

Sequencing Arabic Instruction from Sūrat al-‘Alaq (Q. 96:1–5) through a Dialectical Reading of Classical and Modern Exegesis

Agus Hidayat*

Institut Agama Islam Persis Bandung, Indonesia

*Email: agushidayat@iaipibandung.ac.id

Abstract

Indonesian scholarship on Sūrat al-‘Alaq 1–5 has produced either general educational values or direct mappings of the passage onto established language-teaching methods, and in both cases the exegetical tradition is cited as if it spoke with one voice. This article asks whether the textual order of the five verses, read through the disagreements of the exegetes, can ground a defensible sequence for teaching Arabic, and what kind of authority such a sequence can claim. The study is a qualitative hermeneutic analysis of eight tafsīr works from the sixth to the fifteenth Hijri century, the ‘Ā’ishah report on the beginning of revelation with its commentary in Ibn Ḥajar’s *Fath al-Bārī*, and current second language research. Each pedagogical inference is graded as textual, exegetical, or analogical. The analysis yields four moments that follow verses 1, 3, 4, and 5 respectively, namely guided oral reception of a text (*iqra’*), recursive practice (the repeated *iqra’*), inscription and mediation through the pen (*‘allama bi-l-qalam*), and generative extension from the known to the unknown (*‘allama al-insāna mā lam ya‘lam*). The second moment carries the weakest exegetical warrant, since al-Marāghī reads the repetition as habituation, al-Zuḥaylī as rhetorical emphasis, and al-Rāzī records three further readings. The model therefore functions as a priority of emphasis with graded warrant. Its practical implication is that Arabic instruction derived from *iqra’* should begin with listening and recitation, which reading-centred curricula in Indonesian Islamic schools tend to postpone.

Keywords: Arabic language teaching; Qur’anic pedagogy; Sūrat al-‘Alaq; tafsīr; second language acquisition

Introduction

Arabic occupies an unusual position in Indonesian Islamic education. It is a foreign language for nearly all learners, and it is simultaneously the language of the scripture, the prayer, and the classical curriculum. Classical scholarship framed its study as a religious duty. Ibn Taymiyyah (1999, Vol. 1, pp. 527–528) reports the instruction attributed to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, “Learn Arabic, for it is part of your religion,” and argues that understanding the Qur’an and the Sunnah is obligatory and impossible without the language. This religious motive has shaped what Indonesian institutions teach. Pesantren curricula have long privileged the reading of classical texts through grammar and translation, and the integration of grammar with *kitab kuning* reading remains a live design problem (Zaenuri & Baroroh, 2025). Madrasah and university programmes have meanwhile adopted communicative approaches that place speaking and listening at the centre (Baroroh & Tolinggi, 2020). The international literature on Arabic as a foreign language describes the same tension between text-centred and proficiency-oriented models (Ryding, 2013; Wahba et al., 2017).

Within this setting, the first five verses of Sūrat al-‘Alaq carry a heavy rhetorical load. They are, according to the report of ‘Ā’ishah, the first portion of the Qur’an revealed to the Prophet (Muslim, 1955, Vol. 1, p. 139, no. 160), and their opening word is the imperative *iqra’*. Teachers and textbook authors routinely invoke the verse to legitimise whatever method they already use. Recent Indonesian scholarship on the passage falls into four clusters. The first derives general educational values, such as God as educator, habituation, the pen as medium, character formation, and respect for learning (Zumrodi, 2021; Fauziah et al., 2023; Sugiarto & Ahlan, 2025). The second maps the verses onto existing language-teaching methods. Rifa’i and Nahar (2019) identify the reading method, the audio-lingual method, and the direct method, while Sanusi and Albantani (2021) draw on Qur’anic norms of speech to frame character education in Arabic classes. The third operationalises the passage for empirical testing, either as a neuroscience-based learning theory (Muji & Pangestuti, 2022) or as a measurable construct correlated with student motivation (Banfatin & Salman, 2025). The fourth

examines the linguistic features of the verses and argues that *iqra'* commands the reading of written and unwritten signs alike (Setiyawan & Fauziyah, 2023).

These studies share three limitations. They treat the exegetical tradition as univocal, quoting one or two commentators as if their reading were the meaning of the verse. They move from a description of revelation to a prescription for the classroom without stating the inferential rule that licenses the move. They also take the narrative frame of the 'Ā'ishah report as a settled datum, although its transmission history and the meaning of the Prophet's reply *mā anā bi-qārī* are debated in the commentarial tradition and in Western hadith scholarship. The result is a literature in which the Qur'an confirms whatever the researcher already believed about pedagogy. Reformers of Arabic teaching invoke *iqra'* for reading-first curricula, and advocates of oral methods invoke the same narrative for audio-lingual drilling.

