

The Qur'an's Thematic Approach to Water Fiqh as a Pillar of Environmental Ethics towards Sustainable Theological Ecological Development

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the concept of water in the Qur'an through a thematic interpretation approach and relate it to water fiqh as the basis for the formation of environmental ethics towards sustainable theological ecological development. Water is understood not only as a natural resource that sustains life, but also as a divine mandate that contains theological, moral, and legal dimensions. This understanding is important in the midst of a contemporary ecological crisis characterized by water scarcity, environmental pollution, and uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources. This research uses a qualitative method with a literature study design. The research data is in the form of Qur'anic verses related to water, especially Q.S. al-Anbiyā' [21]:30, Q.S. al-Wāqī'ah [56]:68–70, and Q.S. al-Mulk [67]:30, and is supported by two main literature that discusses Islamic environmental ethics and fiqh al-bi'ah. The data was analyzed using the thematic interpretation method to identify the pattern of the meaning of the verses about water, then analyzed descriptively to map its relationship with the principles of environmental fiqh. The results of the study show that the Qur'an consistently displays water as the source of life, the gift of Allah that is beyond the full control of humans, as well as entities that can experience crises as a form of theological warning against human behavior. These findings are in line with the Islamic framework of environmental ethics and the principles of fiqh al-bi'ah which emphasize responsibility, ecological justice, and the prohibition of environmental damage. This study concludes that the integration of thematic interpretation of the Qur'an and water fiqh makes an important contribution to the development of a sustainability-oriented theological ecology, while enriching the treasures of contemporary Islamic interpretation and fiqh studies in responding to global ecological problems.

Keywords: thematic interpretation, water fiqh, Islamic environmental ethics, theological ecology, sustainability.

Introduction Section

Water is the most basic element in human life and all living things, as well as one of the most crucial issues in today's global environmental discourse. The clean water crisis, water resource pollution, and inequality of access to water show that the water problem is no longer just a technical or economic problem, but has become an ethical, moral, and theological problem. In the context of religious communities, especially Muslims, water has a very special position because it not only supports biological life, but also becomes the main medium in the practice of worship and purity. The Qur'an explicitly places water as the source of life and a sign of Allah's power, as affirmed in Q.S. al-Anbiyā' [21]:30:

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

"And out of water We make every living thing. So why don't they believe?"

This verse affirms that water is not just a natural commodity, but an ontological foundation of life that should be treated with full responsibility and an awareness of faith. However, contemporary reality shows that there is a gap between the theological values of the Qur'an and human practices in managing water resources.

The problem becomes even more complex when modern development is often oriented towards the exploitation of natural resources without considering ecological balance. In this context, a religious-based approach to environmental ethics is becoming increasingly relevant to be offered as an alternative development paradigm. The literature on Islamic environmental ethics confirms that Islam has a comprehensive view of nature conservation, including water, as a mandate that must be maintained by humans as caliphs on earth. This view is reflected in the Islamic View Towards Environment Preservation study which emphasizes that environmental preservation is an integral part of Islamic teachings, not just an additional issue outside of religion. The article asserts that environmental damage is a consequence of man's failure to understand his relationship with nature as a moral and spiritual relationship, not a mere dominating relationship. Thus, the water crisis can be understood as an ethical crisis and a crisis of faith, not just a crisis of resources.

The Qur'an also expressly reminds man of his limitations and dependence on water as a divine gift. This is clear in Q.S. al-Wāqī'ah [56]:68–70:

تَشْكُرُونَ فَلَوْلَآ أَجَا جَعَلْنَاهُ نَسَاءً لَوْ ۝ الْمُنْرِلُونَ تَحْنُ أَمْ الْمُرْنُ مِنْ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ أَنْتُمْ ۝ تَشْرَبُونَ الَّذِي الْمَاءِ أَفْرَأْتُمْ

"Then explain to me about the water you drink. Are you the one who sent it down from the clouds, or are We the ones who sent it down? If We had willed, We would have made the water salty, so why are you not grateful?"

This verse shows that water management should be based on gratitude and theological awareness, not greed and exploitation. Unfortunately, this awareness is often reduced in development practices that ignore the ethical and spiritual dimensions of water. This is where the thematic interpretation approach of the Qur'an is important to re-explore the normative and theological meanings of water comprehensively and systematically.

