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### From Iqra' to Knowledge: Reframing Islamic Educational Epistemology

*Dari Iqra' Menuju Ilmu Pengetahuan: Merumuskan Kembali Epistemologi Pendidikan Islam*

Endan Hamdan Ridwan\*<sup>1</sup> Midad Imadul Bilad<sup>2</sup> Valha Zakiyah<sup>3</sup> Salwa Zakiyah<sup>4</sup> Aliya Hendrayani Maulida<sup>5</sup> Fahmi Abdillah<sup>6</sup>

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah (STIT) Al-Azami Cianjur, Cianjur, Indonesia <sup>123456</sup>

\*Corresponding Author: [hamdanridwan890@gmail.com](mailto:hamdanridwan890@gmail.com)

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#### Abstract

The abundance of information in the digital era has not always been accompanied by the development of critical literacy, knowledge culture, and moral responsibility in the use of knowledge. This study aims to examine the meaning of *iqra'* in Q. Al-'Alaq 96:1–5 and to reconceptualize it as an epistemological foundation of Islamic education. Employing a qualitative library research design, the study applies thematic Qur'anic interpretation and content analysis of classical and contemporary tafsir alongside relevant scholarship on literacy, knowledge, and Islamic education. The findings reveal that *iqra'* extends beyond reading to encompass understanding, inquiry, reflection, writing, and knowledge production within the framework of *tamhid*. The concepts of *iqra'*, *bismi rabbika*, and *qalam* collectively establish an educational framework that integrates literacy, knowledge, spirituality, and moral responsibility. This study contributes a conceptual model of Islamic educational epistemology that bridges revelation and reason, offering a holistic foundation for addressing contemporary challenges in literacy, knowledge development, and character formation.

**Keywords:** Iqra'; Islamic Educational Epistemology; Knowledge; Literacy; Qur'anic Education

#### Abstrak

Melimpahnya informasi pada era digital belum selalu diikuti oleh berkembangnya literasi kritis, budaya ilmu, dan tanggung jawab moral dalam penggunaan pengetahuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji makna *iqra'* dalam Q.S. Al-'Alaq 96:1–5 serta merekonseptualisasikannya sebagai fondasi epistemologis pendidikan Islam. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan metode tafsir tematik Al-Qur'an dan analisis isi terhadap tafsir klasik, tafsir kontemporer, serta literatur yang relevan tentang literasi, ilmu pengetahuan, dan pendidikan Islam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *iqra'* tidak hanya bermakna membaca, tetapi juga mencakup memahami, menelaah, merefleksikan, menulis, dan mengembangkan pengetahuan dalam kerangka *tamhid*. Konsep *iqra'*, *bismi rabbika*, dan *qalam* membentuk kerangka pendidikan yang mengintegrasikan literasi, ilmu pengetahuan, spiritualitas, dan tanggung jawab moral. Penelitian ini menawarkan model konseptual epistemologi pendidikan Islam yang menjembatani wahyu dan akal sebagai fondasi pendidikan yang holistik dalam menghadapi tantangan literasi, pengembangan ilmu, dan pembentukan karakter kontemporer.

**Kata Kunci:** Iqra'; Epistemologi Pendidikan Islam; Ilmu Pengetahuan; Literasi; Pendidikan Al-Qur'an



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## INTRODUCTION

Literacy remains a significant challenge in contemporary education. Although advances in digital technology have dramatically expanded access to information, greater accessibility has not necessarily translated into stronger abilities to read, comprehend, evaluate, and critically process information. The abundance of information in digital spaces is often accompanied by the widespread circulation of misinformation, hoaxes, declining reading habits, and limited reflective thinking among students. This condition reveals a gap between the availability of information and the literacy competencies required to construct valid and meaningful knowledge. Within the context of Islamic education, the issue is even more profound, as literacy encompasses not only the technical ability to read and write but also spiritual awareness, scholarly ethics, and moral responsibility in the use and development of knowledge.

