



Analysis of Ikhtiyār in Qiraat: Its Relevance to the Originality of the Qiraat of the Qur'an

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Abstract

This study concludes that ikhtiyār in Qiraat is an important concept related to the selection process of scholars in determining a recitation of the Qur'an. Ikhtiyār has two opposing sides. On the positive side, it functions as a validation instrument in determining the acceptance or rejection of a reading, so that it becomes an important mechanism in maintaining the authenticity of the Qur'an while maintaining the diversity of Qiraat that is inherited from generation to generation. However, on the other hand, ikhtiyār also has the potential to cause misunderstandings, especially when it is considered to show a difference between Qiraat mutawātir. The interesting thing about this Thesis is an in-depth explanation of how the mechanism of Ikhtiyār can shape the legitimacy of a Qiraat, as well as what implications it has on the sustainability of the science of qiraat itself. Thus, this study not only examines the technical aspects of Ikhtiyār, but also photographs its role in maintaining the purity of the Qur'anic reading. In addition, this research is also directed to respond to various accusations of orientalists who often view the variety of qiraat as a weakness in the transmission of the Qur'an. Through this study, it is shown that the difference in Qiraat is actually a wealth of reading traditions based on scientific authority, not weaknesses as perceived by outsiders. The findings in this study show that the variety of Qiraat al-Qur'an has an authentic source, namely from Allah Swt., not the result of engineering or creation of Qiraat scholars. This is in line with the view of the majority of scholars who affirm that differences in Qiraat are part of the diversity of history that is revealed mutawātir through the path of authentic narration. This view differs fundamentally from the argument of some orientalists who consider that the diversity of Qiraat only arises due to the role of Qiraat scholars in creating variants of reading. According to them, the main source of the difference is solely due to the form of the initial mushaf that has not been equipped with harakat and dot marks, thus opening up space for reading interpretation. Methodologically, this study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method combined with grounded theory design. Through this approach, various classical and contemporary literature on Qiraat and ikhtiyār are examined, and then a framework of understanding that emerges from the data itself is developed.

Keywords: Qur'an, Ikhtiyār, Qiraat, Orientalist, Islam.

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INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an as the holy book of Muslims has been maintained in purity since it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (saw) until now through a very strict and structured transmission mechanism. One of the important aspects in the transmission of the Qur'an is the existence of qiraat or a variety of readings that have been passed down from generation to generation through the uninterrupted path of sanad. This diversity of qiraat is not a contradiction or weakness in the tradition of the Qur'an, but rather is evidence of the richness of the treasures of reading that have been preserved since the time of revelation (Al-Qattan, 2000). This phenomenon of qiraat diversity has become an object of in-depth study in the Islamic scientific tradition, especially in the discipline of qiraat which has developed rapidly since the early centuries of Islam.

In the development of qiraat, the concept of ikhtiyār has emerged which refers to the process of selecting or selecting certain readings by qiraat scholars based on the criteria that have been set. Ikhtiyār etymologically means choosing or selecting, while terminologically in the context of qiraat, it refers to the activity of a reciter or qiraat scholar in determining the reading that is considered the strongest and most valid of the various variants of the existing reading (Al-Zarkashi, 1984). This concept is important because it is closely related to the mechanism of validation and legitimacy of a reading in the qiraat tradition, so that not all circulating readings can be accepted as valid qiraat.

The problem of ikhtiyār in qiraat is a complex discourse because it involves several dimensions, both from methodological, epistemological, and historical aspects. From a methodological point of view, ikhtiyār requires a deep understanding of the criteria used by scholars in selecting the readings, which include three main pillars: conformity with the Ottoman tradition, in accordance with the rules of the Arabic language, and having an authentic sanad and mutawātir (Ibn al-Jazari, 1999). These three criteria are the foundation in determining whether a reading can be accepted as a valid qiraat or rejected as a sharia or weak reading.

From an epistemological perspective, ikhtiyār raises the question of the relationship between the scientific authority of qiraat scholars and the nature of the Qur'anic revelation which comes from Allah SWT. Some parties question whether the selection process carried out by qiraat scholars can affect or even change the substance of revelation itself (Bergstrasser, 1932). This question becomes even more complex when it is linked to the fact that there is a difference of opinion among scholars about the status of a particular qiraat, with some scholars accepting it while others rejecting it. This then raises concerns about the existence of subjectivity in the process of ikhtiyār which can threaten the objectivity and purity of the Qur'anic reading.

Historically, the practice of ikhtiyār has existed since the early days of Islam, although it has not been as systematically codified as it was in later periods. The companions of the Prophet (saw) themselves had made a selection of the readings they received from the Prophet (saw), as seen in the process of codifying the mushaf during the time of Caliph Uthman bin Affan which involved the selection of certain rasm as the standard for writing the Qur'an (Al-Suyuti, 1974). This process was then continued by the generation of tabi'in and tabi'it tabi'in

who developed a more systematic methodology in selecting and validating the readings circulating in various Islamic regions.

