

## Social Inequality in the Perspective of Tafsir Al-Mishbah by M. Quraish Shihab: Thematic Interpretation Study of Tiktok Trends

Agus Nur Zakin<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Saerozi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1-2</sup>Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kudus, Indonesia

Korespondensi: [agusnur2299@gmail.com](mailto:agusnur2299@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [ahmadsaerozi@iainkudus.ac.id](mailto:ahmadsaerozi@iainkudus.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*This study examines the phenomenon of social inequality trends on TikTok through the perspective of Tafsir al-Mishbah by M. Quraish Shihab. It explores how Shihab interprets Qur'anic verses to construct a comprehensive understanding of social justice. The findings show that the trend of social inequality on TikTok reflects real and structural disparities in Indonesian society, particularly in terms of wealth, education, and employment. These digital representations highlight a deep-rooted crisis of justice that goes beyond economics. Shihab's interpretations emphasize Islamic values such as justice ('adl), balance (al-mizān), and collective responsibility as foundational principles for addressing inequality. His readings of verses like QS. Al-Hasyr: 7, QS. Az-Zumar: 9, and QS. Al-Isra': 35 offer an ethical and spiritual framework for understanding inequality as a moral issue. Thus, the findings affirm that Tafsir al-Mishbah can serve as a theological reference for raising collective awareness and developing solutions to the normalization of injustice in the digital era.*

*Keywords: social divide; tafsir al-mishbah; quraish shihab; tiktok*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji fenomena tren kesenjangan sosial di TikTok melalui perspektif *Tafsir al-Mishbah* karya M. Quraish Shihab. Penelitian ini menelaah bagaimana ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an ditafsirkan Quraish Shihab untuk membentuk pemahaman keadilan sosial yang utuh. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa tren kesenjangan sosial di TikTok merefleksikan ketimpangan nyata dalam masyarakat Indonesia, baik dalam aspek kekayaan, pendidikan, maupun pekerjaan. Representasi digital tersebut menunjukkan adanya krisis keadilan sosial yang mengakar secara struktural. Melalui penafsiran M. Quraish Shihab dalam *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, ditemukan bahwa nilai-nilai Islam seperti keadilan ('adl), keseimbangan (al-mizān), dan tanggung jawab sosial menjadi fondasi dalam merespons ketimpangan tersebut. Penafsiran atas ayat-ayat seperti QS. Al-Hasyr: 7, QS. Az-Zumar: 9, dan QS. Al-Isra': 35 memberikan kerangka etis dan spiritual untuk memahami ketimpangan sebagai masalah moral, bukan semata ekonomi. Dengan demikian, temuan ini menegaskan bahwa tafsir Al-Mishbah dapat menjadi rujukan dalam membangun kesadaran kolektif dan merumuskan solusi terhadap normalisasi ketidakadilan di era digital.

*Kata Kunci: kesenjangan sosial; tafsir al-mishbah; quraish shihab; tiktok*



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## Instroduction

In a civilized society, social justice stands as one of the fundamental pillars that sustain the harmony of collective life. Social justice is not merely an ethical principle, but also a central objective of sustainable development (Andini et al. 2024). According to John Rawls' (1971) theory of distributive justice, a just social order is one that offers the greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society. In Islam, the principles of justice (*al-'adl*) and balance (*al-mīzān*) are foundational values emphasized in the Qur'an as the basis for a dignified and healthy social life (Zuchroh 2024). Ideally, therefore, society should reflect equity in access to education, employment, and wealth. Digital media platforms, including TikTok, should serve as participatory spaces that embody social equality and function as tools of empowerment and inclusion for all societal groups—rather than as mirrors of inequality.

However, the reality on the ground presents a stark contrast. As of early 2024, Indonesia ranks fourth globally in terms of TikTok users, with more than 125 million active users (Fahrulroji Rahman and Siti Sarah 2024; Susanto et al. 2023). The platform's dominance not only reflects digital trends, but can also reveal complex social dynamics. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) noted that in March 2023, Indonesia's Gini ratio stood at 0.388, indicating a significant level of inequality in income distribution (Putri et al. 2023). This gap is further exacerbated by unequal access to decent work, where 59.31% of Indonesian workers are still in the economically vulnerable informal sector (Sibagariang et al. 2023). The National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) in 2024 stated that only 1.07 million people occupy the upper class in Indonesia (Purwantono 2024). In the field of education, the UNESCO report states that inequality in the quality and access to education in Indonesia is getting sharper between cities and villages (Noviani et al. 2025). This inequality reflects not only differences in wealth, but also inequalities in education and employment. This fact is supported by the trend of social inequality that has recently been immortalized on social media Tiktok. Shihab, in his various tafsir works such as Tafsir al-Mishbah, emphasizes the importance of social justice as a key principle in Islam (Shihab 2005a). According to him, social inequality that is left unchecked will give birth to social jealousy, moral instability, and a crisis of community solidarity (Shihab 2005b).