This concern is closely connected to the foundational teachings of Islam. The first revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad, namely Q. 96 (Al-‘Alaq): 1–5, begins with the command *iqra’* (“read”), which positions reading as the cornerstone of intellectual and civilizational development. However, the command cannot be reduced to the mere act of reading written texts. Mansyur argues that *iqra’* reflects Islam’s appreciation for reading and writing as essential means of acquiring knowledge, while the reference to the *qalam* (pen) underscores the importance of recording and preserving knowledge as an integral component of the Islamic literacy tradition.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, *iqra’* carries a broader epistemological message, encouraging human beings to read, understand, investigate, write, and develop knowledge while grounding all intellectual endeavors in an awareness of God. Consequently, *iqra’* may be understood as the foundation for cultivating individuals who are knowledgeable, faithful, and morally refined.

The relationship between *iqra’* and literacy in Islamic education has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Aisyah contends that literacy in Islamic education extends beyond reading skills to include awareness of God’s greatness, spiritual development, and moral formation.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Ismail et al. identify the verses of *iqra’* as the foundation of Qur’anic literacy-based education that strengthens academic culture through intellectual integrity, openness of thought, the pursuit of truth, and a balance between intellectual and moral development.<sup>3</sup> These studies demonstrate that Qur’anic literacy serves a broader purpose than simply cultivating reading competence. Nevertheless, their analyses primarily emphasize the role of *iqra’* in character formation and academic culture, leaving insufficient attention to its potential as a comprehensive educational paradigm that integrates literacy, knowledge production, and the epistemological foundations of Islamic education.

The discussion of *iqra’* has also expanded into contemporary educational contexts. Through his study of *Tafsir al-Misbah*, Dhotin argues that the term *iqra’* encompasses not only reading written texts but also collecting, examining, communicating, and investigating various phenomena accessible to human experience.<sup>4</sup> This interpretation is reinforced by Yunengsih, who maintains

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- 1 Masykur H. Mansyur, “Iqra’ Sebagai Bentuk Literasi Dalam Islam,” *HAWARI: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Dan Keagamaan Islam* 2, no. 1 (August 4, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.35706/hw.v2i1.5304>.
  - 2 Siti Aisyah, “Literasi Dalam Pendidikan Islam,” *Journal of Islamic Education El Madani* 3, no. 1 (January 19, 2024): 47–51, <https://doi.org/10.55438/jiee.v3i1.86>.
  - 3 Yahya Zahid Ismail, Afrizal El Adzim Syahputra, and Ika Setiawati, “Pendidikan Berbasis Literasi Al-Qur’an: Analisis Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Iqra’ Dan Relevansinya Dalam Penguatan Budaya Akademik,” *Al Madjid: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 2 (2025): 88–98, <https://doi.org/10.64877/almaidjid.v1i2.121>.
  - 4 Makhfu Dhotin, “Makna Lafadz Iqra’ Dalam Al-Qur’an Menurut Tafsir Al-Misbah Dan Korelasinya Dengan Dunia Pendidikan Kontemporer,” *Ar-Rosyad: Journal of Quran Studies and Tafsir* 2, no. 2 (2026): 159–79, <https://ejournal.iaikhozin.ac.id/index.php/Ar-Rosyad/article/view/443>.

that the command to read in Q. 96 (Al-‘Alaq): 1–5 includes reading revelation, written texts, and the realities of God’s creation as pathways to knowledge and information literacy.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Septiani and Sarwadi demonstrate that the principles embodied in *iqra'* can serve as a foundation for Islamic education by fostering reading habits from an early age, encouraging critical thinking, promoting writing practices, and nurturing students’ character development.<sup>6</sup> Despite these contributions, existing studies largely focus either on the exegetical meaning of *iqra'* or on its implementation within specific educational settings. The relationship between *iqra'*, the development of knowledge, and the construction of a more comprehensive paradigm of Islamic education has yet to be explored systematically.

