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Qur'anic Foundations of the Obligation to Learn: A Thematic and Scientific Exegesis and Its Implications for Islamic Education

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Abstract

This study departs from the growing urgency of strengthening Islamic education in nurturing knowledgeable and ethical individuals, as emphasized repeatedly in the Qur'an and Hadith. While previous studies often treat the obligation to learn in a normative and descriptive manner, they rarely integrate thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhū'i*) and scientific exegesis (*tafsir 'ilmi*) as combined analytical frameworks. This research fills that gap by examining Qur'anic educational verses through both epistemological approaches. Using a library research method, the study analyzes relevant Qur'anic passages alongside classical and contemporary scholarly works. The findings reveal that thematic exegesis systematically organizes Qur'anic guidance on learning into a coherent conceptual framework, whereas scientific exegesis contextualizes these teachings through the dialogue between revelation and modern scientific insights. When employed together, the two approaches generate a comprehensive educational paradigm that emphasizes literacy, intellectual cultivation, and social responsibility. The study carries direct implications for contemporary Islamic education, particularly in designing integrative curricula, strengthening literacy culture, and reframing the obligation to learn as both an act of worship and a civilizational mandate. Ultimately, the research reaffirms the pivotal role of Islamic education in shaping a knowledgeable, just, and morally grounded society.

Keywords: scientific exegesis, thematic exegesis, obligation to learn, Islamic education, civilization.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berangkat dari urgensi penguatan pendidikan Islam dalam membentuk manusia berilmu dan berakhlak, sebagaimana ditegaskan dalam Al-Qur'an dan hadis. Kajian terdahulu umumnya membahas kewajiban belajar secara normatif dan deskriptif, namun belum mengintegrasikan *tafsir maudhu'i* dan *tafsir ilmi* sebagai kerangka analitis yang saling melengkapi. Penelitian ini mengisi celah tersebut dengan mengkaji ayat-ayat pendidikan melalui kedua pendekatan epistemologis tersebut. Menggunakan metode studi pustaka, penelitian menelaah ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an terkait perintah belajar, didukung literatur klasik dan kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *tafsir maudhu'i* menyusun bimbingan Qur'ani tentang kewajiban belajar ke dalam kerangka konsep yang sistematis, sedangkan *tafsir ilmi* mengontekstualisasikannya melalui dialog antara wahyu dan temuan ilmiah modern. Penggabungan keduanya melahirkan paradigma pendidikan Islam yang menekankan literasi, pengembangan akal, dan tanggung jawab sosial. Penelitian ini berdampak langsung pada pengembangan pendidikan Islam kontemporer, khususnya dalam perancangan kurikulum integratif, penguatan budaya literasi, serta pemaknaan ulang kewajiban belajar sebagai ibadah sekaligus misi peradaban. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini menegaskan kembali peran sentral pendidikan Islam dalam membangun masyarakat yang berilmu, berkeadilan, dan berakhlak.

Kata kunci: tafsir ilmi, tafsir tematik, kewajiban belajar, pendidikan Islam, peradaban

Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar in shaping human civilization. In the Islamic worldview, education is not merely a process of transmitting knowledge but an effort to cultivate morality, form character, and uphold justice. Islamic teachings assign the pursuit of knowledge as an obligation upon every Muslim, affirming its spiritual and worldly significance (Herwati, 2024). Therefore, examining the obligation to learn through scientific exegesis (*tafsir ilmi*) and thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhu'i*) becomes essential to reaffirm the theological foundations of education.

The Qur'an underscores the centrality of knowledge in various passages. The first revelation, Surah Al-'Alaq (1-5), commands humankind to read, marking learning as the gateway to civilization. This highlights that seeking knowledge is not only an intellectual activity but a form of worship. Moreover, the obligation to learn encompasses human efforts to understand the universe, navigate social life, and uphold public welfare (Suryadi, 2024). Thus, learning in Islam spans spiritual, social, and intellectual dimensions.

In the modern era, educational systems face increasingly complex challenges. Technological advancements, shifting social dynamics, and changing cultural contexts require a responsive and value-based educational framework. Thematic exegesis offers a suitable method to explore Qur'anic guidance related to learning, enabling its application in contemporary educational settings.

Meanwhile, scientific exegesis bridges Qur'anic messages with empirical knowledge. This approach demonstrates that the command to seek knowledge is not merely doctrinal but is aligned with human nature and the progression of modern science (Mirza & Badruzaman, 2025). Hence, *tafsir ilmi* provides both theological and rational support for the significance of education.

Islam also views education as a collective responsibility. The obligation to learn extends beyond individuals to families, communities, and the state. The Qur'anic emphasis on justice and equitable access to education aligns with the responsibility to provide adequate learning facilities (Permana et al., 2024). Thus, education is understood as both a right and a duty in the Islamic framework.