Several researchers have conducted research related to social inequality in Indonesia and Shihab's thoughts. First, research that discusses the social and economic disparities of the community in Pulau Maringkik Village, Lombok Timur Regency, Barat Nusa Tenggara (Anon 2023). Second, a study that analyzes the influence of social inequality, unemployment and the Human Development Index (HDI) on poverty in Lampung Province with a span of 2012-2023 (Fauzi Nur Kholis and Gunarto 2025). Third, research that describes the impact of the green revolution which burdens farmers in farming, resulting in social inequality among farmers (Gultom and Harianto 2021). Fourth, research that discusses how Islamic philanthropy can answer people's problems regarding economic inequality (Syarifuddin and Sahidin 2021). Fifth, research that describes the social inequality contained in the novels *Oliver Twist* and *Nobody's Boy* (Rosyid 2021). Sixth, research that highlights the social value in Surah Al-Hujurat Verses 9-13 from the perspective of M. Quraish Shihab (Abd Hamid 2021). Seventh, research that describes Shihab's thoughts on the integrity of social care in the Qur'an. From the previous research that has been mentioned, no one has discussed the trend of social inequality in the Tiktok application from the perspective of M. Quraish Shihab.

The trend of social inequality that is rampant in digital media arises from the real experiences of people who are victims of inequality themselves. Shihab in his various works of interpretation underlines that social inequality is a structural as well as spiritual problem that must be resolved through moral, ethical and systemic approaches. In interpreting QS. Al-Hasyr verse 7, he emphasizes that wealth should not only revolve among the rich,

because this will create a social gap that is contrary to the spirit of Islamic justice (Shihab 2002). For him, the principles of justice (*al-'adl*) and balance (*al-mīzān*) are at the core of the Qur'anic social vision. He also cites QS. An-Nahl verse 90 which instructs people to uphold justice and give to relatives, and prohibits exploitative and unjust actions (Shihab 2005a). According to Shihab, the root of social inequality is often not only due to differences in ability, but because of the unfair distribution of wealth and resources, as well as weak ethics in economic life (Shihab 2005b; Sumadi 2025). He strongly criticizes the consumptive culture that is often popularized by the media, including social media, because it encourages a materialistic lifestyle and creates an identity crisis among urban Muslim communities (Fithrotin, Baiti Sekar Wangi, and Sahro Wardil Lathif 2024). Shihab does not view wealth as something bad, but should be understood as a mandate and a means to create mutual benefit (Shihab 2008). He also encourages the state to play an active role in eliminating inequality through policies based on justice (Hakim and Syaputra 2020).

This research uses a type of library research with a thematic tafsir study approach, which examines the trend of social inequality in the eyes of M. Quraish Shihab. In this research, the data collection technique used is literature study. That is by collecting content that represents social inequality such as in terms of wealth, employment, and education. This research aims to explore the trends of social inequality in Tiktok which include wealth, employment, and education. Identifying Qur'anic verses relevant to the social gaps of wealth, employment, and education is also the purpose of this research. In addition, researchers want to examine social inequality trends from an Islamic perspective, namely through the perspective of M. Quraish Shihab written in his work entitled *Tafsir al-Mishbah*. The other purpose of this research is to be a recommendation for academics, society and the government in exploring the social inequality that occurs in Indonesia. That way, this research is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the problem of social inequality that occurs in Indonesia.

## Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of library research, aiming to examine M. Quraish Shihab's thought in addressing the phenomenon of social inequality through his major work, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*. Library research is selected as it enables the researcher to critically analyze written sources to address issues conceptually and theoretically (Zed 2004). The research design is based on a thematic exegesis of a specific figure, which focuses on a particular theme in the Qur'an as interpreted by a single exegete. In this case, the researcher refers to Mustaqim's (2015) classification of four types of thematic exegesis and adopts the fourth type figure based thematic analysis.

The research process began with identifying the main theme of social inequality along with related subthemes such as disparities in wealth, education, and employment. The researcher then collected primary data, including the Qur'an, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, and TikTok content portraying the reality of social inequality, along with secondary data such as books, journal articles, and survey reports. These data were categorized by topic and analyzed using content and interpretive analysis techniques—by comparing social phenomena with Quraish Shihab's interpretation of the relevant Qur'anic verses (Martono 2010). The ultimate goal of this analysis is to draw thematic conclusions that connect digital social realities with Islamic values of social justice as depicted in *Tafsir al-Mishbah*. Thus, this method facilitates a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings in contextually responding to social disparities.









