



Islamic Qur'anic and Hadith Literacy: Thematic Tafsir of *Iqra'*, *Qalam*, '*Ilm* and Reading Culture

Rahman¹, Khairuddin², Ahmad Ghozali³, Perdamaian⁴, Suardi⁵, Wasalmi⁶

¹²³⁴⁵Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, Indonesia

⁶Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam YPIQ BAUBAU, Indonesia

rahman@uin-suska.ac.id¹, khairuddin72@uin-suska.ac.id², ahmad.ghozali@uin.suska.ac.id³,
perdamaian@uin-suska.ac.id⁴, suardi@uin-suska.ac.id⁵, amanahsalmi@gmail.com

Corresponding Author Rahman, Email: rahman@uin-suska.ac.id	Article history: Received: May 13, 2026 Revised: June 05, 2026 Available Online: July 10, 2026.
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Abstract:

Literacy has become one of the fundamental pillars of human civilization and a key element in the development of knowledge-based societies. In the Islamic tradition, literacy is not only understood as the ability to read and write but also as a comprehensive process of acquiring, developing, and disseminating knowledge. This study examines the concept of literacy in the Qur'an and Hadith through a thematic tafsir (tafsir mawdu'i) approach, focusing on the concepts of Iqra' (read), Qalam (pen), and 'Ilm (knowledge). The research employs a qualitative library research method by analyzing Qur'anic verses, prophetic traditions, and classical and contemporary exegetical literature. The findings show that the command of Iqra' in the first revelation emphasizes intellectual engagement and critical reading, while Qalam symbolizes documentation, knowledge transmission, and the preservation of civilization. Moreover, 'Ilm demonstrates that literacy in Islam includes cognitive, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. Hadith literature reinforces these principles through encouragement to seek knowledge, teach others, and document beneficial information. The study concludes that the Qur'an and Hadith establish a holistic literacy framework integrating reading, writing, reflection, and knowledge dissemination. In the contemporary context, these teachings remain relevant in strengthening literacy culture, fostering critical thinking, and promoting lifelong learning amid digital challenges. Therefore, Islamic literacy values serve as a moral and intellectual foundation for an enlightened, knowledge-oriented society.

Keywords: Literacy; Qur'an and Hadith; Iqra'; Qalam; Knowledge Culture

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is the holy book revealed by Allah SWT to the Prophet Muhammad SAW through the Angel Gabriel as comprehensive guidance for humanity. As the primary source of Islamic teachings, the Qur'an encompasses not only religious principles but also profound insights into social life, health, education, natural phenomena, and other branches of knowledge.¹ Consequently, the Qur'an is intended not merely to be recited but also to be understood, contemplated, and implemented in everyday life. Throughout its verses, it repeatedly encourages believers to think critically, observe, investigate, and develop knowledge as part of their devotion to Allah. This epistemological foundation is most explicitly articulated in Surah Al-'Alaq (96):1–5, the first revelation, which begins with the command *iqra'*. The opening revelation signifies that Allah elevates human dignity through the pursuit of knowledge and establishes reading as the gateway to intellectual and civilizational development. The command *iqra'* therefore extends beyond the act of reading the Qur'an itself; it invites humanity to read, understand, and reflect upon both revelation and the universe in order to acquire beneficial knowledge. From its very inception, Islam has positioned literacy as the foundation of civilization and human advancement. In this sense, literacy should not be understood merely as the technical ability to decode written texts but as a comprehensive intellectual tradition encompassing critical thinking, scientific inquiry, reflective learning, and the transformation of knowledge into practical action for the benefit of society.

Interestingly, the Prophet Muhammad SAW as the recipient of revelation was sent by Allah SWT as a bringer of mercy and light for the people, but he was destined to be an *ummi* human being.² Linguistically, "*ummi*" means unable to read and write. However, the Prophet's lack of literacy is not an indication of a lack of literacy. History records that, precisely through a strong literacy strategy, he successfully delivered his message peacefully to various tribes and kingdoms. Literacy during the Prophet's time was manifested through written agreements such as the Medina Charter, diplomatic correspondence to kings, and the tradition of recording revelations by his companions.³ This fact confirms that literacy in Islam has a broad meaning: it includes the ability to read reality, write civilization, and communicate the truth.

The urgency of literacy is increasingly relevant in the 21st century, marked by the explosion of digital information. UNESCO, in its Education for All Global Monitoring Report, affirms that literacy is both a human right

¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Messages, Impressions and Harmony of the Qur'an*, Vol. 15 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002).

² Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Azhim*, Volume 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998).

³ Muhammad Hamidullah, *Majmu'ah Al-Watha'iq Al-Siyasiyah Li Al-'Abd Al-Nabany* (Beirut: Dar al-Nafais, 1987).

and the foundation for lifelong learning.⁴ Unfortunately, UNESCO data also shows that more than 773 million adults in the world are still illiterate, with the majority living in countries with large Muslim populations.⁵ This irony demonstrates the gap between the ideals of the text and the reality of the community. In fact, the first revelation of Islam begins with a command to read, not a ritual. This indicates that building a civilization must begin with a culture of literacy.

In Indonesia, literacy remains a significant challenge despite the country's status as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation. The 2021 National Assessment conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology revealed that approximately one in two students had not achieved the minimum level of reading literacy competency.⁶ This situation is further aggravated by the country's low reading culture, as data from the National Library indicate that public interest in reading remains alarmingly low. Such conditions highlight a substantial gap between the Qur'anic ideal, inaugurated by the command *iqra'*, and the contemporary reality of Muslim society, thereby underscoring the need to reorient religious understanding toward the Qur'an's intellectual and literacy dimensions rather than limiting it to ritualistic practices. Previous scholarship has explored the relationship between Islam and literacy. M. Quraish Shihab argues that the command *iqra'* encompasses both reading the revealed verses (*qauliyyah*) and interpreting the signs of the universe (*kauniyyah*), thereby encouraging Muslims to integrate revelation with empirical inquiry.⁷ Likewise, Azyumardi Azra emphasizes that classical Islamic educational institutions, such as *kuttah* and *madrasah*, emerged from the Qur'anic spirit of literacy and knowledge cultivation. Nevertheless, these studies predominantly adopt historical and normative perspectives and have paid limited attention to the complexities of literacy in the digital era. Contemporary literacy extends far beyond the ability to read printed texts; it encompasses digital, media, data, and religious literacy, requiring individuals to critically evaluate information, distinguish facts from misinformation, and generate knowledge responsibly in virtual environments. These competencies are increasingly essential in today's post-truth society, where the boundaries between fact, opinion, and misinformation have become increasingly blurred. In this context, the Qur'anic injunction *iqra' bismi rabbik* acquires renewed significance, emphasizing that the pursuit of

⁴ UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4. Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All* (Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013–2014, 2014).