The educational challenges faced by many Muslim communities today reveal a gap between normative ideals and actual conditions. Issues such as low educational quality, unequal access, and weak integration between religious and secular knowledge persist, despite the historical legacy of a strong intellectual tradition during the Islamic Golden Age (Meliantina, 2022). This highlights the need to revisit Qur'anic foundations for learning.

Although many studies have examined the obligation to seek knowledge in Islam, most of them remain descriptive and normative, focusing either on thematic discussions or the moral virtue of learning. Existing literature has not yet offered an integrated analysis that combines scientific exegesis and thematic exegesis to interpret Qur'anic educational verses within the context of contemporary challenges. This gap is precisely what the present study seeks to fill by constructing a comprehensive and epistemologically grounded understanding of the learning obligation in Islam.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the obligation to learn through scientific and thematic exegesis to articulate a Qur'anic perspective on education. The study aims to contribute to contemporary exegetical scholarship and strengthen Islamic educational systems so that they remain relevant to modern demands while grounded in foundational values. Thus, this research serves both theoretical and practical purposes in enhancing Islamic education.

Literatur Review

The Concept of Scientific Exegesis

Scientific exegesis (*tafsir ilmi*) is an interpretive method that connects Qur'anic revelation with scientific realities. This approach highlights that the Qur'an discusses not only spiritual and moral dimensions but also contains indications of natural laws observable through science. According to al-Zarqani (2003), *tafsir ilmi* is not speculative in nature but a scholarly endeavor to uncover the Qur'an's intellectual dimensions that remain relevant across time (Sulam et al., 2023). Through this method, Muslims are encouraged to recognize the harmony between revelation and scientific truth and to actively engage with modern knowledge.

Furthermore, *tafsir ilmi* offers a significant contribution to Islamic education by providing a theological foundation for the pursuit of knowledge and research. Learning and scientific inquiry are perceived as acts of worship, as both represent obedience to God's command to explore His creation. Thus, education becomes a form of integration between faith and reason, shaping an epistemological framework in which revelation and intellect complement each other in advancing human civilization.

The Concept of Thematic Exegesis

Thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhui*) is an interpretative approach that compiles Qur'anic verses related to a specific theme for comprehensive analysis. According to Abdul Hayy al-Farmawi (1994), this process involves selecting a theme, collecting relevant verses, examining linguistic aspects, analyzing historical contexts, and constructing a holistic concept that reflects the Qur'an's perspective on a given issue (Maladi, 2021). This approach facilitates contextual understanding of the Qur'an's message, particularly in addressing contemporary educational challenges. Hence, thematic exegesis serves as an essential bridge between divine revelation and social reality.

In the educational context, thematic exegesis plays a crucial role in interpreting the obligation to learn as an integrated system of values. Through this method, verses about reading, reasoning, and practicing knowledge can be analyzed as a unified conceptual framework forming the Qur'anic philosophy of education. This approach not only strengthens the normative foundation of Islamic education but also provides practical guidance for developing curricula and teaching processes grounded in divine values, making them relevant to the needs of the modern world.

In this study, *tafsir 'ilmi* and *tafsir maudhū'i* function not only as explanatory concepts but as the theoretical framework and analytical tools used to interpret the Qur'anic verses on the obligation to learn. Thematic exegesis provides a structural and conceptual mapping of the verses, while scientific exegesis contextualizes these verses through empirical reasoning and contemporary knowledge. Employing both approaches as analytical lenses ensures that the interpretation presented in this study is methodologically coherent and epistemologically grounded.

Analytical Comparison Between Scientific Exegesis and Thematic Exegesis

While both scientific exegesis (*tafsir ilmi*) and thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhū'ī*) aim to deepen the understanding of Qur'anic messages, their epistemological foundations and methodological orientations differ significantly. Scientific exegesis operates by correlating Qur'anic verses with empirical findings, positioning revelation as a source of inspiration that aligns with scientific inquiry. Its analysis is deductive, beginning from the text and extending toward observable realities. In contrast, thematic exegesis applies an inductive method by collecting verses related to a specific issue and synthesizing them into a comprehensive Qur'anic worldview independent of external scientific theories. This distinction highlights that while *tafsir ilmi* integrates revelation with empirical knowledge, *tafsir maudhū'ī* constructs a conceptual framework rooted purely in the internal coherence of the Qur'an.

Despite these methodological differences, the two approaches complement each other in educational studies. Scientific exegesis provides rational justification for the obligation to learn by demonstrating the harmony between Qur'anic commands and scientific progress, whereas thematic exegesis formulates the normative and philosophical principles guiding Islamic education. When combined, they create a holistic framework that connects divine revelation, rational inquiry, and contemporary educational needs. This integrative perspective strengthens the Qur'anic foundation of Islamic education, ensuring that learning is understood not only as a spiritual duty but also as an intellectual and civilizational mandate.

