
Islamic Education in Addressing Modern Challenges: A Modern Tafsir Perspective of Quraish Shihab

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of Islamic education in addressing the challenges of modern life through the modern Qur'anic interpretation of M. Quraish Shihab. The study aims to explore Shihab's understanding of education and identify its relevance to the moral, spiritual, intellectual, and social challenges faced by contemporary society. This study employs a qualitative library research approach by examining Quraish Shihab's works, particularly *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, together with relevant literature on Islamic education and Qur'anic interpretation. The analysis focuses on educational principles, objectives, methods, and their relevance to contemporary educational needs. The findings indicate that Shihab views Islamic education as a comprehensive process grounded in the Qur'an and directed toward the development of the whole human being, encompassing physical, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions. Education is not limited to the transfer of knowledge but also involves purification of the soul, moral formation, and the development of human responsibility as a servant and vicegerent of Allah. Several educational approaches, including exemplary conduct, dialogue, and *mujahadah*, are relevant to contemporary education. Shihab's interpretation of Q.S. Al-'Alaq 1–5 further emphasizes reading, learning, intellectual responsibility, and the transmission of knowledge. The study concludes that Quraish Shihab's modern interpretive approach provides a contextual and holistic foundation for Islamic education to respond to modern challenges while maintaining Qur'anic values and strengthening faith, knowledge, and noble character.

Keywords

Education; Islamic Education; Modern Challenges; Qur'anic Interpretation; Quraish Shihab



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INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential process in human life because it plays a central role in developing knowledge, character, spirituality, and social responsibility.¹ In the context of Islam, education is

¹ Firmansyah Firmansyah, "The Purpose of Education from the Perspective of Hadith in Instilling Islamic Values Dynamically in Daily Life," *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 5, no. 2 (2025): 340–58; Rukya Zaman Juthi, Mohammad Aman Uddin Muzahid, and Rafiqul Islam Molla, "Religious Morality in Education for Serving the Purpose of Our Life," *Islamic University Journal of Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (2025): 310–40.

not merely concerned with the transfer of knowledge but also with the formation of human beings who possess faith, moral integrity, intellectual ability, and awareness of their responsibilities before Allah and within society. The Qur'an provides fundamental principles concerning human development and the importance of knowledge, making education an inseparable part of the Islamic conception of human life.

The development of modern society has brought significant changes to the educational environment. Advances in science, technology, communication, and information have created new opportunities for educational development while simultaneously generating complex challenges. Education is required to respond to changes in social life, technological development, and the increasing diversity of human needs. At the same time, rapid modernization may create problems related to morality, spirituality, social relationships, and the orientation of education. These conditions require an educational perspective that is capable of responding to contemporary developments without abandoning the fundamental values of Islam. Islamic education therefore needs to develop an approach that is responsive to modern conditions while remaining firmly grounded in the Qur'an and Islamic values. The development of education cannot be separated from the effort to build a balance between intellectual development and moral and spiritual formation. Knowledge needs to be accompanied by responsibility, ethical awareness, and noble character. In this context, the Qur'an can serve not only as a source of religious guidance but also as a fundamental reference for understanding the objectives, principles, and direction of education.

The Qur'anic perspective on education emphasizes the importance of reading, learning, knowledge, and human development. This perspective can be seen particularly in Q.S. Al-'Alaq 1-5, which begins with the command to read and emphasizes the relationship between knowledge and the Creator.² The verses provide an important foundation for understanding education as a process of developing human intellectual potential while maintaining awareness of divine authority. Education therefore needs to encourage human beings to develop their intellectual capacities without separating knowledge from faith and moral responsibility.

