



The Concept of Iqra' as a Pillar of Islamic Epistemology in Tafsir al-Munir by Wahbah az-Zuhaili

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ABSTRACT

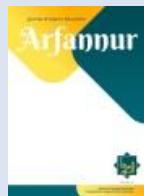
This study explores the meaning and scope of the command Iqra' as the first revealed word in the Qur'an, emphasizing its intellectual and spiritual implications. Far beyond its literal meaning "to read," Iqra' signifies a comprehensive call to seek knowledge, reflect upon creation, and engage in deep spiritual contemplation. Using a thematic qualitative approach and literature review method, this research analyzes Qur'anic verses containing the term Iqra'—particularly Surah Al-'Alaq (verses 1 and 3), Al-Isra' (verse 14), and Al-Haqqah (verse 19)—through the lens of Tafsir al-Munir. The findings reveal that Iqra' forms the foundation of Islamic epistemology, integrating intellectual pursuit with monotheistic consciousness (tawhid) and ethical responsibility. The study also examines related terms such as qara'a, talā/tilāwah, and kataba, highlighting their conceptual relationship in constructing a Qur'anic worldview. Ultimately, Iqra' emerges not merely as a command to read but as a profound symbol of the Islamic civilizational awakening rooted in knowledge, faith, and accountability before God.

Keywords: Iqra', Islamic Epistemology, Tafsir al-Munir, Tawhid, and Moral Responsibility

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji makna dan cakupan kata iqra' sebagai wahyu pertama dalam Al-Qur'an, dengan fokus pada analisis linguistik dan tafsir tematik terhadap ayat-ayat yang memuat perintah tersebut. Kata iqra', yang berarti "bacalah", tidak sekadar menunjukkan aktivitas membaca secara literal, tetapi juga mencakup dimensi intelektual, spiritual, dan reflektif. Studi ini menggunakan metode kajian pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif tematik, merujuk pada Tafsir al-Munir dan analisis semantik kata iqra' dalam Surah Al-'Alaq (ayat 1 dan 3), Al-Isra' (ayat 14), dan Al-Haqqah (ayat 19). Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa iqra' mencerminkan fondasi epistemologi Islam yang menekankan pentingnya pencarian ilmu yang berpijak pada tauhid dan tanggung jawab moral. Konsep ini diperkuat melalui hubungan kata iqra' dengan istilah semakna seperti qara'a, talā/tilāwah, dan kataba, yang bersama-sama membentuk struktur pengetahuan Qur'ani yang integratif. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa iqra' bukan sekadar seruan membaca, melainkan simbol awal peradaban Islam berbasis ilmu, iman, dan kesadaran diri di hadapan Allah.

Kata Kunci: Epistemologi Islam, Tafsir al-Munir, Tauhid, dan Tanggung jawab moral



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A. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an introduces itself with various characteristics and attributes. One of them is that it is a book whose authenticity is guaranteed by Allah, and it is a book that is always preserved (Shihab, 2020). The Qur'an is rich in a variety of diction that has similar meanings but is chosen specifically in certain contexts. According to Fazlur Rahman, the word iqra', literally means 'read', but its use in the first revelation gives a very wide range of meanings (*Major_Themes_of_the_Quran* FAZLUR RAHMAN, n.d.).

Knowledge is one of the absolute prerequisites and has a huge impact on the revival of Islam. Evidently, the first ethos commanded by the Qur'an is to read iqra', not prayer, fasting, zakat and hajj. Based on this, the scholars of Islam are those who are literate or "The region of literacy". This means that wherever it is, the teachings of Islam always teach people to be able to read. And the most important reader is by involving intellectual and spiritual. Because if we are able to apply it, then optimistically we are able to master the world and be happy in His afterlife (Hasibuan, 2018).

When the angel Gabriel delivered the Iqra' command to the Prophet Muhammad, he replied, *Mā anā bi qāri'* (I am unable to read), which reflected the condition of the Arab society at that time who were not familiar with the tradition of reading books. The word Iqra' has a broad and deep meaning. Prof. Nasaruddin Umar identifies four dimensions of this command: reading (how to read), learning (how to learn), understanding (how to understand), and contemplating (how to meditate). (Hasibuan, 2018).