In the digital age, the values embedded in *iqra'* have become increasingly relevant in addressing contemporary literacy challenges. Harahap et al. propose the IQRAH digital literacy learning model, which is based on the interpretation of Q. 96 (Al-‘Alaq): 1–5 and emphasizes critical reading, writing culture, reflective learning, intellectual collaboration, and interactive technology.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Hariati et al. present *iqra'* as a pillar of Islamic literacy capable of responding to misinformation and hoaxes through critical analysis, *tabayyun* (verification), and ethical awareness in the evaluation of information.<sup>8</sup> Beyond formal educational settings, Sugiarto et al. demonstrate that Qur’anic literacy also possesses an important social dimension through community-based Qur’anic literacy programs.<sup>9</sup> Jamilah and Sulisno further argue that Q. 96 (Al-‘Alaq): 1–6 contains concepts of knowledge and literacy that contribute to strengthening Islamic education through the integration of *tawhīd*, intellectual development, and character formation.<sup>10</sup> Collectively, these studies highlight the broad scope of *iqra'*, encompassing basic literacy, academic culture, digital literacy, and community education. However, most existing scholarship remains fragmented, focusing either on exegetical discussions, practical implementation, or specific forms of literacy enhancement. As a result, relatively little attention has been devoted to formulating *iqra'* as a comprehensive educational paradigm capable of explaining the relationship among revelation, reason, knowledge culture, spirituality, and character formation within a unified conceptual framework.

This situation points to the need for a broader scholarly inquiry that moves beyond viewing *iqra'* merely as a command to read or as a foundation for Islamic literacy. Rather, *iqra'* should be examined as an epistemological foundation for education itself. Such a formulation is crucial because it offers a framework for understanding how Islamic education can establish a balanced relationship among revelation, reason, literacy, scientific inquiry, academic ethics, and character

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- 5 Eva Fitri Yunengsih, “Analysis of the Science Perspective of the Qur’an Surah Al-Alaq Verses 1-5),” *ASLIM Journal of Education and Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 10–17, <https://aslim.kjii.org/index.php/i/article/view/2>.
  - 6 Septiani Septiani and Sarwadi Sarwadi, “Implementasi Prinsip Iqra’ Surah Al-Alaq 1–5 Sebagai Landasan Pendidikan Islam Yang Kuat Di Sekolah Dasar,” *Al-Hudaya: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Pendidikan* 1, no. 2 (2025): 59–70, <https://risetkendikia.com/index.php/jurnal-alhudaya/article/view/104>.
  - 7 Farida Hanum Harahap et al., “IQRAH: Model Aplikasi Pembelajaran Literasi Digital Berbasis Tafsir Q.S. Al-‘Alaq Ayat 1–5 Sebagai Revitalisasi Konsep Baitul Hikmah Bagi Generasi Muda,” *Indonesian Journal of Innovation Multidisipliner Research* 4, no. 2 (April 29, 2026): 849–64, <https://doi.org/10.69693/ijim.v4i2.553>.
  - 8 Dona Hariati et al., “Iqra Sebagai Pilar Literasi Islam: Menjawab Tantangan Disinformasi dan Hoaks di Era Digital,” *JUTEQ: JURNAL TEOLOGI & TAFSIR* 2, no. 7 (2025): 1300–1310, <https://languar.net/index.php/JUTEQ/article/view/239>.
  - 9 Sugiarto Sugiarto, Hanifudin Aminullah, and Siti Rochanah, “Implementation Of The Al-Qur’an Literacy Education Program At The Darussalam Foundation, Cibubur Tourism City,” in *International Conference on Digital Advance Tourism, Management and Technology*, vol. 1, 2023, 231–42, <https://doi.org/10.56910/ictmt.v1i1.66>.
  - 10 Nur Jamilah and Sarwadi Sulisno, “Islamic Science, Literacy and Education: Qur’anic Study of Surah Al-Alaq Verses 1 to 6,” *Aslim: Journal of Education and Islamic Studies* 2, no. 3 (2025): 249–58, <https://doi.org/10.63738/aslim.v2i3.79>.

development. Within this framework, education is directed not only toward the acquisition of knowledge but also toward the cultivation of moral consciousness and social responsibility in the production and application of knowledge.

