



Patriarchal Bias in Qur’anic Gender Lexicon A Semantic Analysis of *Ḍaraba*, *Jilbāb*, and *Qawwāmūna*

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<p>Diterima 06 Agustus 2025</p> <p>Revisi I 01 September 2025</p> <p>Revisi II 18 Oktober 2025</p> <p>Disetujui 12 November 2025</p>	<p>This study examines students’ interpretive bias toward Arabic lexical terms in Qur’anic gender-related verses through the perspective of thematic exegesis (tafsīr maudhū’ī). The main issue lies in the tendency to reproduce key terms such as <i>jilbāb</i> (Q. al-Aḥzāb [33]:59), <i>ḍaraba</i> (Q. al-Nisā’ [4]:34), and <i>qawwāmūna</i> (Q. al-Nisā’ [4]:34) from classical exegesis with patriarchal nuances, often without contextual critique. The research employed a qualitative combined design, integrating field research and content analysis. The approaches used were thematic exegesis and Arabic lexical semantics. Textual data were collected through a reading and note-taking method from primary sources, including the Qur’an, classical tafsirs (al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr), and contemporary interpretations (al-Manār, al-Miṣbāḥ, Fazlur Rahman, Amina Wadud, and Quraish Shihab). Field data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 12 students from different study programs (Islamic Family Law, Qur’anic Studies, Arabic Language Education, Arabic Literature, and Islamic Education), selected using stratified purposive sampling. Data validation was conducted through source and method triangulation as well as peer discussion. The analysis followed Miles and Huberman’s model, consisting of condensation, display, and conclusion.</p> <p>The findings reveal that lexical meanings in gender-related verses show diverse interpretations across classical and contemporary exegesis. Classical interpretations emphasize patriarchal aspects, while contemporary interpretations highlight contextual and egalitarian dimensions. Field research indicates that most students reproduce classical patriarchal readings, although a small number have attempted to present more egalitarian and contextual interpretations. These findings</p>

underline the urgency of strengthening critical exegesis literacy and gender awareness in Qur'anic studies, so that Qur'anic interpretation can be more just, humanistic, and aligned with the universal values of justice in Islam.

Keywords: *interpretive bias, arabic lexical terms, gender verses, thematic exegesis*

INTRODUCTION

The study of gender verses in the Qur'an has become an important discourse in modern tafsir studies.(Fikri, 2024) One of the main issues that arises is the bias in interpretation, which seems to reflect the patriarchal views of classical exegetes rather than the message of justice in the Qur'an itself.(Septiani et al., 2023) In this case, Arabic as the main medium of revelation often becomes a point of bias due to the diversity of meanings it contains.

Arabic lexical terms in the Qur'an such as *ḍaraba*, *jilbāb*, and *qawwāmūna* are often interpreted literally or normatively without considering the socio-historical context of the verse or its semantic flexibility.(Rahmayani & Nurwahyuningsih, 2025) This leads to students' understanding of tafsir that is not only reductive but also problematic, especially in the social construction of women and gender relations in Muslim society.(Latifah, 2024)

This study aims to explore how students' interpretive biases are formed and the interpretive references they use.(Faradhilla, 2025) hus, analysis of the semantic meaning of these words is important in exploring the possibility of

more inclusive and ethical meanings.(Saputra et al., 2025)

In this study, the *maudhū'ī* interpretive approach was chosen for its ability to connect verses with similar themes and provide space for macro reflection on Qur'anic values holistically. Combined with semantic analysis of keywords, this study aims to reveal layers of meaning that have been obscured by ideological readings.

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This study does not aim to challenge the authority of classical interpretation, but to open up space for academic criticism for the development of interpretations that are more responsive to gender issues and capable of shaping students who are critical, reflective, and responsive to the challenges of the times. In addition, the results of this study are also expected to contribute to a more gender-equitable discourse on Islamic education, especially in higher education.

Finally, this study is expected to demonstrate that the Qur'an, as a divine text open to interpretation, also needs to be approached with historical awareness and social sensitivity so that its message of justice can be fully felt by all human beings, both men and women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies concerning gender verses in the Qur'an have grown rapidly in the last two decades, particularly since the emergence of *Tafsir* (exegesis) approaches sensitive to issues of equality and power relations between men and women. Several previous studies show that interpretive bias often stems from two main factors: the social-historical patriarchal context of the *mufasssirs* (exegetes) and the linguistic (lexical) aspect of the Arabic Qur'anic text, which is often interpreted literally without considering the variety of its semantic meanings.

A number of studies have highlighted gender Tafsir bias from the perspective of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and Islamic law, especially in understanding verses related to family relations and male leadership. For instance, the research by (Fitriyah & Rahman, 2024) emphasizes the importance of gender reinterpretation in the Qur'an to achieve an inclusive and equality-responsive Tafsir. Their approach highlights how classical Tafsir tends to be patriarchal and the necessity of the

thematic method (*tafsir maudhū'i*) to open new perspectives.