The development of *ikhtiyār* reached its peak during the time of Imam Abu Bakr ibn Mujahid who lived in the third century Hijri, who later codified the seven *qiraat* as the *mutawātir* and most authentic *qiraat* (Ibn Mujahid, 1972). Ibn Mujahid's decision then became an important turning point in the history of *qiraat*, because since then there has been a standardization of *qiraat* that is widely accepted by Muslims. However, this decision also caused controversy among some scholars who considered that restricting *qiraat* to only seven imams was a form of narrowing the diversity of readings which were actually wider and more varied (Abu Syamah, 1997).

In the contemporary context, the discourse on *ikhtiyār* faces new challenges, especially from orientalists who question the authenticity of the Qur'anic *qiraat*. Orientalists such as Arthur Jeffery, Theodor Noldeke, and Friedrich Schwally argued that the diversity of *qiraat* showed uncertainty in the transmission of the Qur'anic text and that *qiraat* was the result of the creativity of *qiraat* scholars in responding to the imperfections of the Ottoman *rasm* that lacked punctuation and punctuation (Jeffery, 1937). According to them, the difference in reading that exists today does not come from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), but emerged later as an attempt by scholars to interpret ambiguous texts.

This orientalist accusation of course received a strong response from Muslim scholars and scholars who defended the authenticity of *qiraat*. They argue that the diversity of *qiraat* is precisely evidence of the richness of oral traditions that have been very tightly maintained through the *sanad* system that is uninterrupted from generation to generation (Al-Zarqani, 1995). The difference in reading does not arise because of the unclarity of the Ottoman tradition, but because indeed the Prophet Muhammad himself has taught the Qur'an in various forms of reading in accordance with different Arabic dialects, as stated in the hadith about *sab'atu ahraf* or seven letters.

The controversy over *ikhtiyār* is also related to the debate about whether *qiraat* is *tauqifi* or *ijtihadi*. The majority of scholars state that *qiraat* is *tauqifi*, meaning it comes directly from the revelation and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), so there is no room for human *ijtihad* in creating new readings (Al-Qastalani, 1996). However, there are some scholars who argue that in certain aspects, *qiraat* has an *ijtihadi* dimension, especially in terms of the application of Arabic rules that allow for variations in reading as long as it is still in accordance with the Ottoman tradition and the applicable language rules (Al-Baqillani, 2001).

This research departs from the need to clarify the position of *ikhtiyār* in the *qiraat* tradition and its implications for the understanding of the originality of *qiraat* of the Qur'an. Through this study, it will be explored how the mechanism of *ikhtiyār* works in the process of *qiraat* validation, what are the criteria used by scholars in selecting readings, and how *ikhtiyār* can function as an instrument to maintain the purity of the Qur'an without reducing the value of divine revelation. In addition, this study will also analyze the response to orientalist criticism by showing that *ikhtiyār* is not an arbitrary or subjective process, but rather a scientific methodology based on strict and objective standards.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of straightening out the understanding of ikhtiyār which is often misunderstood, both by Muslims themselves and by outsiders. Among Muslims, there is sometimes a misconception that ikhtiyār gives authority to scholars to create new readings or change existing ones, when in fact ikhtiyār is only a selection process for readings that already exist and have met the criteria for authenticity. Meanwhile, on the orientalist side, a misunderstanding of ikhtiyār is often used as a pretext to question the authenticity of the Qur'an as a whole.

Using a qualitative approach through literature studies and grounded theory analysis, this research will explore various classical and contemporary literature on qiraat and ikhtiyār, including the works of prominent scholars such as Ibn al-Jazari, Al-Zarkashi, Al-Suyuti, and others. Through an in-depth study of these literatures, a comprehensive conceptual framework will be built about ikhtiyār and its relevance to the originality of the Qur'anic qiraat. The results of this research are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of qiraat science and strengthen the argument about the authenticity of the Qur'an in the midst of various contemporary challenges.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method or library research combined with grounded theory design. The qualitative approach was chosen because of the nature of research that seeks to understand the phenomenon of ikhtiyār in the context of the Islamic scientific tradition in depth and comprehensively, without involving numerical or statistical measurements (Creswell, 2014). This method allows researchers to explore the meanings, concepts, and relationships between concepts contained in classical and contemporary literature on qiraat and ikhtiyār.