Allah commands man to read (study, scrutinize, etc.) whatever He has created, both His explicit verses (qauliyah), i.e. the Qur'an, and His implicit verses, i.e. the universe (kauniyah). Reading must be in His name, meaning because of Him and expecting His help. The purpose of reading and studying the verses of Allah is to obtain results that are pleasing to Him, namely knowledge or something that is beneficial to humans.

This research seeks to answer the question: What is the meaning and scope of the command of iqra' as the first revelation in the context of the revelation of the Qur'an and the universe? Using text analysis of *tafsir AlMunir* as well as linguistic studies in the verses that contain the word iqra', this study aims to present a new understanding of the intellectual and spiritual implications of iqra', while confirming that the insight of knowledge and tadabbur is the core message of the Qur'an. The originality of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach and focus on the historical-linguistic context of the first revelation; adding to the treasury of contemporary Islamic studies.

This study aims to examine the meaning of the word Iqra' as the first revelation and its scope, such as reading nature, exploring knowledge, and contemplating the greatness of Allah. This study also examines the use of the command word iqra' in the Qur'an, especially in Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1 and 3, Al-Isra verse 14, and Al-Haqqah verse 19 by referring to *Tafsir Al-Munir* in order to understand the significance of the selection of the word iqra' in the context of the first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad.

B. METHOD

This research uses the literature study method, which is a data collection technique carried out through searching for written sources, reading, recording, and managing relevant material. This research uses a thematic qualitative approach (maudhu'i) with a literature study method. The strength of this research lies in the ability to analyze data obtained from various references that contain theories to be understood and interpreted in depth and thoroughly (Saadah & Arif, 2022). The purpose of this research is to enrich scientific studies by exploring the meaning of the word *amr* in *kalam insya'* in Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1-3, Al-Haqqah verse 19, and Al-Isra verse 14.

The data in this study were obtained from various relevant sources, both in the form of books and scientific articles available in online journals through Google Scholar, which are related to the research topic. After the data is collected, the next step is to analyze the results in order to obtain the right conclusion.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Linguistic and Semantic Meaning of *Iqra'*

a. Lexical Meaning and Relational Semantics of *Iqra'*

The word *iqra'* is lexically rooted from the word *qara'a* (قرأ), whose primordial meaning is "to gather" (Ar-Razi, 1999). From this basic meaning, the terminological meaning that we know as "reading" developed, because reading activity is essentially the process of gathering letters, words, and meanings into a coherent understanding, both spoken and mentally processed (Al Deeky, M. 2016). The meaning of *iqra'* cannot be understood in isolation. In the Qur'anic semantic approach popularized by Toshihiko Izutsu, a word will reveal its deepest meaning when analyzed in its relational network with other key words around it (Izutsu, 2002).

The command to *iqra'* in Surah Al-'Alaq does not stand alone, but is conceptually bound to the phrase *bismi rabbikalladzi khalaq* (in the name of your Lord who created). This relationship directly emphasizes that intellectual activity in Islam is never value-free; it must always be based on and aimed at divine consciousness (tawhid). The command of *iqra'* is also intertwined with the word *'allama* (teaching) and *al-qalam* (pen). This intertwining of meaning implies that "reading" is the main gate to knowledge taught by Allah through various means, including the tradition of writing symbolized by the pen (Yusuf, 2021). In the context of Islamic education, this semantic network gives birth to a vision that education should be a holistic ecosystem: reading activity (*iqra'*) not only includes the text of revelation, but also "reading" the universe as creation (context *khalaq*), all of which are manifestations of God's teaching (*'allama*) and must be documented and developed through a culture of literacy (*al-qalam*).

2. Epistemological Implications of *Iqra'* in *Tafsir al-Munir* and the Context of Islamic Education

Wahbah az-Zuhaili in *Tafsir al-Munir* expands the horizon of the meaning of *iqra'* beyond the mere activity of reading texts. He emphasizes that this command is the foundation for an integrative Islamic epistemology. According to Az-Zuhaili (2009), the object of this "reading" command includes everything that can be reached by human

understanding, both qauliyah verses (written revelation in the Qur'an) and kauniyah verses (phenomena of the universe and social reality).