Linguistic studies on the Arabic lexicon in gender verses emphasize the importance of a semantic approach for contextual interpretation. (Syahroni & Nurrohim, 2025) examined the meaning of the word *qawwam* in QS. An-Nisa' [4]:34 and found that its meaning must consider responsibility and complementary roles, not merely male supremacy.

From a socio-cultural perspective, interpretive bias not only arises from linguistic inaccuracies but is also influenced by social and cultural structures. A study by (Rusmana et al., 2023) shows how patriarchal cultural norms in Indonesia affect the interpretation of gender verses and shape readers' mindsets.

Based on the review above, it can be concluded that previous research has extensively discussed interpretive bias from legal, cultural, and semantic angles. However, there is still a gap: few studies directly link students' Tafsir bias with a semantic analysis of the Arabic lexicon within the framework of *Tafsir Maudū'ī*.

This research is based on two main theoretical foundations: (1) the theory of *Tafsir Maudū'ī* (Thematic Exegesis) and (2) Qur'anic Arabic lexical semantic analysis. *Tafsir Maudū'ī* (Thematic Exegesis). The concept of *Tafsir Maudū'ī* was systematically developed by modern Tafsir scholars like 'Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawī, al-Dhahabī, and Manna'

Khalil al-Qaṭṭān. This approach emphasizes that the Qur'an must be read as a cohesive unit of interconnected meaning, not merely a collection of isolated verses (Farhan et al., 2024).

According to (Al-Farmawī, 1992), there are two forms of Tafsir Maudū'ī:

1. Tafsīr maudhū'ī li al-mawdhū'āt al-Qur'āniyyah (Thematic Tafsir across verses): Collecting all verses that speak about a single specific theme (e.g., al-mar'ah (woman), qiwāmah (guardianship), or al-'adl (justice)) and analyzing them integrally.
2. Tafsīr maudhū'ī li al-sūrah (Thematic Tafsir within a single Sūrah): Interpreting the entire content of a Sūrah thematically to find its main idea.

This method prevents the interpreter from being trapped in partial or mere textual meanings, encouraging them instead to see the intertextual context between verses and reveal the consistent moral and social vision within the Qur'an. In this study, Tafsir Maudū'ī is used to gather gender-themed verses, especially those containing lexicons like ḍaraba, jilbāb, and qawwāmūna, so they can be compared comprehensively across different contexts.

The second theory used is Qur'anic Arabic lexical semantic analysis, as developed by Toshihiko Izutsu in his work *Ethico-Religious*

Concepts in the Qur'an. According to Izutsu, the meaning of a word in the Qur'an cannot be understood solely based on a dictionary or static lexical meaning, but through "semantic field analysis". This involves tracing the network of meanings of a word in relation to other words within the Qur'anic semantic system.

(Izutsu, 1964a) asserts that every word has a relational meaning, not an absolute one. A word derives its meaning from:

1. Root Word: Indicates the basic meaning or semantic potential of the word.
2. Sentence Context (siyāq al-lafz): Determines the actual meaning of the word in a single verse.
3. Qur'anic Thematic Context (al-siyāq al-maudhū'ī): Shows the conceptual meaning of the word within the entire Qur'anic worldview. (Izutsu, 1964b)

For example, the word ḍaraba etymologically means "to strike/hit," but in the Qur'anic context, it is also used for the meaning of "to travel," "to give an example," or even "to leave." Semantic analysis traces all occurrences of ḍaraba throughout the Qur'an to determine the dominant meaning pattern consistent with the principles of divine justice and compassion (raḥmah).

Similarly, the word qawwāmūna (QS. an-Nisā' [4]:34) does not simply mean "leader" in an authoritative sense, but within the

Qur'anic semantic system, it is close to the concept of moral and social responsibility (from the root q-w-m which means "to establish/uphold"). This analysis is crucial for revealing that students' interpretive bias often arises because they interpret a word based on a single dictionary meaning, not the Qur'anic conceptual meaning.

Izutsu's approach is also in line with the principles of modern linguistic Tafsir that emphasize the importance of the relationship between language structure and ideological meaning. Therefore, lexical semantic analysis can reveal how patriarchal ideology infiltrates through the choice of word meaning during the interpretation process. (Hidayah et al., 2025)

By utilizing these two frameworks, the research, "Students' Tafsir Bias towards the Arabic Lexicon in Qur'anic Gender Verses," aims to explain how interpretive bias is born from semantic unconsciousness and a lack of comprehensive thematic understanding. This theory is expected to affirm that gender justice in the Qur'an can be found precisely through a Tafsir approach that is scientific, thematic, and sensitive to the semantic context of the Arabic language.

