

# The Concept of Insan Kamil Literacy: An Ontological Hermeneutic Approach

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept of *insān kāmil* in Islam through the development of the idea of *insān kāmil* literacy based on the interpretation of Qur'anic literacy verses using an ontological hermeneutical tafsir approach. Departing from the view that *insān kāmil* is not merely a normative–theological ideal but a representation of human existential perfection as a manifestation of the Divine image, this study positions literacy as a holistic human capacity to read revelation, the self, and reality in an integrated manner. The ontological hermeneutical approach is employed to uncover the meaning of revelation as a lived experience of being within human consciousness, thereby enabling a dynamic dialogue between the Qur'anic text, reason, and the existence of the interpreting subject. The findings indicate that literacy constitutes both an epistemological and ontological prerequisite for the realization of *insān kāmil*, since through the processes of *ta'lim/tadrīs*, *taktubu*, *tablīgh*, *tabayyūn*, *tafakkur*, *tadhakkur*, and *tadabbur*, human beings may attain the level of wisdom and justice that integrates knowledge, moral character, and civilizational responsibility. Accordingly, the concept of *insān kāmil* is understood as a dynamic horizon of meaning that guides human beings toward spiritual and ethical perfection and toward fulfilling their role as God's vicegerents on earth.

**Keywords:** Literacy; literacy verses; *Insān Kāmil* Literacy; Ontological Hermeneutical Interpretation.

## INTRODUCTION

The development of modern literacy theory to date has remained largely dominated by Western paradigms that emphasize the ability to access, evaluate, and utilize information effectively through technical and cognitive approaches.<sup>1</sup> Scholars such as Lankshear and Knobel,<sup>2</sup> as well as UNESCO,<sup>3</sup> conceptualize literacy as a social practice and a set of basic skills required for participation in modern society; however, this understanding largely operates within a secular, pragmatic, and utilitarian epistemological framework. Although literacy is expected to develop through processes aimed at achieving important and specific goals related to work and everyday activities, often involving complex systems, such frameworks tend to limit literacy to instrumental functionality rather than engaging its deeper ontological and ethical

<sup>1</sup> ACRL, Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Association of College & Research Libraries., 2016); Thomas P. Mackey & Jacobson, Trudi E., *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners*. (American Library Association (ALA)., 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Colin & Knobel Lankshear Michele, *New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Social Learning*. (Open University Press/McGraw-Hill., 2011).

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO., *Literacy for Life: Education for All Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO Publishing, 2006).

dimensions.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the limitations of this paradigm have been critically examined by literacy scholars such as Street<sup>5</sup>, who characterizes Western literacy as an autonomous model, namely a conception of literacy that is regarded as neutral, value-free, and detached from the moral and spiritual dimensions of human life. In contrast, within the Islamic intellectual tradition, literacy is understood as an epistemological–spiritual activity that is inseparable from the formation of human character. The Qur’anic command “Iqra’” (Qur’an 96:1–5), the exhortation to tadabbur (Qur’an 47:24), tafakkur (Qur’an 3:191), and the use of reason (Qur’an 29:43) collectively indicate that literacy in Islam encompasses contemplative, ethical, and transformational dimensions. The concepts of ‘ilm, hikmah, and adab, as articulated by al-Attas,<sup>6</sup> and Nasr<sup>7</sup> further reinforce the view that literacy is not merely a technical skill but a means of self-perfection. Within the traditions of Islamic mysticism and philosophy, particularly through the concept of insān kāmil as developed by Ibn ‘Arabī,<sup>8</sup> and al-Jili<sup>9</sup>, human beings are positioned as epistemic–spiritual entities entrusted with the task of actualizing their potential for perfection through knowledge and ontological awareness.

Nevertheless, no existing literacy studies have systematically integrated Islamic literacy epistemology, Qur’anic literacy verses, and the concept of insān kāmil within the methodological framework of ontological hermeneutics, as theorized by Heidegger,<sup>10</sup> and Gadamer.<sup>11</sup> The existing literature remains fragmented: studies on Islamic literacy tend to focus primarily on cognitive and pedagogical aspects; thematic Qur’anic exegesis often remains confined to literal and linguistic meanings; while studies on insān kāmil are predominantly metaphysical in nature. As a result, these approaches have yet to produce a comprehensive model of literacy. This scholarly gap thus provides a logical foundation for the development of an alternative literacy concept that is holistic and revelation-based.

On the basis of this gap, the scientific novelty of this article lies in the formulation of the concept of Insān Kāmil Literacy (IKL), namely a Qur’anic literacy paradigm that integrates three interrelated dimensions simultaneously: epistemological (knowledge and rationality), ethical (adab and moral responsibility), and spiritual (hikmah and self-perfection). Novelty is also evident in the methodological approach employed, namely Ontological Hermeneutical Tafsir, which interprets Qur’anic literacy verses not merely as cognitive injunctions but as existential calls that invite human beings to disclose reality and actualize their perfection as insān kāmil.