Against this background, this article seeks to examine the meaning of *iqra'* as a paradigm of literacy- and knowledge-based education. Specifically, it aims to explore the substantive meaning of *iqra'* in Q. 96 (Al-'Alaq): 1–5, analyze its relevance to the concept of literacy in Islamic education, and formulate a conceptual framework for *iqra'*-based education that integrates literacy, knowledge development, spirituality, and moral formation. This study proceeds from the assumption that *iqra'* constitutes an epistemological foundation of Islamic education that not only commands human beings to read texts but also encourages them to understand, investigate, write, develop knowledge, and situate all forms of knowledge within the framework of *tamhid*. Accordingly, the article argues that *iqra'*-based education offers an integrative educational model that unites literacy, knowledge, spirituality, and ethics within a holistic educational framework.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative library research design to examine *iqra'* as an educational paradigm grounded in literacy and knowledge development.<sup>11</sup> Rather than measuring educational practices empirically, the study focused on exploring the epistemological foundations embedded in Q. 96 (Al-'Alaq): 1–5. The primary sources consisted of the Qur'anic text and selected classical and contemporary tafsir works discussing *iqra'*, *qalam*, knowledge, and learning. Secondary sources included scholarly publications on Islamic education, Qur'anic literacy, educational epistemology, academic culture, digital literacy, and character formation. These sources were selected based on their relevance to the study's objective, namely to identify how the command *iqra'* can be understood not merely as an instruction to read, but as a conceptual foundation for an integrative educational framework.

The analysis was conducted through a thematic interpretive approach combined with qualitative content analysis. The first stage focused on identifying key educational concepts contained in Q. 96 (Al-'Alaq): 1–5, particularly those related to reading, learning, writing, and the acquisition of knowledge. The second stage examined how these concepts were interpreted within classical and contemporary exegetical traditions. The third stage synthesized the findings with contemporary discussions on literacy, knowledge production, and Islamic education. Finally, the study formulated a conceptual model of *iqra'*-based education by mapping the interconnections among literacy practices, intellectual inquiry, spiritual consciousness, and character development. To ensure analytical rigor, interpretations and arguments were continuously compared across multiple sources through source triangulation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Iqra'* as the Epistemological Foundation of Islamic Education

Any discussion of *iqra'* as a foundation of Islamic education must begin with the context of the first revelation received by the Prophet Muhammad. Q. 96 (Al-'Alaq): 1–5 marks the beginning of the Qur'anic discourse on knowledge and learning, laying the groundwork for the intellectual tradition of Islam. Significantly, the first divine command was not related to ritual worship, legal regulations, or social organization, but to reading. This highlights the central position of knowledge in the Islamic worldview and underscores the importance of intellectual engagement as a prerequisite for human development. Allah states:

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11 Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2008).

أَفْرَأُ بِأَسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝١ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝٢ أَفْرَأُ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ۝٣ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ۝٤ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ۝٥

“ Read in the name of your Lord who created [1], created man from a clinging substance [2]. Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous [3], who taught by the pen [4], taught man that which he knew not [5]. ” Surah Al-‘Alaq (96).

These verses suggest that the educational process in Islam begins with an intellectual act directed toward the pursuit of knowledge. Yet the command *iqra'* cannot be reduced to the narrow sense of reading written texts. Linguistically, the term carries broader meanings, including reading, gathering, examining, understanding, and communicating knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the object of reading in Islam extends beyond revelation itself to encompass the natural world, social realities, historical experiences, and the diverse phenomena of human life. In this sense, *iqra'* signifies an active engagement with reality, encouraging individuals to investigate and interpret the signs that surround them. Knowledge, therefore, is not acquired through passive reception but through a continuous process of observation, reflection, and understanding.

This broader understanding reveals the deeply epistemological nature of *iqra'*. Reading is not merely a technical skill for accessing information; rather, it serves as a means of constructing knowledge through inquiry, reflection, and rational engagement.<sup>13</sup> The educational implications of this perspective are profound. Education is not limited to the transmission of information from teacher to student but involves cultivating intellectual capacities that enable learners to interpret reality critically and meaningfully.<sup>14</sup> From this standpoint, literacy becomes inseparable from intellectual development. The command *iqra'* thus establishes a framework in which learning is viewed as an active and transformative process aimed at producing understanding rather than simply accumulating information. It is through this process that individuals develop the intellectual disposition necessary for lifelong learning and scholarly growth.

The epistemological significance of *iqra'* becomes even more apparent when considered alongside the phrase *bismi rabbika* (“in the name of your Lord”). The connection between reading and divine consciousness indicates that intellectual activity in Islam is never value-neutral. Acts of reading, investigation, and knowledge production are not pursued solely to satisfy human curiosity or achieve material advancement; they are fundamentally oriented toward recognizing the Creator and fulfilling ethical responsibilities. As a result, knowledge is understood not as an end in itself but as a trust that must be used wisely and responsibly.<sup>15</sup> This integration of intellectual inquiry and spiritual awareness distinguishes the Islamic conception of knowledge from approaches that separate learning from moral considerations. Knowledge acquires meaning when it contributes to human flourishing while remaining grounded in accountability before God.