METHOD

This study employs a combined qualitative design, integrating field research and content analysis with a thematic interpretation approach and lexical semantic analysis of the Qur'anic Arabic. The main sources

consist of the Qur'an, classical interpretations (such as Tafsir al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Katsīr), as well as contemporary interpretations (such as Tafsir al-Manār, al-Miṣbāḥ, and the works of Fazlur Rahman, Amina Wadud, and Quraish Shihab). Data collection techniques were carried out using the reading and note-taking method, which involved carefully reading primary and secondary sources, then recording relevant information related to word meanings, verse contexts, and various interpretations. Data validation was carried out through peer discussion to test the consistency of interpretations and enrich the perspectives of interpretation.

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Meanwhile, field research was used to respond to students' perceptions in understanding gender verses containing Arabic words that could potentially lead to interpretative bias. Field data was collected through in-depth interviews with students who had studied the theme of gender verses in related courses. The sampling technique used stratified purposive sampling, which is the purposive selection of informants by considering their study programme strata and their involvement in Al-Qur'an studies to ensure representativeness. This technique yielded 12 students consisting of 3 students of Islamic Family Law (HKI), 3 students of

Tafseer, 2 students of Arabic Language Education (PBA), 2 students of Arabic Language and Literature (BSA), and 2 students of Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

The selection of 12 informants was not for the purpose of statistical generalization, but rather to achieve depth of data (depth of understanding), in line with the character of qualitative research. In qualitative research, the number of participants is not determined by the size of the population, but by the level of data saturation. This is the point when the information obtained begins to repeat and no longer provides new findings.

The selection of informants was carried out using a purposive sampling technique based on several specific criteria, namely:

- Students who have taken or are currently taking courses that discuss gender-related verses or thematic *Tafsir* (exegesis) of the Qur'an;
- Students who possess a good ability to read and understand Arabic texts;
- Students who are active in Islamic studies or academic activities relevant to *Tafsir* studies; and
- Students who are willing and able to provide critical reflection on issues of *Tafsir* and gender bias.

From the total student population in four relevant departments, 12 students were found to

meet these criteria. This number is considered thematically representative because it reflects the diversity of views from each field of study, while also indicating that no new findings were found in the final interviews (data saturation was reached). Thus, the number of 12 informants is deemed sufficient to deeply and contextually describe the students' perceptions regarding the understanding of gender-related verses.

Field data validation was carried out through source and method triangulation, namely comparing information from various sources with different backgrounds and testing its suitability through more than one data collection technique, such as interviews and observations, so that the data produced was more accurate and reliable.

Data was analysed by considering the contextual meaning, root words, various interpretations, and socio-historical dynamics of each verse. (Mustaqim, 2010) The analysis follows the Miles and Huberman model, which comprises three stages: (1) data condensation, which involves selecting, sorting and filtering data according to the research focus; (2) data presentation, which involves organising the findings in the form of a narrative description or table; and (3) drawing conclusions and verification, which involves formulating a final interpretation supported by textual evidence and historical context. (Miles et al., 2013)

RESULT

1. The Semantic Meaning of Arabic Words in Gender-Related Verses of the Qur'an

A proper understanding of key words in gender-related verses is a crucial first step in interpreting the message of the Qur'an as a whole. This study focuses on three words that are often the subject of controversy: *ḍaraba*, *jilbab*, and *qawwāmūna*. The analysis is conducted through three layers of study: (1) *lughawī* (lexical) meaning, which refers to authoritative dictionaries such as *Lisān al-'Arab* by Ibn Manẓūr, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* by al-Fīrūzābādī, and *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān* by al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī; (2) the meaning of *isti'mālī* (use in the Qur'an), which traces the distribution of words and their collocations in various verses; and (3) the contextual meaning, which takes into account *asbāb al-nuzūl*, socio-historical realities, and developments in tafsir thought.

a. *Ḍaraba* (ضَرَبَ)

The word *ḍaraba* in QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34 is often interpreted as 'beating' one's wife, particularly in the context of enforcing discipline in the household. Lexically, references in *Lisān al-'Arab* by Ibn Manẓūr reveal at least 17 meanings, including: 'to beat' (*ḍaraba al-syay'*), 'to leave' (*ḍaraba "anhu*), 'to travel' (*ḍaraba fī al-arḍ*) QS. al-Nisā' [4]:101, and 'to give an example' (*ḍaraba matsalan*). In the Qur'anic context, this meaning is widespread, for example, 'separating oneself' in and

'giving parables' in QS. al-Nahl [16]:75.(Manẓūr, 1990)