Fundamentally, Islamic thought affirms the existence of human beings as the best of creation, created by God upon the face of the earth, by virtue of their attainment of both outward and inward perfection–physical as well as spiritual-intellectual. Human beings constitute the complete manifestation of the Divine image, reflecting the names and attributes of God in harmonious balance, while the perfection of their knowledge is marked by the attainment of the highest level of consciousness, namely existential

<sup>4</sup> Kimmo Tuominen, Reijo Savolainen, and Sanna Talja, ‘Information Literacy as a Sociotechnical Practice’, *The Library Quarterly*, 75.3 (2005), pp. 329–45, doi:10.1086/497311.

<sup>5</sup> Brian V. Street, *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography, and Education* (Longman, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (ABIM, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford University Press., 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyyah* (Dar al-Sadir, 1980).

<sup>9</sup> ‘Abd al-Karim ibn Ibrahim. Al-Jili, *Al-Insān al-Kāmil Fī Ma‘Rifat al-Awākhir Wa al-Awā’Il*. (Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah., 1980).

<sup>10</sup> M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*. (Harper & Row., 1962).

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. (Seabury Press., 1975).

recognition of God (ma'rifat).<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the conception of insān kāmil inherently requires literacy of the self (jati diri insān kāmil), because human perfection in the Islamic perspective is not merely normative–theological but also reflective–existential, that is, a form of human awareness of one's own reality as a creature of God, a vicegerent, and a moral subject. Without self-literacy that encompasses the ability to comprehend the ontological relationship between the self, revelation, and the cosmos, the concept of insān kāmil risks being reduced to an abstract ideal detached from lived human experience. Self-literacy enables human beings to read themselves as part of God's signs (āyāt anfusiyyah), through which the processes of tafakkur upon reality and tadhakkur of revelation are transformed into ma'rifat, namely an existential awareness that affirms the unity of knowledge, moral character, and civilizational responsibility. Accordingly, insān kāmil literacy is not merely supplementary but constitutes an epistemological and ontological prerequisite for the realization of insān kāmil as a living, conscious, and civilizational responsible human being.

Thus, this study fills a gap in the existing literature while offering a new literacy model that is integrative, transcendental, and relevant to contemporary Islamic education. The research questions addressed are as follows: how can Qur'anic literacy verses be interpreted ontologically in order to formulate a Qur'anic literacy concept oriented toward human perfection? How can the concept of insān kāmil serve as an anthropological foundation for literacy interpretation? And how can Insān Kāmil Literacy (IKL) be constructed as both a critique of and an alternative to the technocratic orientation of Western literacy?

Conceptually, this article aims to: (1) critique the Western literacy paradigm from the perspective of Islamic epistemology; (2) explore the meaning of Qur'anic literacy through an ontological hermeneutical approach; (3) integrate the concept of insān kāmil as an anthropological–literacy foundation; and (4) formulate a conceptual model of Insān Kāmil Literacy (IKL) as a holistic and transcendental literacy paradigm. In doing so, this article offers a theoretical construction that not only expands the scope of literacy studies but also provides an epistemological contribution to the development of knowledge within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

## Discussion

### Understanding Qur'anic Literacy Verses

The concept of literacy in the Qur'an is fundamentally rooted in the command iqra' (read), which constitutes both an epistemological and moral imperative. God initiated revelation not with an explicit command to believe or to formally embrace Islam, but rather with the injunction iqra' to read, comprehend, and reason through God's creation as articulated in divine discourse (Qur'an 96:1–5). Through this inaugural revelation, God instructs all human beings, not only the Prophet Muhammad, regarding the centrality of reason and intellect as prerequisites to faith. In this sense, faith should not be instilled in the human heart without first being preceded by reflection and rational engagement. Moreover, reflection itself cannot attain completeness, nor reach its essential meaning, without undergoing a process of literacy. Literacy thus emerges as the foundational medium through which thinking becomes meaningful, systematic, and oriented toward truth.

Indirectly, this concept provides guidance for a Qur'an-based model of information literacy. The sacrality of these verses is further reinforced when they are situated alongside numerous Prophetic traditions that command the pursuit of knowledge. The Prophet stated that seeking knowledge is an obligation for every

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<sup>12</sup> Sayyidil Yaumi, 'Konsep Manusia Sempurna: Studi Pemikiran Abdul Karim Al-Jili', *Jurnal Moderasi*, 3.1 (2023), pp. 94–117 (p. 97), doi:10.14421/jm.2023.31.06.