On the other hand, the study of fiqh also makes an important contribution in formulating water management ethics. The article Green Economy Financing According to Fiqh Al-Bi'ah shows that environmental fiqh (fiqh al-bi'ah) has great potential in building an environmentally friendly and sustainability-oriented Islamic legal framework. Although the article emphasizes more on the financing aspect of the green economy, the framework of fiqh al-bi'ah it offers is relevant to be developed in the context of water fiqh, especially related to the principles of benefit, damage prevention, and ecological justice. This shows that fiqh is not static, but can be contextualized to address contemporary ecological challenges, including the water crisis. However, the existing literature still tends to separate the study of Qur'an interpretation and the study of environmental fiqh. Tafsir often stops at the theological-normative dimension, while fiqh moves on the aspect of practical law without always departing from the thematic reading of the verses of the Qur'an. In fact, the integration between thematic interpretation of the Qur'an and water fiqh is very necessary to build an environmental ethics that is intact and firmly rooted in the sources of Islamic teachings. This need for integration is even more urgent when the Qur'an itself gives a stern warning about the potential loss of water as a form of Divine test, as affirmed in Q.S. al-Mulk [67]:30:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَصْبَحَ مَاؤُكُمْ غَوْرًا فَمَنْ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِمَاءٍ مَعِينٍ

"Say, Explain to me if your water becomes lost in the ground, then who will bring you flowing water?"

In modern Islamic legal discourse, there is a tendency to re-examine the epistemological foundations of ushul fiqh as the basis for legal istinbath, including on issues previously considered settled in the classical tradition (Apriantoro & Muthoifin, 2021). This shift demonstrates the importance of understanding fiqh not only as a textual product, but also as a dynamic methodological construct responsive to social change (Athief, 2019).

Furthermore, the maqasid al-shariah approach broadens the scope of Islamic legal analysis by placing the protection of life (hifz al-nafs), the environment, and resource sustainability as part of the objectives of sharia (Apriantoro et al., 2022). In the context of the current environmental crisis and the challenges of clean water access, the study of water fiqh becomes relevant for a more contextual and interdisciplinary reinterpretation (Alam et al., 2022).

Furthermore, developments in Islamic legal research also demonstrate a trend toward integration between normative studies and analytical approaches based on literature and mapping research trends (Apriantoro & Athief, 2023). This opens up space for the study of water fiqh to be positioned within a broader spectrum, not only as part of the fiqh of worship (ibadah), but also as a reflection of Islamic legal construction in response to contemporary social dynamics.

Based on this description, this research is important to be carried out because it seeks to fill the gap in the existing literature by integrating the thematic interpretation approach of the Qur'an and water fiqh as a pillar of environmental ethics. This research aims to systematically examine the verses of the Qur'an about water through a thematic approach, and relate them to the principles of environmental fiqh in order to build a sustainability-oriented theological ecological framework. Thus, this research not only contributes to the development of the study of tafsir and fiqh, but also offers a normative-religious basis for a more ethical and sustainable development.

Theoretical review

1. Fiqh of Water within the Framework of Usul al-Fiqh

Conceptually, the fiqh of water cannot be separated from the epistemological structure of *usul al-fiqh* as a methodology for legal derivation (*istinbāt al-ahkām*). In the classical tradition, discussions on the classification of water and its legal implications were developed through approaches such as *qiyās*, *istiidlāl*, and textual interpretation of the Qur'anic and Hadith evidences. However, developments in Islamic legal studies indicate that fiqh rulings should be understood as the product of methodological construction rather than merely as literal derivations from the texts (Ashfahany et al., 2025; Hakim, 2023; Halim et al., 2018).

The epistemology of *usul al-fiqh*, as developed by classical scholars and reexamined in contemporary research, emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between scriptural texts (*naṣṣ*), legal reasoning, and the objectives of Islamic law (Apriantoro et al., 2024). Accordingly, the fiqh of water should not be perceived as a static set of norms, but as the result of an intellectual process that remains open to contextual reinterpretation.

Moreover, within the dynamics of modern Islamic law, scholarly discourse on the development of jurisprudential studies demonstrates an expansion of approaches from textual analysis toward ethical considerations and the social impact of law (Athief, 2019). This approach provides space for the study of the fiqh of water to move beyond purely legal-formal aspects and to incorporate dimensions of public interest (*maṣlaḥah*) and sustainability.

2. Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah and the Contextual Relevance of the Fiqh of Water

The *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* approach constitutes an essential foundation for reexamining the construction of fiqh, including issues related to natural resources. The protection of life (*ḥifẓ al-naḥs*), the environment, and social balance forms an integral part of the objectives of Islamic law (Baharsyah et al., 2022). In this context, water functions not only as a medium for *tahārah* (ritual purification), but also as a vital element for human survival.

