honor of seeing His noble face, elevated dwellings made of pearls, and perpetual forgiveness and pleasure. Al-Ṭabarī emphasizes that the phrase (وَزِيَادَةٌ) “and an increase” includes every form of divine favor beyond (الحُسْنَى) “the best reward,” without restriction. He writes: “Our Lord, the Most Glorious and Most High, with His words (وَزِيَادَةٌ) (and an increase), encompasses all increases beyond (الحُسْنَى) the best reward)... indeed, all of that will be gathered for them, God willing.”

Similarly, Ibn Kathir (1999) explains that *al-ḥusnā* refers to Paradise as the just reward for righteous deeds performed with faith in this world. He connects this to the verse هَلْ جَزَاءُ (‘*Is the reward for good [anything] but good?*’ *ar-Raḥmān*: 60), clarifying that *az-ziyādah* refers to the multiplication of good deeds tenfold up to seven hundredfold or more. Yet, beyond all these material and spiritual pleasures lies the greatest gift of all: seeing the noble face of Allah SWT, a blessing granted not by human merit but through divine grace and mercy. As-Sa’di (2000) expands this understanding by describing *al-ḥusnā* as Paradise in its utmost perfection and *az-ziyādah* as the privilege of witnessing Allah’s noble face, hearing His words, attaining His pleasure, and rejoicing in His nearness. He writes: (وُجُوهُهُمْ قَتَرٌ وَلَا ذِلَّةٌ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ). *“With this, they obtain the highest of what the desiring desire*

and what the asking request are.” These classical interpretations consistently underscore two interrelated dimensions of divine reward: the tangible and spiritual bliss of Paradise (*al-ḥusnā*) and the supreme metaphysical reward of *aẓ-ẓiyādah* the beatific vision of Allah, which represents the culmination of all eternal joys.

When prompted to interpret the same verse, ChatGPT generated the following explanation: “The verse from the Qur’an, هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ , أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ , هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ : refers to the reward for those who do good deeds and act kindly in their worldly lives. They will be given the best reward (*al-ḥusnā*), which is Paradise, and in addition to that, they will be granted an increase, which is seeing Allah SWT in the Hereafter, as mentioned in several authentic hadiths. Their faces will not be covered by darkness or humiliation; rather, they will radiate with happiness, and they will dwell eternally in Paradise.”

This interpretation by ChatGPT aligns closely with the general meaning conveyed by classical exegetes, especially in identifying *al-ḥusnā* as Paradise and *aẓ-ẓiyādah* as the vision of Allah SWT. Nevertheless, it remains concise and lacks reference to the transmitted narrations (*riwāyāt*), linguistic depth, or theological reflection characteristic of traditional *tafsīr* literature (Al-Akhfash, 1990; Amru, 2021). While the AI correctly associates both terms semantically, it simplifies the layered meanings of *al-ḥusnā* as both a moral state (*iḥsān*) and its eschatological reward (*al-jannah*), and it does not elaborate on *aẓ-ẓiyādah* beyond the literal sense.

The difference arises primarily from the epistemological and methodological foundations of each approach. Classical scholars such as al-Ṭabari (2022), Ibn Kathīr (1999), and as-Sa’di (2000) base their exegesis on transmitted sources (*tafsīr bi al-ma’tbūr*), rational analysis (*tafsīr bi al-dirāyah*), and a deep theological understanding grounded in faith and spirituality. ChatGPT, on the other hand, functions as a language-based model that identifies textual and semantic relationships without engaging with hermeneutical principles, the nuances of *uṣūl al-tafsīr*, or the theological implications of divine speech. Its interpretations are therefore descriptive rather than exegetical, providing accurate summaries but devoid of interpretive reasoning or spiritual cognition.