⁵ B. W. Azevedo, J. P., Goldemberg, D., Montoya, S., Nayar, R., Rogers, H., Saavedra, J., & Stacy, Will Every Child Be Able to Read by 2030 (Defining learning poverty and mapping the dimensions of the challenge, 2021).

⁶ Ika Widiastuti, "Assessing the Impact of Education Policies in Indonesia: Challenges, Achievement, and Future Direction," *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 2025, 17(2).

⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Grounding the Qur'an: The Function and Role of Revelation in People's Lives*, Cet. XIX, 1996.

knowledge must be guided not only by intellectual competence but also by theological consciousness and ethical responsibility. Accordingly, from the Qur'anic perspective, literacy is not merely a technical skill but a moral and civilizational value that empowers humanity to overcome ignorance, misinformation, and intellectual stagnation while contributing constructively to society.

Based on this background, this study seeks to re-examine the Qur'anic concept of literacy and its relevance to addressing the challenges of the contemporary digital era. The spirit of *iqra'* should not be reduced to a symbolic or ceremonial slogan but should instead be understood as the foundation of a systematic civilizational movement that fosters intellectual, moral, and social transformation. The Prophet Muhammad SAW, despite being *ummi*, demonstrated that literacy is not confined to the technical ability to read and write; rather, it reflects a profound commitment to seeking, preserving, and disseminating knowledge for the benefit of humanity. Building upon this perspective, the present study analyzes how the Qur'an conceptualizes literacy through the key terms *qara'a* (reading) and *kitābah* (writing), and explores how these concepts can be reconstructed as a framework for Islamic education and da'wah in the digital age. The study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Qur'an-based literacy discourse within Islamic educational studies while offering practical insights for strengthening literacy culture among Muslim communities. Ultimately, as emphasized in the first revelation, human dignity and the advancement of civilization are inseparable from a sustained commitment to the traditions of reading, writing, critical thinking, and the continuous pursuit of knowledge.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative library research design to examine the concept of literacy from the perspectives of the Qur'an and Hadith. Library research is appropriate because the study relies entirely on written sources, including the Qur'an, hadith collections, classical and contemporary works of tafsir, books on hadith studies, and other relevant scholarly literature.⁸ A descriptive-analytical approach is adopted to describe and interpret the Qur'anic concept of literacy and its relationship with key concepts such as *iqra'*, *qara'a*, *kitābah*, *qalam*, and *ummi*. Methodologically, the study applies the thematic interpretation (*tafsīr ma'adū'i*) approach by collecting and analyzing all

⁸ Zed Mestika, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2014), 3–5; John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 183–185.

Qur'anic verses related to literacy in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the Qur'anic worldview on reading and writing.⁹

The primary data consist of Qur'anic verses containing the terms *qara'a*, *kataba*, *'allama*, *qalam*, and *ummi*, identified through *Mu'jam al-Mufabras li Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim* by Muhammad Fuad Abd al-Baqi, together with relevant hadith concerning the first revelation, the recording of revelation, the appointment of scribes, the Constitution of Medina, and the Prophet's diplomatic correspondence.¹⁰ Secondary sources include classical and contemporary tafsir works, such as *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, and *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, as well as historical studies, scholarly articles, and official reports on literacy published by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia to provide contemporary context.¹¹

Data were collected through documentation by identifying, selecting, and organizing relevant primary and secondary sources. The collected data were then classified into thematic categories, including *iqra'*, *kitab*, *qalam*, *ummi*, literacy practices during the Prophet's era, the Medina Charter, and the Prophet's letters. Data analysis employed qualitative content analysis, involving data reduction, thematic organization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing.¹² To enrich the conceptual analysis, this study also applies the semantic approach developed by Toshihiko Izutsu to examine the meanings of key Qur'anic terms within the Qur'anic worldview.¹³ The credibility of the findings was enhanced through source triangulation by comparing classical and contemporary interpretations and cross-checking historical evidence with modern academic studies.¹⁴

Literatur Review

The concept of literacy in Islam originates from the Qur'anic worldview, which places reading, writing, and knowledge at the center of human civilization. The first revelation received by Prophet Muhammad, Q.S. al-'Alaq (96): 1–5, begins with the imperative *iqra'* (“read”), indicating that literacy constitutes the foundation of Islamic epistemology. Al-Ṭabarī interprets *iqra'* as both reading textual signs and understanding the signs of God in creation, thereby extending literacy beyond the mere decoding of

⁹ Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawi, *Al-Bidayah fi al-Tafsir al-Manḍu'ī* (Cairo: Dār al-Tawzī' wa al-Nashr al-Islāmiyyah, 1977), 52–60.

¹⁰ Muhammad Fuad Abd al-Baqi, *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufabras li Alfaz al-Qur'an al-Karim* (Cairo: Dār al-Hadith, 1987).

¹¹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, Hamka, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*; UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report* (Paris: UNESCO, 2024).

¹² Krippendorff Klaus, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2019).

¹³ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 32–45.

¹⁴ Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 291–307.

written language.¹⁵ Likewise, al-Qurṭubī argues that the command encompasses reflection (*tadabbur*) and intellectual engagement, making literacy a means of producing meaning and knowledge rather than a technical skill alone.¹⁶ In modern scholarship, Fazlur Rahman views *iqra'* as a dynamic process connecting revelation with social reality through a continuous movement between text and context.¹⁷

Another central concept in the Qur'anic discourse on literacy is *qalam* (pen), which appears in Q.S. al-'Alaq (96): 4 and Q.S. al-Qalam (68): 1. The Qur'an's explicit mention of the pen signifies the sacred value of writing as an instrument of knowledge transmission. According to Ibn 'Āshūr, *qalam* symbolizes the preservation and dissemination of knowledge across generations and represents a key element of human civilization.¹⁸ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd further argues that the concept of *qalam* reflects the emergence of a textual culture that transformed Arab society from an oral tradition into a literate civilization.¹⁹ The Prophetic tradition also reinforces the importance of writing. Historical reports indicate that some prisoners captured in the Battle of Badr obtained their freedom by teaching Muslims how to read and write, illustrating the institutionalization of literacy in the early Islamic community.²⁰ Rosenthal notes that this literacy-oriented ethos later contributed to the development of manuscript traditions, libraries, and scholarly networks throughout the Islamic world.²¹

The ultimate goal of literacy in Islam is the attainment of *'ilm* (knowledge). The Qur'an repeatedly elevates the status of knowledgeable individuals, as reflected in Q.S. al-Mujādalah (58): 11 and Q.S. al-Zumar (39): 9.²² Al-Ghazālī classifies knowledge into *fard 'ayn* and *fard kifāyah*, demonstrating that learning carries both personal and social obligations.²³ Similarly, Al-Faruqī emphasizes the integration of revelation and reason within an Islamic epistemological framework, rejecting the dichotomy between religious and secular knowledge.²⁴ Al-Attas further argues that the highest

¹⁵ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Jamī' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil Āy Al-Qur'Ān*, vol. 30 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2000).