The literature study in this study involves collecting data from various literary sources, both in the form of classical books on qiraat written by previous scholars and contemporary works that discuss the science of qiraat and orientalist criticism of the Qur'an. Primary sources in this study include monumental works such as "Al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Asyr" by Ibn al-Jazari, "Al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an" by Al-Zarkashi, "Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an" by Al-Suyuti, and "Al-Sab'ah fi al-Qira'at" by Ibn Mujahid (Zed, 2008). Secondary sources include various journal articles, dissertations, and contemporary books that discuss qiraat, ikhtiyār, and orientalist criticism of the Qur'an.

In collecting data, the researcher identifies and selects literature that is relevant to the research theme. This process begins with searching the literature through various academic databases, digital libraries, and library catalogs to find sources related to ikhtiyār, qiraat, and related issues. After the literature is collected, a screening process is carried out to ensure that the sources used have high academic credibility and are relevant to the research focus.

The grounded theory design was applied in this study to allow the emergence of a theory or conceptual framework from the data itself, rather than from a pre-existing theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through this approach, the researcher reads and analyzes the literature that has been collected iteratively, codes for important concepts that emerge, and then develops broader analytical categories. This process is carried out repeatedly until

theoretical saturation is achieved, which is when there are no more new concepts or categories that emerge from the data.

The data analysis in this study involves several stages. The first stage is open coding, in which the researcher identifies key concepts that appear in the literature on ikhtiyār and qiraat, such as the criteria for the validity of qiraat, the mechanism of reading selection, the role of qiraat scholars, and responses to orientalist criticism. The second stage is axial coding, where the concepts that have been identified are then organized into broader categories based on the relationships and relationships between the concepts. The third stage is selective coding, in which the categories that have been formed are then integrated to form a coherent and comprehensive conceptual framework of ikhtiyār in qiraat (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, sources are triangulated by comparing information from various different literatures, both from the perspective of classical scholars and contemporary scholars. In addition, the researcher also conducts member checking by consulting qiraat experts and scholars who are competent in this field to validate the interpretation and analysis carried out. A process of reflexivity is also applied, in which the researcher critically reflects on positions and assumptions that might affect the interpretation of the data.

The limitation of this research lies in its nature based on literature studies, so it does not involve direct observation of qiraat practices or interviews with contemporary reciters. However, this limitation is minimized by using a very rich and comprehensive literature, as well as by conducting an in-depth and critical analysis of the available data. This research is also limited to focusing on ikhtiyār in the context of Qur'anic qiraat, so it does not discuss extensively about other aspects of qiraat that are not directly related to the main theme of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Basic Concept of Ikhtiyār in the Qiraat Tradition

Ikhtiyār in the qiraat tradition is a concept that has complex epistemological and methodological dimensions. Etymologically, the word ikhtiyār comes from the root word “kha-ya-ra” which means to choose or select something that is considered better than others (Al-Fayumi, 1987). In the context of qiraat, ikhtiyār refers to the process of selecting a certain recitation by a reciter or qiraat scholar from various existing variants of reading, based on certain criteria that have been set by the previous scholars. This concept is very important in the qiraat tradition because it is related to the mechanism of validation and legitimacy of a reading as a valid and practicable qiraat.

In the classical literature on qiraat, scholars give diverse definitions of ikhtiyār, although they have essentially the same substance. According to Ibn al-Jazari, ikhtiyār is the process by which a reciter chooses the recitation that is considered the strongest in terms of sanad, most in accordance with the Ottoman rasm, and the most fluent in terms of Arabic (Ibn al-Jazari, 1999). This definition shows that ikhtiyār is not an arbitrary or subjective process, but is based on objective standards that have been agreed upon by the community of qiraat scholars. These criteria then become the foundation in determining whether a reading is acceptable or rejected.

Al-Zarkashi in “Al-Burhan fi ‘Ulum al-Qur’an” explains that ikhtiyār is a manifestation of the ijtiḥād of scholars in determining the reading that is closest to what was taught by the Prophet Muhammad (saw) (Al-Zarkashi, 1984). However, he emphasized that ijtiḥād in this context does not mean creating new readings, but choosing from readings that already exist and have been authentically narrated. In other words, ikhtiyār is a process of selection, not creation. This understanding is very important to correct the erroneous assumption that qiraat scholars have the authority to create variants of reading according to their wishes.

In its historical development, the practice of ikhtiyār has existed since the early days of Islam, although it has not been systematically codified. The companions of the Prophet (saw) such as Ubay bin Ka’ab, Abdullah bin Mas’ud, and Zaid bin Tsabit have made a selection of the readings they received from the Prophet (saw), although in a simple form (Al-Suyuti, 1974). This process then became more structured during the tabi’in and tabi’it tabi’in periods, where a more systematic methodology in selecting and validating readings began to develop. It was during this period that technical terms such as qiraat mutawātir, qiraat mafahur, qiraat ahad, and qiraat syaz began to emerge which showed the existence of a classification of various levels of the validity of the reading (Abu Syamah, 1997).