Classical tafsir such as *Jāmi' al-Bayān* by al-Ṭabarī and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* by Ibn Katsīr choose the meaning of "hitting" on the condition that the blow is light and does not cause injury, based on a hadith narrated by Muslim which emphasises the prohibition of hitting the face and hitting hard. (This hadith needs to be explained.) *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by al-Qurṭubī also adds the detail that hitting is a "last resort" after advice (*maw'izah*) and separation (*hajr*). (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964)

On the other hand, contemporary interpretations such as *al-Manār* by Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā criticise the literal meaning of "striking" as a compromise with pre-Islamic patriarchal culture, proposing the meaning of "moving away" or "taking distance" to prevent the escalation of conflict. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Miṣbāḥ* reinforces this interpretation by emphasising the consistency of the meaning "to leave" used in other verses. (Riḍā, 1947) Amina Wadud, in *Qur'an and Woman*, rejects the interpretation of 'beating' because it contradicts the principle of *mawaddah wa raḥmah*.

b. *Qawwāmūna* (قَوَّامُونَ)

The word appears in QS. al-Nisā' [4]:34, derived from the root *qāma*, which means 'to uphold' or 'to maintain'. Al-Qurṭubī interprets *qawwāmūna* as male leaders over women because of their responsibility

to provide for them. Ibn Kathīr also emphasises male authority in managing the household.

However, a semantic approach in contemporary interpretation shows that this word is closer to the meaning of 'responsible person' which contains elements of service, not domination. Fazlur Rahman sees it as a contextual functional division of roles, while Amina Wadud views it as a moral trust that can be divided based on capacity, not gender.

c. **Jilbāb** (جِلْبَاب)

This word is found in QS. al-Aḥzāb [33]:59. Al-Qurṭubī

interprets jilbab as a long piece of cloth that covers the entire body except the face and palms, with the aim of distinguishing free women from slaves in Medina. Ibn Kathir emphasises this social function based on a narration from Ibn 'Abbas. (Sisi Amaliah Nurrohim et al., 2024)

However, Quraish Shihab and Muhammad Asad emphasise that the verse refers to social protection, not a standard model of clothing. This means that the hijab is a flexible symbol of modesty and security that follows local customs and norms, as long as it fulfils the principles of Islamic modesty. (Rohman et al., 2024)

2. The Influence of Classical Interpretation Bias on the Meaning of Arabic Words in Gender-Related Verses of the Qur'an

Classical commentaries such as Jāmi' al-Bayān (al-Ṭabarī), al-Jāmi' li

Aḥkām al-Qur'ān (al-Qurṭubī), and Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm (Ibn Katsīr) have an important position in Islamic scholarly tradition and have been the main references throughout history. (Annisa & Rahmadhani, 2025) However, contemporary studies show that behind their scientific authority, classical interpretations often contain certain biases in interpreting verses on gender. According to Fazlur Rahman's hermeneutical framework, this bias arises because interpretations are strongly influenced by the socio-cultural influences of patriarchal medieval Arab society. (Prisilia Maya Safa et al., 2025) Amina Wadud adds that the limitations of classical linguistic methodology also cause interpreters to tend to choose certain lexical meanings that are in line with the dominant view without paying attention to gender relations that are prone to discrimination against women. (Rahman et al., 2025) As a result, the semantic breadth of the Qur'an is often ignored, and the interpretations that emerge reproduce structures of injustice that reinforce the subordination of women. From this, it can be understood that bias in classical interpretations is divided into two major forms, namely linguistic bias rooted in the reduction of word meanings as criticised by Wadud, and socio-cultural bias rooted in patriarchal social structures as explained by Rahman and reinforced by Asma Barlas. These two types of bias will be

discussed further in the following analysis:

a. Linguistic Bias

Linguistic bias occurs when interpreters tend to choose meanings that support the existing social order, ignoring alternative meanings that are also lexically valid. (Wadud, 1999) The interpretation of the word *ḍaraba* in QS. *al-Nisā'* [4]:34 is one of the clearest examples of how classical interpretive bias plays a role in shaping social norms that favour patriarchal structures. In Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī's interpretation in his *tafsir jāmiul bayān*, the word is explicitly interpreted as 'beating' a *nusyūz* wife, albeit limited to 'light' beating. Al-Ṭabarī based his understanding on a number of accounts reflecting the practices of early Arab society, which considered physical punishment to be part of social and family control. (Al-Ṭabarī, 1956) This interpretation affirms the norms of his time, in which male authority over women was accepted without much debate.