## Result and Discussion

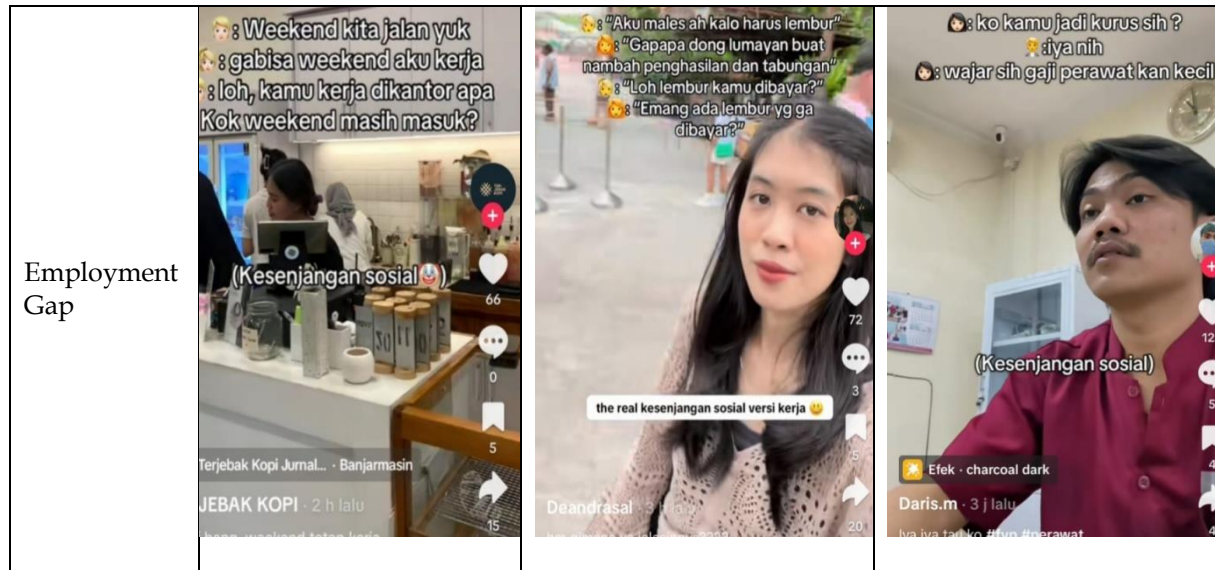
### *Social Gap Trends on TikTok*

Social inequality is a condition in which there are marked imbalances or differences in access to economic resources, education, employment, and other social services in society (Fabela and Khairunnisa 2024). This gap can be seen in various forms, such as differences in income, quality of life, employment, and education. Karl Max as a great thinker in the field of socio-economics views social inequality as a result of the existence of a capitalist system that places the means of production in the hands of a handful of bourgeois classes, while the proletariat class becomes a group that must sell their hard labor to survive (Marx and Engels 2002). The factors of social inequality are economic policies that favor the upper class, unequal access to education and also development between regions (Herdiana 2022).

In today's digital era, social media has indirectly become a space that reflects social reality. One of them is the Tiktok platform which displays various layers of people's lives, from the most luxurious to the simplest. One of them is the trend of social inequality that is currently being immortalized on Tiktok. In table 1, we can see social gap content that has been grouped based on the similarity of video content. The first section contains three contents that show a social gap in terms of wealth.

Table 1: TikTok as a Place to Spread the Latest Trends

Economic Gap	 <p>Nanti boleh kirim catatan materinya gak? aku mau catat ulang di buku</p> <p>"Hah? Kamu catat ulang di Buku? Kenapa ga catat di Ipad aja"</p> <p>(Hahahaha Kesenjangan Sosial)</p> <p>natural · 2 v</p> <p>alex someone · 3 h lalu</p>	 <p>:Hidup kamu kok privat banget yah?</p> <p>"Gak kok, HP aku aja kameranya buruk"</p> <p>Kesenjangan sosial</p> <p>Yeldy Jones · 1 j lalu</p>	 <p>"kok kamu kuliah sambil kerja sih? cari pengalaman ya?"</p> <p>"YA CARI DUIT LAH BANGG"</p> <p>"loh kamu ga biayain sama orang tua emangnya?"</p> <p>(kesenjangan sosial)</p> <p>Efek · natural</p> <p>salwaaputri · 3 h lalu</p>
Education Gap	 <p>"sorry ya, ga ikut main dulu duitku habis buat bayar patungan kostum lomba"</p> <p>: loh kalian ga dapat bantuan dari sekolah kah?"</p> <p>(KESENJANGAN SOSIAL)</p> <p>Sunakan templat</p> <p>SATPASKA 1 · 15 j lalu</p> <p>waduhh · 636</p> <p>#paskibra #foryoupage #paskibrakaindonesia #zkycb... banyak</p>	 <p>: Kamu kuliah dimana</p> <p>: Semarang</p> <p>: Undip ya?</p> <p>: Bukan, Unaki</p> <p>: itu dimana? baru tau ada kampus namanya unaki</p> <p>(Kesenjangan Sosial)</p> <p>Tone up V.2 · 3 v</p> <p>Haycozybubble · 1 h lalu</p> <p>Haha · 196</p>	 <p>"kamu dari poltekkes/ kampus negeri mana?"</p> <p>"aku kampus kesehatan swasta"</p> <p>kesenjangan sosial 🍋🍋🍋🍋</p> <p>CapCut - Coba templat ini</p> <p>diazepam · 3 h lalu</p> <p>Bagian 29 · 1.44</p> <p>#keperawatan</p>