The peak of the development of ikhtiyār occurred during the time of Imam Abu Bakr ibn Mujahid in the third century Hijri, who codified the seven qiraat as the mutawātir and most authentic qiraat. Ibn Mujahid’s decision was actually a form of ikhtiyār on a wider scale, where he selected seven qiraat imams from the many reciters available at his time based on the criteria of the validity of the sanad, conformity with the Ottoman rasm, and fame among scholars (Ibn Mujahid, 1972). Although this decision later became a widely accepted standard, it also drew controversy from some scholars who considered that the restriction on the seven qiraat was an unnecessary narrowing of the actual wider diversity of reading.

This controversy then gave birth to a debate about whether Ibn Mujahid’s efforts were binding or merely a recommendation. Some scholars argue that Ibn Mujahid’s decision is ijtiḥadi and not binding, so that other qiraat outside the seven qiraat that meet the criteria of validity are still acceptable (Al-Dani, 1984). This view then gives rise to the recognition of the ten and even fourteen qiraat, to which are added other qiraat that also have a valid sanad and meet the set criteria. This shows that ikhtiyār is not a static process, but dynamic and continues to develop along with the development of science in the qiraat tradition.

Criteria and Methodology of Ikhtiyār in Qiraat Validation

The validation of qiraat through the mechanism of ikhtiyār is based on three main pillars or criteria that have been agreed upon by the majority of qiraat scholars. The first criterion is conformity with the Ottoman rasm, that is, the reading must be in accordance with the Ottoman mushaf writing, both explicitly and implicitly (Al-Qattan, 2000). This criterion is very important because the Ottoman mushaf is a standard that has been agreed upon by the companions during the time of Caliph Uthman bin Affan as an official mushaf that is used as a reference by all Muslims. Conformity with the Ottoman rasm does not have to be literal in the sense that the reading must be exactly the same as the existing writing, but it can also be ihtimal, i.e. the writing makes it possible to be read in a certain way.

The second criterion is conformity with the rules of the Arabic language, both in terms of *nahwu*, *sharaf*, and *lughat*. Authentic reading must follow the rules of the Arabic language, although it does not have to follow the most famous or powerful rules (Ibn al-Jazari, 1999). Even readings that use the rules of language that are rare or weak are still acceptable as long as the rules are recognized as being in the treasures of the Arabic language. This shows that the language criteria in the validation of *qiraat* are inclusive, not exclusive, thus providing space for a diversity of readings that reflect the richness of different Arabic dialects.

The third criterion is to have a valid *sanad* and *mutawātir*, that is, the recitation must be narrated through an uninterrupted narration of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) with such a large number of narrators at each level that it is impossible for them to agree to lie (Al-Zarqani, 1995). This *sanad* criterion is the most fundamental because it is related to the authenticity of the reading as something that really comes from the Prophet (saw), not the result of the creation or *ijtihad* of later scholars. Without a valid *sanad* and *mutawātir*, a recitation cannot be accepted as a valid *qiraat* even if it meets the other two criteria.

These three criteria must be met cumulatively, not alternatively. This means that a reading can only be accepted as *qiraat sahih* if it meets all three criteria at the same time. If one of the criteria is not met, then the recitation is categorized as *qiraat syaz* or weak recitation that cannot be practiced in worship, even though it can be used for the purpose of interpretation or understanding of meaning (Al-Suyuti, 1974). This classification shows that in the *qiraat* tradition there is a strict hierarchy of validity, so that not all the narrated readings have the same status.

In practice, the application of these three criteria is not always straightforward and often requires *ijtihad* from scholars in determining whether a reading meets the criteria or not. For example, in terms of conformity with the Ottoman tradition, there is a difference of opinion about the extent of flexibility that can be given in interpreting the *mushaf* writing. Some scholars argue that conformity should be very strict, while others provide a wider space for interpretation (Al-Baqillani, 2001). Likewise, in terms of Arabic rules, there are differences of opinion about whether or not readings that use *lughat* or very rare dialects are acceptable.

This debate shows that although the criteria for the validation of *qiraat* have been clearly determined, in its application there is still room for *ijtihad* and differences of opinion among scholars. This is actually something natural in the Islamic scientific tradition which does provide space for diversity of opinions as long as it is based on strong arguments and valid methodologies. However, this difference of opinion should not be interpreted as a weakness in the *qiraat* validation system, but rather shows the intellectual property and depth of the Islamic scientific tradition in maintaining the purity of the Qur'anic reading.

Ikhtiyār as an Instrument for the Preservation of Qiraat Originality

One of the most important functions of *ikhtiyār* is as an instrument in preserving the originality of the Qur'an in the midst of the development of the times and socio-cultural changes that occur in Muslim society. Through the mechanism of *ikhtiyār*, the scholars of *qiraat* make a strict selection of the readings in circulation to ensure that only the readings that truly have historical authenticity and the validity of the *sanad* can be accepted and practiced

by the ummah (Al-Qastalani, 1996). This process became very important especially in the early days of the development of Islam when the Qur'an was still transmitted predominantly through oral tradition, making it very susceptible to various distortions and errors.