Al-Qurṭubī continued this line of interpretation by adding moral restrictions such as prohibiting hitting the face or causing injury, and emphasising that the beating should be intended as a form of 'education'. (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964) However, the emphasis on the physical dimension was maintained, so that the interpretation of *ḍaraba* as a non-violent act was given almost no space. Ibn Katsīr even reinforces this interpretation by quoting a hadith that allows hitting with a *siwak*

(a stick used to clean teeth) as a symbol of a light blow. (Katsīr, 1999)

Different from classical exegetes, contemporary exegetes try to present a more gender-friendly interpretation by using social analysis and approaches that go beyond the use of historical accounts. Among the big names of contemporary exegetes is Ṭāhir bin 'Āsyūr, a renowned exegete from Tunisia. In his work *al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, he reveals that the message of this verse is not only addressed to husbands but also to leaders in authority. ('Āsyūr, 1984) This means that if leaders are concerned that their wives are committing *nusyūz*, they may strike them as a last resort after verbal advice is no longer effective. Furthermore, Ibn 'Āsyūr also explains that although striking one's wife is permissible, it is still a recommendation, not a command. ('Āsyūr, 1984)

In addition, Muhammad Abū Zahrah in *Zahratu al-Tafāsīr* emphasises that beating one's wife is a last resort that should only be used if the two previous steps (verbal counselling and turning away) have not been successful. (Zahrah, 1996) In fact, according to him, beating is only permissible when the marriage is on the verge of divorce. Similarly, Wahbah al-Zuhailī in *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr* states that husbands are not allowed to hit repeatedly, hit the face, or hit hard. The purpose is not to hurt but to 'educate'. (Al-Zuhailī, 1991) However, the scholars also agree that abandoning

the practice of beating is far more important.

The consistency of classical exegetes in choosing the meaning of 'beat' reflects an epistemological bias, as they prioritise the history and social practices they are familiar with over a broader exploration of lexical meanings. Semantically, *ḍaraba* has other meanings such as 'to leave' or 'to separate oneself' which are also relevant to the context of the verse and do not contain elements of physical violence. (Manzūr, 1990) The choice to interpret *ḍaraba* as 'to strike' shows how medieval patriarchal norms were absorbed into interpretation and then presented as absolute religious truth. (Hanna & Abbas, 2023) As a result, alternative interpretations that reject domestic violence are often considered deviant from tradition, despite having strong linguistic and moral foundations.

b. Cultural Social Bias

This bias arises because interpretations are not entirely detached from the socio-cultural realities of their time. Instead of interpreting verses through a universal and contextual lens, classical exegetes often adopted and institutionalised local cultural norms as part of religious teachings. (Adam, 2023)

The meaning of the jilbab and hijab is often shaped by social constructs and patriarchal norms that prevailed during the time of the exegetes. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, viewed the jilbab as mentioned in QS.

al-Aḥzāb [33]:59 as a sign of the social status of free women, which served to distinguish them from slave women so that they would not be harassed or abused. (Al-Ṭabarī, 1956) This interpretation has significant social implications because it indirectly affirms the restriction of public space for slave women and places women's honour in clothing attributes rather than in their humanity.

Al-Tsa'labi, in his book *al-Kasyfu wa al-Bayān*, explains the meaning of the verse *yudnīna 'alaihinna min jalābībihinna* by quoting a narration from Ibn 'Abbās that Allah commanded believing women to cover their heads and faces with a veil and to reveal one eye for seeing. (Zahrah, 1996) Al-Zamakhshari also interprets the jilbab as clothing that is wider than a veil (Al-Zamakhsharī, 1971), and al-Qurṭubī emphasises that the jilbab is a cloth that is larger than a *khimār* (veil), although according to him, the most accurate opinion is that it is a cloth or garment that covers the entire body. (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964) In *Lubāb al-Ta'wīl al-Khāzin*, he explains the jilbab as a robe that covers the entire body of a woman more than armour and also covers the head, so it is understood as a robe that covers the body completely. (Al-Khāzin, 1995)

Meanwhile, al-Qurṭubī interprets the jilbab as clothing that covers the entire body except the face and hands, but the emphasis is more on preventing *fitnah*, which is interpreted as temptation or disturbance to men,

rather than on protecting or empowering women themselves. This orientation shifts the meaning of the jilbab from an instrument of protection of dignity to a symbol of social control over women's bodies. (Millah, 2021)

Ibn 'Āsyūr regarded the jilbab as a piece of cloth smaller than a shawl but larger than a veil, worn by women on their heads with the sides hanging down to the edges of their faces and spread out to cover their shoulders and chests, especially when travelling. He emphasised that the manner of wearing the jilbab varied according to the customs and traditions of each community. Wahbah al-Zuhailī in *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr* explains that this verse was originally addressed to the Prophet's wives to wear clothing that covered their entire bodies when leaving the house to distinguish them from female slaves. (Al-Zuhailī, 1991) He also quotes a narration from Muḥammad bin Sīrīn that women are allowed to open one eye to see. Furthermore, he emphasises that the hijab rule is part of manners and etiquette intended to protect women from accusations and slander.

