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SELF-CHANGE, HUMAN EFFORT, AND DIVINE LAW IN Q. AL-RA'D [13]:11: A COMPARATIVE EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis konsep perubahan diri dalam QS. Al-Ra'd [13]: 11 melalui perbandingan penafsiran al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, al-Sa'dī, dan al-Shinqīṭī, menjelaskan relasi antara ikhtiar dan sunnatullah, serta merumuskan implikasinya bagi Pendidikan Agama Islam. Penelitian kualitatif berjenis kepustakaan ini menggunakan pendekatan tafsir muqāran. Data primer dari lima kitab tafsir dianalisis melalui analisis kebahasaan terhadap frasa kunci dan perbandingan penafsiran secara sistematis berdasarkan kategori yang ditetapkan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, meskipun berbeda periode, orientasi, dan metode, kelima mufassir bertemu pada inti yang sama: perubahan keadaan suatu kaum berkaitan dengan perubahan batin mereka, terutama dalam keimanan, akhlak, dan amal saleh, dan tetap berada dalam kehendak Allah. Perbedaannya terletak pada penekanan: al-Ṭabarī menekankan perubahan moral sebagai sebab dicabutnya nikmat, Ibn Kathīr pergeseran dari ketaatan menuju kemaksiatan, al-Qurṭubī dimensi sosial, al-Sa'dī dua arah perubahan, dan al-Shinqīṭī penafsiran melalui tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān. Perbedaan ini menyangkut apa yang berubah dan siapa yang bertanggung jawab, sehingga kesamaannya bersifat parsial, bukan seragam. Dari penafsiran tersebut, peneliti merumuskan model kausalitas bersyarat: perbuatan manusia merupakan sebab yang dijadikan Allah sebagai syarat perubahan, sedangkan penciptaan hasilnya berada dalam kehendak dan hikmah-Nya. Kebaruannya terletak pada perumusan model tersebut dari perbandingan sistematis lima mufassir dengan metode berbeda. Model ini menolak fatalisme sekaligus antroposentrisme dan menawarkan landasan konseptual bagi Pendidikan Agama Islam melalui muhasabah, pembiasaan, dan budaya sekolah yang religius.

Keywords:
Ikhtiyār;
Islamic Religious Education
Self-Change;
Sunnatullāh;
Tafsīr Muqāran

ABSTRACT

This study analyses the concept of self-change in Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 by comparing the interpretations of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, al-Sa'dī, and al-Shinqīṭī, explains the relationship between human effort (ikhtiyār) and divine law (sunnatullāh), and formulates its implications for Islamic Religious Education. Using a qualitative library design with a comparative exegetical (tafsīr muqāran) approach, the study analysed five works of tafsir through linguistic analysis of the key phrases and a systematic comparison across defined categories. Despite differences in period, orientation, and method, the five exegetes converge on a shared core: the change in a people's condition is linked to their inner change in faith, morality, and righteous deeds, and remains within God's will. They differ in emphasis. Al-Ṭabarī highlights moral corruption as the cause of lost blessings, Ibn Kathīr the shift from obedience to disobedience, al-Qurṭubī the social dimension, al-Sa'dī the two directions of change, and al-Shinqīṭī reads the verse through tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān. These differences concern what changes and who bears responsibility, so the convergence is partial rather than uniform. From these readings, the researchers construct a model of conditional

causality in which human acts are causes that God has made conditions of change, while outcomes rest with His will and wisdom. The novelty lies in deriving this model from a systematic comparison of five exegetes with distinct methods. The model rejects both fatalism and anthropocentrism and offers a conceptual foundation for Islamic Religious Education through self-reflection, habituation, and a religious school culture.

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1. Introduction

Self-change is a central concern of human life because it relates to the effort to improve one's personal, spiritual, and social condition. In the Qur'anic worldview, change is not limited to outward circumstances but concerns, first and foremost, what lies within the human self. This principle is expressed in Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11: "Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves." The verse is among the most frequently quoted passages in Muslim public discourse, yet it is often cited as a motivational slogan for changing one's fate without attention to its context and to the explanations of the exegetes (Rahman & Erdiyansyah, 2024). Such reductive readings risk obscuring the verse's theological message about the position of human effort within the decree and power of God. For this reason, Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 needs to be examined carefully in order to understand the concept of self-change and the place of human effort (*ikhtiyār*) in relation to divine law (*sunnatullāh*).

The central problem in understanding the verse is how to position the human role in change without detaching it from God's decree and sovereignty. This problem is not merely conceptual. Recent studies show that the relationship between destiny and effort remains contested, particularly regarding the extent to which humans determine their own condition (Rustam, 2025). A fatalistic understanding of destiny can produce passivity and weaken the work ethic and social transformation of Muslim communities (Hasibuan & Zuhri, 2026), whereas contemporary theological studies argue that belief in *qadar* need not lead to fatalism because human choice and divine power coexist (Keskin & Azhar, 2024). The Qur'an has been read as affirming a "relational freedom" in which genuine moral agency operates within a divine order of measure and decree (Afif & Riyani, 2025), and the Prophetic traditions likewise present human effort as part of, rather than contrary to, God's decree (Maulana et al., 2025).

Previous studies have approached Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 from different angles. Rustam (2025) examined the correlation between destiny and effort through al-Qurṭubī's tafsir, while Hasibuan and Zuhri (2026) compared al-Ṭabarī, Sayyid Quṭb, and M. Quraish Shihab to identify the theological, social, and psychological dimensions of fatalism. Syafi'i and Sassi (2025) compared Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 with Q. Al-Anfāl [8]:53 and argued that self-awareness underlies social piety and character education. Other studies have used

the verse to explain the development of modern Islamic educational thought in Indonesia (Aslihah & Wasehudin, 2023), to formulate principles of Islamic educational management (Hasnah et al., 2024), and to show how a Qur'anic ethos of self-awareness and accountability can transform the self, the family, and society (Alwani, 2022).