This article addresses that gap with two questions. First, does the textual order of Q. 96:1–5, read through the disagreements among exegetes, support a defensible sequence for teaching Arabic? Second, what epistemic status can each step of such a sequence claim? The contribution is twofold. Substantively, the article proposes a four-moment model that uses all five verses and corrects a double count found in earlier proposals, where writing and instructional media were derived from the same phrase. Methodologically, it introduces a three-level grading of warrant (textual, exegetical, analogical) that makes visible where a Qur'an-based pedagogy rests on the text and where it rests on the researcher's analogy.

Methods

This is a qualitative library-based study using hermeneutic text analysis. The primary corpus consists of the Qur'anic text of Q. 96:1–5, the 'Ā'ishah report on the beginning of revelation in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (1955, Vol. 1, p. 139, no. 160) together with Ibn Ḥajar's commentary on the parallel report in al-Bukhārī (Ibn Ḥajar, 1379 AH, Vol. 1, pp. 22–25), and eight tafsīr works. The tafsīr corpus was selected to maximise variation in period, method, and school rather than to collect agreeing

voices. It comprises al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), representing rational theological exegesis; al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), representing juristic exegesis; Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), representing transmitted exegesis; al-Marāghī (d. 1371/1952), representing Egyptian reformist exegesis; al-Saʿdī (d. 1376/1956), representing concise Salafī exegesis; Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1393/1973), representing linguistic and *maqāṣid*-oriented exegesis; al-Zuḥaylī (d. 1436/2015), representing contemporary analytical exegesis; and al-Ṣābūnī (d. 1442/2021), representing popular synthetic exegesis. Secondary data comprise Western scholarship on the Qurʾan and the early sources, and second language acquisition research published mainly in the last decade.

Texts were accessed through digital editions in al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah and cited by the printed volume and page that the editions preserve. Every Arabic passage quoted or paraphrased in this article was checked against the Arabic text before translation. Attributions found in the secondary literature were verified at the cited volume and page, and a statement was used only when it could be located in the work of the commentator to whom it is assigned.

Analysis proceeded in three stages. The first stage was exegetical mapping. For each verse unit, the reading of each commentator was coded into categories (for example, “repetition as habituation”, “repetition as emphasis”, “repetition as change of addressee”), following the logic of qualitative content analysis in which coding categories must be explicit and replicable (Krippendorff, 2019). The second stage was dialectical comparison. Readings were set against one another, and against the transmission debate on the underlying hadith, to identify which pedagogical claims survive disagreement and which depend on a single interpreter. The third stage was analogical transfer. The move from a revelatory event to a classroom procedure is an analogy, and contextualist approaches to the Qurʾan require that such moves distinguish what the text asserts from the values and practices an interpreter derives from it (Saeed, 2006). Each pedagogical inference was therefore assigned one of three levels of warrant. *Textual* warrant applies when the inference restates what the wording itself says. *Exegetical* warrant applies when at least one major commentator

explicitly draws the pedagogical meaning. *Analogical* warrant applies when the inference is the researcher's extension. As a final step, each moment was checked for convergence with current second language research. Convergence was treated as corroboration of plausibility; it was never treated as proof of the exegesis.

Trustworthiness was pursued through source triangulation across the eight commentaries, verification of quotations in the original Arabic, and the reporting of contrary readings alongside the reading adopted.

Results and Discussion

The Narrative Frame and Its Contested Details

The 'Ā'ishah report narrates that the angel came to the Prophet in the cave of Ḥirā' and said, "Read!" The Prophet replied *mā anā bi-qārī*. The angel pressed him until he reached the limit of his endurance and repeated the command; the exchange occurred three times before the angel recited the five verses (Muslim, 1955, Vol. 1, p. 139, no. 160). The Prophet then returned to Khadījah trembling. For pedagogy, two features of the report have been made to bear weight. The command precedes the learner's capacity, and the command is repeated.

فَجَاءَهُ الْمَلَكُ فَقَالَ: اقْرَأْ. قَالَ قُلْتُ: مَا أَنَا بِقَارِيٍّ. قَالَ: فَأَخَذَنِي فَغَطَّنِي
حَتَّى بَلَغَ مِنِّي الْجَهْدَ، ثُمَّ أَرْسَلَنِي فَقَالَ: اقْرَأْ

"The angel came to him and said, 'Read!' He said, 'I said: I am not a reader.' He said, 'He took hold of me and pressed me until I reached the limit of my endurance, then released me and said, Read!'" (Muslim, 1955, Vol. 1, p. 139, no. 160).