As al-Ṭabari (2022) concludes, the phrase (وَزِيَادَةً) “and an increase” “encompasses all increases beyond (الحسنى) meaning that divine generosity extends far beyond Paradise itself to include the eternal vision of Allah’s noble face. Classical *tafsīr* situates this meaning within a theological framework in which reward and grace manifest both divine justice (*‘adl*) and divine mercy (*rahmah*). By contrast, ChatGPT’s output demonstrates an accurate yet simplified understanding linguistically correct but theologically limited. This contrast highlights the epistemic boundary between human scholarship, which integrates transmission (*manqūl*), reason (*ma’qūl*), and revelation (*wahy*), and artificial intelligence, which operates within data-driven semantics. Thus, while ChatGPT may function as a useful pedagogical aid for quick reference or introductory study, it cannot substitute for the integrative interpretative tradition of classical *tafsīr* that harmonizes intellect, revelation, and spiritual insight.

b. Legal Aspect (*Aḥkam*): Interpretation of the Prohibition of Riba

The prohibition of *riba* (usury or interest) represents one of the most critical legal and ethical principles in Islamic jurisprudence. It serves not only as a legal injunction but also as a

moral safeguard to protect society from systemic financial exploitation. The essence of this prohibition lies in establishing justice, preserving economic balance, and ensuring compassion within financial transactions. In the broader context of Islamic law (*fiqh al-mu'amalat*), *riba* is viewed as a practice that undermines social equity and perpetuates inequality. Therefore, this prohibition reflects both legal enforcement and the moral vision of Islam for a just and ethical economic order.

The verse يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا الرِّبَا أَضْعَافًا مُضَاعَفَةً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ("O you who have believed, do not consume usury, doubled and multiplied, but fear Allah that you may be successful" Āli 'Imrān: 130) contains one of the most explicit prohibitions in the Qur'an concerning financial injustice and economic exploitation. The wording "*lā ta'kulū al-ribā aḍ'āfan muḍā'afah*" vividly portrays the compounding and multiplying effect of interest-based transactions that characterized the pre-Islamic financial system. This verse not only prohibits a specific form of transaction but also lays the ethical foundation for justice, mercy, and social balance in Islamic economic thought.

According to al-Ṭabari (2022), this divine command addresses believers directly: "O you who believe in Allah and His Messenger, do not consume usury in your Islam after He has guided you, just as you used to consume it in your time of ignorance." He elaborates that during the pre-Islamic era, debts were often extended upon maturity in exchange for additional payment. A creditor would say to the debtor, "Postpone my debt, and I will add to it from your wealth," resulting in an endless cycle of debt accumulation. This practice, known as *ribā muḍā'afah* (compounded interest), was explicitly condemned by Allah as an act of oppression and moral corruption. Al-Ṭabari concludes that the prohibition was revealed to protect believers from perpetuating this exploitative custom after embracing Islam, emphasizing that such transactions violate divine justice and mercy.

Ibn Kathir (1999) provides a parallel interpretation, describing the pre-Islamic scenario in which debtors, unable to repay on time, were compelled to accept additional charges to extend the due date. He writes that the lenders would demand: "The choice is to repay or take interest." If repayment was delayed, the debt would increase exponentially, "and sometimes it multiplies a little until it becomes many times over." Ibn Kathir underscores that Allah forbade this system because it institutionalized oppression and widened the gap between the rich and the poor. Furthermore, he reminds that Allah concluded the verse by commanding believers to "fear Allah that you may be successful" linking economic ethics directly with spiritual success and salvation. This connection between financial morality and *taqwā* (God-consciousness) forms the core of Islamic economic jurisprudence.