The command to read here is a call for observation, analysis, reflection (tadabbur), and spiritual appreciation of all His creations.

b. Integrative

Curriculum Az-Zuhaili's vision rejects the dichotomy between religious and general sciences. Studying biology, physics, sociology, and psychology is part of the implementation of the iqra' command to the verses of kauniyah. Thus, the Islamic education curriculum must be designed in an integrative-holistic manner, where each discipline is seen as a way to recognize the majesty of the Creator (Fauzi & Hidayat, 2023).

c. Active and Critical Pedagogy

The iqra' command demands active, not passive, learners. Educators are no longer the only source of knowledge, but rather facilitators who encourage learners to "read" various sources: text, data, nature, and experience. Research-based learning methods, field observations, and problem solving become very relevant to hone intellectual abilities as well as spiritual sensitivity.

d. The Purpose of Tawhid-Based Education

The culmination of Az-Zuhaili's "reading" process is the strengthening of tawhid. Knowledge gained through the process of iqra' should not stop at mastering concepts, but must bring the reader to the awareness of the existence and greatness of Allah. Thus, the ultimate goal of Islamic education is not to produce spiritually dry technocrats, but to give birth to ulul albab people who are able to think and think in one breath.

Thus, the concept of iqra' in Wahbah az-Zuhaili's view is not just a literacy command, but an epistemological pillar that outlines that knowledge in Islam must be obtained through a broad reading process (textual and contextual) and leads to the worship of Allah Swt.

3. Thematic Analysis of Iqra' Verses

a. Surah Al-Alaq verse 1 and 3 (*AlQuran Kemenag Edisi Penyempurnaan-2019, n.d.*)

Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1 and 3 are the first revelations revealed to Prophet Muhammad SAW, marking the beginning of prophethood and Islamic civilization. The verse reads;

إِقْرَا بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝ إِقْرَا وَرِبِّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ۝

Meaning: Read, 'O Prophet,' in the Name of your Loard who created", created humans from a clinging clot.

According to Tafsir al-Munir, the iqra' command does not only refer to the activity of reading texts, but also includes observation, reflection, and the search for knowledge based on faith (Az-Zuhaili, 2009). The phrase "bismi rabbika"

indicates that the search for knowledge must begin with the awareness of tawhid. The repetition of *iqra'* in verse 3 implies the affirmation of the importance of knowledge and its connection to Allah's attribute as Al-Akram (Most Gracious), the source of all knowledge.

Semantic analysis explains that *iqra'* includes both literal and metaphorical interpretations, and is intricately linked to the notion of 'allama (teaching), which encapsulates the communicative exchange of knowledge between the Divine and humanity. Muhammadans articulated that the recitation of divine revelation was not merely a technical endeavor, but rather a spiritual one, as Gabriel transmitted it directly until the Prophet acquired the capacity to memorize it. As a result, *iqra'* emerged as the basic symbol of scientific civilization in Islam, characterized by symbiotic epistemological and theological dimensions. Thus, the concept of *iqra'* not only emphasizes the importance of reading, but also invites people to understand and apply science in a broader spiritual and moral context (H. Mansyur, 2023).

b. Surah Al-Isra' verse 14 (AlQuran Kemenag Edisi Penyempurnaan-2019, n.d.)

The word *iqra'* in the Qur'an does not always mean the command to read the text in the literary sense, but it also implies the command to understand, analyze, and review oneself. One important context for the use of the word *iqra'* is in Surah Al-Isra' verse 14, which reads:

إِقْرُأْ كِتَبَكَ كُفَيْ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حِسْبَنَا

Meaning: 'And it will be said,' "Read your record. You 'alone' are sufficient this Day to take account of yourself."

This verse explains the contextual framework of *iqra'* within an eschatological paradigm, specifically on the day of natural disasters, when each individual is mandated to read their personal ledger of charity as a manifestation of a just and transparent *hishab*. *iqra'* *kitābaka*'s injunction goes beyond mere symbolism; it serves as a reaffirmation of individual accountability for all acts of charity, without external mediation. The record is comprehensive, covering charitable contributions both substantial and modest (Ariga et al., 2024).

