



## Living qur'an: Al-qur'an reception in al muhammad cepu islamic boarding school

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the reception of the Qur'an at the Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School (Pondok Pesantren) in Cepu. This qualitative research employs an inductive descriptive method. Qualitative research is a procedure that analyzes descriptive data in the form of spoken or written observations. The inductive descriptive method is intended to describe and analyze data to obtain a general overview or description of the reception of the Qur'an at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School. This study asserts that the Qur'an is a holy book that remains relevant in all situations and conditions (ṣāliḥ li kulli zamān wa makān). The theoretical framework used is Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge theory, focusing on three typologies of meaning: objective, expressive, and documentary. The study yields at least two findings. First, several forms of reception were identified at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School. Second, the meanings attached to these receptions include: a) objective meaning, indicating that the various reception behaviors at Al Muhammad are symbols of compliance and reverence toward the school's regulations, b) expressive meaning, manifested through the internalization of positive values in the ongoing Qur'anic learning process, and c) documentary meaning, realized in the form of local contextualization within a comprehensive cultural system.

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### Introduction

The Qur'an is often referred to as a sacred text that is flexible, Ṣāliḥ fī Kullī Zamān wa Makān, meaning it is always in harmony with every situation and condition. This harmony is evident in how Muslim communities express and receive the Qur'an within their midst. This reflects a paradigm shift in which the Qur'an, originally seen as a holy book containing moral teachings to guide humanity on the right path, is now expressed and received according to individual knowledge and understanding (Mujtaba, 2024; Al-Baihaqi, 1986).

In the context of receiving the Qur'an, the Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School (Pondok Pesantren) in Cepu is one such institution that preserves this reception. For example, the tradition of reading Surah Yāsīn is routinely observed after Maghrib and Subuh prayers. This tradition is carried out collectively and in congregation, led by either the caretaker or a student appointed by the caretaker to serve as the imam (Sakroni, 2024).

Another interesting aspect highlighted in this study is how the students express their reception of the Qur'an by placing calligraphy in various locations, such as in the dormitory and the caretaker's residence (Rispu, 2012). Additionally, other forms of reception at this pesantren include the regular study of Tafsīr Jalālāin and activities like simā'an or murāja'ah

(Fatah, 2020).

This study aims to explore the different types and variations of Qur'anic reception at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School and seeks to understand the meanings embedded within them (Anwar, Darmawan, and Setiawan, 2016).

Previous research on Qur'anic reception and the living Qur'an is extensive. For instance, Luthfiah Shobahah (2017) conducted research on the practice of reading Yasin Fadilah from the perspective of the Living Qur'an and analyzed social change (a case study at Majelis Taklim Al-Muthmainnah, Lemahabang Kulon Village, Lemahabang District, Cirebon Regency). Elly Magfiroh (2017) published an article titled Living Qur'an: Khataman as an Effort by Santri to Preserve the Qur'an. Abdullah Afandi and Ummu Malihatur Roihana (2018) wrote The Tradition of Reciting Surah Munjiyat at Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School, Kediri: A Study of the Living Qur'an, and Abdul Fatah (2020) authored Living Qur'an: The Tradition of Wirid Al-Ma'tsūrāt at SMAIT Abu Bakar Boarding School, Kulon Progo.

These previous studies differ both materially and formally from the present research. This is because the current study focuses on using Karl Mannheim's sociology theory to explore the search for meaning through three variables: objective meaning, expressive meaning, and documentary meaning (Baum, 1999).

## Method

This qualitative research employs a descriptive method. According to Moleong, qualitative research aims to comprehensively understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects—such as perceptions, actions, behaviors, and motivations—through descriptive means in a natural context (Moleong, 2014). The study seeks to describe the reception of the Qur'an at Pondok Pesantren Al Muhammad Cepu, with the goal of obtaining a detailed description of the values associated with this reception.