12 U Umroni and R Romelah, “Implementation of Al-Quran Learning With the Iqra' Method at Bukit Taman State Elementary School Sukamerindu Musi Rawas South Sumatra,” *Suhuf* 37, no. 1 (May 29, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.23917/suhuf.v37i1.9230>.

13 Chiara Fontana, “Al-Balāghah’s Legacy in Modern Secular Journalism,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 55, no. 4 (October 9, 2024): 488–525, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x-12341538>.

14 Moses Adeleke Adeoye, Entika Fani Prastikawati, and Yusuff Olatunji Abimbowo, “Empowering Learning: Pedagogical Strategies for Advancing 21st Century Skills and Quality Education,” *Journal of Nonformal Education* 10, no. 1 (February 15, 2024): 10–21, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jone.v10i1.1451>.

15 Hasnah Haron, Nurul Nazlia Jamil, and Nathasa Mazna Ramli, “Western And Islamic Values And Ethics: Are They Different?,” *Journal of Governance and Integrity* 4, no. 1 (November 27, 2020): 12–28, <https://doi.org/10.15282/jgi.4.1.2020.5609>.

Another key element in these verses is the concept of *qalam* (the pen), which symbolizes the preservation and transmission of knowledge. The mention of the pen indicates that education involves more than reading; it also requires recording, organizing, and disseminating knowledge. Throughout Islamic history, intellectual progress has been sustained by a strong tradition of writing that produced extensive works in Qur’anic exegesis, hadith studies, jurisprudence, philosophy, science, and education. If *iqra’* represents the acquisition of knowledge, *qalam* represents its development and transmission across generations. Reading enables individuals to access knowledge, whereas writing ensures that knowledge is preserved, refined, and shared. In this regard, the pen functions not merely as a tool of communication but as a civilizational instrument that transforms personal learning into collective intellectual heritage.

The fifth verse further emphasizes the educational nature of human existence through the statement, *‘allama al-insāna mā lam ya‘lam* (“He taught man that which he knew not”). This verse portrays human beings as learners whose knowledge is acquired rather than innate. Humans enter the world without complete knowledge, yet they possess the capacity to learn, grow, and develop through education. Such a perspective positions learning as a defining characteristic of humanity and as a fundamental driver of civilizational progress. Education, therefore, is not simply a process of delivering information but a means of actualizing human potential. The more knowledge individuals acquire, the greater their responsibility to employ that knowledge ethically and constructively. Consequently, the Qur’anic vision of education seeks not only to cultivate intellectual excellence but also to nurture moral awareness and social responsibility.

To clarify the relationships among the key concepts embedded in Q. 96 (Al-‘Alaq): 1–5, the findings of this analysis are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Epistemological Elements of Education in Q. 96 (Al-‘Alaq): 1–5

<b>Qur’anic Element</b>	<b>Epistemological Meaning</b>	<b>Educational Implication</b>
<i>Iqra’</i>	Reading, understanding, and examining reality	Strengthening literacy and critical thinking
<i>Bismi Rabbika</i>	Divine orientation in the pursuit of knowledge	Integration of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality
<i>Qalam</i>	Documentation and transmission of knowledge	Development of writing culture and academic tradition
<i>‘Allama al-Insān</i>	Human beings as lifelong learners	Continuous learning and human development
Knowledge ( <i>‘Ilm</i> )	Outcome of the learning process	Advancement of knowledge for the common good

*Source: Author, 2026*

As shown in Table 1, Q. 96 (Al-‘Alaq): 1–5 does far more than emphasize reading as a basic skill. Rather, it establishes an epistemological framework that integrates literacy, knowledge production, spirituality, and moral responsibility. *Iqra’* serves as the gateway to knowledge acquisition, *qalam* functions as the means through which knowledge is preserved and transmitted, and *bismi rabbika* provides the ethical and spiritual orientation that guides all intellectual endeavors. Taken together, these elements demonstrate that the first revelation articulates a comprehensive philosophy of education in which knowledge and values are inseparable. Within this framework, education is directed not only toward producing knowledgeable individuals but also toward cultivating morally responsible and intellectually grounded human beings.

