

## Education on Literacy of the Verses of the Qur'an: Mahmud Yunus Perspective on the Book of Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al Karim

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### Abstract

*The Quran has placed great emphasis on educational literacy since the beginning of its revelation, thus establishing Muslims in history as a group that built a great civilisation and played a significant role as a centre of world knowledge. This is evidenced by the emergence of a strong intellectual tradition among Muslims, ranging from mastery of religious knowledge to the development of general knowledge. In this context, literacy is not merely the ability to read and write, but also encompasses the skills to understand, analyse, and critique various issues facing society. This article specifically discusses Quranic literacy education through the perspective of Prof. Mahmud Yunus, a legendary Indonesian exegete who wrote a monumental work entitled Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al Karim. This study employs a literature review approach with a content analysis method to explore the meaning of literacy in the verses of the Qur'an as confirmed by Mahmud Yunus. The results show that many verses of the Qur'an emphasise the importance of literacy, for example through the command to read (iqra'), write with a pen (qalam), and think critically about social reality and natural phenomena. Literacy in this perspective is seen as an important instrument for discovering new knowledge, developing traditional records, and building a culture of reflective thinking in society. Thus, literacy education based on the Qur'an can be the main foundation for Muslims in facing the challenges of the times while maintaining the relevance of Islamic teachings in modern life.*

**Keywords:** Education, Literacy, Interpretation.

### Abstrak

Al-Qur'an telah memberikan perhatian besar terhadap pendidikan literasi sejak awal turunnya wahyu, sehingga menjadikan umat Islam tercatat dalam sejarah sebagai kelompok yang membangun peradaban besar dan berperan penting sebagai pusat ilmu pengetahuan dunia. Hal ini dapat dibuktikan dengan lahirnya tradisi intelektual yang kuat di kalangan umat Islam, mulai dari penguasaan ilmu agama hingga perkembangan ilmu pengetahuan umum. Dalam konteks ini, literasi bukan sekadar kemampuan membaca dan menulis, tetapi juga mencakup keterampilan memahami, menganalisis, dan mengkritisi berbagai persoalan yang dihadapi masyarakat. Artikel ini secara khusus membahas pendidikan literasi Al-Qur'an melalui perspektif Prof. Mahmud Yunus, seorang mufassir legendaris Indonesia yang menulis karya monumental berjudul *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al Karim*. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kepustakaan dengan metode analisis isi untuk menggali makna literasi dalam ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an sebagaimana ditafsirkan oleh Mahmud Yunus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa banyak ayat Al-Qur'an mendorong pentingnya literasi, misalnya melalui perintah membaca



(*iqra'*), menulis dengan pena (*qalam*), dan berpikir kritis terhadap realitas sosial maupun fenomena alam. Literasi dalam perspektif ini dipandang sebagai instrumen penting untuk menemukan pengetahuan baru, mengembangkan tradisi pencatatan, serta membangun budaya berpikir reflektif di tengah masyarakat. Dengan demikian, pendidikan literasi berbasis Al-Qur'an dapat menjadi landasan utama bagi umat Islam dalam menghadapi tantangan zaman sekaligus menjaga relevansi ajaran Islam dalam kehidupan modern.

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan, Literasi, Tafsir.

## Introduction

One of the reasons for the stagnation of Islam is the idea that the knowledge mentioned by classical scholars is the final form of knowledge. Therefore, this way of thinking causes Muslims to become passive, stagnant, and unwilling to engage in intellectual work. In other words, the majority of Muslims in the world today only collect and consume works rather than developing and reconstructing them (Mujamil, 2005).

The lack of public awareness of the importance of literacy has serious implications for the inability to develop critical, creative, and productive thinking when facing social, cultural, and educational challenges. One tangible example of low literacy can be seen in the behaviour of people who ignore rules even though they are clearly written. For example, there are still people who continue to smoke in areas where there are clear "no smoking" signs, and they only stop when they are reprimanded by the authorities. This shows that individuals with low literacy skills tend to have difficulty regulating themselves, let alone setting an example for others (Thoriq, 2021). The issue of low literacy remains a major challenge that needs to be addressed seriously by the government. As emphasised by Abdul Mu'ti, Minister of Primary and Secondary Education (Mendikdasmen), the government is targeting an increase in Indonesia's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) score, which is still lagging behind, especially in the field of literacy. The 2022 PISA results show a decline in scores in all aspects and place Indonesia 66th out of 81 countries (Muhammad Syafaruddin, 2024).