Both features are less stable than the pedagogical literature assumes. The meaning of the reply is the first difficulty. Ibn Ḥajar (1379 AH, Vol. 1, p. 24) states that the dominant grammatical reading takes *mā* as a negative particle, meaning "I cannot read well," and he rejects the interrogative reading on syntactic grounds. He then reports Abū Shāmah's solution to the question of why the reply was given three times. The first reply expresses refusal, the second a plain statement of inability, and the third a question. Ibn Ḥajar adds that the interrogative is

supported by variants in which the Prophet asks *kayfā aqraʿ* (“How shall I read?”) in Abū al-Aswad’s *Maghāzī* from ‘Urwah, and *mādhā aqraʿ* (“What shall I read?”) in Ibn Ishāq’s transmission from ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr.

أَجَابَ أَبُو شَامَةَ بِأَنْ يُحْمَلَ قَوْلُهُ أَوَّلًا مَا أَنَا بِقَارِيٍّ عَلَى الْإِمْتِنَاعِ، وَثَانِيًا
عَلَى الْإِخْبَارِ بِالنَّفْيِ الْمُحْضِ، وَثَالِثًا عَلَى الْإِسْتِفْهَامِ

The pedagogical consequence is direct. If Abū Shāmah is right, the threefold exchange is a dialogue in which the learner moves from refusal to an admission of inability and finally to a question about content and manner. That reading supports a picture of instruction in which the learner’s question is the turning point, which differs from the drill-like picture of “repeat until mastered” that the literature usually derives from the hadith.

The second difficulty concerns transmission. The report reaches Muslim through Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī from ‘Urwah b. al-Zubayr from ‘Ā’ishah. Görke, Motzki, and Schoeler (2012) argue, through combined analysis of chains and texts, that a core of ‘Urwah’s account of the beginning of revelation can be traced to the late first Islamic century. Shoemaker (2011) contests the reliability of this method for reconstructing ‘Urwah’s *sīra* and doubts that such reconstructions reach the events themselves. Neither side disputes that the narrative of command, inability, repetition, and reception circulated early. The disagreement concerns how far its details, including the number of repetitions, can be pressed as historical data. A pedagogy that rests its second stage on the exact count of repetitions therefore rests on the most contested layer of the report. Earlier scholarship on the meaning of *tahannuth* in the same narrative illustrates how individual terms in the report have long been debated (Kister, 1968).

Moment One: Guided Oral Reception (Verse 1)

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

“Read in the name of your Lord who created; created the human being from a clinging clot” (Q. 96:1–2).

Al-Marāghī (1946, Vol. 30, p. 198) glosses the command as “become a reader by the power and will of God who created you, after you were not one,” and adds that the Prophet was neither a reader nor a writer, so that he would be given a scripture to read that he would never write. Ibn Ḥajar (1379 AH, Vol. 1, p. 24), citing al-Suhaylī, reads the phrase *bi-smi rabbika* as an instruction that the Prophet would read “neither by your own strength nor by your own knowledge, but by the power and help of your Lord, for He teaches you.” Al-Ṣābūnī (1997, Vol. 3, p. 554) calls the verse the first divine address to the Prophet and a summons to reading, writing, and knowledge, which he describes as the emblem of Islam. Al-Sa’dī (2000, p. 930) notes that the sūrah came at the very beginning of prophethood, when the Prophet “did not know what the Book was, nor faith,” and that the angel persisted “until he read.”

Ibn ‘Āshūr gives the most precise account of what *qirā’ah* means, and his account changes the pedagogical picture.

وَالْقِرَاءَةُ نُطْقٌ بِكَلَامٍ مُعَيَّنٍ مَكْتُوبٍ أَوْ مُحْفُوظٍ عَلَى ظَهْرِ قَلْبٍ ... فَهُوَ
كَمَا يَقُولُ الْمُعَلِّمُ لِلتِّلْمِيزِ: اكْتُبْ، فَيَتَأَهَّبُ لِكِتَابَةِ مَا سَيُمْلِيهِ عَلَيْهِ

“Reading is the utterance of a specific discourse, written or memorised by heart ... it is like the teacher saying to the pupil ‘Write!’, so that he prepares to write what will be dictated to him” (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984, Vol. 30, p. 435).