These studies, however, leave several gaps. Most of them rely on a single exegete or combine classical and contemporary interpreters without examining how the classical tradition itself constructs the relationship between human effort and divine law. Studies that address *qadar* and free will are largely theological and seldom ground their arguments in a systematic comparison of tafsir, while studies that link the verse to education tend to move directly to practical recommendations without a clear exegetical basis. As a result, the concept of self-change in the verse is often understood either deterministically, by neglecting human effort, or anthropocentrically, by neglecting God's will and power. No study has yet compared al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, al-Sa'dī, and al-Shinqīṭī, who represent different periods and methods of exegesis, to construct an integrated framework of self-change.

The interpretive problem is therefore more specific than the general importance of self-change. Earlier studies leave three questions open: whether *mā bi-qawmin* denotes the blessing a people enjoy or their social order; whether *mā bi-anfusihim* denotes an individual inner state, a collective moral condition, or both; and how the clause *ḥattā yughayyirū mā bi-anfusihim* relates the human change to God's change, given the final clause that nothing can repel what God wills. Motivational uses of the verse answer these questions implicitly by reading it as a law of self-determined success. They can be answered only by comparing how exegetes of different periods and methods read the same wording, which is why comparative exegesis (*tafsīr muqāran*) is required (Yetkin, 2023; Wahid & Kamils, 2024).

Comparative exegesis (*tafsīr muqāran*) offers a suitable means of addressing this gap. Comparative designs have been shown to reveal how exegetes with different methodological orientations, such as textual and rational-contextual approaches, produce distinct yet complementary readings of the same passage (Mujahidin et al., 2024). Contextualist hermeneutics further warns that verses detached from their textual and historical context are easily misused (Siddiq, 2021), and recent studies in this journal demonstrate how a careful reading of a single verse can yield universal values relevant to contemporary Muslim life (Mukmin & Rahmat, 2026).

The topic is also significant for Islamic Religious Education. PAI is not oriented solely towards mastery of religious knowledge but also towards the formation of attitudes and character that encourage students to improve themselves. Studies in Islamic education show that Qur'anic values such as monotheism, trustworthiness, honesty, and responsibility support children's cognitive, moral, emotional, and spiritual development (Syahmil & Sa-U, 2024), and that the Qur'an provides principles for managing education dynamically, including the principle of self-change expressed in Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 (Hasnah et al., 2024). A sound understanding of the verse is therefore needed so that the motivation it offers to students rests on a correct theology of human effort and divine decree, rather than on a slogan that promises success through effort

alone or invites resignation to fate. The notion of divine law (*sunnatullāh*), which refers to the consistent patterns through which God governs nature and society (Malkawi, 2023), provides the conceptual bridge between the verse and the educational process.

The three terms in the title are used with defined limits. Self-change refers to the change in *mā bi-anfusihim* as the exegetes explain it, namely in faith, obedience, gratitude, and conduct, not to personal development in a general psychological sense. Human effort (*ikhtiyār*) refers to accountable voluntary acts that the exegetes treat as causes established by God, not as an independent power to create outcomes. Divine law (*sunnatullāh*) refers to the regular pattern by which God links moral conduct with its consequences in communities, which remains subject to His will and is not a mechanical law of nature (Fuqohak et al., 2021; Ünal, 2023).

Based on this background, the study addresses three research questions: (1) how the five exegetes interpret the concept of self-change in Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11; (2) what relationship between human effort and divine law emerges from a comparison of their interpretations; and (3) what implications this concept has for Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*, PAI). Accordingly, the study aims to analyse the concept of self-change in the verse, to explain the relationship between *ikhtiyār* and *sunnatullāh* on the basis of these interpretations, and to identify its relevance for PAI.

The novelty of this study lies in bringing together the dimensions of human effort and divine law as a single conceptual framework for understanding self-change, derived from a systematic comparison of classical and modern exegetes. Unlike earlier studies, it compares five exegetes through explicit categories and derives the educational implications only from that comparison. The study contributes to Qur'anic studies by clarifying the exegetical foundations of the verse and to Islamic education by providing a Qur'anic basis for nurturing students' awareness, responsibility, earnestness, and reliance on God. The remainder of this article presents the method, the results and discussion, and the conclusion.

2. Method

This study is a qualitative library research that uses written sources as the main material for collecting and analysing data. The material object of the study is Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11, while its formal object is the concept of self-change, focusing on the relationship between human effort and divine law. Library research was chosen because the study analyses the interpretations of exegetes rather than collecting field data. The study adopts the comparative exegetical approach (*tafsīr muqāran*), which compares the interpretations of several exegetes on the same verse in order to identify their similarities, differences, and tendencies (Mustaqim, 2017; Wahyudi et al., 2023).

The primary data consist of the Qur'an and five works of tafsir, presented in Table 1. These works were selected purposively to represent different periods and methodological orientations: transmission-based exegesis (al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr), juristic exegesis (al-Qurṭubī), concise creed-centred exegesis (al-Sa'dī), and interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an (al-Shinqīṭī). The secondary data consist of

books and peer-reviewed articles on self-change, *qadar*, *sunnatullāh*, tafsir methodology, and Islamic education.

Table 1. Primary Sources Of The Study

Exegete (d. AH/CE)	Work	Edition used	Methodological orientation
al-Ṭabarī (310/923)	*Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*	Dār Hajr, 2001 (ed. al-Turkī)	Transmission-based (*bi al-ma'thūr*); weighing of reports
al-Qurṭubī (671/1273)	*Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*	Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964	Juristic (*fiqhī*); multiple sources and historical examples
Ibn Kathīr (774/1373)	*Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*	Dār Ṭayyibah, 1999 (ed. Salāmah)	Transmission-based; source-critical use of reports
al-Sa'dī (1376/1956)	*Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān*	Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2000	Concise, creed-centred, practical guidance
al-Shinqīṭī (1393/1974)	*Aḍwā' al-Bayān fī Īḍāḥ al-Qur'ān bi al-Qur'ān*	Dār al-Fikr, 1995	Interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an

The data were collected through documentation by locating, identifying, recording, and classifying all passages in which the five exegetes explain Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11, together with the Prophetic traditions and parallel verses they cite. The unit of analysis was the exegetes' explanation of four key elements of the verse: the act of change (*yughayyiru*), the condition of the people (*mā bi-qawmin*), what is within themselves (*mā bi-anfusihim*), and the final clause on God's will (*wa-idhā arāda Allāhu bi-qawmin sū'an*).