The interpretation of Qur'anic verses concerning education requires an approach that is able to relate the message of revelation to the conditions of contemporary society. Modern Qur'anic interpretation provides an important space for understanding Qur'anic teachings in

² Abdul Muid and Nasrulloh Nasrulloh, "The Role of Education in the Formation of Character and Noble Morals from the Perspective of the Qur'an," *Journal of International Multidisciplinary Research* 2, no. 11 (2024): 218-26; Brady Stimpson and Isaac Calvert, "Qur'anic Educational Philosophy: Foundational Principles of Education in Islam's Holiest Text," *Religions* 12, no. 2 (2021): 82.

relation to changing social realities. Among contemporary Muslim scholars who have contributed significantly to this field is M. Quraish Shihab. Through his interpretation, particularly *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, Shihab presents Qur'anic meanings by considering linguistic, social, cultural, and contextual dimensions. His approach provides an opportunity to understand educational values in the Qur'an in a manner that remains relevant to contemporary circumstances. Quraish Shihab's perspective is important for the discussion of Islamic education because his interpretation does not place the Qur'an solely within a historical context but also seeks to reveal its relevance to present human problems. His interpretation of educational concepts highlights the importance of developing human potential, acquiring knowledge, strengthening faith, and cultivating noble character. Education can therefore be understood as a comprehensive process that involves intellectual, spiritual, moral, and social dimensions.

One important aspect of Islamic education is the method used to transfer and internalize knowledge and values. Education requires more than verbal instruction because values become meaningful when they are demonstrated and practiced in everyday life. Exemplary conduct, dialogue, and personal struggle in developing oneself represent approaches that can support the educational process. Such approaches are relevant to modern education because contemporary learners require not only information but also guidance, interaction, motivation, and examples that can shape their attitudes and behavior. The modern context also requires Islamic education to respond to the increasing influence of technology and changing patterns of human interaction. Technological development provides broad access to information and knowledge, but it also creates the need for stronger ethical and critical awareness. Learners can obtain information rapidly, yet not all information is necessarily accurate, beneficial, or consistent with Islamic values. Islamic education therefore has an important role in guiding learners to use knowledge and technology responsibly. The objective is not to reject modernization but to ensure that modernization remains directed toward human development and the achievement of ethical and spiritual values.

The relevance of Quraish Shihab's interpretation in this context lies in its effort to connect Qur'anic guidance with actual human conditions. His interpretation provides a framework for understanding education as a process that develops human potential while maintaining a relationship with Allah. This perspective is particularly significant when education faces the challenge of balancing scientific and technological advancement with moral and spiritual

development.

Based on this background, the present study focuses on Islamic education in responding to the challenges of modern life through the perspective of Quraish Shihab's modern Qur'anic interpretation. The study specifically examines the concept of education reflected in Quraish Shihab's interpretation, the educational values contained in his discussion of Qur'anic verses, and the relevance of these values to contemporary educational challenges. The study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic education by demonstrating how Qur'anic values can be understood contextually while maintaining their fundamental religious principles.

The discussion is particularly directed toward understanding education as a comprehensive process that integrates knowledge, faith, morality, and human responsibility. Through the perspective of Quraish Shihab, the Qur'anic conception of education can be approached as a foundation for developing educational practices that remain relevant to modern society. Such an approach emphasizes that the modernization of education should not result in the separation of intellectual development from spiritual and moral formation. Instead, technological and scientific progress should be accompanied by the strengthening of faith, character, and ethical responsibility. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine how the modern interpretation of the Qur'an offered by Quraish Shihab can provide a meaningful foundation for Islamic education in addressing contemporary challenges. The study emphasizes the relevance of Qur'anic educational principles to modern educational needs and highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between intellectual advancement and the formation of morally and spiritually responsible human beings.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative library research approach to examine the concept of Islamic education in addressing the challenges of modern life through the perspective of Quraish Shihab's modern Qur'anic interpretation. The library research approach was selected because the study focused on analyzing written sources, particularly Quraish Shihab's interpretation of the Qur'an and relevant literature concerning Islamic education, Qur'anic interpretation, and contemporary educational issues.³ The primary source of the study was Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, particularly the interpretation of Qur'anic verses related to education, knowledge, human development, and moral formation. The study also examined Quraish Shihab's other relevant

³ Patrik Aspers and Ugo Corte, "What Is Qualitative in Research," *Qualitative Sociology* 44, no. 4 (2021): 599–608.

works to obtain a broader understanding of his educational perspective. Secondary sources consisted of relevant books, scholarly articles, and other academic literature discussing Islamic education, modern Qur'anic interpretation, educational values, and the challenges of contemporary education.