In this context, the author attempts to examine the directives or reasons that encourage Qur'anic literacy as the basis of Islamic teachings. The researcher limits this study to the concept of literacy education of Qur'anic verses, using the main reference of *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al Karim* by Prof. Mahmud Yunus. Mahmud Yunus's tafsir work has a specific style or pattern of interpretation, in which his interpretations are written in the form of footnotes. Therefore, it is hoped that this writing contains a wide range of concepts about literacy found in the verses of the Qur'an, with the aim of exploring literacy education in the Qur'an (Thoriq).

Literacy is one of the main foundations in building an advanced civilisation. The Qur'an itself places literacy at the centre of its teachings, as reflected in the first revelation of Surah al-'Alaq (1–5) which commands mankind to "read." However, reality shows that the literacy rate of Muslims in Indonesia is still relatively low. This condition has implications for weaknesses in critical, creative, and productive thinking skills when facing social, cultural, and educational challenges.

Several previous studies have discussed literacy education in the Qur'an from various perspectives. First, Aziz and Mansur (2021) examined the concept of literacy in the

interpretations of Quraish Shihab and Hamka, highlighting its relevance to modern educational challenges. Second, Salahudin and Hidayat (2023) explored the values of literacy in Surah al-'Alaq based on Tafsir al-Azhar and Tafsir al-Misbah, emphasising the progressive dimension of education. Third, Rithon Igisani (2018) focuses on the development of Indonesian mufasssir works and their contribution to literacy, but does not specifically analyse Mahmud Yunus. Fourth, Nurus Syarifah (2020) examines Mahmud Yunus's tafsir as an "academic tafsir," highlighting its scientific, social, and intellectual style, but without focusing on literacy. Fifth, Amursid & Amaruddin (2015) review the characteristics of Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim, but more from the technical aspects of translation and compilation than the dimension of literacy.

These studies show that although the topics of literacy and interpretation have been widely discussed, none have specifically and comprehensively explored literacy education based on Mahmud Yunus's Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim. This is what makes this research unique: it bridges the gap between studies of Qur'anic literacy and Mahmud Yunus' unique perspective on interpretation, which uses a distinctive method of interpretation with footnotes and a practical orientation for the Indonesian Muslim community. The purpose of this study is to analyse the concept of Qur'anic literacy as interpreted by Mahmud Yunus in his Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim.

## Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. This method aims to obtain information about conditions or phenomena that are occurring at the time of the study. The type of research chosen is library research, which is the process of collecting data by searching, selecting, and reconstructing various references such as books, journal articles, and previous studies. This was done because the entire content of the research relied on literature as the basis for problem solving through the stages of collection, compilation, classification, analysis, and interpretation (Zellatifanny & Mudjiyanto, 2018).

The data collection techniques used in this study were carried out in several stages. First, the researcher searched through the main literature, namely Mahmud Yunus's Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim, as the primary source. Second, the researcher collected secondary data in the form of supporting books, journal articles, and previous studies relevant to the topic of literacy in the Qur'an. Third, the collected data was selected based on its relevance to the research focus, then categorised according to the main themes. Fourth, the data was recorded and coded to facilitate the analysis process.

The analytical techniques used in this study are document analysis and content analysis. These methods are used to draw conclusions while paying attention to context so as to provide new knowledge, broaden insight, present facts, and offer practical guidance. The focus of the analysis is directed at Mahmud Yunus's views in his interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an related to literacy education (Sugiono, 2015).

Research data sources are divided into two types: primary and secondary. Primary sources refer to the original work being studied, namely Mahmud Yunus's Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim. Meanwhile, secondary sources are supplementary data relevant to the primary data. Both types of sources were then analysed in depth to produce a conclusion (Thoriq, 2021).