The comparison followed five steps. First, each exegete's commentary on the verse was located in the edition listed in Table 1, and the parallel verses they cite, notably Q. Al-Anfāl [8]:53 and Q. Al-Shūrā [42]:30, were traced. Second, passages explaining the four key elements were selected and read together with the commentary on verses 8 to 10. Third, a linguistic analysis examined how each exegete explains *taghyīr*, *mā bi-qawmin*, *mā bi-anfusihim*, and the particle *ḥattā*, before any thematic coding. Fourth, each reading was related to the exegete's period and method as stated in Table 1. Fifth, the readings were compared under four categories: change of blessing (*ni'mah*), the social condition of the community, the inner change, and the relation between human effort and divine will. A point was treated as convergent only when all five exegetes state it; a point stated by fewer was recorded as a distinctive emphasis, and the researchers' inferences were kept separate from the exegetes' statements.

The data were analysed through qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018; Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023) in four stages, as shown in Figure 1. First, the relevant passages were identified and translated. Second, they were coded according to the meaning of the inner change, the direction and scope of change, the relationship between human action and divine will, and the method of interpretation. This coding served only

to organise the passages for comparison and did not replace the linguistic analysis and the reading of each tafsir according to its own method described above. Third, the coded interpretations were compared to determine their similarities and differences. Fourth, the comparison was synthesised into a conceptual framework of the relationship between human effort and divine law, which was then examined for its relevance to PAI. The researcher acted as the key instrument, reading the Arabic texts directly and recording each interpretive decision in an analytical memo so that the coding could be traced. The credibility of the analysis was maintained through source triangulation, by checking each interpretation against the original Arabic text and against secondary studies on the method of each exegete. Consistency was ensured by applying the same coding categories to all five works, and the interpretations were read in their full context rather than as isolated quotations, in order to avoid the decontextualised use of the verse that the study seeks to correct.

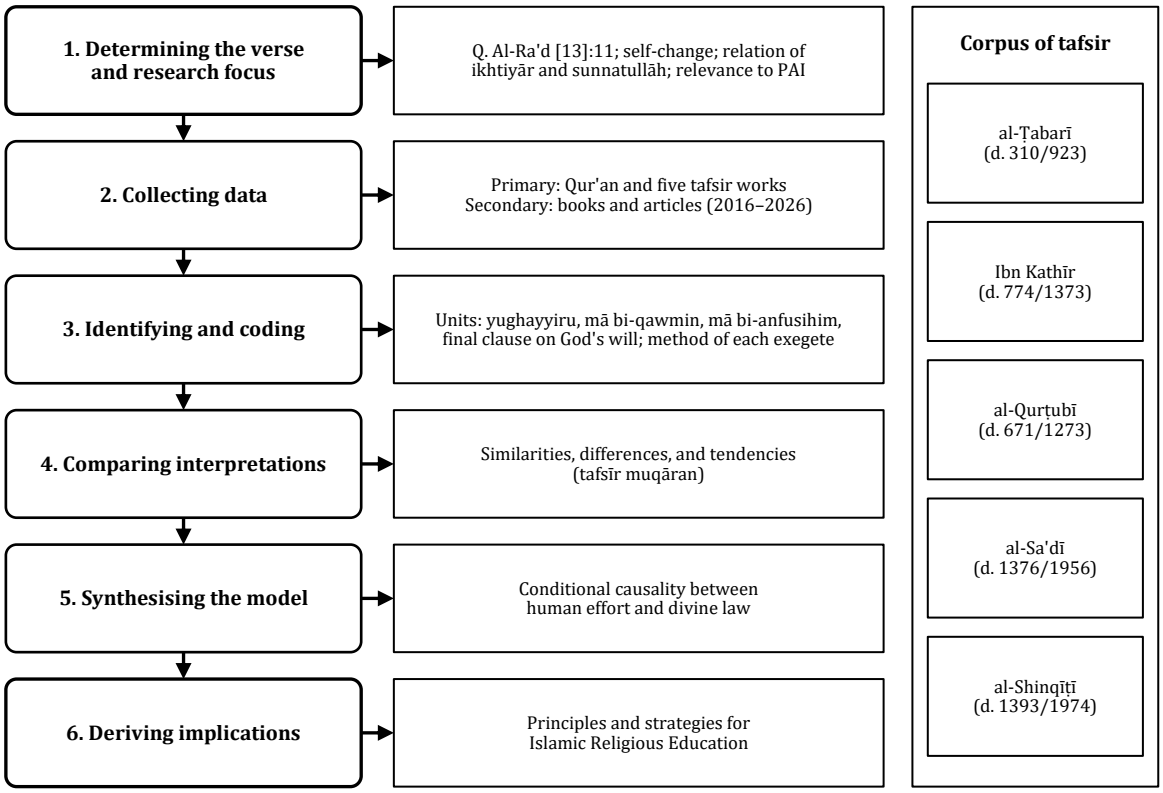

Figure 1. Research procedure of the comparative exegetical study
Source: Author's elaboration (2026).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 The Textual Structure of Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11

The verse under study reads:

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَاتٌ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ

> *"For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah. Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. And when Allah intends for a people ill, there is no repelling it, and there is not for them besides Him any protector" (Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11).*

The phrase *inna Allāha lā yughayyiru mā bi-qawmin ḥattā yughayyirū mā bi-anfusihim* forms the core of the verse because it links the change in the condition of a people to the change within themselves. Its structure contains three key elements: the verb *yughayyiru* (to change), which denotes transformation; the phrase *mā bi-qawmin* (what is with a people), which refers to their external condition; and the phrase *mā bi-anfusihim* (what is within themselves), which directs attention to their inner state. The meaning of these elements cannot be determined by literal translation alone and requires examination through the explanations of the exegetes.

The surrounding verses provide an important context. Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:8–10 affirm that God knows what every female carries, that everything with Him is in due measure, and that it is the same to Him whether a person conceals or declares his speech. The verse under study thus belongs to a passage on God's comprehensive knowledge and measured decree, which means that the statement about human change is placed within a broader affirmation of divine omniscience.