Two types of data sources were used: primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through interviews with members of the Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School community, including the caretaker, students, administrators, and alumni. Secondary data consisted of documents, books, journals, and theses related to the research subject (Mujtaba, 2024; Anwar, Darmawan, and Setiawan, 2016).

Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. The researcher acted as a participant observer, directly observing the activities under study and occasionally participating in the Qur'anic reception processes at the boarding school. Unstructured interviews were conducted, allowing for informal and flexible conversations with informants to create a comfortable interview environment. Documentation involved capturing images of activities related to the reception of the Qur'an (Farichah, 2024; Sakroni, 2024).

After data collection, the analysis process involved: (1) identifying data according to Karl Mannheim's sociology of meaning theory, (2) classifying data based on the theoretical framework, (3) analyzing data by recording interview results relevant to the theory, (4) interpreting the analyzed data in line with the theory, and (5) concluding the analysis by writing a report (Baum, 1999).

## Result and Discussion

### Varieties of Qur'anic Reception at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu

Based on the typology of reception explained by Ahmad Rafiq, the researcher will detail three of these typologies in the context of Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu. These three typologies are: 1) Exegetical reception in the study of the Tafsīr Jalālaīn book, 2) Aesthetic reception in calligraphy at the students' dormitories and the principal's residence, 3) Functional reception of the Qur'an in the tradition of reciting selected surahs.

The study of the Tafsīr Jalālaīn book at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu, is usually conducted every day except Friday mornings. This activity takes place from 05:00 to 06:00 AM WIB. It almost never takes a break unless the principal is indisposed, such as

traveling out of town or being ill. The session begins with the collective recitation of the shalawat Muhammadun while the students wait for the principal to arrive at the gathering. Once the principal is present, the study commences with the recitation of hadrah and fātiḥah. Typically, the Tafsīr Jalālaīn study is conducted by the principal in the bandongan model, which the students can listen to directly. However, in this gathering, a question-and-answer session is opened as a way for students to respond to the study of the book.

Systematically, the study of the Tafsīr Jalālaīn book at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu, consists of three stages. First, the principal recites the Qur'anic verses that will be the topic of discussion. The system used in this study is that the principal or kiai recites the verses sequentially according to the order in the mushaf uṣmānī. After that, the principal explains the meaning of each word in the verses according to their i'rāb and tarkīb. The purpose is to facilitate the students' understanding of the text.

The principal then provides an explanation of the interpretation of these verses. KH. Abdul Halim, as the principal and instructor, often adds additional notes related to the topic under discussion, such as presenting historical stories that are in line with or relevant to the content. He also often motivates the students by singing Javanese songs with shalawat for communal singing.

After the material presentation, the principal usually invites the students to ask questions or respond to the presentation. If questions arise, the principal directly responds and answers them with thorough and detailed explanations. The Tafsīr Jalālaīn study at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School concludes with a greeting from the principal, followed by the recitation of kafāratul majlīs and the Yā Robbanā' Tarafnā song collectively by the students.

In addition, at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu, the presence of the Qur'an is also received aesthetically. One form of this aesthetic reception can be seen in the ornaments or calligraphy of Qur'anic verses in the principal's residence and the students' dormitories. One of the Qur'anic verses displayed in the principal's residence is QS. Āli Imrān [3]: 79. There is even complete calligraphy of the 30 Juz in very small writing on the wall of the principal's residence. This calligraphy is located in the inner guest room of the principal's residence and is decorated with various ornaments. The boundary lines of the illumination of the calligraphy use plant motifs with a harmonious color combination, making the calligraphy appear more beautiful. The calligraphy found in the students' dormitory is QS. Al-Ḥasyr [59]: 18.

The first calligraphy uses the khat naskhi style, while the second uses the khat dīwānī style. The khat in the calligraphy at Ponpes Al-Husna has proportional and rigid square and rectangular letter shapes. With its proportional size, this calligraphy enhances the beauty of both the dormitory and the principal's residence. In addition to the two types of reception mentioned above, Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu, also receives the Qur'an functionally. This functional reception is manifested in the recitation of selected surahs such as surah Yāsīn, surah al-Wāqī'ah, and surah al-Mulk.