¹⁶ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jamī' Li Ahkām Al-Qur'Ān*, vol. 20 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964).

¹⁷ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

¹⁸ Muḥammad al-Tāhir Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr*, vol. 29 (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah, 1984).

¹⁹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Maḥbūm Al-Naṣṣ: Dirāsah Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'Ān* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 1990).

²⁰ Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt Al-Kubrā*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990).

²¹ Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 47.

²² Qur'an 58:11; 39:9.

²³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 15–18.

²⁴ Ismail R. Al-Faruqī, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Herndon: IIIT, 1982), 12.

purpose of knowledge is the cultivation of *adab* (proper ethical conduct), indicating that literacy in Islam is inseparable from moral formation.²⁵

Contemporary scholars increasingly regard *iqra'*, *qalam*, and *'ilm* as an integrated framework of Qur'anic literacy. Quraish Shihab explains that *iqra'* functions as the acquisition of knowledge, *qalam* as its documentation and dissemination, and *'ilm* as the transformative outcome of the entire process.²⁶ This framework aligns closely with contemporary literacy theories that define literacy as a lifelong process of learning, critical thinking, and knowledge production. Nevertheless, existing studies remain largely normative and theological. Few have explored how the integrated concepts of *iqra'*, *qalam*, and *'ilm* can be operationalized to address modern challenges such as digital literacy, media literacy, and information literacy. Therefore, a thematic tafsir study is necessary to reconstruct these Qur'anic concepts and examine their relevance for strengthening reading and writing culture in contemporary society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Construction of Literacy in the Qur'an: The Terms *Iqra'*, *Qalam*, and *'Ilm*

The Quran uses numerous terms to explain the concept of literacy. However, in this paper, the discussion is limited to three key terms: *Iqra'*, *Qalam*, and *'Ilm*. The selection of these three terms is based on their close association with the most familiar literacy activities: reading, writing, and acquiring knowledge. Therefore, this study focuses on deepening the meaning of *Iqra'* as a symbol of the command to read, *Qalam* as a representation of written culture, and *'Ilm* as the ultimate goal of the literacy process in the Quran.

Iqra'

Iqra' (اِقْرَأْ) etymologically means the command to read. This word comes from qara'a (قَرَأَ) – yaqra'u (يَقْرَأُ) – qira'atan (قِرَاءَةً) – *iqra'* (اِقْرَأْ) which means to read, study, convey, or collect.²⁷ In KBBI, *iqra'* (اِقْرَأْ) is defined as a call or command to read, which in the context of the first revelation refers to the reading of verses of the Qur'an.²⁸

Iqra' is the command to pronounce the word *fi'il amr* which became the first revelation of QS. Al-'Alaq: 1. In terms, it means a divine call to the Prophet Muhammad and his people to carry out the activity of reading accompanied by the awareness of monotheism *_bismi rabbik_*. Reading here is

²⁵ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991), 23.

²⁶ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, vol. 15 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 402.

²⁷ Ma'luf, *Al-Munjid Fi Al-Lughab Wa Al-'Ilam*.

²⁸ Syafruddin Syafruddin Nurman, Muhammad, "Menakar Nilai Kritis Fakruddin Al-Razi Dalam 'Tafsir Mafatih Al-Ghayb,'" *Al-Tadabbur: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 6(01) (2021): 53–80.

not limited to reciting the mushaf, but includes the process of understanding, contemplating tadabbur, and practicing.

Based on the results of the inventory using Mu'jam al-Mufahras li Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, it shows that the root word *qara'a* (قَرَأَ) is mentioned 88 times in the Qur'an with various derivative forms.²⁹ This frequency shows that reading activity has a very important position in the construction of Islamic epistemology. The first command revealed to the Prophet Muhammad SAW was *iqra'* (اقْرَأْ) as stated in QS. Al-'Alaq [96]: 1-3 as follows:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ • خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ • اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ •

Meaning:

1. Read by the name of your Lord who created!, 2. He created man from a clump of blood, 3. Read! Your Lord is the Majesty." QS. Al-'Alaq [96]: 1-3.

Semantically, the word *iqra'* (اقْرَأْ) does not only mean reading text verbally, but also contains the meaning of studying, understanding, collecting and conveying information.³⁰

According to M. Quraish Shihab, the object of the *iqra'* command includes two main dimensions, namely the *qauliyyah* verses which are in the form of Allah's revelation written in the Qur'an, and the *kauniyyah* verses which are in the form of natural phenomena of the universe as a form of His creation.³¹

The word "*bi*" in "*bismi rabbika*" is understood as "*al-mushahabah*," meaning inclusion. Therefore, the command to read must be accompanied by an awareness of God, so that the reading does not distance the reader from God, but rather leads them to know God as "*al-akram*."³²

Thus, literacy from the perspective of the Qur'an has not been limited to the ability to read written texts alone. The command to *iqra'* (اقْرَأْ) in the first revelation, QS. Al-'Alaq verse 1, emphasizes that reading activities must go beyond reading letters to reading meaning. The object of *iqra'* covers two domains at once, namely the *qauliyyah* verses in the form of God's revelations contained in the Qur'an and the *kauniyyah* verses in the reality of the universe, social phenomena, and the dynamics of developments of the times. Therefore, Muslims as the *iqra'* community are required to be able to read texts while understanding the context, so as to avoid a textual and rigid religious understanding as well as a secular lifestyle that is poor in spiritual values.

Quranic literacy is integrative because it combines three main pillars: *iqra'* as the process of reading, *qalam* (القَلَمُ) as a symbol of written culture and documentation of knowledge, and '*ilm*' as the ultimate goal of both. This is emphasized in QS. Al-'Alaq [96]: 4-5:

²⁹ Baqi, *Mu'jam Al-Mufahras Li Alfāz Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*.

³⁰ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbab: Messages, Impressions and Harmony of the Qur'an*.

³¹ Shihab.

³² Shihab, *Grounding the Qur'an: The Function and Role of Revelation in People's Lives*.

• الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ • عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

Meaning:

4. *Read! Your Lord is the Majesty*, 5. *who teaches (human) with pen*”.