The verse is also framed by two statements of divine sovereignty. It opens with the guardian angels (*mu'aqqibāt*) who protect each person by God's command, and it closes with the affirmation that when God wills harm for a people, nothing can avert it. This framing shows that the discussion of human effort in bringing about change remains within the framework of God's will and power. Exegetical studies of the verse emphasise that this context, including the reference to the guardian angels, is essential to avoid reading the verse merely as a slogan of self-determination (Rahman & Erdiyansyah, 2024). The verse therefore provides a textual basis for examining the relationship between human effort and divine law without positioning humans as independent determinants of change.

3.2 The Interpretations of the Five Exegetes

Al-Ṭabarī. In *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabarī explains that God does not change the blessings, security, and well-being of a people until they themselves change their condition by replacing obedience with disobedience, justice with oppression, and gratitude with ingratitude. He states:

﴿إن الله لا يغير ما بقوم﴾ من عافية ونعمة، فيزيل ذلك عنهم ويهلكهم، ﴿حتى يغيروا ما بأنفسهم﴾ من ذلك بظلم بعضهم بعضًا، واعتداء بعضهم على بعض، فتحل بهم حينئذ عقوبته وتغييره

> *"Allah does not change the well-being and blessing that a people enjoy, removing it from them and destroying them, until they change what is in themselves by oppressing and transgressing against one another; then His punishment and change befall them" (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, Vol. 13).*

This interpretation shows that the transformation of blessing into calamity does not occur without cause but follows from changes in human behaviour. For al-Ṭabarī, the focus of the verse is moral and spiritual: change in human conduct, especially the spread of injustice, becomes the cause (*sabab*) that God has established within His law, while the

final decision remains under His will. His reading reflects his method of weighing transmitted reports and selecting the most sound explanation, which has been documented in studies of his exegetical preferences (Sobki et al., 2023).

Ibn Kathīr. Ibn Kathīr begins by explaining that God knows all the states of His servants and that each person is guarded by angels who take turns by night and by day, although this protection cannot avert God's decree when it arrives. On the phrase under study, he cites a report that no town or household remains in obedience to God and then turns to disobedience without God changing what they love into what they dislike, and that the confirmation of this is found in the verse:

إِنَّهُ لَيْسَ مِنْ أَهْلِ قَرْيَةٍ وَلَا أَهْلِ بَيْتٍ يَكُونُونَ عَلَى طَاعَةِ اللَّهِ، فَيَتَحَوَّلُونَ مِنْهَا إِلَى مَعْصِيَةِ اللَّهِ، إِلَّا تَحَوَّلَ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يُحِبُّونَ إِلَى مَا يَكْرَهُونَ

> *"There is no people of a town or of a household who are in obedience to Allah and then turn from it to disobedience, except that Allah turns them from what they love to what they dislike" (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, Vol. 4, p. 440).*

Ibn Kathīr thus links the change in human conditions to the change in faith and deeds, and his reliance on transmitted reports reflects a structured, source-critical method that balances transmission with controlled reasoning (Nasrullah et al., 2026). In his reading, the relationship between human effort and divine law is causal, yet the final outcome of every change remains within God's will.

Al-Qurṭubī. Al-Qurṭubī affirms that the change in a people's condition does not occur before they change themselves, and he widens the scope of the agent of change:

أَخْبَرَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى فِي هَذِهِ الْآيَةِ أَنَّهُ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يَقَعَ مِنْهُمْ تَغْيِيرٌ، إِمَّا مِنْهُمْ أَوْ مِنَ النَّاظِرِ لَهُمْ، أَوْ مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهُمْ بِسَبَبٍ

> *"Allah informs in this verse that He does not change what is with a people until a change occurs from them, either from themselves, from the one who oversees them, or from someone connected to them by some cause" (al-Qurṭubī, 1964, Vol. 9, p. 294).*

He illustrates this with the Battle of Uhud, in which the condition of the Muslims changed because some archers left the positions assigned by the Prophet. At the same time, he cautions that not every calamity is the direct result of the sins of those afflicted, citing the Prophetic tradition in which Zaynab bint Jaḥsh asked, "Shall we be destroyed while there are righteous people among us?" and the Prophet answered, "Yes, if wickedness becomes widespread" (al-Bukhārī, no. 3346; Muslim, no. 2880). Al-Qurṭubī's reading reflects his juristic orientation and his use of multiple sources, including prophetic traditions and historical events (Rohman et al., 2023). By including those who oversee a community and those connected to it, he extends the verse from individual responsibility to collective responsibility.

Al-Sa'dī. Al-Sa'dī explains that the blessings, favours, and comfort granted to a people do not change until they themselves change:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ﴾ مِنَ النِّعْمَةِ وَالإِحْسَانِ وَرَغَدِ الْعَيْشِ ﴿حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ﴾ بِأَنْ يَنْتَقِلُوا مِنَ الإِيمَانِ إِلَى الْكُفْرِ، وَمِنَ الطَّاعَةِ إِلَى الْمَعْصِيَةِ، أَوْ مِنْ شُكْرِ نِعَمِ اللَّهِ إِلَى الْبَطَرِ بِهَا، فَيَسْلُبُهُمُ اللَّهُ عِنْدَ ذَلِكَ إِيَّاهَا

> *"Allah does not change the blessing, favour, and ease of life of a people until they change what is in themselves, by moving from faith to disbelief, from obedience to disobedience, or from gratitude for Allah's blessings to arrogance in them; then Allah strips them of those blessings" (al-Sa'dī, 2000, p. 414).*

He adds that when people abandon disobedience and return to obedience, God changes their condition from misery to goodness and mercy. Change in his reading therefore runs in two directions. This concise and creed-centred explanation, which avoids juristic and theological disputes, is characteristic of his method (Haririe et al., 2025). Compared with al-Ṭabarī, who emphasises injustice, and al-Qurṭubī, who widens the discussion to the social dimension, al-Sa'dī presents the concept of change in its complete form, namely the movement from obedience to disobedience and from disobedience to obedience. In his reading, the verse functions not only as a warning about the loss of blessings but also as a source of hope, because God promises a change towards mercy for anyone who returns to the path of obedience.