Data were collected through documentation by identifying, reading, and recording information relevant to the research focus. The collection process concentrated on educational concepts, objectives, principles, and methods reflected in Quraish Shihab's interpretation. Particular attention was given to his interpretation of Q.S. Al-'Alaq 1–5 because these verses contain fundamental concepts concerning reading, learning, knowledge, and human intellectual development. Information concerning educational methods, including exemplary conduct, dialogue, and *mujahadah*, was also identified and examined in relation to the broader concept of Islamic education. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively through several stages. First, relevant information was identified and selected according to the research objectives. Second, the selected information was classified into themes related to the concept of Islamic education, educational objectives, educational methods, Qur'anic educational values, and the relevance of these values to contemporary challenges. Third, the themes were interpreted by considering the context of Quraish Shihab's Qur'anic interpretation. Finally, the findings were synthesized to explain the relevance of his educational perspective to the development of Islamic education in the modern era.

The analysis emphasized interpretation rather than statistical measurement. The study sought to understand the meaning of educational concepts contained in the selected sources and to relate these concepts to contemporary educational conditions. The interpretation was conducted by examining the relationship between Qur'anic values and the educational challenges emerging from modernization, technological development, changing social conditions, and the need for moral and spiritual formation. Through this methodological approach, the study aimed to produce a contextual understanding of Islamic education based on Quraish Shihab's interpretation. The analysis was directed toward demonstrating how Qur'anic principles concerning knowledge, faith, morality, and human development can remain relevant in responding to contemporary educational challenges while preserving the fundamental values of Islamic education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Islamic Education According to Quraish Shihab

The findings indicate that Quraish Shihab places the Qur'an as the fundamental foundation of education. He refers to this concept as Qur'anic education, in which the Qur'an functions as guidance toward a straight path and provides direction for achieving human welfare and happiness, both individually and collectively. Education, therefore, is not restricted to formal schooling but represents a continuous process of human development.

From this perspective, education has a comprehensive meaning.⁴ It includes the development of the physical dimension, the spiritual dimension, and the intellectual dimension of human beings. Education is intended to develop human potential while directing that potential toward a meaningful relationship with Allah. The educational process consequently involves both purification and teaching. Purification can be understood as the development and improvement of the learner's character and inner condition, while teaching involves providing knowledge concerning both the physical and metaphysical dimensions of life. The concept demonstrates that Islamic education cannot be reduced to the transmission of academic knowledge. Knowledge must be accompanied by moral and spiritual development. The ultimate orientation of education is human devotion to Allah, consistent with the Qur'anic understanding of the purpose of human creation. This orientation gives Islamic education a distinctive character because educational achievement is not measured solely by intellectual ability but also by the extent to which knowledge contributes to responsible and meaningful human conduct.

The findings further indicate that Quraish Shihab's educational perspective is particularly relevant to the moral and spiritual challenges of modern society. Modernization may provide significant opportunities for intellectual development, but it also requires educational institutions to pay attention to the formation of character and spiritual awareness. Islamic education therefore has a strategic role in maintaining balance between intellectual advancement and moral development.

Educational Methods: Exemplary Conduct, Discussion, and Mujahadah

The analysis identifies three important educational methods emphasized in the discussion of Quraish Shihab's educational perspective: exemplary conduct, discussion, and *mujahadah*. These methods demonstrate that Islamic education requires approaches that involve both intellectual

⁴ Dessy Syofiyanti, "Pedagogical Perspectives: About the Meaning of Education, Teaching, and Training," *Journal of Practice Learning and Educational Development* 5, no. 1 (2025): 120–29; Juthi, Muzahid, and Molla, "Religious Morality in Education for Serving the Purpose of Our Life"; S Samuel Ravi, *A Comprehensive Study of Education* (PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd., 2022); Michael Fullan, *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (Teachers college press, 2025).

interaction and the formation of personal character. The first method is exemplary conduct. The Qur'anic basis for this method is associated with Q.S. Al-Ahzab 21, which presents the Prophet Muhammad as an excellent example.⁵ In the educational context, exemplary conduct means that educators should demonstrate the values and behaviors that they expect learners to develop. Education is therefore not limited to verbal instruction. Learners can internalize values more effectively when they encounter those values through the conduct of their teachers and other significant figures. The importance of exemplary conduct is particularly significant in Islamic education because character formation requires concrete models. An educator who teaches honesty, discipline, responsibility, and respect should also demonstrate these values in everyday interaction. Through this approach, education becomes a process of habituation and imitation in which learners observe, understand, and gradually internalize positive behavior.