Muslim, both male and female.<sup>13</sup> The Prophet stated that whoever embarks upon a path in the pursuit of knowledge, God will facilitate for him a path leading to Paradise.<sup>14</sup>

The pursuit of knowledge constitutes an act of worship through which human beings walk the Divine path, experience faith authentically, and attain its deeper meaning, without any distinction between men and women.<sup>15</sup> Seeking knowledge is a process of self-actualization aimed at fulfilling God's command and realizing the innate disposition (fiṭrah) of human beings as creatures endowed with the capacity to think and to read. The first revealed verse (iqra') signifies that human beings are naturally inclined toward learning and the pursuit of knowledge, in harmony with their role as vicegerents (khulafā') on earth and their responsibility to lead a meaningful life.<sup>16</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah further emphasizes:<sup>17</sup>

فالعلم إمام والعمل تابعه، والعمل لا ينفع إلا إذا كان مؤسساً على العلم، والعلم هو النور الذي يُبصر به الإنسان طريق الهدى، ومن سلك طريق العلم سلك طريق الجنة

This means that knowledge serves as the leader, while action follows it; actions are of no value unless they are grounded in knowledge. Knowledge is a light by which one perceives the path of guidance. Whoever embarks upon the path of knowledge has indeed taken the path leading to Paradise.

The verse iqra' thus functions as the foundational starting point for the formulation of insān kāmil, serving as the principal reference for Qur'anic literacy. At this stage, human beings are invited to recognize and comprehend both text and reality in an epistemic sense. As noted by Muḥammad 'Abduh<sup>18</sup>, the verse iqra' symbolizes the awakening of reason and knowledge in Islam. This verse affirms the centrality of learning as a conscious means of acquiring knowledge that transforms behavior and personal character.<sup>19</sup> 'Abduh interprets iqra' as a call to understand, investigate, and actively employ reason.

The command iqra' is not complete without being complemented by other coherent Qur'anic injunctions, since within the cognitive domain human beings are inherently prone to forgetfulness. This condition necessitates a form of recording that can assist in recalling information, experiences, and knowledge through structured systems of preservation, thereby safeguarding knowledge and information over time. In other words, acquired knowledge requires deliberate treatment and management so that it is not lost in the future and may be transmitted and utilized by subsequent generations.<sup>20</sup>

Although the Qur'an does not explicitly articulate a direct command to record knowledge, an ontological hermeneutical reading of Qur'an 2:283 reveals implicit meanings concerning the importance of recording and preserving knowledge. In the Qur'an, Allah SWT states in al-Baqarah verse 283:

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ وَلَمْ تَجِدُوا كَاتِبًا فَرِهٌ مَّقْبُوضَةٌ فَإِنْ أَمِنَ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا فَلْيُؤَدِّ الَّذِي أُؤْتِمِنُ أَمْنَهُ وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ وَلَا تَكُونُوا الشَّاهِدَةَ ۗ وَمَنْ يَكْتُمْهَا فَإِنَّهُ آتَمٌ قَلْبُهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ

This means: If you are on a journey and do not find a scribe, then a pledge in hand shall suffice. But if one of you entrusts another, then let the one who is entrusted fulfill his trust and fear God, his Lord. And do

<sup>13</sup> Abu 'Abdillah Muhammad ibn Yazīd Ibn Mājah, Sunan Ibnu Majah (Dar al-Fikr., 2009), p. 224.

<sup>14</sup> Y. ibn S Al-Nawawī, Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (Vol. 16). (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Zulham Effendi, 'Pendidikan Wanita Dalam Filsafat Pendidikan Islam', WARAQAT : Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman, 5.1 (2020), pp. 17–17 (p. 64), doi:10.51590/waraqat.v5i1.95.

<sup>16</sup> Rima Melati, Siti Afifah, and Martoyo, 'Hakikat Mencari Ilmu, Keutamaan Ilmu Dan Hukum Mencari Ilmu', Pengertian: Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia (PJPI), 2.2 (2024), pp. 205–2012 (p. 208), doi:10.61930/pjpi.v2i2.630.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Miftāḥ Dār Al-Sa'ādah Wa Manshūr Wilāyat al-'Ilm Wa al-irādah : Vol. Vol. 1 (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah., 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad 'Abduh, Tafsīr Al-Manār, Juz 30 (al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah, 1974).

<sup>19</sup> Imam Fayyadil Ghufron and Baitiyah Baitiyah, 'Hakikat Belajar Dalam Perspektif Anwar Muhammad Al-Syarqawi', Jurnal Dimensi Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran, 11 (2023), pp. 127–31 (p. 127), doi:10.24269/dpp.v11i1.8208.

<sup>20</sup> Irsyad Hanif Hutagalung, Tamara A Salim, and Nordiana Mohd Nordin, 'Knowledge Preservation Management in University Libraries', Journal of Information and Knowledge Management (JIKM), 1 (2022), pp. 145–54 (p. 145).

not conceal testimony, for whoever conceals it—his heart is indeed sinful. And God is All-Knowing of what you do.