Al-Shinqīṭī**.** In *Aḍwā' al-Bayān*, al-Shinqīṭī explains that God does not change the blessings and safety of a people until they abandon obedience and commit disobedience, and that He changes their condition towards goodness when they improve their faith and deeds. Consistent with his method of interpreting the Qur'an by the Qur'an, he links the verse to Q. Al-Anfāl [8]:53, which states that God would not change a favour He had bestowed upon a people until they change what is in themselves, and to Q. Al-Shūrā [42]:30, which affirms that whatever misfortune befalls people is because of what their hands have earned (al-Shinqīṭī, 1995, Vol. 2, pp. 236–237). This method, which follows the rules set out in the introduction to his work (Amalia & Asy-Syakir, 2024; Hasibuan et al., 2026), shows that the principle of self-change is not confined to a single verse but is a recurring principle of the Qur'an. He also indicates that when disobedience becomes widespread and is not prevented, its consequences affect society as a whole. By reading the verse through its parallels, al-Shinqīṭī shows that the change in human conditions is part of a divine law that consistently links faith, deeds, and morality with their consequences. The relationship between human effort and divine law in his interpretation is therefore integral: human effort is the cause that God has established for change, while the final result remains within His will and wisdom.

3.3 Comparative Analysis: Convergence and Divergence

The comparison reveals four points of convergence among the five exegetes, which together form a shared core rather than an identical reading. First, all of them agree that change in the condition of a people is not accidental but part of the divine law established by God, and that it is always related to the change people undertake within themselves. Second, all of them understand the inner change primarily as a change in faith, morality, obedience, and deeds rather than in economic or political conditions; outward change is regarded as a consequence of moral and spiritual change. Third, all of them hold that human effort does not contradict God's decree, since effort is a cause commanded by the

sharia while its outcome remains under God's will. Fourth, all of them affirm that a turn towards disobedience leads to the loss of blessings, whereas a turn towards faith and obedience brings mercy.

This shared core conceals real differences. On the change of blessing (*ni'mah*), al-Ṭabarī speaks of well-being removed together with destruction, al-Sa'dī of favour and ease of life, and al-Shinqīṭī of blessings and safety, whereas Ibn Kathīr frames the change, through a report, as a turn from what people love to what they dislike. On the social condition, al-Ṭabarī locates the cause in mutual oppression, al-Qurṭubī extends the agent of change to overseers and those connected to the people and warns that calamity can strike a community that includes the righteous, and al-Shinqīṭī notes that unprevented disobedience affects society as a whole; the passages of Ibn Kathīr and al-Sa'dī cited here do not develop shared responsibility. On the inner change, al-Ṭabarī stresses injustice, Ibn Kathīr the turn from obedience to disobedience, al-Sa'dī the movement between faith and disbelief and between gratitude and arrogance, and al-Shinqīṭī the abandonment or improvement of faith and deeds. Self-change is therefore used here as a heading for related readings, not as one meaning shared equally by all five exegetes.

Despite this convergence, each exegete places a different emphasis, as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of the five interpretations of Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11

Exegete	Meaning of *mā bi-anfusihim*	Direction and scope of change	Distinctive emphasis
al-Ṭabarī	Shift from obedience, justice, and gratitude to disobedience, injustice, and ingratitude	Mainly towards loss of blessings; communal	Moral corruption as the cause of punishment
Ibn Kathīr	Shift in faith and deeds	Both directions, supported by a transmitted report	Faith and deeds as the axis of change
al-Qurṭubī	Change by the people, their overseers, or those connected to them	Individual and collective	Social responsibility; not every calamity is caused by the victim's sin
al-Sa'dī	Shift between faith and disbelief, obedience and disobedience, gratitude and arrogance	Explicitly two-directional	Warning and motivation
al-Shinqīṭī	Abandoning obedience or improving faith and deeds	Individual and societal	Intra-Qur'anic reading (Q. 8:53; 42:30)

Table 2 shows that al-Ṭabarī offers the moral foundation, Ibn Kathīr emphasises the dimension of faith and deeds, al-Qurṭubī extends the discussion to the social sphere, al-Sa'dī adds a motivational dimension through the two directions of change, and al-Shinqīṭī strengthens the argument through the intra-Qur'anic method. These differences

do not indicate contradiction; rather, they complement one another and each answers a different aspect of the verse; complementarity here does not mean that the readings are identical. Figure 2 maps these emphases along the historical sequence of the exegetes and shows their shared core.