## Research Results and Discussion

### A. An Overview of Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al Karim

#### 1. Profile of Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al Karim

The Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an is one of Mahmud Yunus's important works as an interpreter. His translation is adapted to Indonesian so that it is easy for readers to understand. In its layout, the text of the Qur'an and its translation are arranged sequentially, so that readers can easily identify the verse numbers in the Arabic text and their equivalents in Indonesian.

Additional explanations regarding verses from the Qur'an are placed directly on the page containing the verse, so there is no need to open another page as in previous editions. These explanatory notes are also enriched with new descriptions, including several scientific issues that can be studied by students.

It should be emphasised that this interpretation is not a translation of an Arabic book, but rather the pure fruit of Mahmud Yunus's thoughts and research from the age of 20 to 73. Therefore, this work has fundamental differences from other interpretations. The main focus of this interpretation is to emphasise the explanation of the guidance of the Qur'an to be used as a universal guide, especially for Muslims and everyone in general. This is the main purpose of the revelation of the Qur'an (Mahmud Yunus, 2021).

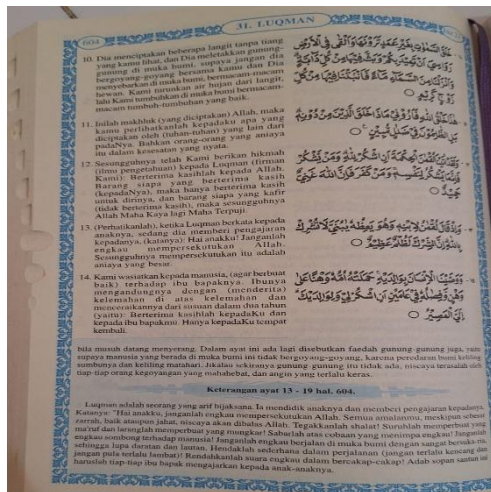
#### 2. Background to the Birth of Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al Karim

Islam is the religion embraced by the majority of Southeast Asian communities. The presence of Islam in a region automatically brings with it a tradition of interpreting the Qur'an. This is because Islamic teachings cannot be fully understood without interpretation of its holy book, especially for non-Arabic speaking peoples, including Southeast Asian communities (Nashruddin Baidan & Erwati Aziz, 2019). Similarly, in Indonesia, the arrival of Islam has led to the emergence of various translations and interpretations of the Qur'an in the Indonesian language. These efforts were aimed at making it easier for the community to understand and explore the contents of the Qur'an. However, when translators and interpreters of the Qur'an began to emerge, some scholars considered this to be forbidden (Howard M. Federspiel, 1996).

Howard M. Federspiel, in his study of the history of translation and interpretation of the Qur'an into Indonesian, divides it into three generations. The first generation lasted from the early 20th century to the early 1960s, the second generation developed in the mid-1960s, while the third generation emerged around the 1970s. According to Federspiel, a number of interpretive works began to appear in the mid to late 1950s, which were then grouped into the first period, namely the early 20th century to 1960 (Howard M. Federspiel, 1983).

Differences in determining periodisation can be influenced by several factors, such as differences in setting the boundaries between periods, differences in perspective on the object of study, and variations in the data obtained by researchers. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Mahmud Yunus's interpretive work occupies an important position in its generation and period (Rithon Igisani, 2015). This interpretation is considered a pioneering work due to its use of the Latin alphabet in translation and

interpretation, as Indonesian is widely used by the Malay-speaking community. In addition, the new patterns introduced in his work classify this interpretation as an academic interpretation. Therefore, this paper will further examine the academic aspects of Mahmud Yunus's Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Karim (M. Amursid & Amaruddin Asra,



2015).

### 3. Characteristics of the Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an

As an exegetical work, Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Karim has a number of important characteristics that can be seen from several aspects, including the systematics of translation and interpretation, the pattern of composition, the method of translation and annotation (footnotes), analysis of terms and concepts, and summaries of the contents of

the Qur'an. First, Mahmud Yunus uses this format to interpret and translate the Qur'an systematically; he places the text of the Qur'an on the right side and the translation on the left side. This arrangement makes it easier for readers to recognise the translation of each verse. In addition, in certain sections, Mahmud Yunus also provides longer and more detailed explanations of certain objects (Mahmud Yunus, 2015).