## Iqra' as a Paradigm of Literacy and Knowledge-Based Education

The abundance of information in the digital age is often regarded as evidence of educational progress. However, such an assumption is not entirely accurate. Easy access to information does not automatically produce a generation that is literate, critical, and knowledgeable. In many cases, students are closer to information than to knowledge itself.<sup>16</sup> They may obtain answers instantly, yet they do not necessarily understand the intellectual processes behind those answers. This condition suggests that the central challenge of contemporary education lies not in the scarcity of information but in the limited ability to comprehend, evaluate, and develop knowledge. It is within this context that the concept of *iqra'* becomes particularly relevant. The Qur'anic command to read does not merely encourage access to information; it cultivates a mode of thinking that enables individuals to transform information into meaningful knowledge.

The educational paradigm grounded in *iqra'* begins with the assumption that literacy is the primary foundation for the development of knowledge.<sup>17</sup> Yet literacy, in this context, cannot be reduced to the technical ability to read and write. A growing body of scholarship suggests that Qur'anic literacy encompasses the ability to understand meaning, interpret reality, connect diverse sources of information, and generate knowledge that can be critically justified. Education, therefore, must move beyond teaching students how to read and instead equip them to understand what they read, question the information they encounter, and relate it to broader social and intellectual concerns. From this perspective, literacy becomes an active and productive intellectual practice rather than a basic mechanical skill. It serves as the gateway through which individuals engage with knowledge and participate in the construction of understanding.

One important implication of this perspective is the need to cultivate a culture of knowledge within educational institutions. Educational practice has often emphasized the mastery of content more than the development of scholarly habits. Students are frequently trained to remember information, yet they are not always encouraged to examine, question, and expand it.<sup>18</sup> The paradigm of *iqra'* offers a different approach. Reading is positioned as the starting point of an intellectual process that extends to reflection, discussion, research, and writing. Consequently, educational success should not be measured solely by the amount of information students can recall but also by their ability to generate ideas, construct arguments, and solve problems rationally. An educational system that neglects the cultivation of a knowledge culture ultimately produces individuals who memorize information rather than seekers of knowledge capable of contributing to intellectual advancement.

The paradigm of *iqra'* further demonstrates that the development of knowledge cannot be separated from the relationship between revelation and reason. In many modern educational frameworks, knowledge is often viewed as a domain governed entirely by human rationality.<sup>19</sup>

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16 Lin Wang and Kuk-Jin Yoon, "Knowledge Distillation and Student-Teacher Learning for Visual Intelligence: A Review and New Outlooks," *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence* 44, no. 6 (June 1, 2022): 3048–68, <https://doi.org/10.1109/TPAMI.2021.3055564>.

17 Miftahur Rofi, "Dynamics in Classical Islamic Education: Between Nonformal Autonomy and Madrasah Hegemony (650–1250 CE)," *Sunan Kalijaga International Journal on Islamic Educational Research* 9, no. 1 (May 30, 2025): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.14421/skijier.2025.91.01>.

18 Linda Darling-Hammond et al., "Implications for Educational Practice of the Science of Learning and Development," *Applied Developmental Science* 24, no. 2 (April 2, 2020): 97–140, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791>.

19 Ilya Levin, Alexei L. Semenov, and Mikael Gorsky, "Smart Learning in the 21st Century: Advancing Constructionism Across Three Digital Epochs," *Education Sciences* 15, no. 1 (January 4, 2025): 45, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15010045>.

Conversely, in certain religious educational settings, religious sciences and worldly sciences are sometimes treated as separate spheres.<sup>20</sup> Such an approach risks creating a dichotomy that limits the growth of Islamic education. Studies suggest that the concept of *iqra'* instead promotes a complementary relationship between revelation and reason.<sup>21</sup> Revelation provides direction and ethical orientation, while reason serves as the instrument through which knowledge is understood, examined, and developed. As a result, education avoids both a value-neutral rationalism and a form of spirituality detached from critical inquiry, fostering a more balanced intellectual framework.