As-Sa'di (2000) offers an insightful theological and moral reflection on the same verse. He explains that Allah prohibited believers from consuming *riba* a practice common among the people of ignorance and those indifferent to the moral boundaries of the *Shari'ah*. He describes how, when a debtor was in difficulty, the creditor would declare: "Pay your debt now, or we will extend the term and increase what is due." The debtor, seeking temporary relief, would accept this unjust condition, leading to debt that multiplied "many times over, without benefit or gain." As-Sa'di emphasizes that in the phrase (الرِّبَا أَضْعَافًا) (doubled *riba*), Allah provides

both a linguistic and moral warning about its severe repulsiveness due to its abundance. He further explains the wisdom (*ḥikmah*) behind the prohibition: Allah forbids *riba* because it embodies injustice, whereas He commands creditors to grant respite to those in difficulty without increasing their debt. To demand more than what is due constitutes “doubled injustice.” Therefore, abandoning *riba* is not only a legal obligation but also a manifestation of *taqwā*, and true success (*falāḥ*) depends on this pious restraint.

When the same verse was presented to ChatGPT for interpretation, it generated the following explanation: “The verse of Allah SWT: ‘يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا الرِّبَا أَضْعَافًا مُضَاعَفَةً’ (Ali ‘Imrān: 130) is a call to the believers, where Allah SWT warns them not to deal with *riba*. *Riba* here means the addition of debt when postponed or imposing interest on a loan. The warning not to eat it ‘double’ refers to the compounding interest that accumulates on loans, leaving debtors suffering under a heavy financial burden. In the context of this verse, usury was widespread among people in the pre-Islamic era, where lenders were given the right to increase the amount owed each time the debtor was late in paying. Islamic Sharia came to prohibit this practice because of its negative impact on society, such as exploiting the conditions of the poor and increasing the gap between the rich and the poor. This verse calls on Muslims to deal fairly, avoid exploiting people's financial needs, and encourage interest-free loans, which increase social solidarity and achieve financial justice.”

This interpretation aligns with the essential message of the verse and resonates with the views of the classical exegetes in identifying *ribā* as compounding interest that leads to social inequality and moral corruption. ChatGPT correctly recognizes the historical background of the prohibition and the ethical rationale underlying Islamic finance. However, its explanation remains concise, omitting detailed elaborations regarding the *asbāb al-nuẓūl* (context of revelation), the gradational process of *ribā*'s prohibition across different Qur'anic revelations, and the theological principles such as *ḥikmah at-tashrīf* (the divine wisdom behind legislation).

While classical *tafsīr* situates the prohibition of *ribā* within a larger framework of justice, mercy, and social equilibrium integrating divine law (*Shari'ah*) with spiritual consciousness (*taqwā*) ChatGPT's explanation operates primarily on a syntactic and semantic level. It can accurately summarize textual meaning but lacks the hermeneutical depth to infer normative intent (*maqāṣid al-shari'ah*). Consequently, its interpretation is linguistically coherent yet normatively reductive, missing the profound moral and spiritual dimensions embedded in Islamic legal exegesis.

As al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and as-Sa'dī collectively emphasize, the prohibition of *ribā* is not merely an economic injunction but a comprehensive moral reform designed to protect human dignity and social justice. The Qur'anic phrase “*lā ta'kulū al-ribā ad'afan mudā'afan*” thus embodies both a legal restriction and an ethical call for compassion, equity, and restraint. By contrast, ChatGPT's output reflects the structural limitation of artificial intelligence it replicates linguistic knowledge without internalizing theological consciousness or ethical intentionality. Hence, while AI-generated interpretations may serve as introductory tools for quick reference, they cannot substitute for the epistemic richness and spiritual insight of classical Qur'anic exegesis rooted in *uṣūl at-tafsīr*, *taqwā*, and divine revelation.

c. Narrative Aspect (*Qaṣaṣ*): The Prayer of Mūsā and Hārūn

The narrative of Prophet Mūsā (Moses) and Hārūn (Aaron) stands as one of the most powerful accounts in the Qur'an, illustrating the dynamic relationship between *du'ā'* (supplication), divine response, and steadfastness in the face of oppression. This story carries deep theological and moral lessons, particularly about the role of faith, patience, and perseverance in moments of trial. As a narrative aspect of Qur'anic interpretation, it reflects how divine intervention is intertwined with human effort, reminding believers that answered prayers come with the responsibility to remain firm in obedience and trust in Allah's plan.