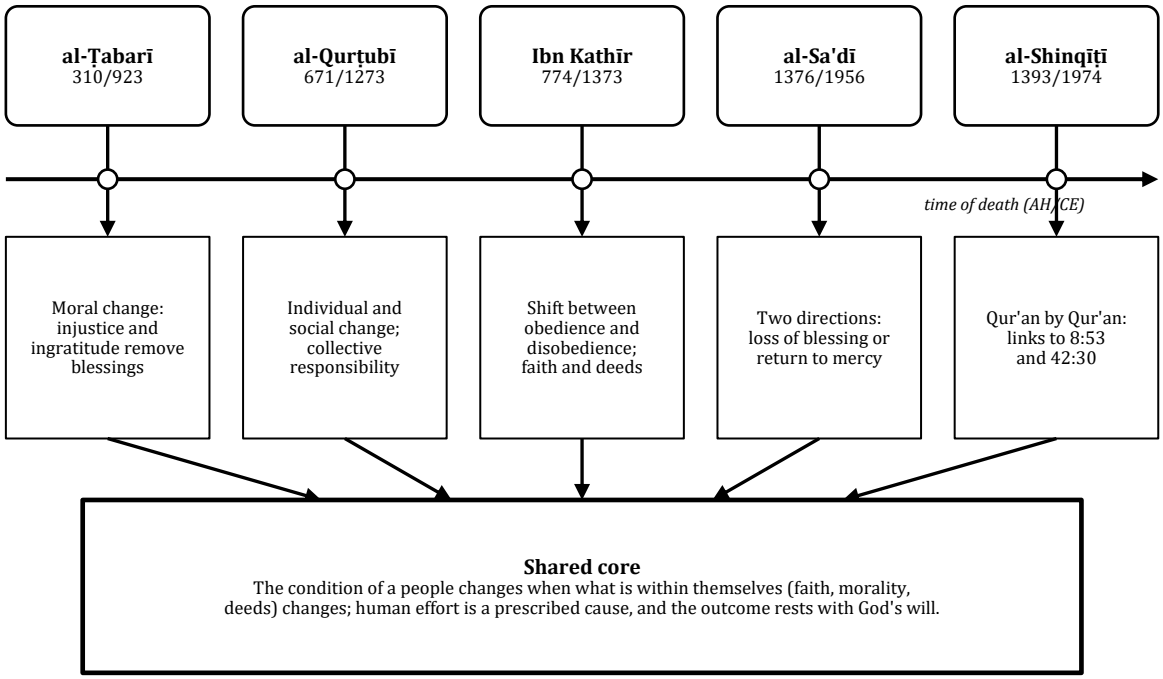

Figure 2. Exegetical Emphases On Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 Across The Five Exegetes
Source: Author's elaboration (2026).

Figure 2 indicates that the interpretation of the verse develops cumulatively across seven centuries. The earlier exegetes, who relied on transmitted reports, emphasise the moral causes of the withdrawal of blessings, whereas the later exegetes make explicit the two-directional and intra-Qur'anic character of the principle. This finding is consistent with research showing that differences of method among exegetes generate distinct but complementary readings (Mujahidin et al., 2024; Kaltsum & Amin, 2024), and that the richness of tafsir lies in the plurality of its methods (Wahyudi et al., 2023). It also confirms the observation that classical and contemporary interpretations of the verse converge on the permanence of blessings unless people change themselves and on the inevitability of God's will (Rahman & Erdiyansyah, 2024). The comparison also extends earlier studies of the verse. Rustam (2025) examined only al-Qurṭubī's interpretation, while Syafi'i and Sassi (2025) compared Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 with Q. Al-Anfāl [8]:53 to derive the value of self-awareness. The present study shows that the link between the two verses, which Syafi'i and Sassi treated as a comparative choice, is already part of the exegetical method of al-Shinqīṭī, and that al-Qurṭubī's social reading is one voice within a broader consensus rather than an isolated position.

Compared with Hasibuan and Zuhri (2026), who combined one classical and two contemporary exegetes, the present comparison demonstrates that the integration of human responsibility and divine sovereignty is already firmly established within the classical exegetical tradition itself.

3.4 The Relationship between Human Effort and Divine Law

On the basis of the five interpretations, the researchers formulate the relationship between human effort and divine law in Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 as a conditional causality established by God. The term is the researchers' construction and is not used by the exegetes themselves. God makes the change undertaken by humans a cause of the change in their condition, but this change does not operate independently; it remains under the will and decree of God as the Owner of the law. Figure 3 presents this relationship as a conceptual model.

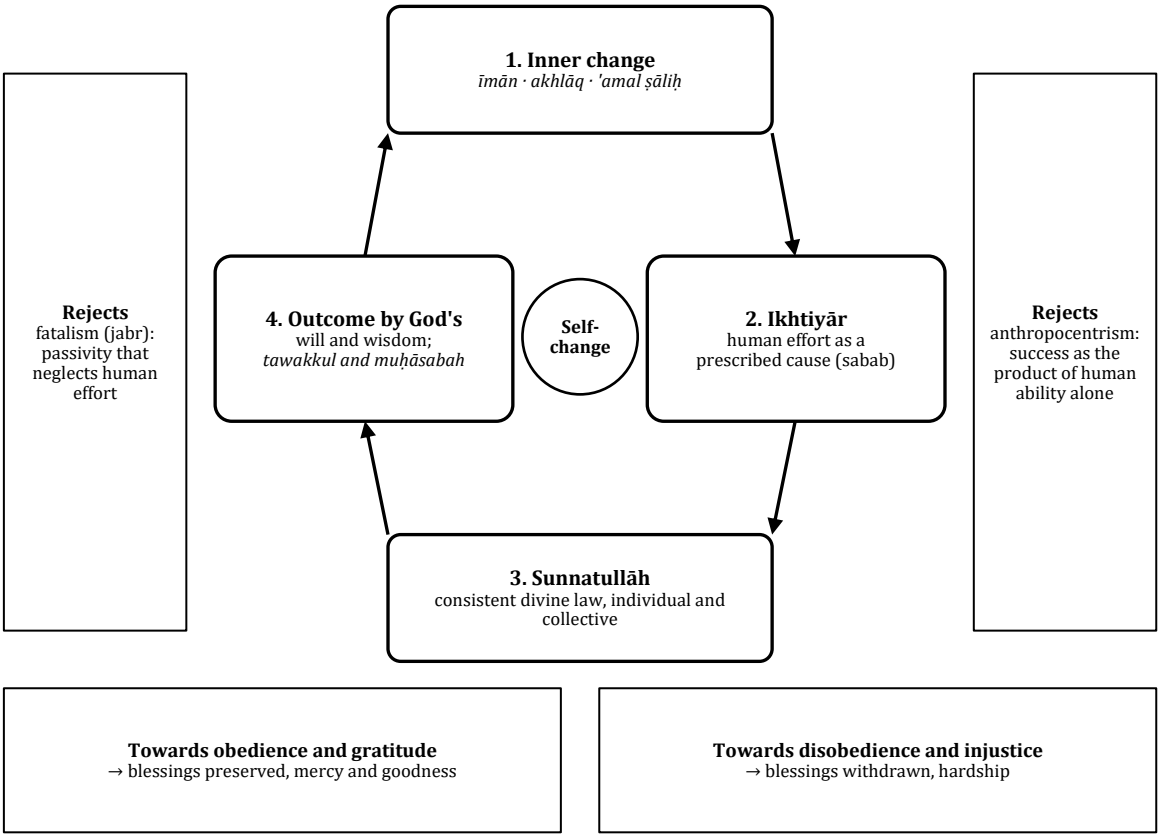

Figure 3. Conceptual Model Of The Relationship Between Human Effort And Divine Law In Self-Change

Source: Author's elaboration (2026).