The second method is discussion. Dialogue and question-and-answer activities provide opportunities for interaction between educators and learners. Discussion allows learners to express ideas, ask questions, clarify understanding, and engage with different perspectives. In this sense, learning is not merely a one-directional process in which teachers transmit information to passive learners. Instead, it becomes an interactive process that encourages intellectual participation. The application of discussion is relevant to contemporary education because modern learners encounter diverse information and increasingly complex social problems. Educational processes need to provide opportunities for learners to think critically and communicate their ideas responsibly. Within Islamic education, discussion can be directed toward developing intellectual openness while remaining grounded in ethical and religious principles.

The third method is *mujahadah*. In the context of moral education, *mujahadah* refers to the effort and struggle undertaken by individuals to overcome internal and external obstacles that hinder their relationship with Allah. Internal obstacles may include uncontrolled desires and excessive attachment to worldly interests, while external obstacles may include negative influences. The method requires strong determination and serious personal effort. *Mujahadah* demonstrates that Islamic education has an important dimension of self-development. Learners are not only expected to acquire knowledge but also to develop the ability to control themselves and overcome negative tendencies. This makes education a continuous process that involves intellectual, moral, and spiritual development.

⁵ Taufik Burhanudin Azis, "Konsep Keteladanan Dalam Surat Al-Ahzab Ayat 21 Sebagai Metode Pendidikan Islam," *Wahana Islamika Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 10, no. 1 (2024): 66–80.

The Educational Meaning of Q.S. Al-'Alaq 1-5

The interpretation of Q.S. Al-'Alaq 1-5 in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* provides an important foundation for understanding the relationship between reading, knowledge, learning, and faith. The first verse, "Read in the name of your Lord who created," is interpreted through the meaning of *iqra'*, which initially refers to reading or collecting. Reading is not restricted to written texts but may encompass different objects and dimensions of life. The command to read is connected with the phrase "in the name of your Lord," indicating that the acquisition of knowledge should remain connected to awareness of Allah.

This interpretation has important implications for education. Learning should not be understood merely as the accumulation of information. The process of learning needs to develop intellectual responsibility and strengthen awareness of divine values. Reading and learning can become meaningful educational activities when they lead learners toward understanding, truth, and the internalization of values. The interpretation of the second verse, concerning the creation of human beings from *'alaq*, emphasizes the distinctive nature of human beings and their dependence on Allah. Human beings are understood as social creatures who cannot live independently of others and ultimately remain dependent upon Allah. This perspective provides an important foundation for educational development because education needs to recognize human beings not only as intellectual subjects but also as spiritual and social beings.

The educational implications of this verse include the importance of learning processes that encourage exemplary behavior and Qur'anic narratives. Education can direct learners toward an awareness of God's creation and the interconnectedness of human beings, nature, and life. Such an orientation prevents knowledge from becoming detached from ethical and spiritual responsibility. The third verse, which again commands reading in the name of the Most Generous Lord, reinforces the importance of learning. The repetition of the command to read can be understood as emphasizing the significance of continuous engagement with knowledge. Human beings possess diverse abilities that allow them to acquire knowledge, develop culture, and actualize their potential. Learning, therefore, is a continuous process rather than an activity limited to a particular educational institution or stage of life.

The fourth and fifth verses emphasize teaching through the pen and teaching human beings what they did not know. In Quraish Shihab's interpretation, the pen represents an instrument through which knowledge can be recorded and transmitted. Writing allows knowledge

to be documented and transferred from one place to another and from one generation to another.⁶ This demonstrates that education involves not only acquiring knowledge but also preserving and transmitting knowledge. The concept of the pen therefore has broader educational significance. Knowledge that is documented can become part of a continuing intellectual heritage. In the modern educational context, this principle is relevant to the development of written materials, digital documentation, learning resources, and other means of knowledge transmission. The fundamental principle remains that knowledge should be preserved, communicated, and used for beneficial purposes.