For Ibn ‘Āshūr, the command does not presuppose a written page. No text had yet been dictated and no sheet had been handed over, so the command anticipates an utterance of what is about to be conveyed. His analogy is explicitly pedagogical. It describes a teacher preparing a pupil to receive dictation.

Western scholarship sharpens the same point from a different direction. Graham (1987) documents that the Qur’an was received, transmitted, and experienced primarily as recited scripture. Rubin (1993) reads *iqra’ bi-smi rabbika* against the biblical idiom of calling upon the name of God and argues that the earliest sense of the phrase was proclamation or invocation, with the reading of a text emerging in later interpretation. Sinai (2017) situates the term *qur’ān* within the

vocabulary of liturgical recitation. Setiyawan and Fauziyah (2023) push in the opposite direction and widen *iqraʿ* to the reading of unwritten signs in creation.

The finding for moment one is therefore narrower than the literature claims and more useful. The textual warrant establishes a command to utter a divinely given discourse. The exegetical warrant, strongest in Ibn ʿĀshūr and al-Marāghī, establishes that the command presupposes guidance from a teacher and the learner’s initial inability. The claim that the verse prescribes silent decoding of written Arabic as the first stage of instruction has only analogical warrant, and it sits uneasily with the oral character of the event. The first moment is best described as guided oral reception of a text.

Moment Two: Recursive Practice (Verse 3)

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

“Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous” (Q. 96:3).

The repetition of the imperative is a textual fact. Its meaning is the most contested point in the passage. Four readings appear in the corpus.

Al-Marāghī (1946, Vol. 30, p. 199) gives the reading on which earlier pedagogical proposals rely.

وَكَزَزَ الْأَمْرَ لِأَنَّ الْقِرَاءَةَ لَا تَكْسِبُهَا النَّفْسُ إِلَّا بِالتَّكْرَارِ وَالتَّعَوُّدِ عَلَى مَا جَرَتْ
بِهِ الْعَادَةُ، وَتَكَرَّرَ الْأَمْرُ الْإِلَهِيُّ يَقُومُ مَقَامَ تَكَرَّرِ الْمَقْرُوءِ، وَبِذَلِكَ تَصِيرُ
الْقِرَاءَةُ مَلَكَهً لِلنَّبِيِّ

“The command is repeated because the soul acquires reading only through repetition and habituation ... the repetition of the divine command stands in place of the repetition of what is read, and thereby reading becomes a settled faculty (*malakah*) for the Prophet” (al-Marāghī, 1946, Vol. 30, p. 199).

Al-Zuhaylī (1418 AH, Vol. 30, pp. 314–315) treats the same repetition as a rhetorical device. In his lexical notes, the second *iqraʿ* is “an emphasis of the first” (*taʿkīd li-l-awwal*), and in his section on rhetoric he classifies it as amplification by repetition of the verb (*ṭnāb*)

“for greater attention to the matter of reading and knowledge.” On this reading the repetition intensifies the command and carries no implication about the mechanics of learning.

Al-Rāzī (1420 AH, Vol. 32, p. 217) records three further views without adjudicating among them. The first *iqra*’ is for the Prophet himself and the second for conveying the message to others; or the first is for learning from Gabriel (*li-l-ta’allum*) and the second for teaching (*li-l-ta’līm*); or the first concerns recitation in prayer and the second recitation outside it.

قَالَ بَعْضُهُمْ: اقْرَأْ أَوَّلًا لِنَفْسِكَ، وَالثَّانِي لِلتَّبْلِيغِ، أَوِ الْأَوَّلَ لِلتَّعْلِيمِ مِنْ

جِبْرِيلَ وَالثَّانِي لِلتَّعْلِيمِ، أَوْ اقْرَأْ فِي صَلَاتِكَ وَالثَّانِي خَارِجَ صَلَاتِكَ

The fourth reading is the one implied by Abū Shāmah’s treatment of the threefold exchange in the hadith, discussed above, where repetition is the shape of a dialogue culminating in the learner’s question.

These readings do not cancel one another, and they do not all support the same pedagogy. Al-Marāghī supports consolidation through repeated practice. Al-Rāzī’s second view supports a different and arguably richer sequence, in which the learner who has received a text goes on to teach it, a move from *ta’allum* to *ta’līm*. Al-Zuḥaylī supports no pedagogical sequence at all. The convergence that survives the disagreement is modest. Every reading treats the second command as a return to the same act, deepened or redirected. Moment two is therefore best named recursive practice. Its textual warrant is the bare fact of repetition; its exegetical warrant for habituation rests on al-Marāghī alone in this corpus, and its exegetical warrant for a learning-to-teaching progression rests on one of three views that al-Rāzī reports anonymously.