In the context of preserving originality, ikhtiyār serves as a filter that separates authentic and inauthentic readings. An authentic reading is a reading that meets the three criteria mentioned earlier, while an invalid reading is a reading that does not meet one or more of these criteria (Ibn Mujahid, 1972). With this filtering mechanism, the qiraat tradition can be maintained from the infiltration of readings that do not have a solid basis, both in terms of narration and in terms of conformity with the standards that have been set.

However, the function of ikhtiyār as an instrument of preservation does not mean that it eliminates the diversity of qiraat which is the richness of the tradition of Qur'anic recitation. On the contrary, through the mechanism of ikhtiyār, the diversity of valid qiraat can be maintained and preserved because there are clear standards about which readings are acceptable and which readings should be rejected (Al-Zarkashi, 1984). Without this standard, the diversity of qiraat can actually become chaos where everyone can claim to be the most correct without a solid basis, so that it will ultimately threaten the unity of Muslims in reading the Qur'an.

The preservation of the originality of qiraat through ikhtiyār is also related to the sanad system which is a characteristic of the Islamic scientific tradition. Every qiraat received must have a clear and uninterrupted genealogy of narration to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Al-Dani, 1984). This sanad system allows for verification of each narration path, so that it can be identified whether a reading really has an authentic origin or is just the result of an error or a narrator's mistake. Thus, this ikhtiyār, which is based on the verification of sanad, is a very effective quality control mechanism in maintaining the purity of the Qur'anic reading.

In practice, the preservation of originality through ikhtiyār also involves systematic documentation of the various qiraat received. Qiraat scholars such as Ibn al-Jazari have compiled books that document in detail various qiraat and their sanad, such as the book "Al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Asyr" which is the main reference in the ten qiraat (Ibn al-Jazari, 1999). This documentation not only serves as a historical record, but also as a guide for future generations in learning and practicing authentic qiraat. With this comprehensive documentation, the qiraat tradition can be passed down in its entirety from one generation to the next without experiencing significant distortions or changes.

Response to Orientalist Criticism of Qiraat Diversity

Orientalist criticism of the diversity of Qur'anic qiraat has become one of the most controversial issues in contemporary Islamic studies. Orientalists such as Arthur Jeffery, Theodor Noldeke, and Friedrich Schwally argued that the existence of various variants of recitation in the Qur'an indicates uncertainty in the transmission of the text and indicates that the Qur'an that exists today is not an accurate reproduction of what was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Jeffery, 1937). According to them, the difference in reading arises

because the form of the Ottoman mushaf does not have punctuation and periods, thus opening up space for diverse interpretations by readers in various regions.

This orientalist argument is based on the assumption that an authentic text must be monolithic, devoid of any variation. However, this assumption actually shows their lack of understanding of the nature of the Qur'an's revelation and its transmission mechanism (Small, 2011). The Qur'an was not revealed in only one mode of recitation, but in seven ahruf or seven faces of recitation as mentioned in the saheeh hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari and Muslim. This hadith explicitly states that the Prophet Muhammad himself has taught the Qur'an in various ways of reading to make it easier for his people who have different dialect backgrounds.

The diversity of qiraat that exists today is not the result of the ambiguity of the Ottoman tradition, but is a manifestation of sab'atu ahruf which has indeed been taught by the Prophet (peace be upon him) since the beginning (Al-Zarqani, 1995). The Ottoman Rasm did not have punctuation marks and dots that did provide space for various possibilities of reading, but the space was not a space that was wide open without limits. Instead, the space is limited by oral traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation through a very strict sanad system. In other words, not all readings that are theoretically possible by the Ottoman tradition can be accepted as authentic qiraat, but only those readings that have indeed been narrated mutawātir from the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Orientalist criticism also ignores the fact that the qiraat tradition has a very strict mechanism of validation through the ikhtiyār system as explained earlier. The scholars of qira'at do not accept the recitation solely based on the possibilities offered by the Ottoman rasm, but must go through strict sanad verification to ensure that the recitation is really from the Prophet (saw) (Ibn al-Jazari, 1999). This verification system is much stricter than the standard of textual criticism used in the study of other ancient texts, so the level of confidence in the authenticity of the Qur'anic qiraat is much higher than in other ancient texts.