Source: TikTok Social Media

The first content, there is a comparison between students who take notes through books and Ipad. The social gap here is seen from the ownership of technology which is a marker of social status. The second content of the social gap is seen from the reason for a private life, because of the inability to buy a quality cellphone. Ownership of gadgets can be a social marker among the community, especially Gen Z (Soemarsono et al. 2024). The third content is the social gap seen from the comparison of students who study while working, due to economic circumstances with students who are financed by their parents. This is also supported by research which states that 28.65% of Indonesian students come from families whose income is between Rp.500,000 to Rp.2,000,000 and 13.54% of their parents have no fixed income, so some students have to work in order to go to college (Garnesia 2023).

Social inequality in education can be seen in number 2 in table 1. The first content shows social disparities in education related to BOS (School Operational Assistance) funds. This phenomenon occurs as a result of difficult access to education, limited resources and the behavior of people who cannot understand the benefits and manage BOS funds properly (Winaya et al. 2022). The second content shows the social gap seen in the comparison of the existence of small campuses with top PTN campuses in the community. The third content shows the social gap that occurs between public and private campuses.

There is also social inequality in the work industry, as can be seen in number 3 in table 1. The first content addresses the social inequality experienced by workers who continue to work on weekends. This highlights the weak implementation of Labor Law No. 13/2003 in Indonesia, which is only effective in the formal sector. In Indonesia there are 83.83 million people or 57.59% who work in the informal sector, while in the formal sector 60.81 million people or 42.05%. The second content shows the social gap seen in workers who are paid overtime and those who are not. Unpaid overtime indicates labor exploitation. The third content shows the social inequality seen in thin bodies, due to insufficient salaries. There is research that states that there is a difference between the wages of nurses from one another. In addition, there was a survey in 2023 that showed as many as 143 thousand nurses in 38 provinces received salaries below the minimum wage (Adinda 2024).

#### *Tafsir al-Mishbah: M. Quraish Shihab's Framework of Thought*

Muhammad Quraish Shihab was born on February 16, 1944 in Rappang, South Sulawesi, to an educated Arab family who had become Indonesian citizens. His father,

Abdurrahman Shihab, was a professor of tafsir and was once the Rector of IAIN Alauddin Ujung Pandang and the founder of the Indonesian Muslim University. Since childhood, Quraish Shihab was used to hearing his father teach the Qur'an, instilling a love for religious studies and tafsir. His formal education began in Ujung Pandang, then continued to Pondok Pesantren in Malang, and then to Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt, where he earned his Lc (S1), MA, and doctorate (Summa Cum Laude) degrees in Qur'anic sciences. In Indonesia, he has been the Vice Chancellor of IAIN Alauddin, Chancellor of IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Minister of Religious Affairs, Egyptian Ambassador, as well as active in various scientific and religious organizations (Arifin 2020).

Shihab is a progressive Muslim scholar who has produced many important works in Islamic studies (Has 2018). Among his writings are "Tafsir al-Manar: Keistimewaan dan Kelemahannya", "Mahkota Tuntunan Ilahi: Tafsir Surat al-Fatihah", and "Atas Nama Agama: Wacana Agama dalam Dialog Bebas Konflik". He also wrote "Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim: Tafsir Atas Surat-Surat Pendek Berdasarkan Urutan Turunnya Wahyu" and compiled "Fatwa-Fatwa Muhammad Quraish Shihab Seputar Ibadah Mahdha". Another very influential work is "Mu'jizat al-Qur'an: Ditinjau dari Aspek Kebahasaan, Isyarat Ilmiah dan Pemberitaan Ghaib" and "Lentera Hati: Kisah dan Hikmah Kehidupan", which he then developed further in "Perempuan (Lentera Hati)". On the thematic methodology side, Shihab came up with "Wawasan al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat" and "Membumikan al-Qur'an: Fungsi dan Peran Wahyu dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat". He also explained the basics of history and Qur'anic science in "Sejarah dan 'Ulumul al-Qur'an", affirming the harmony between revelation and ratio through "Logika Agama: Kedudukan Wahyu dan Batas-Batas Akal dalam Islam", and summarizes the message, impression, and harmony of the Qur'an in his monumental work, "Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an."