Al-Marāghī’s vocabulary is itself a classical inheritance. Ibn Khaldūn (1988, Vol. 1, p. 764) opens his chapter on language as a technical habit with the claim that all languages are faculties (*malakāt*) resembling crafts, and that such faculties “arise only through the repetition of acts,” since an act first leaves a quality, then a state, then a settled faculty. Al-Marāghī’s reading of verse 3 is in effect a Khaldūnian theory of acquisition placed inside an exegetical gloss.

Moment Three: Inscription and Mediation through the Pen (Verse 4)

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

“Who taught by the pen” (Q. 96:4).

The verse names the pen as the instrument of teaching through the preposition *bi-*. Al-Qurṭubī (1964, Vol. 20, p. 120) glosses it as the teaching of script and writing, cites Qatādah’s statement that the pen is a great blessing from God without which religion would not stand and life would not be set right, and states that God has drawn attention to the merit of writing, since “the sciences were not recorded, wisdom was not fixed, the reports of earlier generations were not preserved, nor the revealed scriptures, except by writing.” Al-Saʿdī (2000, p. 930) adds that by the pen “the sciences are preserved and rights are recorded,” and that written texts “stand in place of people’s address,” serving as messengers between them. Al-Marāghī (1946, Vol. 30, p. 199) describes the pen as the medium (*wāsiṭah*) of mutual understanding among people across distance, in the same way that the tongue is a medium of understanding, and he argues that the One who made a lifeless instrument into a means of clear expression can make the Prophet “a reader and a teacher.” Al-Ṣābūnī (1997, Vol. 3, p. 554) likewise glosses the verse as the teaching of script and writing.

Ibn Kathīr supplies the conceptual hinge that links this verse to the ones before it. Commenting on verses 3 to 5 together, he distinguishes three modes in which knowledge exists.

وَالْعِلْمُ تَارَةً يَكُونُ فِي الْأَذْهَانِ، وَتَارَةً يَكُونُ فِي اللِّسَانِ، وَتَارَةً يَكُونُ فِي
الْكِتَابَةِ بِالْبَنَانِ، ذِهْنِيٌّ وَلَفْظِيٌّ وَرَسْمِيٌّ، وَالرَّسْمِيُّ يَسْتَلْزِمُهُمَا مِنْ غَيْرِ
عَكْسٍ

“Knowledge is at times in minds, at times on the tongue, and at times in writing with the fingers, mental, verbal, and graphic; the graphic entails the other two, and the converse does not hold” (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, Vol. 8, p. 437).

The asymmetry Ibn Kathīr states is pedagogically decisive. Written knowledge presupposes knowledge held in the mind and on the tongue,

while mental and spoken knowledge can exist without writing. The pen therefore comes after the tongue in the order of dependence, which is the order the verses follow.

Earlier proposals derived two stages from this verse, one for writing and one for instructional media. The commentaries treat these as one reality viewed from two sides. The pen is the technology of writing and, for that very reason, the paradigmatic medium of instruction. Al-Sa'dī's phrase about written texts standing in place of address shows that writing is valued as mediation of speech across time and distance. Separating writing and media into two sequential stages counts the same phrase twice and breaks the claim that the stages follow the textual order. This study therefore treats verse 4 as one moment of inscription and mediation.

Prophetic practice adds an institutional dimension. Ibn 'Abbās reports that captives of Badr who could not pay ransom were required instead to teach the children of the Anṣār to write (Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, 2001, Vol. 4, p. 92, no. 2216). The editors of the *Musnad* grade the report *ḥasan*, noting that 'Alī b. 'Āṣim is weak but has corroboration and that the remaining narrators are reliable. The report shows writing being taught as a public good in the earliest Medinan community.

The exegetical warrant for moment three is strong and multiple. The textual warrant establishes the pen as instrument of teaching. The extension from the pen to modern instructional media (images, audio, digital platforms) is analogical and rests on al-Marāghī's notion of *wāsiṭah*.

Moment Four: Generative Extension (Verse 5)

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

“Taught the human being what he did not know” (Q. 96:5).

