

RESEARCH ARTICLE	The comparative inter pretation and it's most problematics	
Khaled Benziane	Researcher	
	University of Belhadj Bouchaib	
	Temouchent, Algeria	
	Email Id: khaled.benziane@univ-temuouchent.edu.dz	
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Abstract		
<p>This study addresses a specific type of interpretation known as "comparative interpretation." It aims to establish a scientifically accurate understanding of this type, considering the issues and ambiguities it faces, as well as defining its scope and distinguishing it from other modern interpretative specializations. The research relies on an analytical approach that collects and discusses the views of researchers to achieve the study's objectives and answer its key questions. The study concludes by formulating a specific definition for comparative interpretation and attempts to respond too many of the issues associated with it.</p>		
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1.Introduction

In accordance with the requirements of the era, Allah the Almighty has blessed this nation and appointed esteemed scholars to preserve and serve His noble Book. These scholars gave the Qur'an their utmost attention and care across all its sciences. Consequently, their approaches to interpreting the Qur'an have diversified throughout the ages in response to the needs of their times. These types of interpretation can be categorized into four main approaches:

1. General (or Summarized) Interpretation

2. Analytical Interpretation

3. Thematic Interpretation

4. The fourth and final type is **Comparative Interpretation**, which addresses the contributions of various exegetes (mufasssirun), correcting and refining the course of Qur'anic exegesis. It is of great importance because it provides the researcher with a broad reading of diverse perspectives and varying narrations on the interpretation of a single verse.

It is worth noting that comparative studies have emerged across several disciplines such as jurisprudence, literature, psychology, religious studies, law, and more.

Research Problem:

The core problem of this research lies in attempting to define the concept of comparative interpretation, specifying its areas of study, and distinguishing it from other types of Qur'anic exegesis. This study adopts both **descriptive** and **analytical** methods, as the research involves collecting, describing, and analyzing statements and concepts.

Significance of the Research:

1. The study addresses a concept that still requires more academic contributions to define its terms and framework—namely, *comparative interpretation*.
2. It provides a formal definition of comparative interpretation.
3. It highlights the consequences of the expanded scope of this concept, which has led to increased challenges in delineating its types and forms.

This study is structured into an **introduction**, **two main sections**, and a **conclusion**:

- The **first section** discusses the concept and challenges of comparative interpretation.
- The **second section** explores the types and challenges of comparative interpretation.
- The **conclusion** outlines the key findings and recommendations.

2. The Concept of Comparative Interpretation

"Comparative interpretation" is a compound term made up of two parts: *interpretation* and *comparative*. Understanding the term depends on grasping each of its components.

2.1 The Meaning of Interpretation

A. Linguistically:

Lexicographers have discussed various derivations of the word *tafsir* (interpretation). Among them:

- *Tafsir* comes from *fāsr*, meaning clarification or uncovering what is hidden.

Some link it to the root *s-f-r*, which also implies uncovering or revealing and it refers to **the liquid physicians examine (to diagnose a patient's condition)**.¹

—e.g., "The woman *safarat* (unveiled) her face."²

Ibn Manzur (d. 711 AH) defined *fāsr* as clarification, and *tafsir* as making something clear. He added that it involves uncovering the meaning of ambiguous words³. The word *safar* also refers to the brightness of the morning.⁴

Thus, the linguistic essence of *tafsir* revolves around meanings like revealing, clarifying, and explaining.

B. Terminologically:

¹ **Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ**, by Al-Fayrūzābādī, Vol. 1, p. 456, under the root "F-S-R".

² **The same source**, Vol. 1, p. 408.

³ **Lisān al-'Arab**, by Ibn Manẓūr, Vol. 5, p. 55, under the root "F-S-R".

⁴ **The same source**, Vol. 4, p. 369, under the root "F-S-R".

Scholars have offered varying definitions of *tafsir*, ranging from broad inclusions to narrow technical boundaries. Among the most notable are:

- **Al-Zarkashi (d. 794 AH):**

“It is the knowledge of the circumstances of the verse and the surah, its stories, indications, whether Meccan or Medinan, abrogating and abrogated, specific and general, absolute and restricted, ambiguous and explicit.”⁵

- **Abd al-Azim al-Zurqani (d. 1367 AH):**

“Tafsir is the science concerned with the states of the Noble Qur’an in terms of its indication of God’s intent—according to human capability.”⁶

Based on these, *tafsir* can be defined as the explanation and elucidation of the Qur’an. Any discourse that does not clarify the Qur’anic text does not fall under tafsir. As the Qur’an itself states: **“We have sent down to you the Reminder so that you may explain to the people what has been revealed to them.”** [An-Nahl: 44]

2.2 The Meaning of Comparison

A. Linguistically:

The term *muqarana* (comparison) is derived from *qarana* (to pair), and it has three primary meanings in Arabic:

1. **Connection** – to link two things together.
2. **Companionship** – e.g., “I accompanied him,” or “his *qarina* is his wife.” The Qur’an uses it as in:

“And whoever is a companion of the devil—what a terrible companion!” [An-Nisa: 34]

3. **Combination** – as in combining *Hajj* and *Umrah* (called *qiran*).