Another implication of the *iqra'*-based paradigm is the necessity of integrating ethics into all scholarly activities. The phrase *bismi rabbika* (“in the name of your Lord”) indicates that the pursuit of knowledge must be grounded in moral consciousness. Knowledge that develops without ethical foundations has the potential to produce various forms of misuse, ranging from information manipulation to the exploitation of knowledge for harmful purposes. Consequently, education based on *iqra'* is concerned not only with how knowledge is acquired but also with how it is applied responsibly. Within academic contexts, this principle is reflected in intellectual honesty, respect for sources, commitment to truth, and awareness of the social consequences of knowledge. In this way, ethical responsibility becomes an integral component of intellectual development rather than an external consideration.

The relevance of the *iqra'* paradigm becomes even more apparent when viewed in relation to digital literacy. The digital age has fundamentally transformed the ways in which people access and disseminate information. Yet the ability to obtain information often develops more rapidly than the ability to verify it. Numerous studies have identified misinformation, disinformation, and unverified content as among the most pressing educational challenges of the present era.<sup>22</sup> In such circumstances, *iqra'* must be understood not merely as reading but also as the capacity to examine, compare, verify, and evaluate the credibility of information. Digital literacy from the perspective of *iqra'* therefore requires both critical thinking skills and ethical awareness in the use of technology and information. It is this combination of intellectual rigor and moral responsibility that distinguishes literacy from mere information consumption.

At the same time, the paradigm of *iqra'* encourages a fundamental shift in the understanding of learning itself. Students are no longer viewed as passive recipients of knowledge but as active participants in constructing their own understanding. Reading, questioning, observing, researching, and writing are all activities that reflect intellectual engagement in the learning process. This approach aligns closely with the demands of twenty-first-century education, which emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. The distinction, however, is that the *iqra'* paradigm does not stop at the acquisition of these competencies. Rather, it directs their application within a framework of moral and spiritual responsibility. Education, therefore, seeks not only to produce competent individuals but also to cultivate individuals whose intellectual capacities are guided by meaningful values.

This transformation also has important implications for the role of teachers. Teachers can no longer be regarded merely as the primary source of information, particularly in an age when information is readily accessible through digital platforms. Within the paradigm of *iqra'*, teachers

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20 Lilith Rüschenpöhler, “A Review of Science Teaching Approaches for Equity Focusing on Race, Class, and Religion from the Perspectives of Freire’s and Arendt’s Theories of Education,” *Science Education* 108, no. 4 (July 11, 2024): 1191–1221, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.21868>.

21 Hüseyin Halil, “Exegesis of the Qur’ān with the Biblical and Post-Biblical Literature,” *HTS Theologise Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (November 29, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/HTS.v80i1.10144>.

22 Kai Shu et al., “Combating Disinformation in a Social Media Age,” *WIREs Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery* 10, no. 6 (November 15, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1002/widm.1385>.

function as intellectual mentors who guide students in understanding sources, developing critical thinking skills, and cultivating scholarly ethics. This role is increasingly significant because the central challenge of education today is not the lack of information but the ability to navigate information wisely. Educational success therefore depends not only on the quality of instructional content but also on the ability of teachers to foster a culture of literacy, dialogue, and knowledge within the learning environment. The relationships among the key components of the *iqra'*-based educational paradigm are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Components of the *Iqra'*-Based Educational Paradigm

Component	Primary Function	Educational Implication
Literacy	Acquiring and understanding information	Strengthening reading culture and critical thinking
Inquiry	Examining and testing knowledge	Promoting research and problem-solving
Knowledge	Outcome of learning and investigation	Strengthening academic culture
Spirituality	Providing value orientation	Integrating knowledge and <i>tamhīd</i>
Character ( <i>Akhlāq</i> )	Guiding the application of knowledge	Fostering moral responsibility

*Source: Author, 2026*

As shown in Table 2, the *iqra'*-based educational paradigm is built upon the mutually reinforcing relationship among literacy, inquiry, knowledge, spirituality, and *akhlāq*. Literacy functions as the gateway to knowledge acquisition, while inquiry ensures that knowledge is not accepted passively but is examined and developed through critical reflection. The knowledge that emerges from this process is then guided by spirituality and expressed responsibly through ethical conduct. Taken together, these elements suggest that *iqra'* can be understood as an educational paradigm that integrates knowledge acquisition, intellectual development, spiritual orientation, and character formation within a unified framework. Such a paradigm demonstrates that Islamic education is concerned not only with cultivating intellectual excellence but also with nurturing individuals who are ethical, responsible, and capable of contributing positively to society.