Tafsir al-Mishbah is a monumental work of M. Quraish Shihab that comes after approximately three decades of Indonesian tafsir world minimal work of local mufasir. Since it was first published in 2003 until 2008, this book has undergone nine reprints (Izzan 2021). Its popularity even surpassed previous commentaries written by figures such as Mahmud Yunus, Ahmad Hasan, Hasbi ash-Shiddieqy, Halim Hasan, and Hamka. Previously, in 1997, Shihab wrote Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim with a tartib nuzuli approach (based on the order in which the verses were revealed) using the tahlili method, which is interpreting verse by verse according to the order in the letter (Erdawati 2024). The goal is to provide an understanding of the chronology of divine guidance. However, this approach is considered too lengthy in explaining vocabulary and rules of tafsir, making it less effective for students and general readers who want a quick and interesting understanding.

In contrast to that, Tafsir al-Mishbah follows the tartib mushafi style, which is interpretation based on the order of the Qur'anic mushaf. At the beginning of each letter, Shihab provides an introduction that includes the name of the letter (along with other names if any), the reason for its naming, the number of verses and the difference in calculation, the place of descent of the letter, the order of the letter in the Mushaf and in the chronology of its descent, the main theme of the letter, the relationship between letters, asbabun nuzul, as well as the conclusion of the content of the letter in general (Budiana and Gandara 2021). The method used in Tafsir al-Mishbah remains tahlili, or according to Baqir al-Shadr called tajzi'i method, which is a comprehensive analytical approach to the verses by following the order of the Mushaf. This approach includes analysis of vocabulary, asbab al-nuzul, munasabah between verses, and various other aspects. Although comprehensive, this method does not resolve one topic completely because the explanation of a theme is sometimes scattered in different verses.



In assessing the characteristics of tafsir, aspects such as language style, style of interpretation, accuracy of sources, consistency of method, systematics, critical power, scientific madhhab, and objectivity of the interpreter are very important. Shihab pays great attention to linguistic aspects, especially Arabic grammar (nahwu), in explaining the meaning of vocabulary. He also explores the philosophy behind the selection and order of words in the verse. The style of al-Mishbah tafsir tends to use the approach of tafsir bi al-ma'tsur, which is history-based interpretation (Setiawan 2023). The characteristic of interpretation from the Middle Eastern world is clearly visible, where Shihab often quotes verses of the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, as well as the opinions of companions and tabi'in contained in books such as Kutub al-Sittah. The number of quotations makes this tafsir like an encyclopedia of comparative tafsir, so that his personal thoughts appear more hidden.

Shihab himself admits that he refers to many great scholars, such as M. Syaltut, Sayyid Quthub, Sheikh M. al-Madany, Muhammad Hijazi, Ahmad Badawi, M. Ali as-Shabuny, M. Sayyid Thanthawi, Mutawalli ash-Sya'rawi, and Ibrahim bin Umar al-Biq'a'i. He also cites the views of Thabathaba'i, Thahir Ibn 'Ashur, al-Alusi, az-Zamakhshari, Fakhruddin al-Razi, tafsir al-Muntakhab, as-Suyuti, al-Khatib al-Iskafi, and Sufi figures such as Imam al-Ghazali (Junaedi 2017). Although generally following the form of tafsir bi al-ma'tsur, Shihab still provides space for his personal views, so that Tafsir al-Mishbah can also be categorized as tafsir bi al-ra'yi. The Qur'an is interpreted sequentially, both in terms of verses and letters, accompanied by an explanation of the asbab al-nuzul of the verses (Fadilah and Amin 2023). In addition, Shihab also contains interpretations sourced from the Prophet Muhammad Saw. (through the traditions in Kutub al-Sittah), the companions, tabi'in, and tabi' al-tabi'in, as well as mufasirs from various fields of knowledge, such as theology, fiqh, linguistics, literature, and others.

### *Verses of Social Inequality in the Qur'an*

Social inequality is a classic problem that continues to color people's lives from time to time (Allolayuk 2021). This gap covers various aspects such as education, wealth and employment, which has implications for social justice and human development as a whole. In the context of modern society, these gaps can be found in the form of differences in educational facilities, access to technology, as well as wage disparities and treatment in the world of work. Islam as a religion of rahmatan lil 'alamin has provided moral and structural guidance through the Qur'an in overcoming various forms of social inequality (Siti Nurdina Awalita 2023). The Qur'an not only teaches spiritual equality, but also emphasizes the importance of social and economic justice.