Secondly, regarding the systematic arrangement. Mahmud Yunus's interpretation and translation of the Qur'an is presented in 924 pages. The first part consists of the cover, approval page and introduction, which consists of 7 pages (i–vii). In addition, there are seventy-seven additional pages (i–xxvii) containing a list of surahs as an appendix and the contents of the interpretation, an alphabetical list of surahs, and a list of the divisions of the Qur'an. This innovation is a significant breakthrough because it makes it easier for readers to find specific verses, surahs, or juz. In the closing section, Mahmud Yunus completes his work with 32 special pages that summarise the contents of the Qur'an and discuss topics such as history, law, economics, morals, and other fields.

Third, regarding translation techniques and the provision of explanations in the form of footnotes. Almost the entire content of this work is a translation of verses from the Qur'an, while the rest contains additional explanations in the form of footnotes regarding certain religious terms or concepts. The technique used is literal translation. In addition, Mahmud Yunus also includes a figurative translation marked with double brackets, while more detailed explanations are provided in footnotes. Mahmud Yunus tends to use the language that was used when the Qur'an was revealed. The last characteristic is the last part of the Qur'an, which conveys its entire meaning.

### 4. Methods of interpreting the Holy Qur'an

In terms of interpretation methods, Mahmud Yunus's Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim mostly uses a tahlili approach, which is a method of interpreting the Qur'an by sharing an understanding of the meaning of each surah and verse in sequence according to the





mushaf. This interpretation covers various fields, including the explanation of vocabulary ( ), the meaning of sentences, the background of the revelation of verses, as well as the views or historical sources related to the interpretation of verses from the Prophet, his companions, and other exegetes.

The style of interpretation presented by Mahmud Yunus is predominantly social (ijtima'i). In relation to the typology of interpretation, Syarifah divides the style of interpretation into three main categories, namely social, scientific, and intellectual.

The first is the scientific style or pattern, which explores the harmonious relationship between the Qur'an and science and technology. Mahmud Yunus' interpretation explains the verses of the Qur'an from the perspective of modern scientific theory. Mahmud Yunus then uses modern science to reinforce the miracles of the Qur'an and the high values of Islam. The second style is the social style. Mahmud Yunus places great importance on social values in his interpretation.

This can be seen in his interpretation of customs and socio-cultural traditions, particularly his use of Minangkabau culture as a source for his interpretation ( ). The third characteristic is intellectual. This characteristic arises due to the interpretation of the Qur'an in communities that do not yet understand the Qur'an and Arabic. Mahmud Yunus's approach in applying this model is to incorporate expressions commonly used by intellectuals and the general public in their daily communication (Nurus Syarifah, 2020).

#### 5. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an

The advantage of *Tafsir al-Karim* is that it is a new translation of the Qur'an, made more in line with or similar to the growth of the Indonesian language and easy to understand for readers. Students have a better command of Arabic. Secondly, the translation of the Qur'anic text is arranged side by side and opposite each other, making it easier to see how many verses and translations there are. Explanations of the verses are included and inserted into the relevant verses, making it easier to study the explanations without having to read other pages, as in older editions. Finally, additional information can be provided on academic topics that students need to study (Amaruddin, M Amursid, 2015).

Despite these strengths, al-Karim's interpretation also has a weakness. In other words, this work does not fully fall into the category of interpretation or exegesis based on its presentation. Mahmud Yunus's information is limited to explanations of difficult translations. Not all verses are explained in detail, but are discussed in combination with other verses. In addition, this tafsir work, , can only be understood by Indonesians or those who are fluent in Indonesian, because this tafsir work uses Indonesian (Mumtazah Al 'Ilmah, 2023).