As shown in Figure 3, the model consists of four interrelated components. The first is inner change, which encompasses faith, morality, and deeds. The second is human effort, which the exegetes treat as a prescribed cause rather than as an absolute freedom to determine outcomes. The third is divine law, understood as God's consistent pattern of action that links causes to consequences in both individual and collective life. The fourth is the outcome, which remains subject to God's will and wisdom and is received with reliance on God (*tawakkul*) and self-evaluation (*muḥāsabah*), which in turn renew the inner change. The model is bounded on two sides: it rejects fatalism (*jabr*), which neglects human effort, and it rejects anthropocentrism, which regards success as the product of human ability alone.

This model accords with the theological discussion on human agency. The classical debates among the Ash'arites, Māturīdites, and Mu'tazilites concerning whether humans

act or God creates their acts (Schmidtke, 2016) were resolved in mainstream Sunni theology by affirming both divine creation and human responsibility. Contemporary Māturīdī theology grounds this position in the basic rationality of a world created by a transcendent God (Harvey, 2021), while studies of the Qur'an and hadith describe human freedom as relational, operating within God's measure and decree (Afif & Riyani, 2025; Maulana et al., 2025). The finding that effort and reliance on God reinforce each other is also consistent with exegetical studies of *ikhtiyār* and *tawakkul* (Fikri & Munandar, 2026) and with the view that belief in *qadar* is compatible with proactive risk management (Keskin & Azhar, 2024).

The formulation of conditional causality joins two levels that the verse holds together. At the level of human action, the change within a people is a cause (*sabab*) in the sense that God has made it the condition of His change of their condition; it is a real, accountable act, which mainstream Sunni theology expresses through acquisition (*kasb*) (Schmidtke, 2016). At the level of divine determination, the change in their condition is God's act: God is the subject of the first *yughayyiru*, the people of the second, and the final clause affirms that nothing repels what He wills. The human act is thus a condition God attaches to His action, not an efficient cause that compels it. This avoids both the Jabrī denial of the human act and the Qadarī view of the act as independent of God's will (Mujtaba et al., 2025).

The model also clarifies the meaning of *sunnatullāh*. The exegetes understand divine law as God's consistent decree in human life: blessings remain as long as a people maintain faith, obedience, and gratitude, and they are withdrawn when these are replaced by disbelief, disobedience, and oppression. Divine law is therefore not arbitrary but operates according to God's wisdom and justice. This understanding is in line with studies that describe the divine laws (*sunan*) as governing both nature and society and as determining the rise and endurance of nations (Malkawi, 2023), and with arguments that *sunnatullāh* grounds an Islamic education that is rational and oriented towards change (Raharjo et al., 2025). Studies of the concept also use *sunnatullāh* as a basis for interpreting religious texts and examine in what sense it is unchangeable (Fuqohak et al., 2021; Ünal, 2023). It also resonates with Malek Bennabi's argument that civilisational renewal begins with the formation of effective individuals through spiritual and moral reform (al-Hashimi, 2025; Benlahcene, 2023).

Empirical research supports the psychological relevance of this balance. Studies among Muslim adults in Pakistan and Muslim students in Indonesia show that *tawakkul*, understood as trust in God combined with goal-directed effort, partially mediates the relationship between personality traits and depression and anxiety (Gondal et al., 2024; Nashori et al., 2026). Patience in the Qur'anic sense has likewise been interpreted as an active virtue rather than passive endurance (Langaji et al., 2024). These findings suggest that the integration of human effort and divine law is not only theologically sound but also conducive to psychological resilience. Consequently, the concept of self-change in the verse supports neither a passive attitude that awaits change without effort nor the assumption that success is solely the result of human capability. Genuine change occurs

when humans improve themselves in accordance with God's guidance, and God then changes their condition according to His wisdom and decree.

The two directions of change identified by al-Sa'dī and Ibn Kathīr have a further theological implication. If the withdrawal of blessings follows a turn towards disobedience, the restoration of blessings follows a return to obedience; divine law is therefore not a closed verdict but an open invitation to repentance and reform. At the same time, al-Qurṭubī's caution that not every calamity is the direct result of the sins of those afflicted prevents the verse from being used to blame victims of misfortune. The causality described in the verse operates at the level of communities and moral patterns, and its application to particular individuals must be made with humility, since only God knows the full causes and wisdom of each event. This balance distinguishes the exegetical understanding of the verse from simplified readings that either promise success in return for effort or interpret every hardship as punishment.

The relationship also has individual and social dimensions. Change undertaken by individuals affects themselves, while collective change within a society shapes its overall condition. This dual dimension, highlighted by al-Qurṭubī and al-Shinqīṭī, extends the obligation of effort from personal self-improvement to the improvement of the social environment. In this respect, the present study modifies the predominantly individualistic reading of the verse found in motivational discourse and supports earlier findings that self-awareness is the foundation of social piety (Syafi'i & Sassi, 2025) and of the transformation of families and societies (Alwani, 2022).

3.5 Implications for Islamic Religious Education

The concept of self-change in Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 has strong relevance to the aims of PAI, which seeks to form students who are faithful, God-conscious, and of noble character. Since the verse affirms that genuine change begins within the self, education should not be oriented solely towards the transfer of knowledge but also towards character formation and the habituation of righteous deeds. Table 3 summarises the principles derived from the verse and their pedagogical implications.

The link between the findings and PAI rests on a pedagogical argument in three steps. First, the exegetes locate the decisive change in faith, obedience, and conduct, the domains PAI addresses through its aims of faith, piety, and noble character, so the verse bears on the content of PAI and not only on motivation. Second, they present human change as a real but dependent cause, which corresponds to holding students responsible for effort while teaching them to accept outcomes they do not control, within the relation between morality, *akhlāq*, and character examined in PAI (Maksudin, 2023). Third, the social reading of al-Qurṭubī and al-Shinqīṭī implies that character is formed in communities, supporting institution-wide models of Islamic character education (Miftahuddin et al., 2024). The implications below are conceptual formulations from this argument, not strategies tested in this study.