فَدُّ أُحْيِيَتْ دَعْوَتُكُمَا فَاسْتَقِيمَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعَانِ سَبِيلَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

"Your supplication has been answered. So remain steadfast, and do not follow the way of those who do not know." (Yūnus: 89)

This verse appears in the context of the story of Prophet Mūsā (Moses) and his brother Hārūn (Aaron), when they prayed to Allah SWT for deliverance from Pharaoh's tyranny and the oppression of the Children of Israel. The statement *فَدُّ أُحْيِيَتْ دَعْوَتُكُمَا* marks the divine acceptance of their supplication, serving as both reassurance and instruction to remain firm in obedience after their prayer was granted (Mujahidin et al., 2024).

Classical commentators, such as al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Sa'dī, provide rich exegetical insights into this verse. Al-Ṭabarī (2022) explains that this is a divine affirmation that Allah had accepted the supplication of Mūsā and Hārūn against Pharaoh and his chiefs. He raises a subtle linguistic question why does Allah attribute the answered prayer to both prophets when only Mūsā was the one who prayed verbally? He answers that although Mūsā spoke the supplication, Hārūn's saying of *Āmīn* made him a co-suppliant, for the one who says *Āmīn* shares in the prayer. Thus, both are addressed in the plural form *دَعْوَتُكُمَا* (your prayer).

Ibn Kathīr echoes this understanding, adding that the phrase *فَاسْتَقِيمَا* ("so remain steadfast") instructs both prophets to continue in obedience and perseverance upon divine guidance. He cites narrations from Ibn Jurayj and Ibn 'Abbās explaining that Allah commanded them to maintain *istiqāmah* after their prayer was accepted, emphasizing patience and trust in divine timing. Some scholars, such as Ibn Jurayj, note that Pharaoh continued to live for years after this prayer either forty years or forty days according to differing narrations showing that divine response does not always imply immediate execution but assured fulfillment.

Al-Sa'dī (2000), meanwhile, reinforces the theological lesson that this verse affirms the partnership in supplication between the one who prays and the one who says *Āmīn*. He interprets it as evidence that Allah values unity in prayer and shared devotion, highlighting that divine mercy encompasses both prophets through their joint invocation.

In comparison, ChatGPT's interpretation reflects the general narrative meaning of the verse but lacks the exegetical nuances found in traditional commentaries. The model explains that Allah accepted the prayers of Mūsā and Hārūn against Pharaoh and commands them to remain steadfast, avoiding the path of the ignorant. It correctly identifies the themes of patience, steadfastness, and obedience but does not explore the deeper linguistic, theological, and

contextual layers such as the grammatical reasoning behind دَعَوْنَكُمْ, the temporal delay of divine retribution, or the role of Āmīn in shared supplication.

This difference illustrates a fundamental epistemological gap between artificial intelligence and classical tafsīr. ChatGPT, as an AI language model, operates through pattern recognition and semantic association rather than hermeneutical reasoning (Lund et al., 2023). Its interpretation is coherent and informative at a surface level but devoid of the spiritual depth and analytical precision that characterize tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr. While it can summarize the apparent meaning of Qur'anic verses, it lacks awareness of divine intentionality (qaṣd ilāhī) and cannot perform istinbāṭ the interpretive process of deriving theological and moral insights through transmitted reports and scholarly reasoning.

Hence, this case exemplifies that although ChatGPT can assist in explaining Qur'anic narratives in an accessible manner, its interpretations remain descriptive rather than interpretive. The traditional scholars' tafsīr, by contrast, embodies a synthesis of linguistic mastery, theological reflection, and spiritual insight that remains beyond the epistemic capacity of AI systems.