### B. Biography of the Exegete

#### 1. Birth and Academic Journey

Mahmud Yunus was born on Saturday, 10 February 1899 or 30 Ramadan 1316 AH, in Sungayang, Batusangkar, West Sumatra. He came from a religious family. His father was Yunus bin Incek, a teacher at the mosque and imam of Nagari, and he was

also a farmer from the Mandailing tribe. His mother was named Hafsah binti Imam Samiun, a descendant of Engku Gadang M. Tahir bin Ali, the founder and caretaker of the mosque in the area (Saiful Amin Ghofur, 2008).

Mahmud Yunus' mother was known as Posa from the Chaniago tribe. Although she did not have the opportunity to receive a formal education and was illiterate (Arif Iman Mauliddin, 2019), her daily life was filled with weaving traditional Minangkabau fabrics (Malta Rina, 2011). Since childhood, Mahmud Yunus received basic religious education, particularly in the study of the Qur'an, directly from his grandfather (Herry Mohammad, 2008).

Mahmud Yunus had shown religious talent since he was a child. He learned the Qur'an from his grandfather at the Talang mosque and completed it at the age of seven. They began studying at a village school in Sungayang in 1908. He went to *Madras School* in Surau Tanjung Pauh in his fourth year and was appointed as an assistant teacher or *mudir* at the age of 14.

In 1917, when the head of Madras School, Muhammad Thaib Umar, fell ill, Muhammad Yusuf took over as temporary leader. He even represented the institution at a major meeting of Minangkabau scholars in 1919 at Surau Jembatan Besi, Batang Panjang. At that meeting, it was agreed to establish the PGAI (Persatuan Guru Agama Islam or Islamic Teachers Association). At the end of the same year in Sungayang, Mahmud Yunus founded a branch of the Sumatra Thawalib Islamic student association together with the teachers of Madras School. He also participated in education, particularly by establishing the magazine *Al-Basyir*, which was first published in February 1920. He left for Egypt shortly thereafter in March 1923 to continue his education (Ummi Kalsum, 2020).

Mahmud Yunus officially began his studies at Al-Azhar University in early 1924. While there, he joined the *Al-Jami'ah Al-Khairiah* organisation led by Djanan Tajib, and had the opportunity to manage the organisation's magazine, *Seruan Azhar*. In the inaugural edition, he wrote an editorial calling for unity between the Indonesian and Malay peoples as fellow countrymen to work together to bring about prosperity and progress.

He successfully completed his studies in 1925, obtaining a *Syahadah Alimiyah* degree, making him the second person from Indonesia to graduate from Al-Azhar after Djanan Tajib. On the recommendation of his teacher at Al-Azhar, Mahmud Yunus then continued his education at Darul Ulum, and in May 1930 he successfully obtained a diploma in education from . He is recorded as the first foreign student to graduate from Darul Ulum (Ulvia Nur Anini, 2021).

## 2. The works of Mahmud Yunus

Mahmud Yunus was a highly prolific scholar and writer. Throughout his life, he produced no less than 76 works, consisting of 49 works in Indonesian and 26 works in Arabic. His fields of study were quite diverse, although most of them focused on Islamic sciences, particularly Islamic education, in addition to other themes. Some of his works written in Indonesian include specific methods related to religious education and history in Islamic education.



### 3. *Mufasssir* Award

Mahmud Yunus is known as an Islamic education figure who founded and led a number of important institutions. He established al-Jami'ah al-Islamiyyah in Sungayang and Normal Islam in Padang in 1931. In addition, he also led the Islamic High School (SIT) in Padang and helped pioneer the establishment of the Academy of Religious Sciences (ADIA), even serving as dean of ADIA from 1957 to 1960. In Bukittinggi, he was the founder and leader of the Islamic Middle School (SMI). His academic career continued when he served as Dean of the Tarbiyah Faculty at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta in 1960 before being appointed Rector of IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang.

Throughout his intellectual journey, Mahmud Yunus produced a wealth of works covering history, education, interpretation, fiqh, morals and more. His interpretation of the Holy Qur'an is a monumental and highly significant work (Nurus Syarifah, 2020).