Earlier proposals stopped at verse 4 and left verse 5 without a pedagogical role. The commentaries give it one. Al-Zuḥaylī (1418 AH, Vol. 30, p. 314) analyses the second *'allama* as a substitution of inclusion (*badal ishtimāl*) for the first, meaning that God taught the human being

“by the pen and without it,” in matters general and particular, evident and hidden. Teaching, on this analysis, exceeds what the pen transmits. Al-Saʿdī (2000, p. 930) explains that God brought the human being out of the womb knowing nothing and gave him hearing, sight, and understanding, and made easy for him the means of knowledge. Al-Marāghī (1946, Vol. 30, p. 200) reads the verse as proof “of the merit of reading, writing, and knowledge,” and argues that the One who taught humanity everything it knows can teach the Prophet to read and much else besides, “since your soul is prepared to receive it.” Al-Qurṭubī (1964, Vol. 20, p. 120) speaks of God moving His servants “from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge.”

Two exegetical motifs matter for pedagogy. The first is the learner’s preparedness (*istiʿdād*), which al-Marāghī makes the ground of further teaching. The second is the movement from the known to the unknown, which al-Zuḥaylī extends beyond the written channel. Together they describe a terminal moment in which the learner generates new knowledge from what has been received, recited, and written. The textual warrant establishes divine teaching of what was unknown. The exegetical warrant establishes that this teaching exceeds the pen and builds on the learner’s prepared capacities. The application to comprehension, inference, and transfer in Arabic is analogical.

Table 1 summarises the four moments, the verse that anchors each, the range of readings in the corpus, and the level of warrant attached to each pedagogical inference.

Table 1. *Four moments of Arabic instruction derived from Q. 96:1–5, with levels of warrant*

Moment and verse	Readings in the corpus	Warrant	Corroborating research	Classroom implication
1. Guided oral reception <i>iqraʾ bi-smi rabbika</i> (v. 1)	Become a reader by divine enablement (al-Marāghī); read by your Lord’s help, not your own strength (al-Suhaylī in Ibn	Textual: command to utter a given discourse Exegetical: guidance and initial inability	Phonological mapping precedes decoding in Arabic (Saiegh-Haddad, 2017); listening and recitation activities (Chamidah &	Begin units with modelled listening and recitation of short meaningful texts before silent reading and parsing

	Ḥajar); <i>qirā'ah</i> as utterance of written or memorised discourse, like a pupil readied for dictation (Ibn 'Āshūr); recitation or proclamation (Graham; Rubin; Sinai)	Analogical: listening-first sequence	Istiqomah, 2021)	
2. Recursive practice second <i>iqra'</i> (v. 3)	Habituation until reading becomes <i>malakah</i> (al-Marāghī); emphasis, <i>ta'kīd</i> or <i>itnāb</i> (al-Zuhaylī); self then others, learning then teaching, in prayer then outside (al-Rāzī); refusal, inability, question (Abū Shāmah in Ibn Ḥajar)	Textual: repetition only Exegetical: contested, single source for habituation Analogical: spaced retrieval, learning to teaching	Repetition and vocabulary gain (Uchiyara et al., 2019); spacing (Kim & Webb, 2022); retrieval practice (Agarwal et al., 2021)	Recycle texts and vocabulary across spaced sessions; let learners retrieve and explain to peers
3. Inscription and mediation <i>'allama bi-l-qalam</i> (v. 4)	Teaching of script and writing; merit of writing for preserving knowledge (al-Qurṭubī; al-Ṣābūnī); writing stands in place of address (al-Sa'dī); pen as <i>wāsiṭah</i> of understanding (al-Marāghī); graphic knowledge	Textual: pen as instrument of teaching Exegetical: strong and multiple Analogical: modern media as extensions of the pen	Reading–writing reciprocity (Grabe & Zhang, 2016; Graham et al., 2018); dual coding and multimedia (Clark & Paivio, 1991; Mayer, 2020)	Integrate writing with reading from the first units; use visual and digital media to mediate meaning

	entails mental and verbal knowledge (Ibn Kathīr)			
4. Generative extension <i>ʿallama al-insāna mā lam yaʿlam</i> (v. 5)	Taught by the pen and without it (al-Zuḥaylī, <i>badal ishtimā</i>); learner’s preparedness grounds further teaching (al-Marāghī); means of knowledge given to one born knowing nothing (al-Saʿdī)	Textual: teaching of the unknown Exegetical: teaching exceeds the pen Analogical: comprehension and transfer	Comprehension as integration with prior knowledge (Grabe & Stoller, 2019); productive word knowledge (Nation, 2022)	Close units with tasks that apply known forms to unseen texts and new communicative purposes

Source: Author’s synthesis of the exegetical corpus and the literature cited.

Discussion

Convergence with Second Language Research

Each moment finds corroboration in current second language research, and the corroboration is uneven in ways that mirror the exegetical findings.