By limiting the meaning of jilbāb to gender segregation, classical interpretations tend to ignore the flexibility of the original meaning and reinforce social structures that marginalise women from public spaces. This interpretation reveals a patriarchal bias that links women's honour to their physical concealment, as well as a cultural bias that absorbs the norm of

separating spaces between men and women from pre-Islamic Arab traditions and institutionalises it as a universal religious norm. (Maulida et al., 2025)

Furthermore, the classical interpretation of the word *qawwāmūna* in QS. *al-Nisā'*:34 often shows a strong socio-cultural bias. Al-Ṭabarī interprets this term as a form of absolute male leadership over women based on two main things, namely the physical superiority of men and their obligation to provide financial support. (Hamidah et al., 2025) his understanding indirectly reflects the patriarchal structure of society during his time, where public roles and leadership were almost entirely monopolised by men.

Al-Qurṭubī reinforced this gender hierarchy by using this verse as evidence that wives must give full obedience to their husbands, leaving little room for consideration of equality in household decision-making. (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964) However, this interpretation often ignores the semantic dimensions of the root word *qawama*, which does not only mean 'to rule' or 'to govern,' but also 'to uphold,' 'to maintain,' and 'to administer justly.' In the Arabic nuance of the Qur'an, *qawwāmūna* is more accurately understood as a role of responsibility that demands trust and protection, not merely unilateral authority.

Muhammad Abduh understood the term *qawwām* as leadership that has the meaning of guarding, protecting,

supervising, and providing for women's needs. (Adyatama et al., 2023) Because of these things, men get a larger share of inheritance than women, because men have the responsibility to provide for their families, while this responsibility is not imposed on women. The model of male leadership over wives in this verse is a democratic model of leadership, namely leadership that gives the led freedom to do things according to their own views and desires, both in terms of education and work. Rasyid Ridha adds to Abduh's explanation that included in the category of leadership is the marriage contract, which falls within the realm of male authority, and the right of men to divorce their wives. (Riḍā, 1947)

Muhammad Abu Zahrah in his work also explains that the meaning of *al-rijālu qawwāmūna* is that men stand up or carry out what is the responsibility of women, starting from protecting, educating, and guiding, just like a father who educates and protects the morals and religion of his daughter. Furthermore, Abu Zahrah also explains that if men have absolute leadership, women also have partial leadership, as stated by the Prophet SAW that men are caregivers or responsible for their families and women are responsible or leaders in domestic affairs. Thus, the reduction of meaning to merely legitimising absolute male leadership is the result of an interpretation shaped by social norms and patriarchal power structures, not solely by the textual guidance of the Qur'an.

3. Students' Perceptions of Understanding Arabic Lexical Terms in Qur'anic Verses on Gender that Have the Potential for Biased Interpretation

Interviews with 12 students from various religious studies programmes at UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang (HKI, Tafsir, PBA, BSA, and PAI) identified a strong tendency to maintain patriarchal interpretations of a number of keywords in the Qur'anic verses on gender. The three words that are the focus are *ḍaraba* (QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34), *jilbab* (QS. Al-Ahzāb [33]:59), and *qawwāmūna* (QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34). Although some students have gained access to modern contextual interpretations, their perceptions have been influenced more by the patterns of pesantren education, family teachings, and references to classical tafsir books used in lectures.

The majority admitted that they first learned the meaning of these words not from linguistic studies or modern thematic exegesis studies, but from explanations by their teachers, *ustadz*, or classical exegesis books studied in madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools. This has caused their perceptions to tend to maintain the established meanings in classical exegesis literature, even though the actual semantic meanings allow for broader interpretations.

a. The interpretation of *Ḍaraba* (ضَرَبَ) as a form of discipline

The majority of students interpret *ḍaraba* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34 as 'beating' in the context of a husband disciplining his wife who is considered *nusyūz* (disobedient). Some state that this beating must be light, not causing injury, and carried out after a process of counselling and separation. Thus, almost all sources acknowledge that this verse still places the husband as the party who has the right to take physical action against his wife. A male student (M-1) from the HKI study programme said, *"Yes, the word ḍaraba clearly means to beat, ma'am. In the tafsir book I read, it is permissible for a husband to hit a disobedient wife, as long as it does not cause injury. So, this is a form of the husband's right of leadership."*(M.-4 Mahasiswa Tafsir, Laki-Laki, 2025)

Furthermore, a tafsir student (male, M-4) gave his opinion: *"If the wife is disobedient, it is true that the husband has the right to reprimand her and even give her light physical punishment. That is a way of educating, not violence."*(M.-7 Mahasiswa Tafsir, Laki-Laki, 2025)