The Obligation to Learn in the Perspective of the Qur'an and Hadith

The Qur'an places great emphasis on the importance of knowledge. *Surah Al-'Alaq* (1–5) marks the beginning of revelation and establishes reading as the gateway to knowledge. This underscores that learning is an act of worship that fosters civilization. Additionally, *Surah Al-Mujadalah* (11) states that Allah elevates those who believe and possess knowledge, signifying that knowledge is both a measure of virtue and a means of spiritual closeness to God. Thus, learning in Islam represents not only a moral obligation but also an act of devotion with profound spiritual significance.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reinforced this principle through his saying, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" (Ibn Majah). This

hadith illustrates the universality of the learning command, regardless of gender, age, or social status. The obligation to learn in Islam encompasses personal, social, and spiritual dimensions, as knowledge elevates individuals while uplifting communities. Education, therefore, functions as an instrument for promoting justice, welfare, and moral integrity within Islamic civilization.

Education as an Instrument of Islamic Civilization

History demonstrates that the glory of Islamic civilization is inseparable from its educational tradition and intellectual development. During the Islamic Golden Age, institutions such as the Nizamiyyah Madrasa in Baghdad served as hubs for the formation of scholars who significantly contributed to global advancement (Fextoria, 2023). Muslim thinkers such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Khaldun produced monumental works not only in theology but also in medicine, philosophy, mathematics, and sociology. Their intellectual activities embodied the spirit of *iqra'*, transforming divine revelation into a living culture of knowledge.

Thus, education in Islam is more than a vehicle for transmitting knowledge it is a vital instrument for civilizational progress. The Qur'anic obligation to learn inspires Muslims to master diverse disciplines as part of their responsibility as stewards of the earth. When properly implemented, education nurtures individuals who are both knowledgeable and virtuous, serving as catalysts for societal transformation. Reviving this scientific and spiritual ethos is crucial for enabling modern Islamic education to reclaim its historic role as the foundation of global civilization.

Education as a Social Responsibility

In Islamic thought, education is not solely an individual duty but also a collective obligation (*farḍhu kifayah*). Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1995) emphasized that both society and the state bear responsibility for ensuring equal access to quality education for all citizens, without discrimination (Huriani et al., 2022). This principle aligns with Islam's commitment to justice and equality of opportunity. When managed collectively, education becomes a shared endeavor aimed at achieving communal prosperity and enlightenment.

The concept of social responsibility in education implies that every segment of society has a role in fostering knowledge. Individuals are obliged to seek learning, parents to guide, communities to create supportive environments, and governments to guarantee educational rights. This synergy produces a participatory and equitable educational system. Consequently, education in Islam is not merely an intellectual activity but also a form of social worship dedicated to the collective good and advancement of humanity.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach using the library research method with a descriptive–analytical orientation. Such an approach is appropriate because the primary materials examined—Qur'anic verses, Hadith texts, and classical tafsir literature—require careful and systematic interpretation to uncover their normative and epistemological implications for Islamic educational thought (Abdullah et al., 2022; Syamsul et al., 2023; Wada et al., 2024). The aim is to trace how these textual foundations shape the Islamic conception of the obligation to seek knowledge and its relevance to contemporary educational discourse.

The data consist of two categories. Primary data include Qur'anic verses related to learning—particularly QS. Al-'Alaq (1–5), QS. Al-Mujādalah (11), QS. Az-Zumar (9), and QS. Al-Baqarah (282)—as well as classical and modern exegetical works such as Tafsir al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, al-Maraghi, and Tafsir al-Misbah. Secondary data are drawn from methodological texts, scholarly journals, and academic studies that discuss Islamic education and Qur'anic epistemology.

The process of data collection proceeded through several gradual stages. *First*, all Qur'anic verses and relevant Hadith were identified and compiled according to their thematic relation to the obligation of learning. *Second*, interpretive viewpoints from classical and contemporary tafsir were gathered to provide a wide comparative base. *Third*, key concepts emerging from these sources were mapped and organized to reveal patterns within the Qur'anic discourse on knowledge. *Fourth*, supporting literature from modern educational studies was selected to contextualize the findings within present-day challenges.

Data analysis was conducted using an integrative framework combining thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhū'ī*) and scientific exegesis (*tafsir 'ilmi*). Thematic exegesis was used to group and synthesize verses under the unifying theme of learning, taking into account linguistic nuances, contextual background (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and intertextual coherence across the Qur'an. Scientific exegesis complemented this by relating Qur'anic insights to empirical realities and contemporary scientific developments, allowing the verses to be engaged through a reasoned and dialogical interpretive process.