In addition, contemporary Muslim scholars have also pointed out that orientalist criticism of qiraat is often based on incomplete or even incorrect information. For example, Arthur Jeffery in his book "Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an" claims to have found thousands of variants of readings that show inconsistencies in the text of the Qur'an (Jeffery, 1937). However, this claim has been refuted by Muslim scholars who point out that most of the variants cited by Jeffery are qiraat syaz that are indeed not accepted by the majority of scholars, or even are misnatorial errors that have been identified and rejected from the beginning (Al-A'zami, 2003). In other words, Jeffery mixes up valid qiraat with invalid qiraat, thus giving a false impression about the condition of transmission of the Qur'an.

A more comprehensive response to orientalist criticism comes from studies of ancient Qur'anic manuscripts that show a very high degree of consistency in the transmission of the Qur'anic text. Recent studies of ancient Qur'anic manuscripts, such as the Sanaa manuscript and manuscripts from the first century Hijri, show that the Qur'anic text has been very well preserved since the early days of Islam (Sadeghi & Bergmann, 2010). Although there are some minor variations in certain spellings or writings, these variations do not affect the substance of the text and can be fully explained within the framework of the diversity of qiraat that has been recognized by Islamic tradition.

The Implications of Ikhtiyār on the Understanding of Tauqifi versus Ijtihadi in Qiraat

One of the fundamental debates in the discourse on qiraat is whether qiraat is tauqifi or ijthadi. The view of tauqifi states that all valid qiraat are directly sourced from the revelation and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), so there is no room for human ijthad in creating variants of recitation (Al-Qastalani, 1996). According to this view, the role of qiraat scholars is only as a narrator and guardian of tradition, not as a creator or innovator of reading. On the other hand, the ijthadi view argues that in certain aspects, qiraat has an ijthadi dimension that allows scholars to make a selection and even in some cases develop readings based on the applicable Arabic rules.

The majority of scholars, including Ibn al-Jazari, Al-Zarkashi, and Al-Suyuti, are inclined to the view of tauqifi by emphasizing that every valid qiraat must have a sanad that continues to the Prophet (saw) (Ibn al-Jazari, 1999). They argue that the Qur'an is the kalam of Allah that should not be confused with the product of human thought, so that every reading must be proven to come from an authoritative source, namely the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This view is reinforced by various hadiths that state that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) taught the Qur'an to the Companions in a very meticulous way, even in detailed aspects such as how to pronounce certain letters or the places of waqaf.

However, there are some scholars who recognize the existence of the dimension of ijthadi in qiraat, especially in the context of ikhtiyār or the selection of readings. According to this view, although qiraat is substantially tauqifi, in terms of applying the rules of Arabic and the selection of the strongest readings, there is room for ijthad of scholars (Al-Baqillani, 2001). For example, when there are two readings that both have a valid sanad and are both in accordance with the Ottoman rasm, then the qiraat scholars can make an effort to choose one of the readings that is considered more eloquent or stronger in terms of language.

The controversy about tauqifi versus ijthadi is also related to the understanding of the concept of sab'atu ahruf. Some scholars interpret sab'atu ahruf as seven specific ways of reading that have been established by the Prophet (peace be upon him), so that there is no room for variation beyond what he has taught (Al-Suyuti, 1974). However, there are also scholars who interpret sab'atu ahruf more broadly as a general principle that provides flexibility in reading as long as it is still within the corridor of the rules that have been set. According to this second interpretation, the qiraat that develops then is an application of the principle of sab'atu ahruf, not a literal reproduction of specific readings.

In the context of ikhtiyār, this debate has significant implications. If qiraat is understood purely tauqifi, then the role of ikhtiyār is limited only to the verification of sanad and ensuring conformity with the criteria that have been set (Al-Zarqani, 1995). The scholars of qiraat do not have the authority to judge or choose the reading based on personal preference or rational considerations alone. However, if qiraat is understood to have an ijthadi dimension, then ikhtiyār can also include an assessment of the quality of the reading in terms of fasahah, conformity with the context of the verse, and other rational considerations.

In practice, most scholars take the middle way by acknowledging that qiraat is substantially tauqifi, but in the technical aspect of its application there is limited room for

ijtihād (Abu Syamah, 1997). For example, in determining whether a reading is in accordance with the Ottoman rasm or not, ijtihād is needed to interpret the existing writing. Likewise, in assessing whether a reading is in accordance with the rules of the Arabic language, in-depth knowledge of various different Arabic dialects and *lughat* is required. However, ijtihād in these technical aspects should not go beyond the limits set by the principle of *tauqifi*, namely that every reading must have a valid historical basis.

The Role of *Ikhtiyār* in Maintaining the Unity of the Ummah and the Diversity of *Qiraat*

One of the interesting paradoxes in the *qiraat* tradition is how to maintain the unity of the ummah in reciting the Qur'an on the one hand, while at the same time maintaining the diversity of *qiraat* which is a legacy from the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) on the other. *Ikhtiyār* plays a very important role in managing this paradox by providing a framework that allows both goals to be achieved simultaneously (Ibn Mujahid, 1972). Through the mechanism of *ikhtiyār*, the diversity of *qiraat* can be maintained as a treasure of tradition, but at the same time there are clear standards about which readings are acceptable so that there is no excessive fragmentation in the practice of reading the Qur'an.