The education gap has become a fundamental social problem in society. The Qur'an as a guide to life for Muslims has provided guidance on how education should be accessed equally. As conveyed through the word of Allah Swt. in Surah Az-Zumar verse 9 and Surah At-Taubah verse 60:

أَمْ مَنْ هُوَ قَانِتٌ أَنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُوا رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ ۚ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ ۚ ﴿٩﴾

"(Are they better) or those who worship (their Lord) devoutly in the hours of the night, prostrating and standing, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of their Lord? Say, (O Prophet,) "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" None will be mindful (of this) except people of reason."

﴿٦٠﴾ إِنَّمَا الصَّدَقَتُ لِلْفُقَرَاءِ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْعَمِلِينَ عَلَيْهَا وَالْمُؤَلَّفَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَالْغَرَمِينَ وَفِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ ۚ فَرِيضَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٦٠﴾

"Alms-tax is only for the poor and the needy, for those employed to administer it, for those whose hearts are attracted (to the faith), for (freeing) slaves, for those in debt, for Allah's cause, and for (needy) travellers. (This is) an obligation from Allah. And Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise."

The education gap is a multidimensional social problem that demands comprehensive attention from both religious and public policy perspectives. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of equitable access to knowledge, as stated in Surah Az Zumar verse 9, which distinguishes between the knowledgeable and the unknowledgeable - like light and darkness - which can only be understood by those who are of sound mind (Shihab 2002). Ibn Kathir asserts that this verse confirms the primacy of knowledge and the strategic role of scholars, while Shihab emphasizes that knowledge becomes the basic differentiator between individuals. Thus, the interpretation of this verse is not only theological, but also implicative for education policy, namely that improving the quality and equitable access to learning is a fundamental effort to raise the social status of Muslims.

The wealth redistribution system in Islam through the zakat instrument also highlights the educational dimension. In Surah At-Taubah verse 60, the group "*fi sabilillah*" is understood by Imam al-Qurthubi as covering the activities of science development and community education. Shihab complements this understanding by emphasizing that the allocation of zakat funds for "*fi sabilillah*" is not only oriented towards material needs, but also towards building human resource capacity through educational services. Thus, the zakat instrument becomes a socio-economic guarantee that mitigates the education gap while strengthening social cohesion, in accordance with the maqāsid purpose of sharia to uphold justice and the benefit of the people.

﴿أَفَمَنْ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ الْحَقُّ كَمَنْ هُوَ أَعْمَىٰ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ ۝١٩﴾

*"Can the one who knows that your Lord's revelation to you (O Prophet) is the truth be like the one who is blind? None will be mindful (of this) except people of reason."*

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ اسْكُرُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُرَفِّعُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ۝١١

*"O believers! When you are told to make room in gatherings, then do so. Allah will make room for you (in His grace). And if you are told to rise, then do so. Allah will elevate those of you who are faithful, and (raise) those gifted with knowledge in rank. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do."*

The phenomenon of socio-economic stratification in education is actually contrary to the principle of equality taught by Islam. Surah Ar-Ra'd verse 19 asserts that those who understand the truth of revelation cannot be equated with those who do not, although this does not mean legitimizing discrimination, but rather emphasizing the urgency of knowledge. Al-Maraghi views this verse as differentiating understanding, not justifying inequality. Furthermore, Surah Al-Mujadilah verse 11 emphasizes that Allah elevates the degrees of the believers and the knowledgeable - as As-Suyuthi explains - as a form of appreciation for the effort to study. Shihab adds that this elevation includes spiritual and socio-economic aspects, so that knowledge functions as a means of individual and societal transformation, not just a status symbol, and becomes a motor for improving collective welfare. In providing a perspective on the virtues of science in Islam. Shihab interprets that this degree increase is not only in the spiritual context but also socio-economic.

Socio-economic disparities also occur in terms of wealth. The wealth gap is a social phenomenon that has existed since ancient times. In the modern context, this gap is increasingly evident from differences in access to technology and lifestyles.

﴿يُؤْتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا وَمَا يَذَكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُوا الْأَلْبَابِ ۝٢١٩﴾

*"He grants wisdom to whoever He wills. And whoever is granted wisdom is certainly blessed with a great privilege. But none will be mindful (of this) except people of reason."*

Wealth disparity has become a structural problem in modern society, where differences in access to technology and lifestyles create a widening gap between the well-off and the less fortunate. The Qur'an, particularly in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 269, affirms that Allah bestows al-hikmah-understanding and wisdom-to whom He wills, which includes the ability to manage wealth responsibly. According to Imam At-Thabari, this wisdom includes



understanding the Shari'ah and its application in daily life, including the management of wealth to benefit oneself and society. Shihab adds that al-hikmah is a great gift that leads its owner to many virtues, so that wealth management is not just a matter of material accumulation, but also the fulfillment of socio-economic goals in Islam. Thus, this verse provides a theological foundation for the practice of equitable wealth distribution, emphasizing that economic disparities can be minimized through wisdom in the use of wealth in accordance with sharia principles.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقْوَاهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

"O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may (get to) know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware."