The analytical work unfolded in three interconnected phases: data reduction by selecting and classifying relevant textual evidence; interpretation by comparing multiple tafsir sources and integrating thematic and scientific perspectives; and conclusion drawing by formulating conceptual and educational implications. To strengthen the validity of the findings, the study applied source triangulation, comparing classical commentaries, modern interpretations, and contemporary educational scholarship. A hermeneutic sensitivity was maintained throughout the analysis to ensure that interpretations remained faithful to the text while attentive to contemporary contexts. Through this approach, the study provides a comprehensive and integrative understanding of Qur'anic guidance on the obligation to learn and its significance for Islamic education in the modern era.

Result

The findings of this study were obtained through a comprehensive review of primary textual sources, including Qur'anic verses, prophetic traditions (hadith), and classical as well as contemporary tafsir that discuss the obligation to seek knowledge in Islam. The results reveal that learning is a fundamental principle in Islamic teachings, possessing strong theological, moral, and social foundations. The textual analysis identifies several verses that explicitly or implicitly emphasize the significance of education as both an individual and collective duty for Muslims.

The first and foremost verse is QS. Al-'Alaq (1-5), containing the divine command *iqra'* ("read"). This initial revelation serves as the epistemological cornerstone of Islamic civilization. The command to read encompasses not only reading written texts but also understanding natural phenomena, social realities, and spiritual signs of God's

greatness. Thus, it establishes the act of learning as an intellectual form of worship that leads humankind toward recognizing the Creator (Harahap, 2022; Rasyada et al., 2025).

The second finding comes from QS. Al-Mujadilah (11), which declares that Allah will exalt those who believe and possess knowledge. This verse underscores the close link between faith and knowledge, positioning learning as a means of elevating both spiritual and social status. Knowledge grants responsibility to uphold justice and spread benefits within society (D. F. P. A. Sari & Retnaningsih, 2022).

Meanwhile, QS. Az-Zumar (9) presents a rhetorical comparison between those who possess knowledge and those who do not. The question, “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” serves as a logical affirmation that knowledge is the light distinguishing truth from falsehood. This verse conveys the moral message that every Muslim must seek knowledge to correctly understand divine commands and prohibitions (Abdullah et al., 2022; Rasyada et al., 2025).

Other verses, such as QS. Al-Baqarah (282), highlight the command to record transactions meticulously, which underscores the value of literacy, documentation, and responsibility in social life. In educational terms, it forms the ethical foundation for accuracy and integrity in learning. Likewise, QS. Al-Baqarah (269) states that wisdom (hikmah) is the highest form of beneficial knowledge, implying that the goal of learning extends beyond information acquisition toward moral and spiritual enlightenment (Harahap, 2022).

The study also identifies several hadiths that reinforce the obligation to seek knowledge. The most well-known narration, reported by Ibn Majah, states: “Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim, male and female.” Classified as hasan by many scholars, this hadith establishes the universal nature of education as a divine duty (Multazami et al., 2025; Umar, 2022). Islam thus views education as both a right and an obligation for all people, irrespective of gender or social class.

Another hadith declares: “The superiority of the scholar over the worshipper is like that of the moon over all other stars,” illustrating that knowledge illuminates human life with guidance and benefit (Fauzan et al., 2024; Rustina, 2021). Furthermore, the Prophet stated that whoever walks a path to seek knowledge, Allah will make easy for him the path to Paradise affirming that learning is a sacred act of worship with eternal rewards.

In summary, the findings reveal that both the Qur'an and Hadith place knowledge at the center of faith, morality, and civilization. Knowledge is the instrument for understanding divine will, improving social life, and building a just and enlightened society. The obligation to learn in Islam is not merely individual but collective and universal. Hence, education represents gratitude for the gift of intellect and a form of devotion to Allah SWT.

Discussion

The Obligation to Learn in the Perspective of the Qur'an

The obligation to learn, from the Qur'anic perspective, holds a central position in shaping Islamic civilization. The first revelation to Prophet Muhammad SAW QS. Al-'Alaq (1-5) commands iqra' ("read"), symbolizing the awakening of human intellectual consciousness. This command extends beyond mere literacy to include the contemplation of natural and social phenomena as signs of God's greatness. Hence, learning is viewed as a spiritual process that guides humanity toward knowing its Creator and cultivating the earth through knowledge (Rasyada et al., 2025; Harahap, 2022).

Furthermore, QS. Al-Mujadilah (11) provides theological legitimacy for the exalted status of knowledge by declaring that Allah raises in rank those who believe and possess knowledge. This verse positions knowledge as a means of elevating human dignity both before God and within society. True knowledge in Islam is inseparable from faith, for it leads the learner to obedience and moral responsibility. Thus, every act of learning undertaken with sincerity becomes an act of worship (D. F. P. A. Sari & Retnaningsih, 2022).