Moment one, guided oral reception, converges with the view that reading in Arabic begins as an oral-phonological achievement. Saiegh-Haddad’s (2017) model of Arabic word reading in development emphasises that young readers must map a vowelised script onto a standard variety that differs phonologically and lexically from their spoken dialect. Phonological familiarity with the target forms is a prerequisite for decoding. For Indonesian learners, who have no spoken variety of Arabic at all, oral exposure to the forms of the text is even more necessary. Ibn Kathīr’s ordering of mental, verbal, and graphic knowledge, in which writing depends on the tongue, points in the same direction (Ibn Kathīr, 1999, Vol. 8, p. 437). Rifaʿi and Nahar (2019) arrive at a similar point from the hadith, where Gabriel recites and the

Prophet repeats, although they convert it directly into the audio-lingual method. Classroom studies in Indonesia show that listening and speaking activities, including memorisation of short sūrahs and supplications, already function as entry points into Arabic in non-formal settings (Chamidah & Istiqomah, 2021). The convergence supports the analogical claim that instruction derived from *iqra*’ should begin with listening and recitation of meaningful text.

Moment two, recursive practice, converges with the strongest body of evidence in the field. A meta-analysis of correlational studies found a positive relationship between the number of encounters with a word and incidental vocabulary learning, with substantial moderation by learner and task variables (Uchihara et al., 2019). Spaced repetition yields larger gains than massed repetition (Kim & Webb, 2022), and retrieval practice benefits learning across ages and subjects (Agarwal et al., 2021). Frequency is a central determinant of language processing and acquisition (Ellis, 2002). The research thus supports al-Marāghī and Ibn Khaldūn on the importance of repetition while specifying conditions they did not address. Repetition works when it is spaced, varied, and effortful, and mechanical repetition of the same form at short intervals is the least effective variant. Al-Rāzī’s reading of the second *iqra*’ as a move from learning to teaching finds a natural extension in classroom designs where learners retrieve and explain material to peers, which is itself a form of retrieval practice.

Moment three, inscription and mediation, converges with research on the reciprocity of reading and writing. Grabe and Zhang (2016) review evidence that reading and writing develop together in first and second language academic literacy, and a meta-analysis of programmes that balance reading and writing instruction found gains in both (Graham et al., 2018). The research supports the integration of writing with reading from an early point, which qualifies any reading of the verse order as a strict chronology. On the side of mediation, dual coding theory holds that information encoded verbally and visually is retained better than information encoded in one channel (Clark & Paivio, 1991), and research on multimedia learning shows deeper understanding from words with relevant pictures than from words alone (Mayer, 2020). Indonesian

studies report benefits of interactive media for Arabic literacy, while noting unequal access and limited teacher training (Muhammad & Irmansyah, 2024).

Moment four, generative extension, converges with models of reading comprehension as the integration of text information with prior knowledge to build new understanding (Grabe & Stoller, 2019), and with vocabulary research showing that knowing a word includes the ability to use it productively in new contexts (Nation, 2022). The convergence here is the loosest of the four, which matches the analogical status of the moment.

Three Positions in the Debate

The analysis allows the scholarly debate around Qurʾan-derived pedagogy to be mapped into three positions.

The first position may be called normative textualism. It holds that the verses prescribe a method of instruction, which can be identified and applied. Rifaʿi and Nahar (2019) and much of the Indonesian literature operate within it. Its strength lies in taking the text seriously as a source of guidance. Its weakness lies in the absence of an explicit inferential rule. The same narrative is made to yield the reading method, the audio-lingual method, and the direct method at once, which suggests that the method is brought to the text and found there.

The second position may be called axiological minimalism. It holds that the verses give an ethos of learning (the dignity of knowledge, the sanctity of the pen, the humility of the learner) and leave method to human experience. Zumrodi (2021), Fauziah et al. (2023), and Sugiarto and Ahlan (2025) largely occupy it. It is epistemically cautious, and its caution makes it pedagogically thin. It cannot explain why the passage has the order it has, or why the commentators repeatedly speak of habituation, mediation, and preparedness.

The third position is historical-critical. It reads the passage as an account of a unique prophetic event and of a command to recite or proclaim, situated in the oral liturgical culture of late antique Arabia (Graham, 1987; Rubin, 1993; Sinai, 2017). On this view, any derivation of classroom method is anachronistic. Its strength is philological

precision. Its weakness, from the standpoint of Islamic education, is that it brackets the interpretive tradition through which Muslim communities have actually received the text.