The term most relevant to the command to write or record in the aforementioned verse is implicitly contained in the phrase *walam tajidū kātiban* (“and you do not find a scribe”). The word *kātib* in this context denotes a person or professional entrusted with the task of recording a transaction. Indirectly, this implies the necessity of such a role in documenting what is intended, ongoing, or has already been carried out, transacted, or agreed upon. When understood more broadly, this opens the meaning that anything beneficial to human life warrants documentation or recording. Regarding this command, al-*Ṣābūnī* explains that recording transactions and significant activities constitutes an expression of justice within God’s law, as it serves to strengthen testimony and evidence, thereby preventing forgetfulness and eliminating doubt.<sup>21</sup>

Ontologically, the lessons and injunctions concerning writing and recording are highly relevant and inherently applicable to the preservation of knowledge and learning. This understanding is further reinforced by the interpretation of Qur’an 68:1 (al-Qalam), in which God swears by the pen and by what is written by angels and human beings in the form of goodness, benefit, and knowledge.<sup>22</sup> This indicates that recording, as a form of knowledge documentation, archiving, and information preservation, has long been an integral human practice essential to the continuity of life and the advancement of civilization. In contemporary contexts, this practice has evolved significantly, transitioning from manual to digital forms. It has thus become a recognized and essential component of information organization and knowledge management. Such organization is carried out through the processes of storing, safeguarding, and managing information, as well as ensuring the ease of information retrieval (information storage and retrieval). Its primary objective is to preserve organizational memory and to support innovation.<sup>23</sup>

The use of Qur’anic language that does not explicitly indicate a specific contextual command corresponds, in Arabic linguistic theory, to what is known as *uslūb al-amr ghayr al-ṣarīḥ* (أسلوب الأمر غير الصريح), namely an indirect imperative form.<sup>24</sup> This stylistic mode of indirect command in the Qur’an serves, among other purposes, to test and cultivate the moral sensitivity of its readers.<sup>25</sup> It is also categorized as a form of *dalālat al-iltizām*, which denotes an obligation inferred through the logical implications of the text, or as *al-amr bi-ghayr ṣīghat al-amr*, that is, a command conveyed without employing the explicit imperative verb (*fi’l al-amr*) yet nonetheless carrying a binding meaning. In this sense, such a mode represents a subtle divine injunction that encourages believers to become reflective, dynamic individuals who respond to the demands and challenges of their time. In relation to the *iqra’* verse, this indicates that the second stage of Qur’anic literacy lies in the imperative to write, record, document, and archive information.

The subsequent stage following the processes of storing, recording, and documenting knowledge is the act of communicating it (*tablīgh*). God explicitly commands this obligation in several Qur’anic verses, such as al-Mā’idah 5:67, al-Aḥzāb 33:39, and al-Naḥl 16:125. Qur’an 5:67, in particular, conveys a direct command to the Prophet Muḥammad to conceal nothing whatsoever of God’s revelation (knowledge).

<sup>21</sup> Hajarul Akbar, ‘Orders to Record Debts (Study of Surah Albaqarah Verse 282)’, *Dusturiyah: Jurnal Hukum Islam, Perundang-Undangan Dan Pranata Sosial*, 11.2 (2021), pp. 229–43 (p. 242), doi:10.22373/dusturiyah.v11i2.11810.

<sup>22</sup> Fayiz bin Sayyaf as-Sarīḥ, with Abdullāh bin ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-‘Awājī, *At-Tafsīr Ash-Shaghīr* (Dar al-Minhaj, t.t.).

<sup>23</sup> Shahram Yazdani, Snor Bayazidi, and Amir Ali Mafi, ‘The Current Understanding of Knowledge Management Concepts: A Critical Review’, *Medical Journal of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 34 (2020), p. 127, doi:10.34171/mjiri.34.127.

<sup>24</sup> B. al-D. Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān Fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān: Vol. Vol.1 (Dār al-Ma’rifah., 1988)*; ‘Abd Allāh Darāz, *Al-Naba’ al-‘Azīm: Nazarāt Jadīdah Fī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm (Dār al-Qalam., 1992)*; M. al-Ṭ. Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr: Vol. Vol. 2 (al-Dār al-Tūnisīyah li al-Nashr., 1984)*.

<sup>25</sup> Darāz, *Al-Naba’ al-‘Azīm: Nazarāt Jadīdah Fī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*.