In QS. Az-Zumar (9), the rhetorical question "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" affirms that knowledge is light distinguishing guidance from misguidance. In modern educational discourse, this principle advocates for a knowledge-based society that values education as the foundation of progress. Through knowledge, Muslims are equipped to understand divine laws, manage social life, and contribute to civilizational development (Rasyada et al., 2025).

Moreover, QS. Al-Baqarah (282) underscores the importance of documentation and recordkeeping, reflecting academic ethics such as honesty, precision, and accountability. This verse implies that knowledge must be managed systematically and responsibly for the collective good. Meanwhile, QS. Al-Baqarah (269) affirms that Allah grants hikmah (wisdom) to whomever He wills, and whoever attains wisdom has indeed been given abundant goodness. In educational terms, hikmah represents the integration of intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Dahana & Rahmawati, 2024; Harahap, 2022).

Thus, the Qur'an establishes learning as a theological, intellectual, social, and moral imperative. Learning aims not merely at information acquisition but at holistic human development. Every Muslim is called to be a lifelong learner who cultivates both intellect and spirituality. In Islam, knowledge without practice has no value, and learning that does not lead to recognition of Allah loses its ultimate purpose.

Prophetic Traditions on the Obligation to Seek Knowledge

The Prophet Muhammad's traditions (hadith) serve as practical guidance for implementing Qur'anic principles, including the obligation to seek knowledge. The narration reported by Ibn Majah "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" is among the most cited foundations of Islamic education. It affirms that learning is a universal duty transcending gender, age, and social status (Multazami et al., 2025). Historically, this teaching was transformative, abolishing pre-Islamic discrimination that limited education to privileged groups.

The Prophet also illustrated the excellence of knowledge through vivid analogies. He stated, "The superiority of the scholar over the worshipper is like that of the moon over all other stars." This comparison highlights that knowledge holds greater value because it enlightens others and benefits humanity at large (Rustina, 2021; Fauzan et al., 2024). Knowledge in Islam is not self-centered but social and civilizational, guiding the community toward justice and prosperity.

Moreover, several hadiths stress the importance of applying knowledge. The Prophet warned that one who seeks knowledge but fails to practice it is like a lamp that gives light to others while burning itself. This metaphor teaches that knowledge without

action leads to arrogance and spiritual ruin (Umar, 2022; Kamilah et al., 2024). Hence, learning must result in ethical behavior, social contribution, and moral transformation.

Another narration promises that whoever walks a path to seek knowledge, Allah will ease his path to Paradise. This statement elevates learning to the level of *jihad fi sabilillah* a sacred striving requiring effort, patience, and sincerity. In contemporary education, this hadith supports the concept of lifelong learning, positioning intellectual pursuit as continuous worship.

Thus, the Prophet's teachings frame learning as a multidimensional obligation spiritual, moral, and social. Knowledge leads to divine closeness, personal refinement, and the creation of a just and enlightened society. Islamic educational tradition rooted in the hadith perceives knowledge not merely as a means of livelihood but as a form of worship and character formation toward *insan kamil* (the complete human being).

Thematic Exegesis on Individual and Collective Responsibility

The thematic exegesis (*tafsir maudhū'ī*) approach allows researchers to explore a Qur'anic concept holistically by compiling related verses and analyzing them as an integrated whole. In the case of learning obligation, this method reveals that the command to seek knowledge is not confined to personal duty but encompasses a broader collective dimension involving the entire community (Mundzir et al., 2025). In Islam, learning is both a personal moral responsibility and a societal trust (*amanah*) that sustains the continuity of civilization.

At the individual level, learning serves as a means of developing intellect and strengthening faith. The Qur'an consistently links reflection to belief, as exemplified in QS. *Ali Imran* (190–191), describing the thoughtful as those who contemplate the creation of the heavens and the earth. Thus, learning combines rational and spiritual dimensions; gaining knowledge is a way of deepening one's awareness of divine greatness (Kamilah et al., 2024; Harahap, 2022).

Nevertheless, the Qur'an also stresses that the duty of knowledge extends beyond the self. Verses such as QS. *Al-Maidah* (2) and QS. *Ali Imran* (104) urge believers to cooperate in goodness and to collectively enjoy what is right. These teachings highlight education as a shared social obligation. Families, communities, and governments are

jointly responsible for establishing equitable and accessible learning environments. The Islamic education system should thus aim to build not only knowledgeable individuals but also a *learning society* that values knowledge as a collective good (Almas, 2025; Mundzir et al., 2025).