However, this view is still in the minority and is often considered 'inappropriate' by their more conservative peers. In small group discussions conducted by researchers, students with progressive views were even challenged by students with interpretive views (Male, M-5): *"If the meaning is simply to move away, why*

did Allah use the word ḍaraba, which was clearly interpreted as hitting by the scholars of the past?" Based on the results of the interviews above, it can be understood that the meaning of the word *ḍaraba* (ضَرَبَ) In QS. An-Nisā' [4]:34, there is room for various interpretations based on both classical and contemporary exegesis. There is no compulsion to determine one interpretation as the most correct, because both have arguments that can be justified. If interpreted as hitting, then it is still in accordance with the structure of the verse, which mentions the stages of handling *nusyūz*, starting with advice (*al-wa'z*), then separation (*al-hajr*), and finally the word *ḍaraba* appears. However, the interpretation of 'beating' is problematic in the current era because it is prone to misperceptions, especially among the general public who may consider this verse as legitimising physical violence against wives. In reality, women are often in a more vulnerable position as victims of domestic violence.(Rozy, 2023) Therefore, without a deep understanding, this interpretation can be dangerous if applied carelessly.

On the other hand, if *ḍaraba* is interpreted as 'moving away' or 'separate beds', it also has weaknesses when applied in the reality of modern households. This is because, in fact, there are couples who have not slept in the same bed for a long time due to various reasons (busy schedules, health conditions, or family situations), so that the meaning of 'separate beds' can lose

its relevance.(Ridwan & Mahmud, 2025) This was conveyed by one of the PAI students (Female, M-12): *“In my opinion, interpreting ḍaraba as sleeping separately is not appropriate when applied in all circumstances. Let me give you an example from my own parents, ma’am. They are elderly and have not shared a room for a long time. So, if a husband and wife are constantly arguing and are told to sleep separately, it will have no effect, because they have been sleeping in separate rooms for a long time. Perhaps the meaning could be broader, such as living in separate houses first so that both parties can be calm.”*(Mahasiswa PAI, Perempuan, 2025)

In this case, an alternative interpretation that understands ḍaraba as ‘moving away to a more spacious place’ (for example, temporarily separating from the home) could be more applicable as an effort to cool down the conflict without resorting to physical violence, and would be more in line with the principles of justice and respect for women’s dignity.(Najwa Al-Husda, 2024)

b. The Interpretation of the Word Qawwāmūna (قَوَّامُونَ) as Legitimation of Male Leadership

QS. An-Nisā’ [4]:34, which contains the word qawwāmūna, is mostly interpreted as male leadership over women in the family. Students cited biological (physically stronger) and financial (providing for the family)

reasons as the main justifications. This is clearly seen in the statement of one HKI student (male, M-2): *“When I read Ibn Kathir’s interpretation, it clearly states that men are superior to women because of their intellect, physical strength, and role as breadwinners. So it is only natural that Allah gives men the right to lead”*“(Mahasiswa HKI, Laki-Laki, 2025) This statement shows that students have not had much access to contemporary interpretations that are more gender-sensitive.

Interestingly, some students associate their understanding of the verse with their personal experiences or family environment. A PBA student (male, M-9) said: *“I see my father at home deciding everything, from money matters to children’s education. My mother just obeys, and I think that fits with the meaning of qawwāmūna. So, men should indeed be in control (lead).”*(Mahasiswa PBA, Laki-Laki, 2025) This tendency shows that students’ social experiences reinforce patriarchal bias in their interpretation of verses. Opposing opinions and experiences were also found among two female students studying HKI and Tafsir. One of them argued: *“I see the verse as not just about gender, but about responsibility. So if a woman has the capacity to lead, it’s okay for her to lead”* (Mahasiswa HKI, Perempuan, M-3, 2025)

The tafsir student also added based on her family experience (Female, M-6): *“That’s right, ma’am. Besides, in my house, the opposite*

happens. I feel that my mother is the most dominant here. Even my father is often afraid of being scolded by my mother”(Mahasiswa Tafsir, Perempuan, 2025)

This opinion shows that the interpretation of the word *qawwāmūna* in QS. An-Nisā “[4]:34 is still heavily influenced by the patriarchal cultural framework and the students’ own social experiences. The majority understand this verse as legitimising male leadership over women for both biological and financial reasons, so that the classic gender-biased view remains dominant.(Zakiah, 2023) owever, there is also an alternative perspective from some students who see this verse as not merely talking about gender but about responsibilities in the household that can be carried out by anyone according to their capacity. This difference in interpretation reminds us that understanding Qur’anic verses cannot be separated from social conditions, family experiences, and students’ access to contemporary interpretations that are more sensitive to issues of equality.(Oktasajidah et al., 2025)

c. The Interpretation of the Word *Jilbāb* as Control and Moral Legitimacy for Women

Students’ understanding of the word *jilbāb* (QS. al-Ahzāb [33]:59) shows a strong bias in interpretation, where the *jilbab* is not only interpreted as outer clothing for Muslim women but also as an instrument of social control and moral legitimacy for women.