The unity of the ummah in reading the Qur'an is very important, especially in the context of prayer which is the pillar of Islam. If each individual or group reads the Qur'an in a very different way without any clear standard, then this can cause confusion and even conflict among the ummah (Al-Qattan, 2000). Therefore, scholars since the beginning have sought to establish a widely accepted standard of reading, as was done by Caliph Uthman bin Affan in codifying the *mushaf* and by Ibn Mujahid in establishing the seven *qiraat* as the standard.

However, this standardization effort does not mean eliminating the diversity of *qiraat* which is indeed part of the Islamic tradition. The diversity of *qiraat* is seen as a blessing and convenience for Muslims who have different dialect backgrounds and abilities (Al-Suyuti, 1974). The hadith about *sab'atu ahraf* explicitly states that the Qur'an was revealed in seven letters to make it easier for the ummah to read it. Therefore, eliminating this diversity would actually contradict the wisdom behind the revelation of the Qur'an in various faces.

Ikhtiyār serves as a mechanism that allows both goals to be achieved by setting objective criteria to determine which readings are acceptable (Al-Zarkashi, 1984). Through this criterion, the diversity of *qiraat* can be maintained but within the limits that have been agreed upon by the scholarly community. Readings that meet the criteria are accepted as authentic *qiraat* that can be practiced, while readings that do not meet the criteria are rejected as *qiraat syaz* that cannot be practiced in worship even though they can be used for understanding meaning.

In contemporary practice, the role of *ikhtiyār* in maintaining unity and diversity can be seen in the different uses of *qiraat* in different regions of the Islamic world. In most Arab countries, the *qiraat* Hafs 'an Ashim is the most dominant, while in North Africa and parts of West Africa, the *qiraat* Warsh 'an Nafi' is more widely used (Nelson, 2001). In Sudan and some other African countries, the *qiraat* of Al-Duri 'an Abi 'Amr is also quite popular. This diversity

shows that although there are differences in the readings used, all of these qiraat are equally recognized for their validity and can be practiced in worship.

However, in the era of globalization and modern communication, the diversity of qiraat also faces new challenges. With the increasing ease of access to various sources of information about qiraat through the internet and digital media, there is a potential for confusion among people who do not have sufficient knowledge about qiraat (Al-Hilali, 2016). Some people may question why there is a difference in reading and even think that one reading is more correct than the other. Therefore, more intensive educational efforts are needed to explain to the ummah the nature of the diversity of qiraat and about the standards used in ikhtiyār to validate a reading.

The Dynamics of Ikhtiyār in Contemporary Development

In the contemporary context, the practice of ikhtiyār faces a variety of new dynamics that did not exist in classical times. The development of information and communication technology has opened up very wide access to various sources about qiraat, including audio recordings of various prominent reciters from around the world (Gade, 2004). On the one hand, this makes it easier for Muslims to learn qiraat from various sources, but on the other hand it also poses new challenges in terms of verification and validation of readings circulating in digital media.

One of the main challenges is the rampant recording of Qur'an recitations that are unclear about sanad and its validity. In the digital age, anyone can upload recordings of Qur'an recitations to platforms such as YouTube or mobile applications without any strict verification mechanism (Hirschkind, 2006). This has the potential to spread false readings or even readings that do not have an authentic historical basis. Therefore, the role of authoritative institutions in qiraat is increasingly important to verify and certify readings circulating in digital media.

In various Muslim countries, special institutions have been established that are tasked with maintaining qiraat standards and providing certification to reciters. For example, in Egypt there is an Al-Azhar Institute that has a special program for qiraat education and certification (Berkey, 2007). In Saudi Arabia, there is the King Fahd Mushaf Printing Complex which not only prints mushaf but also conducts research on qiraat and provides verified audio sources. In Indonesia, there are Tahfidz and Qiraat Institutions in various Islamic universities that also perform similar functions.

These institutions carry out the function of ikhtiyār in a contemporary context by verifying the sanad of the reciters, ensuring that they have learned qiraat from the teachers who have a sanad that is connected to the Prophet (peace be upon him) (Wajdi, 2019). In addition, these institutions also provide quality standards for audio recordings of the Qur'an, including technical standards such as sound quality and substantial standards such as the correctness of the readings. Thus, ikhtiyār in the contemporary era is not only related to the selection of readings in terms of history and conformity to classical criteria, but also involves technical aspects related to technology.