QS. Al-'Alaq [96]: 4-5.

This verse demonstrates that the written tradition should not stop at merely recording and storing information, but should also produce knowledge that enlightens and benefits life. The integration of *iqra'*, *qalam*, and *'ilm* simultaneously negates the dichotomy between religious knowledge and general knowledge, as both stem from the commandment of *iqra' bismi rabbik*, namely reading with a divine awareness and a monotheistic orientation.

Consequently, Quranic literacy necessitates the ability to comprehensively understand the realities of life. A literate person is not only fluent in reading and reciting the verses of the Quran, but also able to read the signs of the times and respond to various contemporary issues, such as the environmental crisis, the digital divide, disinformation, and global humanitarian problems. Through the *iqra'–qalam–'ilm* framework, the Quran encourages the birth of humans who are no longer ummiy in the intellectual and spiritual sense, namely individuals who are critical in understanding the text, sensitive to context, and productive in generating ideas and solutions based on divine values. At this point, literacy transforms from merely technical skills into a down-to-earth, transformative, and intelligent religious practice.

Qalam

The second term closely related to literacy is *qalam*. Etymologically, *qalam* (القَلَمُ) comes from the root word *qa-la-ma* (ق ل م), which means to cut, sharpen, or whet.³³ In classical Arabic, *qalam* originally meant “a sharpened arrow” or “a sharpened piece of wood/feather for writing”.³⁴ This whittling process is what gave birth to writing instruments. In Quranic terminology, the *qalam* is the primary means of transferring knowledge and civilization through the tradition of writing.³⁵ Allah even swore by the pen, showing how sacred the function of writing is in Islam.

The word *qalam* (القلم) is mentioned explicitly twice in the Qur'an, the most important mention of which occurs in Surah Al-'Alaq: [96]: 4.³⁶

• الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

Meaning: “*Read! Your Lord is the Majesty*”

³³ Ahmad Warson Munawwir, *Al-Munawwir Arabic-Indonesian Dictionary* (Surabaya: Pustaka Progressif, 1997).

³⁴ Baqi, *Mu'jam Al-Mufahras Li Alfaz Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*.

³⁵ Idil Hamzah Marwati, Andi, “Diskursus Term Mufrad Jamak: Analisis Semantik Dan Siyاق Lafadz Rihun Dan Al-Riyah Dalam Penafsiran,” *ISME: Journal of Islamic Studies and Multidisciplinary Research* 2(2) (2024): 57–72.

³⁶ Muslimat Aulia, *NILAI PENDIDIKAN DALAM QS. AL-ALAQ AYAT 1-5 MENURUT TAFSIR AL-MISBAH KARYA M. QURAIISH SHIHAB* (Doctoral dissertation, IAIN KENDARI, 2025).

This verse emphasizes that the pen is the primary instrument in the transmission, preservation, and development of knowledge. According to commentators, the use of the pen indicates the uniqueness of writing as a means that distinguishes humans from other creatures. Through writing, knowledge can be documented, passed down, and developed across generations, thus enabling human civilization to continue to progress. Furthermore, the word pen is also mentioned in Surah Al-Qalam, verse 1:

ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ ...

Meaning: "Nun. By the pen and what they write".

God's oath by the pen and everything written demonstrates the supreme status of literacy. In the Quranic tradition, divine oaths are only addressed to matters of great value and significance. Therefore, this verse can be understood as the Quran's recognition of the importance of written culture as a foundation for the development of knowledge, the spread of Islamic propagation, and the formation of human civilization.

Thus, the concept of the *qalam* in the Qur'an refers not only to the pen as a physical tool for writing, but also encompasses the entire system of documentation, transmission, and development of knowledge. If the *iqra'* symbolizes the activity of reading and acquiring knowledge, then the *qalam* represents the effort to preserve, disseminate, and develop that knowledge. Both are the main pillars of Qur'anic literacy that lead humanity towards '*ilm*' (knowledge) and a civilization based on divine values.

Allah SWT even swears by the pen, which shows the glory of the writing tool as a means of transmitting knowledge.³⁷ In his interpretation, Ibn Kathir explains that the phrase *alladzī 'allama bil-qalam* is an indication that Allah taught humans the ability to write after previously not knowing how to do it.³⁸ Therefore, the activity of writing is seen as part of a divine gift that allows knowledge to be passed down from one generation to the next.

Al-Raghib al-Asfahani emphasized that the *qalam* is not just a writing tool, but a symbol of human civilization.³⁹ Through writing, knowledge can be documented, developed, and transmitted sustainably. Without a written culture, the process of passing on knowledge would face significant limitations.

'*Ilm*

Besides *iqra'* and *qalam*, the most dominant term in the construction of Qur'anic literacy is '*ilm*' (الْعِلْمُ). These three terms form a complete epistemological unity in the first revelation of QS. Al-'Alaq: 1–5.

³⁷ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zhalal Al-Qur'an*, Volume 6 (Beirut: Dar al-Syuruq, 1992).

³⁸ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Azhim*, Volume 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998).

³⁹ Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani, *Mufradat Alfaz Al-Qur'an* (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1992).

Etymologically, 'ilm comes from the root word '*a-li-ma* (ع ل م) which means to know, mark, or give a sign so that something becomes clear.⁴⁰ From this root are born the words '*alamah* (sign), '*ma'lam* (marked place), and '*alam* (universe as a sign). So the basic meaning of '*ilm* is the clarity of something after it was previously vague or unknown.⁴¹

Terminologically, '*ilm* (العلم) in the Qur'an does not simply mean "knowledge" in the general sense. 'Ilm is true (*haqq*), convincing (*yaqin*), and beneficial (*naf'*) knowledge, acquired through a learning process involving reading (*iqra'*) and writing (*qalam*).

Based on the inventory results, the root word '*ilm* is mentioned around 854 times in its various forms.⁴² This high frequency indicates that knowledge is a central theme in the Qur'an. This is reinforced by QS. Al-Mujadalah [58]: 11, which emphasizes that Allah will raise the status of those who believe and are knowledgeable by several degrees.⁴³

One of the verses is in the QS. Al-'Alaq verse 5 as follows:

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

Meaning: "He taught man what he did not know".

This verse places '*ilm*' as the ultimate goal of the literacy process. Reading and writing are not ends in themselves, but rather means to acquire knowledge that can elevate the status and quality of human life. Thus, the first series of revelations demonstrates the close relationship between the *iqra'*, the *qalam*, and '*ilm* as an inseparable epistemological whole.