This article takes a fourth position, which may be called graded sequentialism. It agrees with the historical-critical position that the event is unique and that *iqra'* is primarily oral. It agrees with normative textualism that the order of the verses carries meaning, since the exegetes themselves read the passage as a progression from the command to read, through repetition, to the pen and to knowledge of the unknown. It agrees with axiological minimalism that method cannot be read off the text without remainder. The resolution is to treat the sequence as a priority of emphasis whose steps carry different degrees of warrant, and to state those degrees openly.

Ibn Khaldūn offers a classical precedent for this kind of order. In his chapter on the correct way of teaching the sciences, he holds that instruction benefits the learner only when it is gradual, attentive to the learner's preparedness (*isti'dād*), and delivered in three passes over the same discipline. The first pass gives the principles in summary and leaves a partial and weak faculty, the second raises the level and introduces disagreement, and the third resolves every obscure point until the faculty is secured; "this is the beneficial way of teaching, and as you see it is attained in three repetitions" (Ibn Khaldūn, 1988, Vol. 1, p. 734). His sequence is an order of deepening in which every pass covers the whole field. That is the sense of order proposed here. The four moments mark where emphasis falls as instruction deepens, and each returns in later cycles of the curriculum.

Critique of Current Practice

The model carries a critique of two features of the status quo. The first concerns curriculum. Reading-centred programmes in Indonesian Islamic schools often postpone listening and speaking until grammatical competence is established, and they justify this priority by appeal to *iqra'*. The exegetical evidence assembled here points the other way. In Ibn 'Āshūr's account and in the narrative of the first revelation, the first act of *qirā'ah* is the utterance of a received text under guidance. A curriculum

that begins with silent decoding and grammatical parsing inverts the order it claims to follow. Communicative programmes have their own blind spot, since they rarely build in the recursive, spaced practice of meaningful text that both al-Marāghī and the research literature support (Baroroh & Tolinggi, 2020; Kim & Webb, 2022).

The second concerns research practice. The literature on Qurʾan-based pedagogy frequently cites tafsīr as ornament. One commentator is quoted, a page reference is given, and the quoted reading is treated as the meaning of the verse. In the course of verification for this study, a widely repeated description of these verses as “the first mercy and the first blessing” proved to come from Ibn Kathīr (1999, Vol. 8, p. 437) and al-Marāghī (1946, Vol. 30, p. 198), although it circulates in pedagogical writing under other names, and several page references in the secondary literature did not match any standard edition. Such errors are systemic. They arise when tafsīr enters educational research through secondary summaries and are reproduced because reviewers in education rarely check Arabic sources. Graded warrant offers a partial safeguard, because it obliges the researcher to show which commentator says what, where, and how far the pedagogical claim depends on that statement.

Limitations and Implications

The study is limited to five verses, eight commentaries, and one hadith with its principal commentary. It does not examine Shīʿī or Ṣūfī exegesis, whose readings of *iqraʾ* may differ. The convergence with second language research is a test of plausibility; it is not an empirical validation of the model in Arabic classrooms. The transmission debate on ʿUrwah’s account was engaged through secondary scholarship and was not re-examined through an independent analysis of chains and texts.

The implications are practical. Arabic programmes that claim inspiration from Q. 96:1–5 should begin with guided listening and recitation of short meaningful texts, build spaced and varied retrieval into every unit, introduce writing alongside reading from the outset with media used as extensions of the pen, and culminate in tasks that require learners to extend what they know to new texts and contexts. Future research should test such a sequence in classroom studies with

Indonesian learners and should extend the exegetical corpus to traditions not examined here.

Conclusion

Read through the disagreements of its commentators, Sūrat al-‘Alaq 1–5 supports a four-moment sequence for teaching Arabic. Instruction begins with guided oral reception of a text (verse 1), is consolidated through recursive practice (verse 3), proceeds to inscription and mediation through the pen (verse 4), and culminates in generative extension from the known to the unknown (verse 5). The moments differ in warrant. The first and third rest on broad exegetical agreement. The second rests on a reading by al-Marāghī that al-Zuḥaylī and al-Rāzī’s reported views do not share, together with a hadith detail whose interpretation and transmission are debated. The fourth rests largely on analogy. The sequence therefore describes a priority of emphasis, and its strongest practical lesson is that pedagogy which invokes *iqra’* should start with the ear and the tongue.

The broader contribution is methodological. Qur’an-based pedagogy gains credibility when it reports the range of exegetical readings, verifies its sources in Arabic, and states the level of warrant for each inference. That discipline turns the verse from a slogan that confirms existing practice into a text that can question it.

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