Table 3. Implications of the concept of self-change for Islamic Religious Education

Principle from the verse	Educational value	Proposed pedagogical direction
Change begins within the self	Purification of the self (*tazkiyat al-nafs*)	Worship-based habituation; integration of spiritual goals into the curriculum
Effort is a prescribed cause	Responsibility, discipline, self-efficacy	Goal setting; growth-oriented feedback; contextual learning
Outcome rests with God's will	*Tawakkul*, patience, humility	Reflection on success and failure; avoiding both despair and arrogance
Change runs in two directions	Hope, repentance, continuous improvement	Self-evaluation (*muḥāsabah*) journals; mentoring
Change has a social dimension	Collective responsibility, mutual advice	Religious school culture; teacher modelling; peer support

The first implication concerns the purification of the self (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). The inner change emphasised by all five exegetes corresponds to the process of self-purification, which can be integrated into PAI through curriculum design, institutional culture, and a spiritually aware learning environment (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Practices of worship, particularly prayer, function as a core pedagogy of inner purification and moral identity formation (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025), while Qur'anic recitation and ritual practice shape a moral habitus that guides social conduct (Dweirj, 2023). Al-Ghazālī's principle of self-discipline (*riyāḍat al-nafs*) also remains a living framework for understanding how Muslims form and sustain religious habits (Fatmawati et al., 2026).

The second implication concerns responsibility and self-efficacy. Students need to understand that success in learning, character formation, and improvement in life cannot be achieved without earnest effort. Research on PAI shows that school climate, contextual instruction, habituation, and discipline policies build self-efficacy that contributes to students' religious character (Husniah et al., 2025; Muzakir et al., 2025), and that a growth mindset strengthens self-efficacy and well-being among Muslim students (Wihartati et al., 2026). The balance between effort and reliance on God derived from the verse provides a theological basis for such a mindset: students are encouraged to strive with discipline and perseverance, not to despair when they fail, and not to become arrogant when they succeed.

The third implication concerns self-evaluation and affective learning. The cycle of effort, outcome, and *muḥāsabah* in Figure 3 can be implemented through reflective practices such as spiritual journals, which have been shown to improve students' religious attitudes (Amanda et al., 2026). Such practices are important because digital and knowledge-based training tends to produce procedural gains more readily than affective and reflective growth (Sinaga et al., 2026). Studies on moral psychology in Islamic education likewise emphasise that moral values are internalised through stages of moral cognition, attitude reinforcement, and habituation (Rahman & Khumainy,

2024), and that Qur'anic values support the cognitive, moral, social, emotional, and spiritual development of children (Syahmil & Sa-U, 2024).

The fourth implication concerns the educational environment. The social dimension highlighted by al-Qurṭubī and al-Shinqīṭī implies that educational institutions should cultivate a religious culture in which students remind one another of goodness and keep away from behaviour contrary to Islamic teachings. PAI builds honesty, responsibility, discipline, empathy, and spirituality through reflective learning, teacher modelling, and Islamic school culture (Ahmad & Bakri, 2025), and structured religious outreach programmes in pesantren have been reported to internalise honesty, discipline, responsibility, and compassion (Ummah et al., 2025), and religiously grounded schooling has been associated with greater religious moderation among Muslim students (Marpaung et al., 2024). Institutions undergoing digital transformation, such as pesantren, also need to preserve Islamic values while adapting their governance and learning systems (Manaf, Novita, et al., 2026). Bibliometric evidence confirms that Islamic education research increasingly links pedagogy with character development (Ni'mah et al., 2023).

The fifth implication concerns the role of teachers and the way the verse is taught. Teachers are not merely transmitters of content but models and managers of change who plan, organise, and evaluate learning in ways that embody Qur'anic principles such as sincerity, honesty, and responsibility (Hasnah et al., 2024). When the verse is used in the classroom, teachers should present it together with its context and its exegetical explanation, so that students do not understand it as a guarantee of success through effort alone or as a justification for blaming people who suffer misfortune. Presenting the five interpretations side by side can also train students to appreciate the diversity of exegetical opinion as complementary rather than contradictory, in line with the long tradition of Islamic educational thought in Indonesia that has drawn on this verse to promote renewal (Aslihah & Wasehudin, 2023).

In sum, the concept of self-change in Q. Al-Ra'd [13]:11 can serve as a philosophical foundation for PAI. Religious learning should be directed not only towards mastery of content but also towards the formation of Muslim personalities who continuously engage in self-reflection, improve themselves, and strive to become better persons in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah. This finding extends previous studies that recommended integrating the verse into the PAI curriculum (Syafi'i & Sassi, 2025) by grounding that recommendation in an explicit model of the relationship between human effort and divine law.

4. Conclusion

The conclusions of this study are of two kinds, which are kept distinct. The first two are drawn directly from the five interpretations. First, the five exegetes converge on the view that the change in the condition of a people is part of divine law and is closely related to the change they undertake within themselves, particularly in faith, morality, righteous deeds, and obedience to God. Second, the exegetes differ in what they take to be changed and in who bears responsibility: al-Ṭabarī emphasises moral corruption as the cause of

the withdrawal of blessings, Ibn Kathīr stresses the shift between obedience and disobedience, al-Qurṭubī extends the verse to the social dimension, al-Sa'dī affirms the two directions of change, and al-Shinqīṭī demonstrates the consistency of the principle through the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an. The remaining two are the researchers' conceptual construction based on these findings. Third, the researchers formulate the relationship between human effort and divine law as a conditional causality, in which human acts are causes that God has made conditions of His change while the creation of outcomes rests with His will and wisdom; this understanding rejects both fatalism and anthropocentrism. Fourth, the concept offers a conceptual foundation for Islamic Religious Education, suggesting that faith, character, responsibility, and self-improvement may be nurtured through self-purification, self-efficacy, self-evaluation, and a religious school culture; these are proposed directions whose effectiveness has not been tested in this study.

Theoretically, the study proposes a model of conditional causality that integrates human responsibility and divine sovereignty; practically, it offers PAI a set of conceptual principles and proposed directions for nurturing self-change. The study is limited to library research and to five exegetes. Future research is recommended to include contemporary exegetes to obtain a wider range of perspectives, and to conduct field studies that examine how the concept of self-change can be implemented and measured in PAI learning and in community life. The findings are also expected to serve as a reference for teachers, students, and researchers in developing PAI learning that emphasises effort, responsibility, and character formation based on Qur'anic values.

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