According to M. Quraish Shihab, '*ilm* from the perspective of the Qur'an encompasses two main dimensions. First, knowledge of Allah SWT, obtained through understanding the *qauliyyah* (revelation) and *kauniyyah* (universe) verses. Second, knowledge about nature, humans, and life, aimed at realizing the benefit and well-being of humanity. Therefore, knowledge, in the Qur'an's view, is not value-neutral, but is always bound by ethical and spiritual dimensions.

Therefore, '*ilm* from a Quranic perspective is not only measured by the breadth of information a person possesses, but also by the extent to which that knowledge leads to a deeper understanding of God, fosters moral awareness, and encourages actions that benefit others. Knowledge that does not produce wisdom, responsibility, and closeness to God loses its transformative dimension, becoming merely a collection of information lacking divine values. Thus, the concept of '*ilm* in the Quran is an integration

⁴⁰ Ibn Faris, *Maqayis Al-Lughah*, Volume 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1979).

⁴¹ MUHAMMAD AKBHAR SHODIQ, *Integrasi Interpretasi Makna Kata Khalifah: Respon Terhadap Gerakan Hizbuttahrir Di Indonesia* (Buletin Al-Turas, 2019).

⁴² Baqi, *Mu'jam Al-Mufahras Li Alfaz Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*.

⁴³ Farikha Irsyadah Muid, Abdul, Dicky Achmad Zidane, "Ilmu Pengetahuan (Tafsir Surat Al-Mujadalah, 58: 11. Al-Zumar, 39: 9 Serta Al-Taubah, 9: 122)," *Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Dan Pendidikan Islam* 13(13) (2024).

of knowledge, faith, and good deeds oriented toward the advancement of civilization and devotion to God Almighty.

In the context of literacy, 'ilm is the ultimate goal of the process of reading and writing. Al-Ghazali divided knowledge into *fardhu 'ain* and *fardhu kifayah*, both of which can only be achieved through a strong intellectual tradition, especially a culture of reading and writing.⁴⁴ Thus, literacy does not stop at technical skills, but leads to the birth of useful knowledge.

When these three terms are analyzed thematically, there appears to be a very close relationship between reading (*iqra'*), writing (*qalam*), and knowledge ('*ilm*). *Iqra'* is the starting point of the learning process, the *qalam* functions as an instrument for developing and disseminating knowledge, while '*ilm* is the expected end result. Interestingly, these three elements appear in one series of the first revelations (QS. Al-'Ala' [96]: 1–5).⁴⁵

This concept differs from the early modern definition of literacy which tended to limit literacy to the ability to read and write.⁴⁶ From the perspective of the Qur'an, literacy is not neutral, but is framed by divine values reflected in the phrase *bismi rabbik*.⁴⁷ Therefore, Qur'anic literacy is an intellectual activity oriented towards the search for truth and devotion to Allah SWT.

Literacy in Hadith: Practice and Legitimacy of the Prophet Muhammad SAW

The hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad SAW provide legitimacy as well as concrete examples of the importance of literacy. In the history of the first revelation, the Angel Gabriel ordered the Prophet to read (*iqra'*), while the Prophet answered, *mā ana bi qārī'*.⁴⁸ The history contained in Sahih al-Bukhari shows that the command to read is the initial foundation of the intellectual transformation process of the Muslim community.⁴⁹ The hadith referred to is as follows:

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ أُمِّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا، أَنَّهَا قَالَتْ: "أَوَّلُ مَا بُدِئَ بِهِ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِنَ الْوَحْيِ الرُّؤْيَا الصَّادِقَةُ فِي النَّوْمِ، فَكَانَ لَا يَرَى رُؤْيَا إِلَّا جَاءَتْهُ مِثْلَ فَلَقِ الصُّبْحِ، ثُمَّ حُبِبَ إِلَيْهِ الْخَلَاءُ، وَكَانَ يَخْلُو بِغَارِ حِرَاءٍ فَيَتَحَنَّنُ فِيهِ -وَهُوَ التَّعَبُّدُ- اللَّبَائِلُ ذَوَاتِ الْعَدَدِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَرْجِعَ إِلَى أَهْلِهِ وَيَتَزَوَّدَ لَذَلِكَ، ثُمَّ يَرْجِعُ إِلَى خَدِيجَةَ فَيَتَزَوَّدُ لِمِثْلِهَا، حَتَّى جَاءَهُ الْحَقُّ وَهُوَ فِي غَارِ حِرَاءٍ، فَجَاءَهُ الْمَلَكُ فَقَالَ: اقْرَأْ، قَالَ: مَا أَنَا بِقَارِئٍ، قَالَ: فَأَخَذَنِي فَغَطَّنِي حَتَّى بَلَغَ مِنِّي الْجُهْدُ ثُمَّ أَرْسَلَنِي فَقَالَ: اقْرَأْ، قُلْتُ: مَا أَنَا بِقَارِئٍ، فَأَخَذَنِي فَغَطَّنِي الثَّانِيَةَ حَتَّى بَلَغَ مِنِّي الْجُهْدُ ثُمَّ أَرْسَلَنِي فَقَالَ: اقْرَأْ، قُلْتُ: مَا أَنَا بِقَارِئٍ، فَأَخَذَنِي فَغَطَّنِي الثَّالِثَةَ حَتَّى بَلَغَ مِنِّي الْجُهْدُ ثُمَّ أَرْسَلَنِي فَقَالَ: اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ. خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ. اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ" (البخاري)

⁴⁴ Saliha Sebgag Fadhil, Muhammad Yusuf, "Sufi Approaches to Education: The Epistemology of Imam Al-Ghazali," *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 4(1) (2021): 91–107.

⁴⁵ Aulia, NILAI PENDIDIKAN DALAM QS. AL-ALAQ AYAT 1-5 MENURUT TAFSIR AL-MISBAH KARYA M. QURAISH SHIHAB.

⁴⁶ UNESCO, *The Plurality of Literacy and Its Implications for Policies and Programs* (Paris: UNESCO, 2004).

⁴⁷ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

⁴⁸ Al-Bukhari, *Shahih Bukhari Dan Shahih Muslim*.

⁴⁹ Kharif Zitoun Lammouchi, Kamel Eddine, *Abu Al-Hasan Al-Qabisi and His Impact on "Fath Al-Bari" by Ibn Hajar Al-Asqalani*, 11(1), 2025.