Collective responsibility is inseparable from the Qur'anic principles of *amanah* (trust) and *'adl* (justice), as stated in QS. *An-Nisa* (58). Leaders and educational institutions bear the duty to ensure fair distribution of educational opportunities. Denying access to knowledge undermines the justice that the Qur'an commands. Therefore, educators and policymakers must act as trustees who guarantee that the obligation to learn is fulfilled by all citizens without discrimination.

Beyond governmental efforts, civil society also plays a crucial role. Religious organizations, social institutions, and local scholars can foster literacy and informal education. The *majlis taklim* tradition, for instance, embodies communal responsibility for nurturing a culture of knowledge. In this way, learning transcends the classroom and becomes embedded in everyday life (Umam, 2021).

From a thematic perspective, the obligation to learn in Islam comprises two interdependent dimensions. The first is individual, encouraging continuous intellectual and spiritual growth; the second is collective, promoting justice, participation, and shared literacy. Together, they form the foundation of an Islamic vision for a learned and virtuous society.

Scientific Exegesis and Its Relevance to Contemporary Education

The scientific exegesis (*tafsir ilmi*) approach bridges divine revelation and empirical knowledge. In education, it emphasizes the Qur'an's encouragement to use intellect as a means of understanding God's creation. QS. *Yunus* (100) declares that humiliation befalls those who refuse to think, establishing critical reasoning as a sacred intellectual act (Ilmi et al., 2025).

QS. *Ali Imran* (190–191) further highlights the value of scientific reflection on natural phenomena as a path to strengthen faith. In modern pedagogy, this aligns with higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. The Qur'an never rejects science; rather, it guides its development within a monotheistic worldview. Thus,

tafsir ilmi becomes a paradigm that integrates scientific inquiry with moral and spiritual principles (Fikri & Munfarida, 2023).

Islamic intellectual history offers many examples of this synthesis. Scholars like Ibn Sina, Al-Khawarizmi, and Al-Biruni viewed scientific research as an act of worship, exploring nature to uncover divine laws. Reviving this ethos in modern education encourages learners to use technology ethically, avoid misinformation, and cultivate spiritually guided digital literacy.

Tafsir ilmi also provides a normative foundation for education oriented toward *maslahah* the common good. Knowledge must yield tangible social benefits rather than remain theoretical. Contemporary issues such as moral degradation, environmental exploitation, and humanitarian crises call for an ethical, value-based approach to science. Qur'anic principles of balance and stewardship can thus inspire a humanistic and sustainable scientific ethic (Minarti, 2022).

In the digital age, *tafsir ilmi* gains renewed relevance. Tech-savvy youth must be trained to think critically and responsibly. The Qur'an's calls for reflection and investigation provide an epistemic framework for discerning truth and combating misinformation. Islamic education grounded in *tafsir ilmi* can produce digitally literate, morally upright, and spiritually conscious generations. In this sense, *tafsir ilmi* transcends academic interpretation it embodies a holistic educational paradigm uniting faith, intellect, and action (Fikri & Munfarida, 2023; Ilmi et al., 2025).

Scientific Interpretation of Qur'anic Verses (Tafsir 'Ilmi Application)

A scientific exegesis approach requires that Qur'anic verses be interpreted through the lens of empirical knowledge while maintaining the primacy of revelation. One example is found in Surah Al-'Alaq (1-5), which commands humankind to "read" and highlights the process of learning through the phrase *alladhī 'allama bil-qalam* (He who taught by the pen). Contemporary cognitive science shows that reading and writing activate complex neural pathways that strengthen memory formation and critical thinking aligning with the Qur'anic emphasis on literacy as the foundation of human civilization. Thus, *tafsir 'ilmi* reveals a harmony between divine guidance and neurological processes related to learning.

Another verse relevant to scientific exegesis is Surah Al-Mujadalah (11), where Allah elevates those endowed with knowledge. Modern educational sociology supports this principle through the concept of social mobility: higher levels of education correlate with improved socioeconomic status, leadership capacity, and community well-being. This alignment demonstrates that the Qur'anic elevation of knowledgeable individuals is not merely spiritual but also corresponds to measurable patterns in human development.

Surah Al-'Imran (190–191), which encourages reflection on the creation of the heavens and the earth, further illustrates the scientific dimension of the Qur'an. The verse urges believers to contemplate cosmic order, which resonates with the principles of astronomy, physics, and environmental science. Through tafsir 'ilmi, this verse can be understood as an invitation to scientific observation, emphasizing that empirical investigation is a means of deepening faith. These interpretations make clear that scientific exegesis is not speculative but provides a methodological bridge between divine revelation and scientific inquiry, especially within contemporary educational discourse.