The phenomenon of social stratification based on wealth - where ownership of luxury goods or access to technology is used as a measure of nobility - is actually contrary to Islamic teachings on human equality. Surah Al Hujurat verse 13 asserts that a person's glory before Allah is measured by his piety, not by social or material status. Ibn 'Ashur emphasizes that this verse abolishes discrimination based on descent, skin color, or level of wealth, and affirms the universal principle of ukhuwah Islamiyah (Aisah and Khusni Albar 2021). Shihab, in Tafsir al Mishbah, further emphasizes that "*fi sabilillah*" - some of the recipients of zakat - includes community empowerment efforts through education and economic capacity building. Thus, Islam not only rejects material-based caste views, but also promotes a redistribution of resources that upholds social justice, where every individual has equal rights and access to develop spiritually and economically.

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٥﴾

"Read, (O Prophet,) in the Name of your Lord Who created – (1) created humans from a clinging clot. (2) Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous, (3) Who taught by the pen – (4) taught humanity what they knew not. (5)"

The first revelation, contained in Surah Al 'Alaq verses 1-5, emphasizes the importance of knowledge as the foundation of human progress: the command "iqra'" (read) underlines that the ability to read, write and access knowledge is a universal right that must be guaranteed without social or economic discrimination (Shihab 2005a). Ash Syaukani, in Tafsir Fath al Qadir, explains that the command to read is general, covering both textual reading and worldly knowledge, so that any useful knowledge becomes an instrument for the combination of faith and expertise (Harahap 2019). Shihab adds that this commandment is also a strategy to alleviate poverty, because increasing one's capacity through knowledge will expand economic opportunities and reduce inequality. Thus, Al 'Alaq not only begins the prophetic journey, but also builds an epistemological foundation for an inclusive education system, which makes access to knowledge the main prerequisite for realizing social justice and the welfare of the people.

Inequality in the world of work has emerged as a complex phenomenon in the modern era, where equal treatment and appreciation of workers with similar status and workloads are often overlooked. This structural injustice not only harms individuals, but also erodes trust and collective spirit in the professional environment. As a moral and ethical guide, the Qur'an provides a firm foundation for justice in work and business, especially in Surah Al Isrā' verse 35, which emphasizes the urgency of honesty and the perfection of measures and balances in every transaction. This verse reminds us that only through the application of the principles of "perfecting the measure" and "weighing with the right balance" can organizations and communities realize fair, balanced, and sustainable working relationships.

وَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ إِذَا كِلْتُمْ وَزَنُوا بِالْقِسْطَاسِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا ﴿٣٥﴾

*"Give in full when you measure, and weigh with an even balance. That is fairest and best in the end."*

This verse confirms that Allah's norm of justice includes a mechanism for proportionally rewarding the efforts and contributions of each individual. In the context of the modern world of work, this mandate demands that employers provide wages that match the burden and value of the work-without discrimination based on social background, economic status, or other non-professional factors. The widespread wage inequality, where workers with equal positions or burdens receive different compensation, clearly contradicts the divine command to "perfect the measure" and "weigh with a true balance." By applying this principle, every form of transaction - both financial and non-financial - must reflect the ethics of fairness, ensure the welfare of workers, and strengthen social cohesion within the organizational structure and society at large.

According to Imam Ar Rāzī in *Tafsīr al Kabīr*, the command to measure and weigh is not only related to the physical scale or merchandise, but also extends its meaning to the rights of workers in receiving a fair "measure" of wages in accordance with their responsibilities and quality of work. Shihab, in *Tafsir al Mishbah*, asserts that the balance sheet analogy forces each party to avoid inequality-both exploitation of low wages and overcompensation without productive reasons-because social justice is the ultimate goal of sharia. The application of this verse in modern employment policies encourages fair minimum wage regulations, transparency of salary structures, and effective enforcement mechanisms, so that gaps in the world of work can be reduced and economic justice realized for all levels of society (Suryani 2017).

### ***Integration of Quraish Shihab's Tafsir Al-Mishbah with Social Gap Trends***

M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir Al Mishbah* offers an analytical framework that combines textual and contextual understanding of various forms of social inequality in Indonesia. Inequality in wealth distribution, access to education, and employment opportunities is not merely an economic problem, but a moral and spiritual issue that requires the foundation of Islamic values as *rahmatan lil 'ālamīn* (Amelia, Oktarahmadini, and Harahap 2025). Shihab emphasizes that *tafsir Al Mishbah* does not only elaborate on the *lafaziyah* meaning of the Qur'anic verses, but also reveals their relevance to contemporary social reality. By examining the digital phenomenon, for example, he shows how the gap between those who have access to the latest technology and those who rely solely on traditional means reflects society's failure to apply Islamic wisdom principles that prioritize social responsibility. This contextual interpretation triggers a deep reflection that every owner of resources-material, educational, or position-should make justice and public good the measure of success, not just material accumulation.