Meaning:

From 'Aisyah Ummul Mu'minin ra, she said that the beginning of the revelation received by Rasulullah SAW was through true dreams while sleeping. Every dream he saw came as clear as the light of dawn. Then he liked khalwah (solitude) and often worshiped in the Hira Cave until the Angel Gabriel came while he was there. The angel said, "iqra", then the Prophet SAW answered, "Mā ana bi qārī" (I cannot read). The angel then hugged and held him tightly until he felt exhausted, then let go and said again, "iqra'." The Prophet SAW still answered, "Mā ana bi qārī'." This incident was repeated three times. After the third hug, the Angel Gabriel read the words of Allah: "Iqra' bismi rabbika alladzi khalaq. Khalaqa al-insāna min 'alaq. Iqra' wa rabbuka al-akram" (Read in the name of your Lord who created. He has created man from a clot of blood. Read, and your Lord is the Most Glorious), and so on until the end of the hadith." (HR. al-Bukhari).⁵⁰

This hadith shows that the first revelation that came down to the Prophet Muhammad SAW began with the command to read (*iqra'*), which emphasizes the importance of literacy, the pursuit of knowledge, and intellectual development as the main foundations of Islamic civilization.

Scholars such as al-Nawawi and al-Asqalani explain that the Prophet's response was not a rejection, but rather a statement that he was illiterate. This actually confirms the miracle that the Quran was revealed to an unreading Prophet. Therefore, *iqra'* here means the command to "convey/repeat the revelation," as well as legitimizing that literacy is the initial foundation for the intellectual transformation of the Muslim community.⁵¹ Thus, the command to read *iqra'* emphasizes more on the readiness to receive knowledge than just the technical ability to read.

The literacy practices of the Prophet Muhammad SAW can be seen through at least three main aspects.

Kuttab al-Wahy Institution

The Prophet appointed a number of companions as writers of revelation, including Zaid bin Tsabit, Ali bin Abi Thalib, Ubay bin Ka'ab, and Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan.⁵² According to Al-A'zami, there were around 42 friends who had served as revelation writers.⁵³

The process of writing down revelations was carried out systematically. The Prophet dictated the revealed verses, and his companions wrote them down on various media such as date palm fronds, thin stones, or bones. The

⁵⁰ Abdullah bin Umar Ad-Dumāji, *At-Tawakkal Alallah Ta'ala* (Darul Falah, 2022).

⁵¹ Farah Nuril Izza, "Hermeneutika: Arah Baru Interpretasi Hadis (Studi Analisis Pemikiran Yusuf Al-Qardhawi Dalam Fatwa-Fatwanya)," *KOMUNIKA: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 8(2) (2014): 192–220.

⁵² M. Hadi Masruri, *Peran Sosial Perempuan Dalam Islam: Kajian Historis-Normatif Masa Nabi Dan Khulafa'Rasyidun* (EGALITA, 2012).

⁵³ Sümeyye Güven, *Qur'anic Studies in the British Orientalist Tradition: The Case of Alphonse Mingana* (Doctoral dissertation, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi, İstanbul, 2019).

written text was then read back to the Prophet for verification.⁵⁴ This system shows the existence of a very strict quality control mechanism in the Islamic literary tradition since the early days.

Constitutional Literacy through the Medina Charter

The second aspect is evident in the drafting of the Medina Charter. This document, consisting of 47 articles, became the basis for relations between various community groups in Medina.⁵⁵

W. Montgomery Watt called the Charter of Medina one of the earliest written constitutions that systematically regulated the life of a plural society.⁵⁶ The existence of this document shows that writing was used as an important instrument in building a just social and political order.

The practice of literacy was also evident in the diplomatic activities of the Prophet Muhammad . He sent letters to the great rulers of the world at that time, such as Heraclius the Roman Emperor, Kisra the Persian King, Najashi the King of Abyssinia, and Muqawqis the Governor of Egypt, as a form of official communication between countries.⁵⁷ This event shows that the *qalam* tradition had been practiced systematically by the Prophet: messages were no longer only delivered orally through messengers, but were documented in written form, given a prophetic stamp, and sent as legal diplomatic documents.

These letters serve as concrete evidence of the implementation of the Iqra' and the pen in the realm of state. *First*, through the *iqra'*, the Prophet read global political realities: he understood the map of world power and the importance of preaching through diplomacy. Second, through the pen, he utilized written culture to transcend geographical and linguistic boundaries. The text of the letter to Heraclius begins بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ، مِنْ مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى هِرَقْلَ عَظِيمِ الرُّومِ become a model of polite, clear, and documented international communication.⁵⁸

An example of the Prophet's literacy is when he sent a letter to Kisra, the ruler of Persia as contained in Sahih al-Bukhari No. 4424 and Tarikh al-Tabari as follows:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ . مِنْ مُحَمَّدٍ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ إِلَى كَرِي عَظِيمِ فَارِسَ، سَلَامٌ عَلَى مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَى، وَأَمِنْ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ، وَشَهِدَ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ . فَإِنِّي أَدْعُوكَ بِدَعَايَةِ اللَّهِ، فَإِنِّي أَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَى النَّاسِ كَافَّةً، لِيَنْذَرُ مَنْ كَانَ حَيًّا وَيُحَقِّقَ الْقَوْلَ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ . أَسْلَمَ تَسْلَمَ، فَإِنِ ابْتِغَى الْإِيمَانَ ابْتِغَى الْإِيمَانَ . عَلَيْكَ .

Meaning:

⁵⁴ Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁵⁵ Ibn Hisham, *Sirah Nabawiyah*, Volume 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1998).

⁵⁶ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

⁵⁷ Umi Sumbulah, *Islam Dan Ablah Kitab Perspektif Hadis: Dilengkapi Kajian Living Sunnah* (UIN Maliki Press, 2011).

⁵⁸ Imam Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam* (The Other Press, 2013).

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. From Muhammad Rasul Allah to Kisra, ruler of Persia. Safety for anyone who follows the instructions, believes in Allah and His Messenger, and testifies that there is no god but Allah Almighty and there is no partner with Him, and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger. I invite you to Allah's call, because indeed I am Allah's messenger to all mankind to give warning to the living and so that Allah's decree applies to the disbelievers. Enter Islam, you will surely be safe. If you refuse, then the sins of all the Magi will be your responsibility.” (HR. Al-Bukhari)

Kisra tore the letter after reading it. When the news reached the Prophet SAW, he prayed that the kingdom of Kisra would be destroyed as he tore up the letter.⁵⁹

Another example is when the Prophet also sent a letter to Muqawqis as narrated in *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* by Ibn Hisham and *Tarikh al-Tabari*, as follows:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ. مِنْ مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى الْمُقَوْقِسِ عَظِيمِ الْقَبْطِ. سَلَامٌ عَلَى مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَى أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنِّي أَدْعُوكَ بِدَعَايَةِ الْإِسْلَامِ. أَسْلِمْتَ تَسْلَمَ، يُؤْتِكَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَكَ مَرَّتَيْنِ. فَإِن تَوَلَّيْتَ فَإِن عَلَيْكَ إِثْمُ الْقَبْطِ. وَيَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

Meaning :

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. From Muhammad, the servant of Allah and His Messenger, to Muqawqis, the leader of the Qibthi nation. Safety for anyone who follows the instructions. Amma ba'du, truly I invite you to Islam. Enter Islam, you will surely be safe. Allah will give you a double reward. However, if you turn away, then you will bear the sins of the entire Qibthi people. O People of the Book, come to one sentence that is the same between us and you, namely that we do not worship other than Allah, do not associate anything with Him, and do not make any of us gods other than Allah. If they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims.