Despite offering a comprehensive framework that integrates literacy, knowledge, spirituality, and *akhlāq*, the implementation of an *iqra'*-based educational paradigm continues to face significant challenges. One major obstacle is the persistence of educational systems that prioritize content mastery and measurable academic outcomes over intellectual development. As a result, reading is often treated merely as a means of obtaining information for assessment purposes rather than as an intellectual process aimed at developing understanding and generating knowledge. At the same time, digital technology presents a paradox. While it can strengthen literacy practices by expanding access to information, it can also encourage dependence on instant information and reduce intellectual depth. This situation indicates that the success of the *iqra'* paradigm depends not only on the strength of its conceptual foundations but also on the ability of educational institutions, teachers, and students to cultivate a culture of knowledge in which reading, research, writing, and reflection become integral components of everyday academic life. In this regard, *iqra'* should not remain merely a normative principle of Islamic education but must be translated into concrete educational practices capable of addressing the intellectual, moral, and social needs of contemporary society.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that *iqra'* in Q. Al-‘Alaq 96:1–5 should not be understood merely as a command to read but as a comprehensive epistemological foundation for Islamic education. Through thematic analysis of the Qur’anic text, classical and contemporary exegetical traditions, and relevant educational literature, the study reveals that *iqra'* encompasses a series of interconnected intellectual activities, including reading, understanding, inquiry, reflection, writing, and knowledge development. The concepts of *iqra'*, *bismi rabbika*, and *qalam* collectively construct an educational framework that integrates literacy, knowledge production, spirituality, and moral responsibility. The findings further indicate that Islamic education, as envisioned in the first revelation, is not limited to the transmission of information or the acquisition of technical skills. Rather, it seeks to cultivate individuals who are capable of engaging critically with texts and reality while remaining guided by ethical and spiritual values. In this perspective, literacy is transformed from a basic educational competency into a lifelong intellectual process that connects revelation, reason, and human development.

The principal contribution of this study lies in its reconceptualization of *iqra'* as a framework for Islamic educational epistemology. While previous studies have generally examined *iqra'* in relation to Qur’anic literacy, character education, academic culture, or digital literacy, this study advances the discussion by positioning *iqra'* as a foundational paradigm that systematically links literacy, inquiry, knowledge, spirituality, and character formation within a unified conceptual structure. This contribution offers a broader understanding of how Islamic education can respond to contemporary challenges, including information overload, declining reading culture, disinformation, ethical crises, and the fragmentation of knowledge. By emphasizing the complementary relationship between revelation and reason, the proposed framework provides an alternative educational vision that rejects both value-neutral approaches to knowledge and forms of religiosity detached from critical inquiry. Consequently, the study enriches contemporary discussions on Islamic education by offering a holistic perspective that aligns intellectual excellence with moral and spiritual responsibility, thereby contributing to the development of a more balanced and integrative educational philosophy.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. As a library-based and conceptual inquiry, it focuses primarily on the interpretation of Q. Al-‘Alaq 96:1–5 and does not empirically investigate how the proposed epistemological framework operates in actual educational settings. The findings therefore remain theoretical and require further validation through field-based research. In addition, the study concentrates on a specific Qur’anic passage and does not incorporate other educationally relevant Qur’anic concepts that may enrich the construction of Islamic educational epistemology. Future research should examine the practical implementation of the *iqra'*-based paradigm in schools, madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools, and higher education institutions. Empirical studies may explore its implications for curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, assessment models, academic culture, and digital literacy programs. Comparative studies involving other Qur’anic educational concepts could also contribute to a more comprehensive framework of Islamic educational thought. Such investigations would provide stronger evidence regarding the applicability, effectiveness, and transformative potential of *iqra'*-based education in addressing the intellectual, ethical, and social challenges of contemporary society.

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