Education as the Pillar of Civilization

In Islam, education is not merely a process of knowledge transmission but the foundation upon which civilization stands. The Qur'an portrays humans as *khalifah fil ardh* stewards of the earth responsible for cultivating it through knowledge and righteous action. Consequently, the quality of education reflects the vitality of a civilization. Islamic history demonstrates that true greatness emerged not from military power but from the intellectual energy and reverence for learning (Rohiman & Arsad, 2025).

During the Golden Age of Islam, education catalyzed multidimensional progress. *Bayt al-Hikmah* in Baghdad became a center of knowledge where scholars translated and expanded scientific works, while Cordoba's libraries symbolized intellectual inclusivity. These examples show that Islam pioneered the integration of religious and worldly sciences long before the modern era (Dahana & Rahmawati, 2024; Faisal, 2024).

Civilizational education must rest upon moral foundations. The Qur'an encourages not only intellectual growth but also ethical refinement. In Islamic tradition, a true scholar (*'alim*) is valued not by the volume of knowledge possessed but by the wisdom and benefit derived from it. This aligns with the concept of *'ilm an-nafi'* beneficial

knowledge which lies at the heart of Islamic education (Fauzan et al., 2024; Ramdani et al., 2025).

In contemporary settings, education as a pillar of civilization must produce intelligent, creative, and virtuous generations. Globalization demands adaptability and technological fluency, yet without spiritual grounding, progress can become destructive. Islamic education offers equilibrium balancing faith and intellect, competence and character. Embedding Qur'anic values within educational systems ensures intellectual excellence alongside moral integrity (Dahana & Rahmawati, 2024).

Education also serves as a tool for social equity. Islam declares learning as a universal right, transcending economic or gender barriers. The Prophet Muhammad SAW exemplified this inclusivity by teaching both men and women equally. Thus, the modern notion of inclusive education traces its essence back to Islam's earliest teachings. Strengthening Islamic education today means preserving this spirit of equality and accessibility for all.

In essence, education sustains civilization by transmitting knowledge and virtue across generations. When the culture of learning declines, civilizations falter. Hence, the greatest investment lies not in material wealth but in cultivating knowledgeable and ethical human beings. Education rooted in Islamic values produces societies that advance scientifically while remaining moral, compassionate, and just.

The Moral and Spiritual Dimensions of Learning

The moral and spiritual dimensions of learning occupy a central place in Islamic education. The Qur'an and Hadith affirm that knowledge is never value-neutral it carries ethical purpose. Knowledge devoid of morality leads to arrogance and misuse of power. Hence, Islam integrates intention (*niyyah*) and ethics into the learning process. The Prophet Muhammad's supplication, "O Allah, grant me beneficial knowledge," underscores that not all knowledge is inherently good unless guided by moral intent (Fauzan et al., 2024).

In Islamic pedagogy, *'ilm nafi'* (beneficial knowledge) serves as the measure of scholarly virtue. Knowledge must elevate human conduct and contribute positively to society. Teachers, therefore, are not merely transmitters of information but mentors

shaping ethics and character. Education in Islam thus extends beyond intellectual development toward moral cultivation (Kamilah et al., 2024; Ridhahani, 2022).

Moral integrity manifests in academic honesty, responsibility, and respect for teachers. Classical scholars such as Az-Zarnuji, in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, emphasized sincerity, diligence, and etiquette toward teachers as keys to blessed knowledge. These principles remain relevant amid modern moral crises like plagiarism and academic dishonesty. Islamic education acts as a moral safeguard, fostering integrity and humility in scholarship.

Spiritual consciousness likewise drives genuine learning. When learning is pursued for Allah's sake, it becomes an act of worship. QS. *Fathir* (28) declares, "Indeed, those who fear Allah among His servants are the scholars." The more profound one's knowledge, the deeper their humility and submission to God (Ridhahani, 2022). This harmony between intellect and heart defines the uniqueness of Islamic education.

In today's context, education that neglects morality and spirituality risks producing intellectually bright yet ethically fragile individuals. Islam advocates balance nurturing intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence simultaneously. True education forms not just smart minds but noble souls. By instilling moral and spiritual values early, the younger generation grows into responsible learners embodying the virtue of *ihsan*.

Implications of the Obligation to Learn for the Educational System

The Qur'anic and prophetic command to seek knowledge profoundly shapes the structure of contemporary Islamic education. Learning, in this sense, is not merely intellectual activity but a manifestation of faith and social responsibility. Every Muslim has both the right and the duty to pursue knowledge, applying it for the betterment of society. Education thus becomes the cornerstone for cultivating a knowledgeable and ethical community (Fauzan et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2023).

A key implication of this principle is that education must be inclusive and equitable. Access to quality learning should not be limited by gender, wealth, or social status. Justice, a central Qur'anic value, mandates that all individuals have equal opportunities for intellectual and moral growth. Islamic educational institutions,

therefore, must lead efforts in promoting equitable access to both academic and spiritual education (Ramdani et al., 2025).