In uncovering the roots of the wealth gap, Shihab emphasizes the value of *al hikmah* or wisdom in managing *zakat* and property. Wisdom here goes beyond mere cognitive intelligence: it includes an awareness of social responsibility and the ability to translate religious teachings into well-targeted philanthropic practices (Subki and Fitrah Sugiarto 2021). By looking at the phenomenon of students showing off expensive devices on social media, the *tafsir* reminds us that luxury is not a measure of nobility - because all wealth is essentially a divine mandate and test. Through the *zakat* mechanism, *Al Mishbah* places wealth distribution as an instrument of social security that is able to reduce economic inequality while fostering community solidarity. Especially for those who have difficulty accessing higher education, the strategic allocation of *zakat* can create opportunities for study sustainability and economic empowerment, turning material donations into comprehensive human resource investments (Hakim 2023).

The issue of inequality in education is studied by Shihab as a reflection of inequality in access to knowledge, which is actually a differentiator of human degrees according to Tafsir Al Mishbah (Cahyawati and Muqowim 2022). Although knowledge can raise spiritual and socio-economic degrees, it should not create a widening gap (Ariswanto, Zubaidah, and Chalid 2025). The interpretation of the first revelation (QS Al 'Alaq 1-5) is used as a basis that the reading (*iqra'*) command is a universal right, covering all forms of knowledge, both religious and worldly (Febriani and Susanty 2023). Thus, the education system must be based on inclusivity, facilitating equal access without discrimination of economic status (Istiqomah 2021). Shihab sees that the failure to utilize school operational assistance funds fairly signifies blindness to social benefits; whereas, wise management of public budgets should narrow the gap between educational institutions (Daulay 2014). Through the synergy between spiritual values and public policy, this contextual interpretation asserts that equitable distribution of education quality-not institutional reputation-should be the main indicator of successful human resource development.

The employment gap, according to Shihab, is a direct consequence of the weak application of the principle of justice in the distribution of business results. He highlights the practice of substandard wages, neglect of overtime compensation, and exploitation of informal workers as violations of Islamic ethics (Mayasari and Prasasti 2024). In Tafsir Al-Mishbah, work justice is not just a normative obligation, but a value that lives in every industrial relationship: employers are obliged to "perfect the measure" of rewards according to the burden of the task, while workers must be valued as equal partners (Shihab 2019). Shihab emphasizes the need for transparent regulations-such as minimum wage standards and grievance mechanisms-as well as consistent law enforcement to address structural inequality (Shaleh and Firman 2018). By upholding fairness as the foundation of the labor system, society not only protects workers' rights, but also strengthens social harmony and long-term productivity.

Based on an analysis of TikTok content trends that reflect social inequality and the interpretation of M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, this study finds that the phenomenon of digital social disparity is a tangible reflection of systemic inequality in Indonesian society, particularly in terms of wealth, education, and employment. The study reveals that Quraish Shihab's interpretations offer a robust ethical and spiritual framework for understanding and responding to such inequalities. For instance, verses on distributive justice (Qur'an, Al-Hasyr: 7), equality in knowledge (Az-Zumar: 9), and fairness in labor (Al-Isra: 35) are all interpreted through a contextual approach that emphasizes the need for social transformation grounded in Qur'anic values. These findings affirm that emerging social trends on TikTok cannot be understood merely as forms of entertainment, but rather as concrete manifestations of a crisis in social justice—subject to critical analysis through the lens of Islamic exegesis. Accordingly, this study successfully addresses how social inequality in digital media can be thematically interpreted from an Islamic perspective, while also contributing both theoretically and practically to the discourse on social disparity in the digital age.

## Conclusion

M. Quraish Shihab's perspective in Tafsir Al-Mishbah not only reflects the depth of understanding of the verses of the Qur'an, but also presents moral direction and applicable solutions in dealing with the reality of social inequality in the digital era. In the realm of wealth, he emphasizes the importance of wisdom, piety, and redistribution mechanisms



through zakat; in the field of education, equal access and utilization of knowledge are the main pillars; while in employment, the principles of 'adl (justice) and ihsan (benevolence) must be upheld. His emphasis on justice, science, and piety is the foundation for transformative movements that touch the realm of individuals, systems, and culture. This research shows that the trend of social inequality on digital platforms reflects the inequality that exists in Indonesian society. M. Quraish Shihab's perspective emphasizes the importance of social justice in Islam, which includes equitable distribution of wealth, employment opportunities, and education. The findings underscore the need for cooperation between society and the government to address inequality, to avoid the perception that inequality is inevitable, which can foster social apathy and undermine government legitimacy.

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