The recitation of surah Yāsīn is routinely done by the students after the Maghrib prayer. The recitation of surah al-Wāqī'ah takes place after the Isha prayer, while the recitation of surah al-Mulk occurs after the Fajr prayer. The technical execution of these three surahs' recitations is like that of any typical practice, starting with hadrah and fātiḥah, followed by the recitation of aurād with specific numbers. After the recitation, a student chosen by the principal usually leads a concluding prayer.

### **Reception of the Eternity of the Qur'an in the Tradition of Qur'anic Preservation**

The typology of reception as explained by Ahmad Rafiq does not fully accommodate the reality and facts of Qur'anic reception at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu. That is, the three typologies—exegetical, aesthetic, and functional—cannot cover the reception of the Qur'an in the form of Qur'anic submission, whether through bi al-nadzri, bi al-hifdzi, or merely murāja'ah.

The above activities or practices are part of the students' efforts to preserve the originality and authenticity of the Qur'an by forming a Qur'anic character in each student. As is generally the case, these activities are manifested in the awarding of syahādah to those who have completed the Qur'an, whether bi al-hifdzi (at least Juz Amma or Juz 30) or bi al-nadzri. Of course, one of the objectives of awarding syahādah is to promote the Qur'an and as part of its preservation.

Essentially, eternal reception, in substance, is almost the same as functional reception. The difference between the two lies in whether there is feedback or not. Functional reception expects feedback after absorbing the Qur'an, while eternal reception does not. Readers or practitioners of functional reception expect blessings after reading the Qur'an or selected surahs. For instance, when reading surah Yāsīn, the students of Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu, hope that the reward from the recitation can benefit their ancestors who have passed away. The recitation of surah al-Wāqī'ah is, for example, expected to bring ease and blessed sustenance. Similarly, the recitation of surah al-Mulk is expected to save one from the punishment of the grave.

The purpose of the eternal reception of the Qur'an here is solely to preserve the authenticity and originality of the Qur'an from time immemorial. This preservation is affirmed in QS. al-Hijr [15]: 9, which states that Allah will always preserve the Qur'an forever. This means that eternal reception is a form of worship or ta'abbudi performed by the students of Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu, both orally and in writing.

#### **The Meaning of Qur'anic Reception at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu**

The theory used in this study is Karl Mannheim's sociology of meaning. This theory is then used to uncover the meaning of Qur'anic reception at Al Muhammad Islamic Boarding School, Cepu.

Karl Mannheim stated that human behavior carries at least three inherent meanings. First, the objective meaning, which is derived from the social context in which the action takes place. Second, the expressive meaning, which is personally conveyed by the actor and integrated into practice or tradition. Third, the documentary meaning, which is implied by an action but not fully recognized by the actor, suggesting that the action reflects a broader cultural context without the actor being entirely aware of it.

##### **a. Objective Meaning**

The objective meaning found in the various receptions of the Qur'an at Ponpes Al Muhammad Cepu symbolizes obedience and reverence towards the established rules of the pesantren, as well as the guidance provided by the caretakers to the students. Obedience, reverence, submission, and respect towards the caretakers are characteristic of a religious institution known as pesantren. It is said that pesantren serves as a platform for the kiai to establish a patronage system, which has enabled the pesantren to endure to this day.

In the context of studying the Tafsir Jalālaīn, interviews with students who participate in this study reveal that their involvement is seen as a form of adherence to the pesantren's regulations. Obedience, reverence, and respect are among the first values instilled in the students. This moral character is a way for the students to show respect to their teachers, with the awareness that the kiai is a successor of the prophets, a waraṣah al-anbiyā'. They understand that the kiai's approval is crucial for their success. A popular Arabic adage, which they likely comprehend, illustrates this:

ثبوت العلم باملاذكرة وبركة العلم باخلدمة ومنافع العلم برضا الشيخ

"Knowledge is established through study, blessed knowledge is obtained through high dedication (khidmah), and beneficial knowledge comes through the approval of the teacher."