## C. Theoretical Foundations of Literacy Education

### 1. Definition of Literacy Education

This educational term originally comes from the Greek word "paedagogie", which combines "Pias" (child) and "ago" (I guide the child), meaning guidance given to children. In English, this term was later translated into "education", which means development or guidance.

Historically, the term literacy comes from the Latin word *litteratus*, which means *an educated person* or a learned person. In the Middle Ages, those who were able to read and write in Latin were called *litteratus*. Thus, literacy was initially defined as the skill of reading and writing using the spoken language (Eva Rachel Meisyana Sianipar, 2024).

In the 2019 Book System Law, literacy is understood as the ability to critically understand information, enabling every individual to access technology and knowledge to improve their quality of life (K. Wawan, 2023). Several experts also provide various definitions of literacy. UNESCO views literacy as a set of reading and writing skills that can be acquired by anyone. Meanwhile, Alberta emphasises that literacy is not just reading and writing, but also acquiring knowledge and thinking critically in problem solving (Aprida Niken Palupi, 2020).

Based on these various opinions, it can be concluded that literacy is an educational process that aims to develop reading and writing skills integrated with thinking skills. Literacy activities involve efforts to access information and knowledge, then actualise the results of that thinking in the form of written work (Mawarny, 2020).

### 2. The Concept of Literacy in Learning

Literacy was previously defined only as the ability to read and write. As time has progressed, the concept of literacy has expanded to encompass various fields. Abidin (in Reni Kusmiarti & Syukri Hamzah, 2019) explains that the changing concept of literacy has developed through five generations. The first generation defined literacy as the skill of utilising language and visual symbols in various forms to perform activities such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, observing, communicating, and developing critical thinking skills. The second generation emphasised the connection



between literacy and social and cultural contexts. The third generation viewed literacy as a set of elements that included visual, auditory, and spatial aspects, not limited to written words. The fourth generation asserted that literacy is a social construct that is not neutral. The fifth generation is known as the concept of multiliteracy, which is the skill of using various forms of text, both conventional and innovative, as well as symbols and multimedia to understand and convey ideas.

Furthermore, Kern (2000) formulated seven principles of literacy. First and foremost, literacy involves communication between the writer or speaker and the reader or listener. Second, literacy is collaborative through interaction between the two parties. Third, literacy is related to language conventions, whether in reading, writing, listening or speaking. Fourth, literacy is related to cultural knowledge, because language practices always exist within a system of values, beliefs, customs, and ideals. Fifth, literacy involves problem-solving skills. Sixth, literacy requires self-reflection. Seventh, literacy depends on the use of language as the primary means of communication.

Based on these definitions and principles, it can be concluded that learning literacy is the ability to develop critical thinking skills through the process of analysing, evaluating, and solving problems by utilising information from various sources. This literacy emphasises a multiliteracy, multicultural, and multimedia approach by empowering the diverse intelligences possessed by learners.

### 3. The Purpose of Learning Literacy

In the context of literacy learning, Axford emphasises that one of the main objectives is to help students find useful methods to improve their reading and writing skills, such as the ability to understand and interpret the meaning of complex texts with specific linguistic structures.

In line with this, Abidin, Mulyati, and Yunansah (2018) formulated several objectives for 21st-century literacy learning, namely: (1) to make students strategic readers, writers, and communicators; (2) to develop critical thinking skills and accustom students to thinking systematically; (3) fostering strong motivation to learn; and (4) fostering independence as creative, innovative, productive, and characterful learners. With these objectives, it is hoped that students will not only be able to explore meaning in depth, but also have their own stance and views as critical and reflective individuals.

### 4. The Concept of Literacy in Islam

Islam places literacy at a very high position. In this regard, the Qur'an explains that everyone should use their brains as best as possible and reflect on His verses. The clearest evidence is found in the first revelation, namely Q.S Al-Alaq: 1-5, which is considered by exegetes as the basis for building an advanced civilisation by mastering science. The command to read (Iqra') in this verse is understood broadly, not only in relation to written texts, but also includes the verses of kauniyah (the universe) and qauliyah (the Qur'an) as objects of reading.