Overall, the analysis reveals that ChatGPT demonstrates strong semantic synthesis, capable of producing coherent summaries that parallel classical interpretations at a literal level. Nevertheless, its explanations lack the hermeneutical depth, theological reasoning, and epistemic structure that characterize tafsīr bi al-dirāyah.

From an Artificial Intelligence perspective, this limitation arises because LLMs like ChatGPT operate through probabilistic prediction rather than spiritual or rational comprehension. Their "knowledge" is statistical, not revelatory. Hence, when applied to sacred texts requiring moral and metaphysical understanding, the model reproduces linguistic data rather than interprets divine meaning. Therefore, while ChatGPT can serve as a supplementary tool for linguistic or introductory tafsīr studies, it cannot substitute traditional exegetical scholarship grounded in context, transmission, and theological reflection.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations of ChatGPT's Performance in Interpreting the Qur'an

The integration of ChatGPT into Qur'anic interpretation presents both promising opportunities and substantial ethical and methodological concerns. On one hand, AI offers accessible pathways for the public to engage with the Qur'an, particularly for those without formal training in Arabic or Islamic studies. On the other hand, the interpretive nature of the Qur'an deeply rooted in linguistic precision, theological depth, and established exegetical methodologies poses unique challenges that AI models are not yet fully equipped to address. A critical analysis of ChatGPT's strengths, weaknesses, and challenges reveals the extent to which its performance aligns with or diverges from classical tafsir traditions.

One notable strength of ChatGPT is its ability to produce interpretations that often align with accepted exegetical understandings. The model conveys essential meanings of Qur'anic verses in a manner that is clear, concise, and easy to comprehend, making it suitable for introductory engagement. For instance, in interpreting the verse "قَالَ قَدْ أُجِيبَتْ دَعْوَانُكُمَا فَاسْتَقِيمَا" it accurately identifies istiḳāmah as steadfastness in truth and obedience. Likewise, when addressing verses that have

multiple scholarly interpretations such as, "ChatGPT briefly outlines alternative views without overcomplicating the explanation. This allows readers to recognize interpretive diversity efficiently. Furthermore, the model occasionally demonstrates contextual awareness, as seen in its explanation of *لَا تَأْكُلُوا الرِّبَا أَضْعَافًا مُضَاعَفَةً*," where it correctly situates the verse within the pre-Islamic financial system based on compounding interest. Its emphasis on moral and ethical dimensions such as warnings against polytheism and neglecting divine blessings shows an inclination to highlight the ethical essence of the Qur'an (Mukmin et al., 2025). These features indicate that ChatGPT can be a useful tool for introducing Qur'anic concepts to general audiences and for supporting accessible learning.

However, this accessibility comes with significant limitations. ChatGPT often lacks the linguistic, jurisprudential, and methodological depth that characterizes classical tafsir. Its interpretations tend to summarize the overall meaning without engaging in nuanced discussion of legal implications or theological details. For example, in verses related to *riba*, the model does not explore its historical calculation, socio-economic impacts, or the in-depth legal discussions found in classical tafsir by Al-Tabari (2022), Al-Qurtubi (1964), and Al-Razi (1999). It frequently omits *asbāb al-nuzūl* (reasons for revelation), relevant hadiths, and variant scholarly opinions, limiting its ability to reflect the intellectual richness of Islamic exegetical tradition. The model also struggles with subtle theological distinctions, such as differentiating between major, minor, and hidden forms of *shirk* (polytheism), and does not adequately address rhetorical and stylistic elements that contribute to the Qur'an's inimitable eloquence area deeply analyzed by scholars like Al-Zamakhshari (1987). Additionally, its lack of accurate references to early exegetical authorities and authenticated hadiths undermines the scholarly reliability of its responses, rendering them more like general summaries than methodologically grounded interpretations.