The last part of this adage is particularly significant to the students, indicating that any action they take should first receive permission and approval from their kiai. This has become the habitus of students in studying the Tafsir Jalālaīn, following a system deeply rooted in their individual beliefs.

#### b. Expressive Meaning

The various receptions of the Qur'an found at Ponpes Al Muhammad Cepu result in diverse expressive meanings, naturally arising from the different individuals involved. In the context of studying the Tafsir Jalālaīn, at least three main expressive meanings have been identified at Ponpes Al Muhammad Cepu. First, students seek to expand their knowledge of Qur'anic interpretation. Second, the activity is seen as an effort to become the best possible human beings. Third, it serves as a way to avoid arrogance, recognizing that even if one feels knowledgeable, one should still engage in study.

For the caretakers and instructors, the study of the Tafsir Jalālaīn is an appreciative act by Muslims towards the works of classical scholars. Tafsir is a key to understanding the Qur'an. By studying tafsir, students can unlock the meanings of the Qur'an, whether in the context of worship (ubūdiyyah), social transactions (mu'āmalah), or learning from historical narratives for guidance. Therefore, students gain a comprehensive understanding of the content and meaning of the Qur'an. It is highly discouraged for students to understand the Qur'an without the tafsirs of previous scholars, as this would lead to a literal and rigid interpretation.

Regarding the aesthetic reception of the Qur'an as expressed in the calligraphy at Ponpes Al Muhammad, this calligraphy symbolizes spirituality. It is not only an aesthetic enhancement of the pesantren but also intended to inspire enlightenment in the readers. This is crucial, as the hope is that when someone reads the calligraphy, their heart will be moved and reminded. For example, the calligraphy of Surah Āli Imrān [3]: 79 displayed in the dormitory serves as a reminder of the importance of sincerity in both learning and teaching. Both are essential for the blessings that will be received by both the teacher/kiai and the students. Meanwhile, the calligraphy in the dormitory, Surah al-Ḥasyr [59]: 18, serves as a reminder for students to always introspect, be cautious in their actions, and be pious to Allah, as Allah is always watching every action of humans, including the students.

#### c. Documentary Meaning

Documentary meaning is the implicit or implied meaning of a certain action. It implies that every action taken by the actor is not entirely recognized as an expression of a broader cultural context. In the context of the study of the Tafsir Jalālaīn, it is understood from respondents that the routine activity is part of the effort to maintain a tradition that has been passed down through generations. This means that, indirectly, respondents have affirmed that the study of the Tafsir Jalālaīn is a symbol of the essence of knowledge in the pesantren community. As noted by Mas'udi, knowledge in the pesantren context is viewed as something inherited, transmitted, and not created anew.

Thus, there are two main consequences in the context of the Tafsir Jalālaīn study. First, the realization of homogeneity or uniformity in the Tafsir Jalālaīn study across pesantren. It can be said that almost all pesantren study the Tafsir Jalālaīn, albeit with different expressions or techniques. Second, the realization of a stratification of knowledge, where the Tafsir Jalālaīn is one of the classical scholarly works that serves as a central reference. The kiai only provides commentary or explanation from the book, acting merely as an instrument rather than as someone with the capacity to evaluate it. Therefore, it can be concluded that the study of the Tafsir Jalālaīn at Ponpes Al Muhammad Cepu is, in essence, an expression of a comprehensive cultural tradition. The study of the Tafsir Jalālaīn has existed and been preserved in various pesantren and other religious study assemblies from the past to the present.

Another aspect that has become a pervasive cultural practice, though not directly acknowledged, is the aesthetic reception of the Qur'an through calligraphy. Islamic art, particularly calligraphy, has been present since ancient times. However, the actors or practitioners may not fully recognize its existence. The origin of calligraphy is based on at least two factors: first, historical data that can be validated, and second, mystical beliefs with unclear origins. Nonetheless, calligraphy did not emerge spontaneously; it underwent various stages



and processes over many years before evolving into its current form, and it will likely continue to develop.