The majority of respondents interpreted the *jilbab* as a symbol of women’s obedience to religious teachings and at the same time as a standard of morality that distinguishes ‘good’ women from women who are considered ‘immoral’.

PBA (Female, M-10) student argued: *“Women who truly protect their honour will definitely wear a long jilbab. If she still wears a short hijab, let alone tight trousers, it means she does not truly understand the verses.”*(Mahasiswa PBA, Perempuan, 2025) This statement indicates that the *hijab* is treated not merely as a form of religious expression but as a measure of morality that determines a woman’s social position. In other words, the meaning of the *hijab* in the students’ perception has shifted from its original semantic meaning, namely outer clothing to distinguish free women from slaves during the time of the Prophet, to a means of moral categorisation attached to the bodies of contemporary Muslim women.(Rohmaniyah et al., 2023)

This phenomenon becomes even clearer when the BSA respondent (Female, M-8) emphasises: *‘Look, ma’am, I apologise if wearing a hijab is just following a trend, but that’s no different from fashion. You have to wear a hijab that complies with the Qur’an so as not to cause slander.’*(Mahasiswa BSA, Perempuan, 2025)

This quote shows the claim of religious legitimacy to justify certain

dress standards. In other words, the students' interpretation of the word hijab leans more towards normative control, which implicitly positions women's bodies as a public space that must be regulated, monitored, and judged.

This analysis is in line with the views of Muslim feminist Asma Barlas (2002), who criticises the tendency of both classical and contemporary interpretations to associate the hijab solely with female morality. (Marwa & Akhmad Dasuki, 2025) According to them, this has implications for the strengthening of patriarchal culture, in which the honour of the family and even the Muslim community is attached to women's bodies and clothing.

Furthermore, the interpretation of the hijab as a symbol of women's moral legitimacy is also reflected in the daily practices of students. Some respondents admitted that they were more reluctant to befriend or look up to women who wore long hijabs. A source from the Islamic Education study programme (Male, M-11) said:

'If a lecturer or female religious teacher wears a wide hijab, it feels more sincere to accept her knowledge. Because it is clear that she is a devout person.' (Mahasiswa PAI, Laki-Laki, 2025)

This indicates that the hijab in the social sphere of students is not only a religious obligation but also a symbol of moral authority. This interpretation certainly creates social exclusivity because women who choose different

styles of hijab (for example, fashionable or short) are often positioned as less pious or less moral.

From this phenomenon, it can be concluded that the hijab in the perception of students is mostly interpreted as social control and moral legitimacy for women. This interpretation tends to ignore the historical and functional aspects of the hijab and reinforces patriarchal power relations in which society's moral standards are imposed on women through clothing symbols.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, it is necessary to strengthen critical interpretation literacy in academic circles so that students do not merely reproduce classical interpretations textually but are also able to present interpretations that are relevant to social developments. Islamic higher education institutions are also advised to integrate a gender equality perspective into the curriculum of Al-Qur'an and interpretation studies so that a more inclusive and humanistic generation of interpreters emerges. Furthermore, future research can be developed by expanding the number of respondents, using an interdisciplinary approach, or examining other verses that have the potential to contain interpretive bias in order to enrich the findings.

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CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that the lexical meanings of Arabic words in gender-related verses such as *jilbāb*, *ḍaraba*, and *qawwāmūna* have been interpreted in various ways from classical to contemporary times. Classical interpretations tend to emphasise socio-patriarchal aspects, for example, *jilbab* is understood as a marker of status and moral control, *ḍaraba* is interpreted as legitimising the actions of husbands, and *qawwāmūna* is understood as the absolute leadership of men. Meanwhile, contemporary interpretations highlight contextual and egalitarian dimensions, interpreting *jilbab* as a symbol of personal piety, *ḍaraba* in a non-violent sense, and *qawwāmūna* as a functional responsibility that can change according to context.

Field findings show that students' perceptions still largely reproduce classical interpretations that are patriarchal in nature. The majority

of students interpret the hijab as a form of moral control over women, *ḍaraba* as legitimising the husband's power over his wife, and *qawwāmūna* as male superiority in the family. However, there are a small number of students who are beginning to present new interpretations that are more equitable and in line with social developments, especially among those who are familiar with contemporary exegesis literature.

Reflection on these findings confirms the need to strengthen critical exegesis literacy and gender awareness in Qur'anic studies. The *maudhū'ī* exegesis perspective reminds us that the Qur'an cannot be understood partially or bound solely to patriarchal traditions but must be interpreted comprehensively, taking into account its socio-historical linguistic aspects and universal values of justice. Thus, tafsir education in academic circles needs to be directed towards equipping students with critical analysis skills so that they do not merely reproduce the biases of the past but are able to present interpretations that are fair, humanistic, and contextual.

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