From these meanings, new terms have developed such as *equality*, *equivalence*, *balance*, and *opposition*. Many modern scholars favor the term *balance* (*muwazana*) when defining comparison.

B. Terminologically:

Classical scholars did not define comparative interpretation as a formal term, though it exists implicitly in their works. Its usage can be traced throughout the historical development of tafsir.

Among contemporary scholars:

- **Ahmad al-Koumi** defined it as:

“The explanation of Qur’anic verses based on the writings of multiple exegetes, by comparing their opinions and analyzing the different interpretations, and attempting to reconcile apparently contradictory verses, hadiths, or even divine scriptures.”

- **Mustafa Ibrahim al-Mashni** defined it as:

“A type of tafsir that focuses on comparing the opinions and interpretations of exegetes regarding the meanings, themes, and implications of Qur’anic verses, while considering the exegetes’ differing backgrounds and knowledge. The preferred view is then selected based on solid evidence.”

⁵ *Al-Burhān fi ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, by Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī, Vol. 1, p. 13.

⁶ *Manāhil al-‘Irfān fi ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīm al-Zurqānī, Vol. 2, p. 3.

Based on these definitions, we can say that one of the earliest known scholars to adopt this approach was **Imam al-Tabari** (d. 310 AH), the leader of exegetes. In his tafsir, he would present the opinions of different scholars on each verse, discuss the evidence for each view, compare them, and favor the strongest opinion.

- **Fahd ibn Sulayman al-Rumi** also defined it:

“The exegete collects all relevant texts on a given verse—whether from the Qur’an, Hadith, companions, followers, other exegetes, or even divine scriptures—then compares the views, examines the evidence, and identifies the strongest opinion while refuting weaker ones.”

- **Musa’id ibn Sulayman al-Tayyar** stated:

“This method involves comparing two interpretations and favoring the one that is stronger.”

It appears from his statement that he was describing the methodology rather than formally defining the concept.

In this study, we have limited ourselves to these four definitions only, which open the door to many methodological inquiries for the researcher and scholar.

2.3. Challenges of the Concept of Comparative Interpretation Among Contemporary Scholars

From the definitions presented by al-Koumi, Mustafa Ibrahim al-Mashni, and Fahd al-Rumi, we can identify several challenges that accompany the definition of "comparative interpretation." These challenges can be summarized as follows:

- Most of the concepts and definitions of *comparative interpretation* appear in works primarily concerned with *thematic interpretation*. Hence, one might argue that the concept was not the main focus in those contexts.
- The definitions tend to describe the procedures, steps, and research methodology involved in comparative interpretation. However, it is known in logical theory that a definition should not be based on procedures and methods, but rather on essence and boundaries.
- Al-Koumi’s definition includes elements that do not fall within the scope of comparative interpretation, such as:
 - Apparent contradictions
 - Verbal ambiguities
 - Comparative religion
 - Methodologies and orientations of exegetes

In modern academic studies, particularly in Qur’anic and Tafsir studies departments, it is well established that each subfield has its own domain and specificity. This kind of interdisciplinary overlap complicates the study of comparative interpretation due to the lack of clear boundaries and precise methodological steps.

- Including *preferential judgment (tarjih)* in the definition without outlining the specific criteria or rules upon which it is based, and without clarifying the extent to which scholars agree on these criteria, is problematic.

Thus, it is suggested either to:

- Exclude *tarjih* from the definition altogether, or
- Clearly establish the methodological foundations for *tarjih* to avoid contradictions and disagreements, especially since this falls more properly under the domain of *Usul al-Tafsir* (the principles of Qur’anic exegesis) rather than comparative interpretation.
- Limiting the comparison to only two or three opinions unnecessarily narrows the scope of research.

- Another major challenge associated with the concept of comparative interpretation is the dominance of the **theoretical and literary aspect** over the **practical application** of the methodology.