Muqawqis received the letter with respect and appreciation. Although he did not convert to Islam, he responded to the Prophet's letter by sending various gifts, including Mariah al-Qibtiyyah, who later became one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives.⁶⁰ Muqawqis's attitude shows that the Prophet's diplomatic letters not only function as a medium for preaching, but also as a means of political communication and international relations based on ethics, respect, and peaceful dialogue.

Based on examples of the Prophet's literacy based on these hadiths, Muhammad Hamidullah succeeded in identifying a number of original manuscripts of the Prophet's letters which are still stored in various museums around the world.⁶¹ These letters generally begin with *Bismillah al-Rahman al-*

⁵⁹ Ibn Hisham, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyah*, Volume 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2001).

⁶⁰ Ahmad Saifuddin Yusof Deraman, Fauzi, "Muhammad Bin Ishaq Menuruf Perspektif Nuqqad Dan Muhaddithin," *Jurnal Islam Dan Masyarakat Kontemporari* 3 (2010): 115–33.

⁶¹ Muhammad Hamidullah, *Six Originaux Des Lettres Du Prophète* (Paris: Tougui, 1985).

Rahīm and end with an official stamp that reads “*Muhammad Rasulullah*”.⁶² This shows that the culture of administration, documentation and authentication has developed since the time of the Prophet.

The fact that the Prophet, known as Ummi, established a state documentation system, had a secretary, and utilized written media in government administration shows that literacy was positioned as a social and civilization policy, not merely an individual ability.⁶³

Furthermore, the Prophet SAW said:

قَيِّدُوا الْعِلْمَ بِالْكِتَابَةِ

Meaning: *Tie knowledge with writing*.⁶⁴

This hadith became the normative basis for the development of the tradition of writing and codifying knowledge in Islamic civilization, including the codification of hadith in the second century Hijriah.⁶⁵

Characteristics of Qur'anic Literacy

Based on the thematic analysis of Qur'anic verses and the Prophet's hadith, five main characteristics of Qur'anic literacy were identified. The first is the theocentric dimension, meaning that Qur'anic literacy is fundamentally oriented toward Allah SWT, as reflected in the phrase *bismi rabbik*, which emphasizes that all processes of reading, learning, and acquiring knowledge must be grounded in divine consciousness and devotion to God.⁶⁶ Reading and writing activities are seen as part of worship that has a spiritual dimension.⁶⁷

Transformative. The goal of literacy is not only the transfer of information, but also the change of individuals and society. QS. Ar-Ra'd [13]: 11 emphasizes that social change begins with changes within humans.⁶⁸ In Islamic history, the transformation of Arab society from a simple community to a great civilization took place through the internalization of revelation and the strengthening of a culture of literacy.⁶⁹ Integrative. The Qur'an connects reading and writing activities into a single learning process.⁷⁰ Therefore, Qur'anic literacy rejects the dichotomy between reading and writing. The two

⁶² Muhammad Hamidullah, *Six Originaux Des Lettres Du Prophète de l'islam: Étude Paléographique et Historique Des Lettres Du Prophète*, 1985.

⁶³ Muhammad Hamidullah, *Majmu'ah Al-Watsaiq Al-Siyasiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1987).

⁶⁴ Al-Hakim, *Al-Mustadrak*, Volume 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990).

⁶⁵ M. Mustafa Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature* (Indiana: American Trust, 1977).

⁶⁶ Aulia, NILAI PENDIDIKAN DALAM QS. AL-ALAQ AYAT 1-5 MENURUT TAFSIR AL-MISBAH KARYA M. QURAISH SHIHAB.

⁶⁷ Burhān al-Islām Zarnuji, *Ta'lim Al-Muta'allim Tariq Al-Ta'allum* (Toko Kitab'Al-Hidayat, 1996).

⁶⁸ and Mhd Rasidin Witro, Doli, Betria Zarpina Yanti, “Mental Revolution to Increase Economic Independence and Nation's Competitiveness of Surah Ar-Ra'd Verse 11 Perspective,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 21(2) (2020): 431–48.

⁶⁹ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁷⁰ Aulia, NILAI PENDIDIKAN DALAM QS. AL-ALAQ AYAT 1-5 MENURUT TAFSIR AL-MISBAH KARYA M. QURAISH SHIHAB.

are complementary activities. Socio-Collective. Knowledge in Islam is not solely aimed at individual interests.⁷¹ Knowledge must be disseminated for the common good. This spirit has given rise to various Islamic educational institutions such as kuttabs, halaqahs, and madrasas.⁷²

Across Media. Quranic literacy is not limited to written texts. Reading social phenomena, understanding societal conditions, and interpreting the signs of the times are also part of literacy.⁷³ This characteristic is in line with the concept of multiliteracies which emphasizes the importance of the ability to understand various forms of media and communication.⁷⁴

The Relevance of Qur'anic Literacy to Contemporary Reading and Writing Culture

The findings of this study have strong relevance to the current state of global and national literacy. UNESCO data from 2023 shows that approximately 754 million adults worldwide remain illiterate, while approximately 250 million children have not yet achieved basic literacy competencies.⁷⁵ In Indonesia, the results of the 2022 PISA test show that Indonesian students' reading ability is still at a relatively low level compared to many other countries.⁷⁶

The first problem is the reduction of the meaning of literacy which is only understood as the ability to spell and read texts.⁷⁷ In fact, the concept of *iqra'* in the Qur'an demands the ability to think critically, reflectively, and responsibly. In the context of the digital era, the principle of *tabayyun* as found in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 6 is an important part of Qur'anic literacy.⁷⁸

The second problem is the low level of writing culture. People act more as consumers of information than as producers of knowledge.⁷⁹ This condition is contrary to the spirit of *qalam* which emphasizes intellectual productivity and documentation of knowledge.⁸⁰

The third problem is the development of literacy practices that are detached from moral and spiritual values. Modern definitions of literacy emphasize the ability to understand and produce information, but they do not

⁷¹ Ahmad Islahud Doraini, *Tafsir Ayat Pendidikan Dalam QS Al-'Alaq Ayat 1-5 Menurut Quraish Shibab* (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Raden Intan Lampung, 2018).