In addition, the Qur'an also emphasises the importance of writing, as indicated by the term qalam. Allah even swears by qalam to show its urgency. The exegetes interpret



qalam in three dimensions: as a tool (pen), as a process (the way Allah teaches knowledge to humans), and as a result (writing that becomes a vessel of knowledge) (Ahmad Mujib, 2016).

The urgency of literacy in Islam is also emphasised in Surah al-Kahfi verse 109, which stresses that all knowledge comes from Allah, and writing serves as a means of preserving that knowledge. However, the activities of reading and writing must be based on sincere intentions, "*bismirabbik*". Literacy that is not grounded in orientation towards Allah has the potential to cause harm, as mentioned in verses 78-79 of Surah al-Baqarah (Ahmad Mujib, 2016).

#### D. Literacy in the Perspective of the Interpretation of the Holy Qur'an

Based on a thematic interpretation approach, the author has compiled a number of verses from the Qur'an that relate to the command and encouragement to read and write, which form the basis for the concept of literacy in the Qur'an. The following verses illustrate the concept of literacy in the Qur'an:

##### 1. Interpretation of Q.S Al 'Alaq verses 1-5:

Meaning: *Read in the name of your Lord who created. He created man from a clot of blood. Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught (man) with the pen. He taught man what he did not know.*

Mahmud Yunus explains that Surah al-'Alaq was the first revelation sent down to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This event occurred when he was 40 years old and was meditating in the Cave of Hira, Mecca. At that time, the angel Jibril came to convey Allah's command by saying "Iqra'" (Read!). The Prophet Muhammad replied that he could not read. According to Mahmud Yunus (2015), this verse contains an exhortation for all Muslims to be able to read and write with a pen (qalam). This is in line with the practice in developed countries that require basic education so that all citizens are literate. The wisdom behind the Prophet Muhammad's inability to read and write is described as a miracle, so that there can be no accusation that the Qur'an is merely a copy of previous scriptures such as the Torah, Zabur, or Injil.

In line with this, Quraish Shihab in Tafsir al-Misbah explains that the command to read does not only mean reading texts, but also studying, conveying, and understanding everything that humans can reach, whether written or not. Thus, the object of reading includes qauliyah verses (revelation) and kauniyah verses (the universe). According to Shihab, building literacy in this broad sense is an important provision for producing comprehensive knowledge. Good literacy does not limit itself to texts or specific fields, but also encompasses the realities that exist in the universe (Muthoifin Salahudin & Syamsul Hidayat, 2023).

##### 2. Interpretation of Q.S Al Qalam verse 1

Meaning: *Nun, by the pen and what they write.*

Essentially, the pen has such a significant influence in modern society that writers attain high status due to their work and the accuracy of their penmanship. Some even become government leaders because of their talent or because they produce writings

that are proof of the pen's great power. As a result, everyone must learn to write and use a pen, at least for everyday purposes (Mahmud Yunus, 2015).

However, Quraish Shihab emphasises that the general meaning of al-qalam is more appropriate. In this context, al-qalam is interpreted as all forms, including modern technology such as even the most advanced computers. This interpretation is in line with the command to read (iqra') as the first revelation, which contains a broad recommendation for literacy, including the processes of reading, writing, and the development of science (Amri Vitra, 2023).

## Conclusion

Efforts to build a culture of literacy based on the Qur'an have actually existed since the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, when the first revelation was given to him. In other words, with the revelation of the Qur'an, particularly Surah Al-'Alaq, verses 1-5, the process of drawing humanity out of ignorance and into a society capable of reading and writing began. It is crucial to contextualise this revelation to broaden the meaning and scope of literacy activities, especially in this modern era.

Mahmud Yunus interprets various important aspects of literacy. This begins with the interpretation or conveyance of the meaning of *iqra'* and *al-qalam*, the purpose of literacy, to the concepts of literacy from various paradigms. However, it is possible that this interpretation will produce new results. Essentially, Mahmud Yunus's interpretation of Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1-5 and Surah Al-Qalam verse 1 both help students learn to read.

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