Hamka emphasized the aspect of moral introspection, stating that the record of charity does not only contain outward actions, but also inner intentions and trajectories. Awareness of *hisab* should encourage an honest and responsible ethic of life since in the world (Abdullah & Adnan, 2012).

Quraish Shihab (2002) adds that this verse reflects an objective *hisab* system, in which humans are witnesses to themselves. The command of *iqra'* here is a symbol of moral and spiritual awareness, which should be built since worldly life. Thus, this verse expands the meaning of *iqra'* from merely reading texts to an invitation for reflection, accountability, and self-awareness within an ethical and spiritual framework.

c. Surah Al-Haqqah verse 19 (AlQuran Kemenag Edisi Penyempurnaan-2019, n.d.)

فَآمَّا مَنْ أُوْتَ كِتَبَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَيَقُولُ هَآؤُمْ افْرَءُوا كِتْبِيَّةَ

Meaning: "As for those given their records in their right hand, they will cry 'happily', Here 'everyone'! Read my record!"

Surah Al-Haqqah verse 19 describes the happiness of a believer who receives a book of records of deeds from his right hand on the Day of Judgment. The phrase "Ha'umu iqra'ū kitābiyah" indicates an expression of pride and gratitude for the receipt of good deeds, as well as the spirit to share spiritual happiness with others. In Tafsir al-Munir, Wahbah az-Zuhaili explains that the book given from the right direction symbolizes the success and justice of hadeeth, where openness to the record of charity becomes authentic evidence of one's life. Hamka in Tafsir Al-Azhar emphasizes that this verse reflects public gratitude and recognition of divine help. Quraish Shihab in Tafsir al-Mishbah adds that the use of the word iqra' indicates openness and confidence in the results of a meaningful life.

The meaning of iqra' in this verse does not stand alone, but is part of a conceptual series that begins with Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1 and 3. The verse is the first revelation that marks the beginning of prophethood, emphasizing the importance of reading as a symbol of the search for knowledge based on tawhid. Mufasirs such as az-Zuhaili, Hamka, and Quraish Shihab state that iqra' here goes beyond literacy activities to include reflection and understanding of the universe as the verses of Allah.

Surah Al-Isra' verse 14 expands the meaning of iqra' into an eschatological dimension, where humans are commanded to read their own book of deeds on the Day of Judgment. This indicates a form of moral and spiritual accountability that is fair, objective, and incontrovertible, as Wahbah az-Zuhaili, Hamka, and Quraish Shihab assert.

The theme of iqra' in the Qur'an forms a unified whole: starting from the call to seek knowledge derived from revelation (Al-'Alaq), realizing personal responsibility for charity (Al-Isra'), and ending in a form of spiritual happiness because of the success of living life with knowledge and faith (Al-Haqqah). Iqra' is not just a command to read, but the foundation of Islamic epistemology that integrates knowledge, faith, introspection, and accountability before Allah Ta'ala.

4. Comparison of Similar Words in the Context of the Qur'an: Qara'a, Talā, Kataba, and Iqra'

a. **Qara'a (قرأ) Its Basic Meaning and Implications**

The verb qara'a is the root of the word iqra' which was first revealed to Prophet Muhammad through the revelation of QS. Al-'Alaq:1. Lexically, qara'a means to read, recite, or voice. However, in the context of pre-Islamic Arabia, reading was not always related to written texts. Reading could also mean oral transmission, including poetry, texts, and ancestral stories. In Arab society, the ability to memorize and convey orally was

considered a high form of cultural intelligence (Izutsu, 2002).