According to al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī, this verse constitutes a foundational basis for the obligation of da‘wah and tablīgh al-risālah upon the prophets, a responsibility subsequently carried forward by the Companions, the Successors (tābi‘īn), and, more broadly, by scholars and preachers (‘ulamā’ and du‘āt).<sup>26</sup> Scholars (‘ulamā’) are regarded as the heirs of the prophets in carrying out da‘wah and tablīgh as part of their moral responsibility and ethical consequence. This role is attributed to them because they are selected figures distinguished by the depth of their knowledge, as indicated in Prophetic traditions (Abū Dāwūd, no. 3641; al-Tirmidhī, no. 2682), which they are then entrusted to transmit to the wider community in order to shape human behavior grounded in knowledge and spiritual awareness in devotion to God. Tablīgh thus constitutes an essential practice of knowledge dissemination and the transmission of recorded knowledge. Its ultimate aim is to preserve human existence as a dynamic being continually engaged in learning, creativity, and innovation,<sup>27</sup> to strengthen the understanding of practical knowledge, namely knowledge that is not merely theoretical but is embodied in concrete actions, ethical conduct, and lived experience.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, it functions as an evidence-based practice strategy, ensuring that research findings are genuinely implemented within the broader community and that knowledge—both religious and scientific—remains sustainable, continuous, and enduring across generations rather than becoming stagnant or discontinued.<sup>29</sup> Anyone who understands and masters knowledge bears the responsibility of tablīgh as an integral part of Islamic law (sharī‘ah), which simultaneously entails a moral, social, and religious obligation to preserve divine values and to uphold ethical guidelines for sustainable human life. Through tablīgh, processes of communication and the transfer of knowledge take place, thereby generating understanding, discourse, critical engagement, and further intellectual development. Within theories of knowledge, information gives rise to data as a thesis, which is subsequently synthesized to produce an antithesis or a new thesis in a continuous and evolving process. Such modes of knowledge communication require comprehensive, rigorous, and accurate authorization control. In the Qur’anic framework, this principle of verification is referred to as tabayyūn.

The principle of tabayyūn (information verification) is articulated in Qur’an 49:6, which emphasizes the importance of accuracy and responsibility in receiving and disseminating news, information, and knowledge across various media and platforms. Alloh SWT instructs the believers regarding the concept of tabayyūn as stated in Qur’an 49:6:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهْلَةٍ فَتُصِبُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نُدْمِينَ

### **This means:**

O you who believe, if a wicked person comes to you with some news, then verify it carefully, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and afterward become regretful for what you have done.

According to al-Ṭabarī, Alloh SWT commands believers to ascertain the truth of information conveyed by a morally unreliable source so that they do not make judgments without knowledge and subsequently

<sup>26</sup> A. A. Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi‘ Li Ahkām al-Qur’ān* (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah., 1964); M. b. J. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān* (Mu’assasah al-Risālah., 2001).

<sup>27</sup> Rinawati Zailani and Fitri Kurniasari, ‘Diseminasi Pengetahuan Sebagai Variabel Pemeditasi Antara Akuisisi Pengetahuan Dengan Kemampuan Inovasi’, *INOBI: Jurnal Inovasi Bisnis Dan Manajemen Indonesia*, 5.2 (2022), pp. 162–74 (p. 162), doi:10.31842/jurnalnobis.v5i2.221.

<sup>28</sup> Hadija Sukri and others, ‘Peningkatan Pengetahuan Masyarakat Melalui Diseminasi Hasil Penelitian Tanaman Aren Di Kabupaten Maros’, *Jurnal Dinamika Pengabdian*, 10.1 (2024), pp. 177–85, doi:10.20956/jdp.v10i1.37010.

<sup>29</sup> Nurul Mukminah Zainan Nazri and Norhasnira Ibrahim, ‘Dissemination of Knowledge and Information in Globalization : An Islamic Perspective’, *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development*, 9.64 (2024) <<https://academicinspired.com/jised/article/view/2074>> [accessed 11 December 2025].

fall into regret.<sup>30</sup> This verse is not merely a legal injunction but a foundational moral principle of Islamic civilization, emphasizing justice, prudence, and responsibility in information practices.<sup>31</sup> It teaches an ethic of communication and information literacy in Islam, affirming that not all information received should be disseminated without verification. This principle is particularly relevant in the contemporary digital era and the context of social media.<sup>32</sup>

The interpretation of the aforementioned verses underscores the Islamic view of literacy as the foundation of civilization. Islam places knowledge (*‘ilm*) at the core of the formation of *tamadun* (civilization). Without literacy, there can be no transmission of knowledge, and without knowledge, there can be no Islamic civilization.<sup>33</sup> Civilization emerges from the fundamental abilities to read and write, which in turn give rise to rational and administrative systems of thought.<sup>34</sup> Through literacy, societies are able to transition from an oral culture to a written intellectual culture, fostering the development of science, philosophy, and codified law—elements that constitute the very essence of civilization.<sup>35</sup>

The Qur’an articulated the concept of literacy long ago, as exemplified in Qur’an 3:190–191:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ۚ ۱۹۰ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا ۖ سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ۗ ۱۹۱

This verse portrays the characteristics of *ulū al-albāb*, namely those who employ their intellect to engage in *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and *fikr* (reflection upon God’s creation). These two activities—remembrance and reflection—constitute the epistemological foundation of Qur’anic literacy from which Islamic civilization emerges. According to al-Qurtubī, this verse contains an implicit command to engage in reflective thinking, thereby affirming the primacy of knowledge and the role of intellectual reasoning (*ijtihād al-‘aql*) in comprehending the wisdom underlying creation.<sup>36</sup>