Another dynamic that has emerged in the contemporary context is the increasing interest in qiraat other than qiraat Hafs which has dominated most of the Islamic world. There is a movement to revive other qiraats such as qiraat Warsh, qiraat Qalun, and other qiraats that

may be less popular in certain regions (Dutton, 1999). This movement is driven by the awareness of the importance of maintaining the diversity of qiraat as a heritage of Islamic tradition and also by the desire to understand the Qur'an more comprehensively through various different reading faces.

However, efforts to revive the less popular qiraat also face various challenges. One of the main challenges is the lack of teachers who are competent in these qiraats, especially in areas where the qiraat is not commonly used (Messick, 1993). To overcome this challenge, several institutions have developed special programs to train qiraat teachers and provide scholarships for students who want to explore certain qiraats. In addition, digital technology is also used to provide qiraat learning resources through online platforms, mobile applications, and video tutorials.

Contemporary developments have also given rise to a new debate about the standards of the endeavor. Some people argue that in this modern era a more flexible standard is needed to accommodate the development of science and technology (Graham, 1993). For example, in the case of sanad verification, there are proposals to use database and digitization technology to document sanad more systematically and facilitate verification. However, the proposal has also drawn criticism from more conservative circles who worry that excessive flexibility could threaten the standards of legitimacy that have been maintained for centuries.

CONCLUSION

This research has analyzed in depth the concept of ikhtiyār in the qiraat tradition and its relevance to the originality of the qiraat of the Qur'an. Through the study of various classical and contemporary literatures, it can be concluded that ikhtiyār is a very important mechanism in maintaining the authenticity and purity of the Qur'anic reading. Ikhtiyār is not an arbitrary or subjective process that gives scholars the authority to create variants of reading according to their wishes, but rather a scientific methodology based on objective criteria that have been agreed upon by the community of qiraat scholars.

The three main criteria in ikhtiyār, namely conformity with the Ottoman rasm, conformity with the rules of the Arabic language, and the validity of the sanad, have proven effective in maintaining the authenticity of qiraat for centuries. Through the consistent and strict application of these criteria, the qiraat tradition can be maintained from the infiltration of readings that do not have a solid basis, both in terms of narration and in terms of conformity with the standards that have been set. Thus, ikhtiyār serves as a filter that separates the authentic qiraat from the inauthentic qiraat, so that only the recitation that truly has historical authenticity can be accepted and practiced by the ummah.

This research also shows that the diversity of qiraat in the Islamic tradition is not a weakness or contradiction as claimed by orientalist, but rather a wealth of reading traditions that reflect the nature of the revelation of the Qur'an revealed in sab'atu ahraf. The difference in reading does not arise because of the unclarity of the Ottoman tradition or because of the creativity of the qiraat scholars, but because indeed the Prophet Muhammad (saw) himself has taught the Qur'an in various forms of reading to make it easier for his people who have different dialect backgrounds. This diversity has been maintained and preserved through a very

strict sanad system and through the mechanism of ikhtiyār that ensures that each recitation has an authentic historical basis.

The implications of this study on the discourse on tauqifi versus ijthadi in qiraat show that although qiraat is substantially tauqifi, in the technical aspect of its application there is limited room for ijthad. This ijthad is mainly concerned with the interpretation of predetermined criteria, such as in determining whether a recitation is in accordance with the Ottoman tradition or in assessing whether a recitation is in accordance with the rules of the Arabic language. However, ijthad in these technical aspects should not go beyond the limits set by the principle of tauqifi, namely that every reading must have a valid history basis and continue to the Prophet (peace be upon him).

In the contemporary context, ikhtiyār faces various new dynamics and challenges that require an appropriate response from the community of scholars and institutions that are competent in the field of qiraat. The development of information and communication technology has opened up very wide access to various sources about qiraat, but it also poses challenges in terms of verification and validation of readings circulating in digital media. Therefore, more systematic efforts are needed to verify the sources of qiraat circulating in digital media and to provide sources that have been officially validated by authoritative institutions.

This study also recommends the need for more intensive educational efforts for Muslims about the nature of qiraat diversity and about the standards used in ikhtiyār to validate a reading. Many Muslims do not understand well about the existence of various qiraat and about the status of the validity of each qiraat, so that sometimes it causes confusion or even unnecessary conflicts. Through proper education, Muslims can understand that the difference in qiraat is part of the richness of Islamic tradition and that all valid qiraat have the same status in terms of their practicability.

For further research development, it is recommended to conduct an empirical study of the practice of ikhtiyār in a contemporary context, including how qiraat institutions in various countries verify and certify reciters. In addition, it is also necessary to conduct a comparative study of the differences in ikhtiyār methodologies applied by various schools and traditions in Islam, as well as their implications for the diversity of qiraat practices in various regions. Such research will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of ikhtiyār in the qiraat tradition and its contribution to the preservation of the authenticity of the Qur'an in the contemporary era.

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