Iqra' in the form of *fi'il Amr* (command word) does not only mean technical reading, but contains the meaning of the command to contemplate, understand, and spread knowledge. Therefore, this command can be understood as a symbol of the beginning of the era of science in Islam (Rahman, 1984). *Qara'a* paved the way for cognitive and contemplative processes in the Islamic scientific tradition.

b. *Talā* (تلاء) and *Tilāwah* (تلاوة): Spiritual Recitation

The word *talā* means to read sequentially and consistently, and is often used in the context of recitation of revelation. In the *Qur'ān*, this word emphasizes regularity, appreciation, and depth of meaning in recitation. Surah Al-Baqarah verse 121 states that the true believers are those who "yatlūnahu ḥaqqa tilāwatihi" (read with true *tilawah*), which indicates the spiritual dimension of recitation (Abdel Haleem, 2004).

Tilāwah, the masdar form of *talā*, is not just a phonetic or technical activity, but a ritual of worship that touches the spiritual dimension. *Tilāwah* demands *tartīl* (QS. Al-Muzzammil: 4), i.e. slow, thoughtful, and rhythmic recitation. In the scholarly tradition, *tilāwah* contains three aspects: *al-lafz* (memorization), *al-fahm* (understanding), and *al-'amal* (practice) (Al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, juz 1).

c. *Kataba* (كتب): Documentation and the Permanence of Revelation

Unlike the previous two words, *kataba* literally means to write or record. This word has great historical significance in Islam, as it is part of the process of textual preservation of revelation. QS. Al-Baqarah:282, which is the longest verse in the *Qur'an*, commands the writing down of debts and credits, showing the importance of documentation in legal and social aspects.

Companions of the Prophet such as Zayd ibn Thābit played an important role in the process of writing down the *Qur'ān*, from the oral version to the *Mushaf*. In Islam, the word "*kataba*" became an important symbol representing the responsibility of the ummah towards the truth of revelation as well as the preservation of law and History ('Ulya & Saidah, 2017).

5. Conceptual Relation: *Iqra'* as a Symbol of Transformation

These four words have a strong common thread in the context of Islamic epistemology. *Iqra'* is the most inclusive concept among the three, as it integrates the activities of reading (*qara'a*), spiritual appreciation (*tilāwah*), and textual preservation (*kataba*).

Iqra' is defined in the Islamic epistemological framework as not only the beginning of the learning process, but also as a representation of spiritual and intellectual enlightenment. The word has a proactive meaning, which implies seeking information, considering its meaning, and disseminating it for the common good. Hence, *iqra'* stands as a call for every Muslim to participate in lifelong learning-or lifelong learning-that is based on revelation.

The command of *iqra'*, according to Al-Attas (1980), reflects the principle of *tawhid* in Islamic epistemology, because reading is not just reading letters, but reading the signs of God in His creation (*ayat kauniyah*). Thus, *iqra'* is a bridge between text and



context, between revelation and the real world.

Penafsiran Wahbah az-Zuhaili tentang "Iqra'" dalam Al-Qur'an (QS. Al-'Alaq:1, 3; Al-Isrā':14; Al-Hāqqah:19)

a. The meaning of Iqra' in QS. Al-'Alaq:1 and 3

According to Wahbah az-Zuhaili in *Tafsir al-Munīr*, the first verse revealed to Prophet Muhammad SAW, "Iqra' bismi rabbika allatī khalaq", is a great command to start a civilization revolution based on knowledge. Reading, understanding, and contemplating God's creation, both those expressed in revelation (al-āyāt al-qawliyyah) and those implied in the universe (al-āyāt al-kauniyyah), according to Az-Zuhaili (Az-Zuhaili, 2014, *Tafsir al-Munīr*, Juz 30).

This verse indicates that Islam is a religion of both revelation and reason. The reading that is commanded is not merely phonetic literacy, but also tafaqquh (deepening of meaning). In fact, in the 3rd verse of the same surah, "Iqra' wa rabbukal-akram", Az-Zuhaili emphasizes the nature of al-Akram (the Most Gracious) as a form of Allah's respect for humans with knowledge. Allah honors humans not because of material things, but because of their intellectual and spiritual capacities that are honed through the learning process.

b. The Concept of Qalam and Ta'līm in Early Revelation

use and the metaphorical context), the process of comprehension (at an intellectual level), engagement in contemplation (from a spiritual perspective), and the application of knowledge (within a moral framework). This educational methodology epitomizes what certain scholars refer to as prophetic education, which links the faithful (Nasr, 2002).