This verse functions as an epistemological manifesto of Islam, affirming a dialectical relationship between revelation and reason, along with their respective epistemological boundaries. It articulates an Islamic vision in which revelation serves as the guiding framework, while reason operates as an active instrument for comprehending truth, the universe, and the civilizational role of humanity.<sup>37</sup> In Rahman’s view, literacy is not merely the act of reading texts, but also entails reading reality in a critical and reflective manner.<sup>38</sup> Hanafī emphasizes that *tafakkur* in this verse constitutes an intellectual and social activity that functions as a driving force of civilization. In Hanafī’s conception, literacy is not merely an individual capability but a form of collective consciousness that generates social transformation. This verse thus gives rise to what he terms *al-‘aql al-madanī* (civilizational reason), namely a mode of reasoning oriented toward the common good (*maṣlaḥah*) of the community.<sup>39</sup> Shihab characterizes this verse as the foundation of Islamic intellectual ethics. According to him, individuals who engage in *dhikr* and *fikr* represent the ideal figures in Islam, as remembrance and reflection do not merely involve reading the letters of revelation but also entail reading the signs of life. Literacy at this level is described as integrative literacy,

<sup>30</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, p. Vol 13 p.160-162.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmi‘ Li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, pp. 99–103.

<sup>32</sup> M. Q. Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian al-Qur’an* (Lentera., 2002), p. Vol. 13 p. 160-162.

<sup>33</sup> H. Hanafī, *Dirasat Islamiyyah* (Dar al-Tali‘ah., 1991).

<sup>34</sup> J. Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>35</sup> W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Methuen, 1982).

<sup>36</sup> Al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmi‘ Li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*.

<sup>37</sup> Mohammad Abdelhamid Qatawneh and Mohd Fauzi Bin Hamat, ‘The Congruence between Revelation and Reason and the Impact of Its Civilized Role on Muslim Ummah’, *Quranica*, 12.1 (2020), pp. 157–82 (p. 157).

<sup>38</sup> F. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. (University of Chicago Press, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> Hanafī, *Dirasat Islamiyyah*.

namely the integration of cognition and spirituality.<sup>40</sup>

The subsequent stage following tafakkur and tadhakkur is tadabbur. In general terms, literacy refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and apply texts within the context of lived experience. Tadabbur, however, denotes a deeper process of contemplation, reflection, and interpretation of the Qur'anic verses in order to generate sound understanding and righteous action. From a Qur'anic perspective, tadabbur constitutes the highest form of literacy, as it encompasses the ability to read (qirā'ah/tilāwah) as an initial technical stage of literacy, the capacity to comprehend through tafakkur and tadhakkur as a cognitive dimension, and the capacity for deep reflection and ethical evaluation through tadabbur as a reflective and moral dimension.

In Qur'an 38:29 (Ṣād), Alloh SWT states:

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ

This means: This is a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, so that they may reflect deeply (yatadabbarū) upon its verses.

adabbur represents an active effort to comprehend the Qur'anic message contextually and contemporaneously, rather than merely textually.<sup>41</sup> It does not culminate in understanding alone, but must lead to a transformation of worldview and behavior. In the context of literacy studies, this is referred to as transformative literacy, that is, reading with the purpose of transforming both the self and society. Tadabbur thus signifies reading to transform, not merely reading to inform.

As the axis of Qur'an-based information literacy, there are highly universal verses that serve as foundational principles, namely Qur'an 16:90 (al-Nahl) and Qur'an 2:269 (al-Baqarah). Alloh SWT states:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَاءِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ ۗ يَعِظُكُم لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

This means: Indeed, Alloh SWT commands justice, excellence, and generosity toward relatives, and He forbids immorality, wrongdoing, and transgression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed.

يُؤْتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا ۗ وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

This means: He grants wisdom (ḥikmah) to whom He wills, and whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been given abundant good; yet none take heed except those endowed with intellect (ulū al-albāb).<sup>42</sup>

These two verses constitute a manifesto of universal social and moral ethics as well as a Qur'anic portrayal of the ideal human being (insān kāmil). Within the framework of information literacy ethics, these verses function as normative texts that articulate the fundamental principles concerning the ultimate purpose of human life, namely to become individuals who generate benefit and maṣlaḥah, both for themselves at the personal (shakṣiyyah) level and for others at the social level. This ethical orientation is realized through the internalization of the values of justice (al-'adl), benevolence (al-iḥsān), social solidarity (itā' dhī al-qurbā), and the prevention of corruption and wrongdoing (nahy 'an al-faḥshā' wa al-munkar wa al-baghy), all of which converge in a single overarching virtue, namely wisdom (ḥikmah). As articulated by Ibn Miskawayh,<sup>42</sup>

وَأَصْلُ الْفَضَائِلِ كُلِّهَا هُوَ الْحِكْمَةُ

This means: Wisdom (ḥikmah) constitutes the foundation of all virtues.