Contemporary studies that integrate the *maqāṣid* perspective into economic and social issues demonstrate that Islamic law possesses the flexibility to respond to modern challenges (Alam et al., 2022). Therefore, the fiqh of water can be analyzed from a broader perspective, namely as part of a normative system that supports ecological justice and the sustainable distribution of resources.

3. The Dynamics of Islamic Legal Construction and Analytical Approaches

Recent developments in Islamic legal research reveal a tendency toward integrating normative approaches with literature-based analysis supported by scientific mapping methods (Apriantoro & Athief, 2023). This approach illustrates that Islamic legal discourse continues to undergo transformation in response to academic and social demands.

Within this context, the fiqh of water can be situated within a broader spectrum of study, as part of the evolution of Islamic legal thought that is closely connected to social, cultural, and customary (*urf*) variables (Athief et al., 2022). Consequently, the analysis of the fiqh of water is not merely descriptive, but also reflective and constructive in addressing contemporary challenges.

Methods

This study is a normative legal research employing conceptual and epistemological approaches. The focus of the research is directed toward analyzing the construction of the fiqh of water in classical literature and its relevance to contemporary social dynamics. The normative approach is chosen because the object of study is oriented toward legal norms and the methods of legal derivation (*istinbāt al-aḥkām*) within the fiqh tradition (Kusumastuti et al., 2022).

Methodologically, this research applies an *usul al-fiqh* approach to examine the epistemological foundations of legal determination. The discourse on *maṣlaḥah mursalah* and its development throughout the history of Islamic law demonstrates that law is not constructed solely through textual interpretation, but also through considerations of public interest and legal rationality (Rosyadi, n.d., 2017; Rosyadi et al., 2024). This perspective is crucial for rereading the fiqh of water, which has often been understood in a predominantly literal manner. In addition, this study also considers the method of *tarjīḥ* as a mechanism for selecting and evaluating arguments in cases of juristic disagreement among the *fuqahā'*. This approach helps to explain the diversity of scholarly opinions regarding the classification of water and its legal implications.

The dimension of social change is likewise taken into account as a methodological consideration. The dialectical relationship between Islamic law and social reality indicates that fiqh products are always formed through interaction with the context of their time.³ Accordingly, the reinterpretation of the fiqh of water is not intended to alter its foundational norms, but rather to understand its legal construction within its historical and social contexts.

This research employs library research as its primary method, using primary legal sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical fiqh literature, as well as secondary legal sources including scholarly articles on *maṣlahah*, methods of legal determination, and the dynamics of Islamic law. The analysis is conducted using descriptive-analytical and interpretative methods in order to identify the structure of fiqh arguments as well as their contextual relevance.

Results

The results of this research were obtained from a thematic analysis of the verses of the Qur'an related to water as well as a review of two main literature that discusses Islamic environmental ethics and fiqh al-bi'ah. Based on thematic exploration, it was found that the Qur'anic verses about water are scattered in various surahs and display a consistent pattern of meaning related to the origin of life, human dependence on water, and the potential water crisis as a form of theological warning. The data show that the Qur'an explicitly mentions water as the source of life for all beings, as stated in Q.S. al-Anbiyā' [21]:30, which affirms the ontological relationship between water and life. This pattern is in line with the literature that states that Islam views nature as an integral part of the life system that must be maintained (Islamic View Towards Environment Preservation, 2022). These verses do not stand alone, but rather reinforce each other in building a theological narrative about water as a divine gift and trust.

Furthermore, the results of the grouping of verses show that the Qur'an also emphasizes man's absolute dependence on water that comes from the will of Allah, as recorded in Q.S. al-Wāqī'ah [56]:68–70. These verses show that water is not completely under man's control and can change its quality according to God's will. This thematic data is consistent with findings in the Islamic environmental ethics literature that environmental crises arise when humans ignore their limitations and act as if they have complete control over nature (Islamic View Towards Environment Preservation, 2022). Thus, the results of the study show that there is a compatibility between the Qur'an's message about water and the Islamic environmental ethical framework as described in the literature.

In addition, the results of the study also noted the existence of verses of the Qur'an that explicitly describe the possibility of water loss from human life. Q.S. al-Mulk [67]:30 shows the scenario of the loss of water sources and the inability of man to bring them back without Divine intervention. This data shows that the Qur'an does not only talk about water in the context of creation, but also in the context of ecological threats. This pattern is relevant to the findings of fiqh al-bi'ah literature which states that environmental protection, including water, is part of efforts to prevent damage (*fasād*) that has a wide impact on social and economic life (Green Economy Financing According to Fiqh Al-Bi'ah, 2023). This verse serves as a normative basis that emphasizes the urgency of responsible water management.