In addition to methodological issues, there are pressing technical challenges. The most critical is the lack of transparency regarding the interpretive sources and frameworks underlying ChatGPT's responses. While the model draws from diverse textual materials, it does not specify its interpretive orientation whether it leans toward traditional, rational, or jurisprudential perspectives making it difficult to assess theological consistency and scholarly credibility. This ambiguity stands in contrast to classical tafsir works, which clearly document sources, interpretive principles, and scholarly chains. Moreover, ChatGPT often fails to provide verifiable references, increasing the risk of misinterpretation and the spread of inaccurate information (Ibn Atiyyah, 2001).

From a scientific standpoint, the Qur'an's complexity its layered linguistic, legal, theological, historical, and rhetorical dimensions demands advanced analytical capabilities. Interpreting creed-related verses involving *shirk* or legal rulings on matters like *riba* or *thaharah* requires nuanced understanding of theological terminology, historical context, jurisprudential principles, and the diversity of legal schools. Classical tafsir traditions rely heavily on authentic prophetic traditions, the opinions of the Companions, and early scholars (Al-Makki, 1989; Shomad et al., 2024). ChatGPT, however, lacks the ability to systematically integrate these dimensions. Its responses remain general and do not adequately reflect the jurisprudential differences between schools of thought, such as those concerning purification (*thaharah*), which have well-documented

variations (Ibn Abi Hatim, 1998). Consequently, its interpretations may not align with authoritative exegetical standards or specific doctrinal perspectives (Al-Balkhi, 2002; Faizal et al., 2024).

In conclusion, while ChatGPT shows promise in making Qur'anic content more accessible, its lack of methodological rigor, linguistic depth, theological precision, and transparent sourcing raises serious ethical and scholarly concerns. Without proper scholarly oversight, there is a risk of users perceiving AI-generated outputs as authoritative interpretations. Therefore, future development of AI-based Qur'anic interpretation tools must integrate classical tafsir methodologies, provide clear source attribution, and involve expert review to ensure theological soundness and academic credibility.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examined ChatGPT's interpretive performance in understanding selected Qur'anic verses, comparing its outputs with the exegetical works of classical scholars such as Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, Al-Qurṭubī, and As-Sa'dī. The findings reveal that while ChatGPT successfully conveys the apparent meanings of verses and demonstrates strong semantic coherence, it lacks the methodological depth, theological nuance, and epistemic framework characteristic of traditional tafsir. Its interpretations remain descriptive rather than analytical reflecting linguistic correlations instead of hermeneutical reasoning rooted in *tafsir bi al-ma'thur* and *tafsir bi al-dirayah*. Thus, the study confirms that although AI models can assist in preliminary understanding, they cannot replicate the integrative synthesis of transmission (*naql*), reason (*'aql*), and revelation (*wahy*) that defines authentic Qur'anic exegesis.

Beyond this empirical finding, the research contributes a conceptual mapping of AI's strengths and limitations within the field of tafsir. It provides an initial framework for understanding how artificial intelligence engages with sacred texts highlighting that its epistemology is probabilistic rather than revelatory. This mapping is significant as it exposes both the potential of AI as a pedagogical or linguistic aid and its inherent incapacity to handle metaphysical, moral, and theological dimensions of revelation. Therefore, the study argues for the necessity of developing an integrative methodological framework that combines computational tools with classical hermeneutical principles to ensure that AI-assisted tafsir remains faithful to both scientific rigor and *shar'i* integrity.

In light of these insights, this research opens new directions for interdisciplinary inquiry between digital humanities and Qur'anic studies. Future studies are recommended to test other language models beyond ChatGPT, incorporate supervised datasets grounded in classical tafsir traditions, and design AI filters trained on verified commentaries by recognized scholars. Such advancements would help refine the epistemic reliability of AI-generated interpretations while safeguarding the sanctity of divine discourse. Ultimately, this study underscores that the role of AI in tafsir should be seen not as a replacement for human scholarship, but as a complementary tool within a disciplined and ethically guided interpretive framework.

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