⁷² Azyumardi Azra, *Islamic Education: Tradition and Modernization* (Jakarta: Logos, 1999).

⁷³ Ibn Hisham, *Sirah Nabawiyah*, Volume 3 (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1998).

⁷⁴ The New London Group, *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* (Harvard Educational Review, 1996).

⁷⁵ UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023* (Paris: UNESCO, 2023).

⁷⁶ OECD, *PISA 2022 Results*, Vol. I (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023).

⁷⁷ Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁷⁸ Muhammad Halif Asyroful Bahana, "Penggunaan Media Sosial Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Al-Misbah Berdasarkan Qs. an-Nahl [16]: 90 Dan Qs. Al-Hujurat [49]: 6 Sebagai Etika Berkomunikasi Dan Berinteraksi Di Era Digitalisasi," *Mahad Aly Journal of Islamic Studies* 2(1) (2023): 21–32.

⁷⁹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, ed. Routledge (London, 2002).

⁸⁰ National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, *Indonesian Book Publishing Statistics 2022* (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Press, 2023).

explicitly include ethical and transcendental dimensions.⁸¹ As a result, literacy skills can be used to spread hoaxes, hate speech, and propaganda.⁸²

Based on these findings, this study proposes a Tahfidz-Literacy model consisting of three main pillars. First, cultivating *iqra'* as a movement to critically read revelation and social reality. Second, reviving the spirit of *qalam* through daily writing programs, writing training, and the digitization of scientific works. Third, making *'ilm* the primary goal by building a learning ecosystem based on mosques, schools, and communities.⁸³

In addition, the spirit of the Medina Charter can be used as a model for digital literacy that is oriented towards strengthening tolerance and diversity.⁸⁴ The Prophet's diplomatic letters also provide an example of polite, credible, and data-based public communication.⁸⁵

Ultimately, the tradition of *kuttab al-wahy* inspires the emergence of a generation of Muslims capable not only of consuming information but also of producing accurate, ethical, and beneficial knowledge. In the context of the digital age, every Muslim is required to be a "modern-day writer of revelation," that is, an individual who verifies information before disseminating it, writes based on valid data, and upholds ethical communication.⁸⁶ Thus, the *hadith qayyidū al-'ilma bil-kitābah* remains relevant as a foundation for developing a culture of literacy in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that literacy, from the perspective of the Qur'an and Hadith, cannot be reduced solely to the technical ability to read and write. Through a thematic analysis of the terms *iqra'*, *qalam*, and *'ilm*, it was found that Qur'anic literacy is built on a theocentric foundation oriented towards divine values. The phrase *bismi rabbik* in the first revelation emphasizes that reading and writing activities are part of worship directed towards acquiring beneficial knowledge. Within this framework, *iqra'* functions as the starting point for the process of seeking knowledge, the *qalam* as an instrument for developing and transmitting knowledge, while *'ilm* is the ultimate goal that leads humans to glory and an increase in status in the sight of Allah SWT. Thus, the Qur'an places literacy as the main foundation for the formation of a civilization based on knowledge and the values of monotheism.

⁸¹ UNESCO, *Global Framework of Reference on Digital Literacy Skills* (Montreal: UIS, 2018).

⁸² Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Al-Ghazali's Concept of Causality* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2010).

⁸³ JSIT Indonesia Team, *Integrated Islamic School Literacy Achievement Report 2021–2023* (Jakarta: JSIT Press, 2023).

⁸⁴ Kuntowijoyo, *Political Identity of Muslims* (Bandung: Mizan, 1997).

⁸⁵ Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Prophet's Establishing a State* (Hyderabad: Habib & Co, 1988).

⁸⁶ Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh Maqashid Syariah* (Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2007).

This concept is reinforced by the literacy practices developed by the Prophet Muhammad . Although known as an ummi (literate), the Prophet actively cultivated a culture of literacy through various institutions and policies. First, religious literacy was realized through the establishment of the *kuttab al-wahy* (religious council), tasked with recording, verifying, and maintaining the authenticity of revelation. Second, constitutional literacy was realized through the drafting of the Medina Charter, a written document governing the life of a multicultural society. Third, diplomatic literacy was realized through sending letters to world rulers as a means of political communication and *da'wah* (Islamic outreach). These historical facts demonstrate that the Prophet's ummi status did not mean rejecting literacy, but rather affirmed that the source of prophecy came from God's revelation, while the tradition of literacy continued to be systematically developed as an instrument of civilization.

This study also found that Quranic literacy has integrative, transformative, theocentric, socio-collective, and cross-media characteristics. The Quran does not separate reading and writing activities, but rather connects them in a single learning process that aims to produce knowledge that benefits society. Therefore, literacy does not stop at consuming information, but must result in the production of knowledge that can be disseminated for the common good. These characteristics make the concept of Quranic literacy remain relevant in facing the challenges of the digital era marked by a flood of information, hoaxes, disinformation, and post-truth phenomena. In this context, the principle of *iqra' bismi rabbik* serves as an ethical foundation so that literacy activities remain grounded in the values of truth and moral responsibility.

Therefore, based on the findings of this study, a reorientation of the Muslim literacy movement is needed, emphasizing not only reading and writing skills but also integrating spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions. The spirit of *iqra'* needs to be realized through strengthening a culture of critical reading of *qauliyah* and *kauniyah* verses. The spirit of *qalam* needs to be actualized through developing a culture of writing, documenting knowledge, publishing scientific works, and strengthening productive and responsible digital literacy. The spirit of *'ilm* needs to be directed towards developing a lifelong learning ecosystem involving families, schools, universities, mosques, and public spaces.

Furthermore, Islamic educational institutions need to develop learning models that integrate the traditions of memorizing the Quran, critical reading, and writing skills as a unified educational process. In the digital era, the Muslim generation is also required to become knowledge producers capable of presenting valid, constructive, and ethical content. Thus, the literacy values taught in the Quran and Hadith will not only serve as normative discourse but

also become a force for social transformation capable of producing a knowledgeable, civilized, and competitive society.

Ultimately, if the spirit of *iqra'*, *qalam*, and *'ilm* is consistently implemented in individual and social life, the Qur'an's ideal of ennobling humanity through knowledge will become increasingly evident. Literacy will no longer be understood merely as a basic skill, but rather as a path to civilization that will lead to the birth of a generation of *khairu ummah* who love to read, write productively, think critically, and are able to provide enlightenment to society and the world.

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