Based on the analysis of two main references, it was found that the concept of Islamic environmental ethics places humans as guardians (*caliphs*) of nature who have a moral obligation to preserve the environment. The article Islamic View Towards Environment Preservation explicitly states that Islamic teachings integrate spiritual and moral values in human relations with nature, including in the use of water resources (Islamic View Towards Environment Preservation, 2022). This data shows that water conservation is not seen as a purely ethical choice, but rather as a logical consequence of faith and adherence to Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, the results of a study of the article Green Economy Financing According to Fiqh Al-Bi'ah show that fiqh al-bi'ah provides a normative framework to regulate human activities so as not to damage the environment. Although the main focus of the article is green economy financing, it contains fiqh principles relevant to water management, such as damage prevention, public welfare, and collective responsibility for the environment (Green Economy Financing According to Fiqh Al-Bi'ah, 2023). This data shows that fiqh al-bi'ah can be used as a legal basis to support sustainable water management ethics. To clarify the findings, the following is a summary table of the results of the grouping of thematic data of Qur'an verses and their relationship with literature:

<i>Main Theme</i>	<i>Al-Qur'an Data</i>	<i>Literature Findings</i>
<i>Water as a source of life</i>	Q.S. al-Anbiyā' [21]:30	Nature is seen as a life system that must be preserved (Islamic View Towards Environment Preservation, 2022)
<i>Human dependence on water</i>	Q.S. al-Wāqī'ah [56]:68–70	Humans do not have absolute control over nature (Islamic View Towards Environment Preservation, 2022)

<i>Potential crisis and water loss</i>	Q.S. al-Mulk [67]:30	The need to prevent environmental damage through the principles of fiqh al-bi'ah (Green Economy Financing According to Fiqh Al-Bi'ah, 2023)
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Overall, the results of the study show that the Qur'anic verses on water have thematic coherence with the principles of Islamic environmental ethics and fiqh al-bi'ah as reflected in the two references analyzed. The data of the Qur'an and literature show the same emphasis on aspects of responsibility, human limitations, and the need to maintain the balance of nature. These results are presented as a presentation of the main data without further interpretation, so that it can be the basis for conceptual discussion in the next section.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the Qur'anic verses on water have a coherent and interrelated thematic structure in building a theological-based framework of environmental ethics. Water is not only positioned as a physical element that supports life, but also as a medium of relations between humans, nature, and God. This is evident in Q.S. al-Anbiyā' [21]:30 which affirms water as the source of life for all beings, Q.S. al-Wāqī'ah [56]:68–70 which places water as a divine gift beyond the full control of man, and Q.S. al-Mulk [67]:30 which describes the possibility of water loss as a theological warning. These three groups of verses, when read thematically, form a complete Qur'anic narrative about water as a mandate, not just a resource. These findings reinforce the view that the Qur'an has provided a normative foundation for environmental ethics long before the issue of ecological crises became a global concern. When these findings are linked to the Islamic View Towards Environment Preservation literature, it is seen that there is a strong fit between the message of the Qur'an and the Islamic environmental ethical framework outlined in the literature. The article asserts that Islam views nature as part of the moral and spiritual system, so the unfettered exploitation of the environment is seen as a form of ethical deviation. The findings of this study show that the Qur'anic verses on water explicitly support this view, especially through the emphasis on human dependence on God's will in the provision of water. Thus, this study not only confirms the findings of the literature, but also provides a more structured textual basis for the Qur'an through a thematic interpretation approach.

In addition, the findings on the potential water crisis as illustrated in Q.S. al-Mulk [67]:30 have direct relevance to the literature on Green Economy Financing According to Fiqh Al-Bi'ah. Although the article focuses on financing the green economy, the fiqh al-bi'ah principles it posits such as damage prevention, public good, and collective responsibility are in harmony with the Qur'an's message about the threat of water loss. The findings of this study show that fiqh al-bi'ah can be understood as a normative response to the theological warnings of the Qur'an. In other words, environmental fiqh does not stand in a vacuum, but rather has strong roots in the Qur'anic messages about water and the sustainability of life. The main significance of the results of this study lies in its success in integrating the thematic interpretation approach of the Qur'an with the framework of environmental fiqh in one complete conceptual building. So far, as reflected in the two literature analyzed, the study of Islamic environmental ethics and fiqh al-bi'ah is often presented normatively-conceptually without an in-depth exploration of the thematic structure of the verses of the Qur'an. This research contributes by showing that verses on water, when read thematically, not only enrich theological understanding, but also provide normative direction for the development of sustainability-oriented water fiqh. Thus, this research expands the space for dialogue between the interpretation of the Qur'an and environmental fiqh.