In the context of the preservation of the Qur'an carried out by Ponpes Al Muhammad Cepu, this practice is essentially a manifestation of a comprehensive cultural tradition. The initial form of Qur'an preservation can be traced back to the time of the Prophet and his companions. The Qur'an was preserved by memorization, and historical evidence shows that although not all, the majority of companions were memorized the Qur'an, such as Zaid bin Tsabit, Ibn Abbas, Uthman bin Affan, and Ali bin Abi Talib.

The preservation of the Qur'an by the companions served as the embryo and foundation for the comprehensive codification of the Qur'an. While it is socially and historically understood that the preservation and perpetuation by the companions were primarily through memorization, some companions did attempt to write down the Qur'an. This tradition was then continued by subsequent generations, including the *tābi'īn*, *tābi tābi'īn*, later scholars, and even today, with many memorizing and preserving the Qur'an through both manual calligraphy and printed texts. This practice is also evident at Ponpes Al Muhammad Cepu.

The practice of eternal reception of the Qur'an at Ponpes Al Muhammad Cepu is essentially a form of cultural tradition that is unconsciously practiced by other religious institutions. For example, many *pesantren* have special Qur'an memorization programs (*tahfidz*), such as Pondok Pesantren Yanbū al-Qur'an Kudus, Pondok Pesantren al-Munawwir Krapyak, Pondok Pesantren al-Qur'an Betengan, Pondok Pesantren Al-Barakah Lirboyo Kediri, among many others. These *pesantren* usually award a certificate to students who have completed the Qur'an during a graduation ceremony at one of their annual events.

## Conclusion

Based on the research conducted by the researcher on the reception of the Qur'an at Pondok Pesantren Al Muhammad Cepu, the following conclusions can be drawn the Qur'an reception practices at Ponpes Al Muhammad Cepu are categorized into four variants, namely: a) Exegesis Reception. This is manifested in the form of studying the *Tafsīr Jalālaīn* book. b) Aesthetic Reception. This takes the form of calligraphy derived from verses in the Qur'an, displayed within the caretakers' area and the students' dormitories. c) Functional Reception. This is manifested in the tradition of reciting selected surahs, such as *Yāsīn*, *al-Wāqī'ah*, and *al-Mulk*. d) Eternal Reception of the Qur'an. This is realized through various forms of Qur'an preservation activities, including memorization, Qur'an recitation sessions, and *murāja'ah al-Qur'an* (reviewing the Qur'an).

Based on Karl Mannheim's sociological theory, the inherent meanings from the various Qur'an receptions at Pondok Pesantren Al Muhammad Cepu are divided into three categories: a) Objective Meaning. The variety of Qur'an receptions at Ponpes Al Muhammad Cepu symbolizes obedience and compliance with the *pesantren*'s regulations. This reflects the institutional characteristics of the *pesantren*, where obedience, reverence, submission, and respect towards the caretakers are fundamental values. b) Expressive Meaning. The expressive meaning identified is the internalization of positive values through the continuous Qur'an learning process at the *pesantren*. This process fosters personal growth and the striving to become better individuals, while also preventing arrogance by encouraging ongoing study regardless of one's perceived knowledge level. c) Documentary Meaning. The documentary meaning found is the local contextualization of the comprehensive cultural system. This indicates that the Qur'an reception practices are embedded within the broader cultural traditions of the *pesantren*, maintaining and perpetuating longstanding customs and educational practices.

In summary, the study highlights that the reception of the Qur'an at Pondok Pesantren Al Muhammad Cepu encompasses a diverse range of practices, each with distinct functions and symbolic meanings. These practices not only reinforce the institutional values of obedience and reverence but also promote personal and communal growth through continuous learning and cultural preservation.

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