The obligation to learn also calls for a holistic curriculum one that nurtures intellect, ethics, and spirituality simultaneously. A well-designed Islamic curriculum bridges modern sciences with Qur'anic values, ensuring that learners develop both competence and conscience. The integrative paradigm of Islamic education connecting *knowledge, faith, and action* remains essential in fostering balanced human development (Minarti, 2022; Y. Sari et al., 2023).

Teachers play a pivotal role within this system. In Islam, educators are not only transmitters of information but also moral guides and spiritual mentors. Their effectiveness lies not only in intellectual mastery but in personal integrity and sincerity. The Prophet Muhammad SAW exemplified this model of education through wisdom and exemplary conduct a model that contemporary systems should aspire to revive.

Families and communities share equal responsibility. Parents serve as the first teachers, cultivating curiosity and reverence for knowledge from early childhood. Meanwhile, society must provide environments that encourage lifelong learning. The synergy among home, school, and community forms a sustainable ecosystem for continuous education (Umam, 2021).

In today's digital age, Islamic education must integrate technology without losing ethical grounding. Digital literacy is essential, yet its purpose must remain oriented toward human benefit. Therefore, Islamic education rooted in the obligation to learn should produce technologically adept learners who are spiritually aware and socially responsible (Ilmi et al., 2025; Fikri & Munfarida, 2023).

Ultimately, the obligation to learn inspires an educational model that balances intellect and faith, science and ethics, worldly success and eternal values. The ideal Islamic education system produces not only intelligent individuals but enlightened souls who embody the unity of reason, morality, and devotion.

Challenges of Education in the Modern Era

Education in the modern era faces challenges of unprecedented complexity. Globalization, rapid technological advancement, and shifting social dynamics demand adaptability and resilience. While globalization provides broader access to information, it also introduces cultural influences that may conflict with Islamic principles. In this landscape, Islamic education must act as both guardian of identity and agent of progress (Safitri et al., 2025).

A pressing concern is the moral decline among youth. The rise of instant gratification, diminished respect for teachers, and weakened social responsibility indicate a disconnection between intellectual growth and spiritual maturity. Islamic education seeks to harmonize these dimensions through Qur'an-based character formation, ensuring that learners are not only knowledgeable but also virtuous and accountable (Fauzan et al., 2024; Ridhahani, 2022).

Technological advancement presents another challenge: misinformation and digital dependency. In an era of boundless information, discernment becomes essential. The Qur'an, through the *tafsir ilmi* approach, encourages critical thinking and reflective reasoning. Islamic education should cultivate ethical digital literacy, empowering students to use technology for knowledge and da'wah rather than distraction (Fikri & Munfarida, 2023; Ilmi et al., 2025).

Educational disparity remains a persistent issue. Many regions continue to face unequal access to quality education and limited learning infrastructure. The Qur'anic principle of *'adl* (justice) requires equity in all spheres, including education. Thus, governments and Islamic institutions must collaborate to ensure fair distribution of resources and sustainable educational development (Ramdani et al., 2025).

Another internal challenge lies in preserving spirituality amid the pressures of secularization. Some Islamic institutions, despite their labels, have become overly materialistic and certification-driven. Revitalizing the spiritual essence of education where learning is worship and moral growth is crucial (Luqoni, 2024; Minarti, 2022). Education must aim beyond academic credentials toward forming *insan kamil*, the complete human being who balances worldly pursuit with divine devotion.

In conclusion, the challenges of modern education are not merely technical but philosophical and moral. The solution lies in harmonizing intellect and spirituality.

Islamic education, grounded in faith and reason, holds the capacity to produce balanced, ethical, and visionary generations. By embracing technology without compromising tawhidic values, it can rise as a moral compass in the rapidly changing world.

Although this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the obligation to learn in Islam and its relevance to modern educational systems, it is limited in its empirical scope. The present research adopts a library-based approach, focusing primarily on textual interpretation and conceptual construction rather than direct implementation within educational institutions. Future studies are therefore encouraged to expand upon this work through field-based research that explores how the values of learning obligation are integrated into curricula, teaching practices, and the culture of contemporary Islamic schools. Such efforts would enrich the practical dimension of this study and strengthen the linkage between theory and educational reality.

Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm that the obligation to learn in Islam is grounded in a strong theological foundation, with both the Qur'an and Hadith presenting knowledge-seeking as an act of worship and a vital component of human development. The command *iqra'* in QS. Al-'Alaq (1-5) indicates that learning is not limited to intellectual growth but encompasses spiritual, moral, and civilizational dimensions. This demonstrates that the obligation to seek knowledge functions simultaneously as a personal duty and a collective responsibility.

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