A similar view is also expressed by al-Aṣfahānī<sup>43</sup>:

الْحِكْمَةُ أَصْلُ الْمَحَاسِنِ كُلِّهَا، وَمِنْهَا تَنْفَرُّ سَائِرُ الْفَضَائِلِ

This means: wisdom is the source of all goodness, from which all virtues branch forth.

<sup>40</sup> Shihab, Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian al-Qur'an.

<sup>41</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an (Lentera Hati, 1996), pp. 93–95.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Miskawayh, Ahdhīb Al-Akhlāq Wa Taḥīr al-A'rāq (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1987), p. 30.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Rāghib Al-Aṣfahānī, Mufradāt Alfāz Al-Qur'ān (Darul Qolam, 2007), pp. 312–14.

Imam Al-Razi<sup>44</sup> defines the meaning of wisdom as contained in his exegesis of Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 269.":

وَالْحِكْمَةُ هِيَ الْغَايَةُ الْعُلْيَا مِنْ خُلُقِ الْعَقْلِ، وَهِيَ أَصْلُ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَمَنْشُورُهَا

"Wisdom is the highest attainment of the creation of reason and serves as the source of all goodness."

Broadly, this verse can be understood as emphasizing the function of revelation as a guide for moral and social education, which constitutes the essence of Qur'anic literacy.<sup>45</sup> From a literacy perspective, practicing this verse entails requiring the community to read and engage with revelation as a guide for social action, rather than merely as a ritual recitation.<sup>46</sup> It also entails teaching Qur'anic critical literacy, namely the ability to comprehend the message of revelation within social and structural contexts.<sup>47</sup> In line with this, the verse teaches guidance for thinking and acting. It emphasizes that the commands and prohibitions contained in the verse constitute a form of literative learning (ta'līm and tazkiyah) that cultivates morally and socially upright human beings.<sup>48</sup>

As a guide for thinking and acting for individuals categorized as 'literate,' justice is understood as an objective and proportional attitude toward information. Al-'Adl (justice) here does not merely refer to fairness in legal or social terms, but also encompasses fairness in the assessment and dissemination of information. According to al-Rāzī in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, al-'Adl entails giving something its due measure and placing things in their proper context.<sup>49</sup> In the context of literacy, this implies objectivity, namely neither exaggerating nor diminishing the facts. Therefore, a just approach to information entails evaluating and conveying it according to its truth, rather than based on emotions, personal interests, or prejudice.

Al-Iḥsān signifies surpassing justice through wisdom and benevolence. In the context of literacy, this embodies the concept and ethics of communication, emphasizing the dissemination of information in a constructive, educational, and responsible manner. Meanwhile, the prohibition against al-baghy (transgression) carries the message of refraining from misusing information for personal gain or harming the reputation of others.

In Islamic civilization, literacy is not merely the ability to read and write, but encompasses moral awareness in handling knowledge and information. This verse upholds the following pillars:

1. Al-'Adl as the concept of objectivity in thinking and assessment.
2. Al-Iḥsān as the concept of civilized and responsible communication.
3. An-Nahy 'an al-Baghy as the concept of anti-hoax and anti-manipulation of information.

Therefore, Surah An-Naḥl: 90 can be read as an epistemological foundation for information ethics in Islam, guiding humans to be objective in evaluating information (al-'Adl), proportional in conveying it (al-Iḥsān), and restrained from bias and malice (an-Nahy 'an al-Baghy). At the highest attainment, this leads to the emergence of a wise individual (attaining ḥikmah), which is a hallmark of the profile of an *insān kāmil*, as also emphasized by Imam Ghazālī,<sup>50</sup> that human perfection (Insan Kamil) is a person whose morals imitate the morals of Allah SWT as best and as possible:

الْكَمَالُ الْإِنْسَانِيُّ هُوَ تَخَلُّفُهُ بِأَخْلَاقِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى عَلَى قَدْرِ طَاقَتِهِ

<sup>44</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Tafsīr al-Kabīr) (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.), pp. 191–93.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Qurtubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām al-Qur'an*.

<sup>46</sup> Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*.

<sup>47</sup> Hanafi, *Dirasat Islamiyyah*.

<sup>48</sup> Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*.

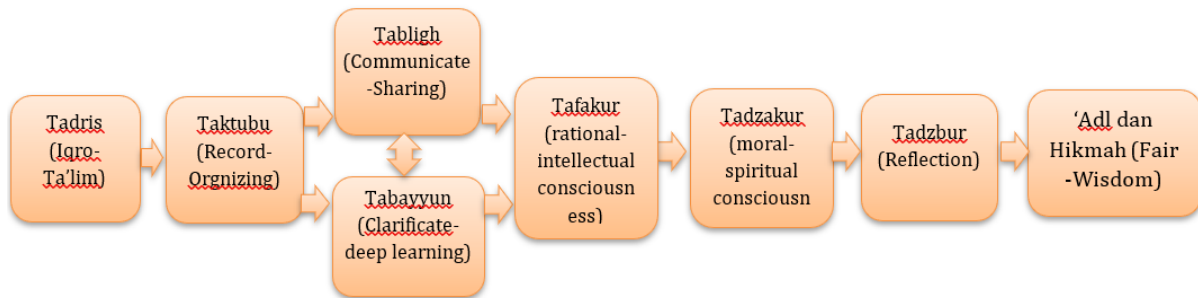
<sup>49</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Tafsīr al-Kabīr).