This inconsistency—and at times contradiction—in defining comparative interpretation may be understandable, and those who offer such definitions are excusable, especially given that classification in this field is still in its early stages. The concept of comparative interpretation and its accompanying issues remains a fertile ground for research, creativity, and scholarly contribution, particularly from graduate students specializing in Qur'anic studies.

Based on these challenges, the following definition is proposed. While defining terminology is an extremely important and difficult task, definitions can either follow the path of strict logical classification or be approached through approximation—using examples, categories, or synonymous expressions. The latter approach is adopted here to offer a concise, working definition:

Comparative interpretation: “A comparison between exegetical opinions and interpretations of the Holy Qur'an, beginning with a comprehensive survey of the views of various scholars. This comparison is grounded in sound, accepted traditions, the linguistic rules of Arabic (the language of the Qur'an), and takes into account the textual context and self-evident principles of reason, all within a rigorous scholarly methodology.”

3. Types of Comparative Interpretation

3.1 Categories of Comparison

Comparative interpretation can be classified into different types depending on the categorization used by scholars in this field. The most well-known classification is the **binary division**, which includes:

- **Type 1: Analytical Comparison**
- **Type 2: Comparison of Methodologies and Approaches**

First Type: Analytical Comparison

In this type, the researcher gathers the views of multiple exegetes on a single verse or on related verses. The comparison involves a detailed examination of the meanings of the verse—based on both transmission (*riwayah*) and understanding (*dirayah*)—including variant readings, reasons for revelation, linguistic analysis, grammar, and more.

The researcher then compares these views and favors one over the others, providing justification for this preference. The comparison may also involve verses on similar themes, such as:

- **Theological issues**, e.g., comparing *Qadi Abdul Jabbar* and *al-Zamakhshari*
- **Reasons for revelation**, e.g., *al-Tabari* vs. *al-Suyuti*
- **Verse interconnections**, e.g., *al-Razi*, *al-Baydawi*, *Abu al-Su'ud*
- **Surah structures**, e.g., *Hamiduddin al-Farahi* vs. *Hussain Ali*
- **Legal issues**, e.g., rulings on *magic* in *al-Jassas*, *al-Tahawi*, *al-Kiya al-Harrasi*, and *Ibn al-Arabi*
- **Sufism**, e.g., *wahdat al-wujud* in *Ibn Arabi* vs. *al-Alusi*
- **Divorce laws**, e.g., comparing *Hanafi* and other views
- **Contemporary issues**, e.g., the reality of *angels and Iblis* in *Muhammad Abduh* vs. *Rashid Rida*
- **Social interpretation**, e.g., *Ubayd Allah Sindhi*, *Maududi*, *Abul Kalam Azad*
- **Use of Sunnah in tafsir**, e.g., *Ghulam Ahmad Parwez* vs. *Amin Ahsan Islahi*

Comparisons may also extend to similar themes in other religious scriptures (e.g., between Qur'anic texts and the Torah or the Bible) to demonstrate the Qur'an's superiority, authenticity, and clarity. Prominent works in this genre include:

- *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* by Maurice Bucaille

- *Muhammad in the Bible and the Qur'an* by Ibrahim Khalil, among others.

Second Type: Comparison of Methodologies and Approaches

A. Comparison of Methodologies:

This involves a thorough and comprehensive study comparing the exegetical methodologies of one or more scholars. For example, *Ibn Taymiyyah* (d. 728 AH) and *Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi* (d. 745 AH) compared the methodology of *al-Zamakhshari* (d. 538 AH) and *Ibn Atiyyah* (d. 542 AH). They concluded that *Ibn Atiyyah's* tafsir was more accurate, comprehensive, and faithful, while *al-Zamakhshari's* was more concise and deep. However, the former was more authentic and less prone to innovation (*bid'ah*).⁷

Such comparative studies can cover:

- Reliance on transmitted reports
- Use of Isra'iliyyat
- Linguistic and theological emphasis
- Attention to Qur'anic sciences, stories, and stylistic features

B. Comparison of Approaches:

Approach here refers to the exegete's religious, theological, and methodological inclinations, shaped by their beliefs, intellectual framework, and interpretative preferences—which ultimately influence their tafsir.⁸

Scholars have long classified tafsir books according to dominant approaches, such as:

- *Narrative-based tafsir*
- *Rational tafsir*
- *Fiqhi tafsir*
- *Mystical (Ishari) tafsir*
- *Linguistic tafsir*
- *Literary tafsir*
- *Sociological tafsir*

Comparative studies may examine:

- The *traditionalist* approach in classical and modern tafsir
- The *jurisprudential* approach across historical periods
- The *Sufi* approach in the 13th century
- The *scientific* approach in the 14th century
- Regional variations in exegetical trends

3.2 A Pause with the Challenges of Comparative Tafsir Classifications

From the aforementioned definitions—particularly that of Ahmad Ali al-Kouni, who was among the first to offer a terminological definition—it is evident that comparative interpretation includes five distinct areas:

1. Explaining Qur'anic verses by comparing the views of multiple exegetes
2. Comparing different interpretive approaches
3. Reconciling apparently contradictory verses or between Qur'anic verses and Hadith
4. Comparing Qur'anic verses with texts from other divine scriptures
5. Comparing verses with similar wording or themes

⁷ *Sharh Muqaddimat al-Tafsir* by Ibn Taymiyyah, by Muhammad ibn Salih al-'Uthaymin, p. 121.

⁸ *Manahij al-Tafsir wa-Itijahatuh*, by Muhammad 'Ali al-Rida'i, pp. 17-19.

However, *Mustafa Ibrahim al-Mashni* limits it to two types only:

- Analytical comparison
- Comparison of methodologies and approaches

When examining the work of scholars such as *Rawda Faraoun*⁹, *Ibrahim Khalifa*¹⁰, *Abd al-Sattar Saced*¹¹, *Abd al-Ghafoor Ja'far*¹², and *Fadl Hasan Abba*¹³, it becomes clear that most researchers confine comparative interpretation to the analysis of differing views on the same verse or passage.

The inclusion of other comparison types—such as methodologies or intertextual comparisons with other scriptures—is a broader expansion and remains a matter of scholarly debate, particularly in light of disciplinary boundaries and specializations.

Thus, from this perspective, it (i.e., comparison of methodologies and approaches) is not inherently part of comparative interpretation.

There is a clear distinction between comparing the exegetes themselves and comparing **interpretative opinions**, which may ultimately lead to a comparative assessment of approaches and methodologies **when necessary for clarification or justification**.

Accordingly, treating the comparison between methodologies and interpretative approaches as a **distinct category** of comparative interpretation is a form of broadening the scope. This expansion requires regulation—especially considering that the field of *“Exegetical Methodologies and Trends”* is now regarded as a **separate discipline** on its own.

Another issue relates to the **classification** of comparative interpretation categories. In addition to the classifications proposed by **al-Koumi** and **al-Mashni**, there is another opinion suggesting that **comparative tafsir** should be limited to only two types:

- **Positional Comparative Tafsir:** A comparison within a specific verse or part of a verse, which may also include a full surah or the entire Qur'an.
- **Thematic Comparative Tafsir:** A comparison of **scattered verses** brought together under a **single thematic subject**.

4. Conclusion

The **main findings** of this study can be summarized as follows:

- The classical works on tafsir and Qur'anic sciences do **not contain a precise, comprehensive terminological definition** of “comparative interpretation” as it is known today among modern scholars.
- Nonetheless, **indications and foundational elements** of this exegetical approach are indeed found in the works of earlier scholars.
- Several **conceptual and methodological challenges** have emerged concerning the **definition and categorization** of comparative tafsir. These issues demand further scholarly contributions and sustained efforts to **establish methodological principles** for research in this domain.

⁹ *Comparative Tafsir: An Applied Study on Surat Al-Fatiha*, by Rawdah Fir'awn, p. 40.

¹⁰ *Studies in the Methodologies of the Mufasssiriin*, by Khalifah Ibrahim, Vol. 1, p. 46.

¹¹ *Introduction to Thematic Tafsir*, by Sa'id 'Abd al-Sattar, p. 17.

¹² *Tafsir and the Mufasssiriin in Its New Form*, by Ja'far 'Abd al-Ghafur, p. 57.

¹³ *Tafsir: Its Fundamentals and Trends*, by Fadl Hasan 'Abbās, p. 206.

- The concept of “comparative interpretation” has expanded considerably, with overlaps into other specializations, and there is a noticeable dominance of **theoretical discourse** and terminological formalism at the expense of practical application in this field.

Recommendations

- This study recommends that **graduation theses** for students specializing in tafsir, Qur’anic sciences, and Qur’anic studies should **focus on comparative tafsir**—specifically limiting the scope to the **comparison of exegetical opinions and interpretations**.
- The study also calls for **intensified efforts** to address all the conceptual and practical challenges related to comparative interpretation, both in terms of **definition** and **categorization**.

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