This perspective is in line with the assertion that scientific inquiry in the Islamic tradition must always rest on the principles of tawhid (awareness of the Unity of God) and ethical accountability. In addition, Wahbah az-Zuhaili explains the terms Qalam (pen) and Ta'līm (teaching) as articulated in Surah Al-'Alaq as an extension of the ideas encapsulated in Iqra'. These three important terms-Iqra', Qalam, and Ta'līm-are a comprehensive and systematic framework for Islamic education.

- 1) Iqra' as a basic principle: This directive serves as the beginning of the pursuit of knowledge. In an educational setting, it implies that any learning endeavor should begin with the right intention and awareness of the importance of scientific inquiry.
- 2) Qalam as a tool: The pen symbolizes the recording and securing of knowledge. It underscores the important role of literacy and documentation in Islamic education, thereby facilitating the transfer of knowledge across generations.
- 3) Ta'līm as a pedagogical approach: Ta'līm (teaching) signifies that knowledge in Islam is considered a divine gift. It positions the educator as a mediator who disseminates knowledge sourced from God. As a result, Islamic education emphasizes not only the transmission of information, but also the cultivation of character and spirituality.

Thus it can be understood that Iqra' is a model of education that goes beyond words; it is a model that combines the cognitive, spiritual, and ethical. This concept becomes the foundation for building a knowledge-centered civilization, where every education is aimed at achieving well-being both in this world and in the hereafter. Therefore, having a deep understanding of these concepts is essential to becoming a kamil person who is balanced in knowledge and spirituality (Haq & Soleh, n.d.).

c. ***Iqra'* in QS. Al-*Isrā'*:14: Personal Accountability**

This verse reads: "*Iqra' kitābaka, kafā binafsika alyawma 'alaika ḥasīban.*" Wahbah az-Zuhaili interpreted that on the Day of Judgment, every human being will be ordered to read the "kitāb" (record of his deeds), which has been written by angels during his life in the world. The command "*iqra'*" in this verse according to Az-Zuhaili has the meaning of an evaluative command, not just technical. He mentions that the reading of this book is a very personal form of *hisāb* (accounting of deeds). No one can help or defend other than oneself. Therefore, according to him, *iqra'* in this verse is the strongest form of individual moral responsibility, and reinforces the importance of learning and awareness of the consequences of deeds (Az-Zuhaili, 2014).

d. **The meaning of *Iqra'* in QS. Al-*Hāqqah*:19: Happy Expression of the Record of Charity**

Allah says in QS. Al-*Hāqqah*:19: "Fa amma man ūtiya kitābahu bi yamīnihī fa yaqūlu hā'umuqra'u kitābiyah." According to Az-Zuhaili, this verse describes the believer's expression of joy and pride when receiving the record of his deeds in the right hand. The phrase "ha'umuqra'u kitābiyah" is an open call: "Read this record of mine!"

Az-Zuhaili emphasizes that this sentence indicates that good deeds that are recorded will be a source of pride, and that this can happen because of knowledge, awareness, and appreciation of revelation. He also points out that the reading of this book in the future is the fruit of a process of education and piety rooted in the commandment of *iqra'* in the world.

D. CONCLUSION

Wahbah az-Zuhaili consistently interprets the word *iqra'* in the Qur'an as a concept that is multidimensional and integral in Islamic teachings. According to him, *iqra'* does not only refer to technical reading activities, but includes cognitive and spiritual dimensions that demand understanding, contemplation, and practice of revelation and the reality of life. This concept also represents the foundation of Islamic epistemology, where knowledge comes from God, is conveyed through revelation, written with *qalam* (pen), and taught through the process of *ta'līm* (teaching).

The word *iqra'* also has deep moral implications, as it symbolizes the accountability of charity in the afterlife, where each individual is asked to read his or her own record of deeds. Furthermore, for those who are knowledgeable and practice their knowledge, *iqra'* is the door to happiness and glory, as their record of deeds becomes a source of pride before Allah. Thus, *iqra'* is an eternal call for Muslims to make knowledge, charity and morals a comprehensive way of life.

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