<sup>50</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn Juz 3* (Dar al-Khayr, 1997).

According to Ibn Maskawaih, human perfection is when all the potential of his soul is united in goodness, and his mind is perfected by virtue.<sup>51</sup>

### Main Pillars of Insan Kamil Literacy

It can be concluded that the main pillars of Qur’anic information literacy are arranged in a systematic and structured conceptual sequence. Verse by verse, they guide a model of critical literacy for the community to practice. Based on an in-depth study employing an ontological hermeneutic exegesis approach, the wisdom and lessons regarding critical literacy education emerge, which can be illustrated as follows:



**Figure: The Concept of LIK (Qur’anic Insan Kamil Literacy)**

1. Tadrīs (Learning): The fundamental and original command inherent to every rational servant (Q.S. Al- Alaq 1–5).
2. Taktubu (Writing/Recording): The stage of effort as a scholarly trust to record, organize, and systematize knowledge, data, and information (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 283).
3. Tabligh (Dissemination): The stage of conveying, spreading, and disseminating knowledge, data, and information (Q.S. Al-Maidah 67; Al-Ahzab 39; An-Nahl 125).
4. Tabayyun (Verification): The stage of verifying and validating sources, producing authentic and in- depth data and information (Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 6).
5. Tafakkur (Contemplation): The stage of rational awareness through an intellectual approach, resulting in logical and rational understanding (critical and reflective thinking) (Q.S. Āli ‘Imrān: 190–191).
6. Tadzakkur (Moral-Reflective Awareness): The stage of moral-spiritual awareness through remembering and deriving lessons, producing moral consciousness and self-transformation (Q.S. Al- Baqarah 221; Al-Araf 2; Sad 29).
7. Tadabbur (Reflective-Hermeneutic Analysis): The stage of ontological hermeneutic reflection, delving into the deepest meanings, understanding the implications behind a text, leading to profound understanding and wisdom (Q.S. Sad: 29).
8. ‘Adl and Hikmah (Justice and Wisdom): The ultimate achievement of the literacy process, which is to become an exemplar of Insan Kamil (Q.S. An-Nahl: 90; Al-Baqarah: 269).

Beyond the broad characterization of Islam as a belief system often understood solely as a revelation- based teaching, rational and logical methods have long been a hallmark of Islamic law, philosophy, and education. One thesis notes that while the rational tradition of medieval Islam faced opposition from modernists and fundamentalists, resulting in the decline of traditional Islamic intellectual life and its replacement with a more modern but much shallower form of thought, the resources of this Islamic

<sup>51</sup> Miskawayh, Ahdhīb Al-Akhlāq Wa Taṭhīr al-A‘rāq, p. 47.

scholarly tradition remain an integral part of Islamic intellectual heritage and will prove vital for its revival. According to Walbridge, the future of Islam will be marked by the return of rationalism.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

The relationship between Lafadz (verbal expression) and Meaning in the literacy verse command “Iqra’ bismi rabbika” (Read in the name of your Lord) indicates that literacy activities are not neutral but are bound by divine values. There is a shift in interpretive orientation from merely understanding the textual and contextual meaning to engaging with reality. Literacy verses serve as a guide for human life, both individually and socially, as a form of social action. The Qur’anic text gives rise to social realities in the form of Islamic scholarly traditions and information ethics in the modern era. Its ontological integration is understood as dynamic and living. The concept of a living text demonstrates that the Qur’an continuously produces new meanings in accordance with the development of the times.

The ontology of the text in the exegesis of literacy verses reveals the deep dimension of the Qur’an as a source of knowledge and as a guide for both individual and social action. The relationship between lafadz, meaning, and reality demonstrates the integration of revelation, intellect, and action in building a literacy civilization of *Insan Kamil* (LIK) under the guidance of Qur’anic values. The characteristics of *Insan Kamil* as the ideal Muslim include the optimal functioning of intellect, the use of intuition, adorning oneself with divine attributes, and embodying noble moral conduct.

This concept can be proposed as a new model of literacy in the modern world, particularly in the fields of science, information studies, and library science. Islam provides a response to the uncertainties of Muslim intellectuals who still adopt traditional theories of literacy. The *Insan Kamil* Literacy (LIK) model should be further explored by future researchers through more complex and comprehensive approaches.

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<sup>52</sup> John Walbridge, *God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason*, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 2010), doi:10.1017/CBO9780511761959.

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