The contribution of this research to the field of scientific interpretation and Islamic studies lies in the affirmation that the thematic interpretation approach has great potential to answer contemporary problems, especially environmental crises. The findings of the study show that the Qur'an is not reactive to modern environmental issues, but has contained basic principles of ecological ethics that are relevant across the ages. By associating water verses with fiqh al-bi'ah, this research also contributes to the development of contemporary fiqh that is more responsive to ecological challenges, as hinted at in the literature on environmental fiqh-based green economy. The theoretical implication of this research is the opening of space for the development of the concept of "water fiqh" as an integral part of fiqh al-bi'ah. The findings show that water has a very central theological position in the Qur'an, so its regulation is not enough only from the technical aspects of the law, but also from the moral and spiritual dimensions. This is in line with the view in the Islamic View Towards Environment Preservation which emphasizes the integration of spiritual values in environmental preservation. Thus, water fiqh departing from the thematic interpretation of the Qur'an has the potential to become a more comprehensive normative framework in responding to the water crisis.

The practical implications of this study are related to the development and management of water resources. The findings of the study show that the Qur'an consistently places water as a divine mandate that must be maintained in its sustainability. This principle, when associated with fiqh al-bi'ah as discussed in the green economics literature, can serve as a normative basis for more ethical and benefit-oriented water management policies. Thus, this research has practical relevance for development discourses that want to integrate religious values in environmental policy. However, this study also has a number of limitations that need to be looked at. First, this study uses only two supporting literature, so the resulting discussion is still limited to the perspective of Islamic environmental ethics and fiqh al-bi'ah as described in the two sources. While this restriction is done consciously to maintain the focus and consistency of the analysis, it also limits the breadth of perspective that can be presented. Second, this study focuses on verses of the Qur'an that explicitly mention water, so it does not include other verses that are implicitly related to ecology and the environment.

Another limitation lies in the normative-textual nature of the research. This research has not touched on the empirical aspects related to water management practices in contemporary Muslim societies. Therefore, the findings of this study are more appropriately understood as conceptual and theoretical contributions, rather than as an evaluation of social policies or practices. However, this limitation also opens up opportunities for further research that can test the relevance of theological ecological frameworks based on thematic interpretation and water fiqh in real social and policy contexts. Overall, this discussion confirms that the results of the research have strong significance both theoretically and practically. By linking the thematic interpretation of the Qur'an on water and Islamic environmental ethics literature as well as fiqh al-bi'ah, this research makes a real contribution to the development of a sustainability-oriented theological ecology. This research places water not only as an environmental issue, but as an issue of faith, ethics, and the collective responsibility of humanity.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Qur'an contains a strong and coherent conceptual framework regarding water as the main pillar of life as well as a theological mandate that must be maintained in its sustainability. Through a thematic interpretation approach, this study found that the Qur'anic verses about water consistently affirm three main messages, namely water as the source of life for all beings, human absolute dependence on the Divine will in the provision of water, and the potential water crisis as a form of theological warning. These three messages form a Qur'anic narrative that places water not only as a natural resource, but also as a morally and spiritually meaningful entity.

The findings show strong alignment with the Islamic environmental ethical framework as reflected in the literature analyzed. This research shows that the Islamic view of environmental conservation and the principles of fiqh al-bi'ah have clear roots in the Qur'anic verses on water. By linking the thematic interpretation of the Qur'an and environmental fiqh, this research contributes to the development of contemporary Islamic thought, particularly in an effort to build a sustainability-oriented theological ecology. The main contribution of this research lies in the integration between the study of tafsir and fiqh, which have often been separated in academic discourse.

Scientifically, this research enriches the study of Qur'an interpretation by showing that thematic approaches have high relevance in responding to modern ecological problems. In addition, this research also provides a conceptual contribution to the development of water fiqh as part of fiqh al-bi'ah, by placing theological values as an ethical foundation in the management of water resources. Thus, this study confirms that Islamic teachings are not only normative-theological, but also have real implications for sustainability and development issues. As for suggestions for future research, further research can expand the study by involving more environmental interpretation and fiqh literature to enrich the analytical perspective. In addition, further research can also combine normative-textual approaches with empirical approaches to examine how Qur'anic values on water are implemented in water management policies and practices in Muslim societies. Interdisciplinary approaches involving environmental studies, public policy, and social sciences also have the potential to deepen understanding of the contribution of Islamic teachings in responding to the global water crisis more comprehensively.

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