The Relevance of Quraish Shihab's Interpretation to Modern Education

The findings demonstrate that Quraish Shihab's interpretation provides a contextual foundation for Islamic education in responding to modern challenges. His perspective combines Qur'anic guidance with consideration of human intellectual, spiritual, and social development. Education is consequently understood as a process that should prepare human beings to face changing circumstances without losing their religious and moral foundations.

The relevance becomes particularly visible in the relationship between knowledge and faith. Modern education increasingly emphasizes scientific and technological competence, but Quraish Shihab's perspective indicates that knowledge should remain connected to awareness of Allah. The command to read in Q.S. Al-'Alaq 1–5 illustrates that intellectual activity is not separated from spiritual orientation. Learning can develop human capabilities while simultaneously strengthening responsibility before the Creator. The concept also provides a basis for addressing moral challenges. Exemplary conduct, discussion, and *mujahadah* represent complementary educational approaches. Exemplary conduct emphasizes the importance of educators as role models, discussion encourages intellectual interaction, while *mujahadah* develops self-control and spiritual discipline. Together, these methods demonstrate that Islamic education requires a balance between external learning processes and internal character formation.

Quraish Shihab's approach to interpretation also reflects an effort to understand Qur'anic teachings contextually. The article identifies two broad approaches in the methodology of Qur'anic interpretation: *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur*, which relies on transmitted reports from the Prophet and his companions, and *tafsir bi al-ma'qul*, which involves intellectual interpretation while considering

⁶ M Fatih, "Strengthen The Role Of Munāsabah In Interpreting The Al-Qur'an: Study of M. Quraish Shihab Perspective On Tafsir Al-Mishbah," *MUSHAF: Jurnal Tafsir Berwawasan Keindonesiaan* 1, no. 2 (2021): 22–49; Andi Rosa and Muhamad Shoheh, "Literacy Culture About Sociology of Contemporary Religious Texts: A Study of Interpretation of The Quran in Indonesia," *KnE Social Sciences*, 2024, 422–36.

linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts. The combination allows Qur'anic interpretation to move beyond a purely textual approach toward an understanding that is contextual and applicable to contemporary conditions. This contextual orientation is important for Islamic education in the modern era. Educational challenges continue to develop alongside changes in society, technology, and human interaction. Islamic education therefore needs to maintain its Qur'anic foundation while developing educational practices that respond to current circumstances. The perspective offered by Quraish Shihab demonstrates that maintaining religious foundations does not necessarily require rejecting modern developments. Instead, modern developments can be approached through a framework of faith, knowledge, morality, and human responsibility.⁷

Overall, the findings show that Quraish Shihab's concept of Islamic education is holistic and Qur'an-based. Education is directed toward human welfare and happiness while ultimately oriented toward devotion to Allah. The educational process encompasses intellectual development, purification of the soul, moral formation, and the transmission of knowledge. The methods of exemplary conduct, discussion, and *mujahadah* further demonstrate the importance of integrating knowledge with character and spiritual development. The interpretation of Q.S. Al-'Alaq 1-5 reinforces the centrality of reading, learning, teaching, writing, and knowledge transmission in Islamic education. At the same time, these activities remain connected to divine awareness and intellectual responsibility. Through this framework, Quraish Shihab's modern interpretation offers an educational perspective that is both rooted in the Qur'an and relevant to contemporary challenges. It provides a foundation for developing learners who are intellectually capable, spiritually aware, morally responsible, and able to respond constructively to the changing demands of modern life.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Quraish Shihab's perspective provides a comprehensive foundation for Islamic education in responding to the challenges of modern life. Through his modern Qur'anic interpretation, particularly in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, education is understood not merely as a process of transferring knowledge but as a comprehensive effort to develop human beings physically, intellectually, spiritually, and morally. The Qur'an serves as the fundamental source that directs the educational process toward human welfare, happiness, and ultimately devotion to Allah. The findings also demonstrate that Islamic education requires educational

⁷ Aiyub Aiyub and Isna Mutia, "Muhammad Quraish Shihab's Methodology in Interpretation of The Qur'an," *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu Ashirah* 20, no. 1 (2023): 1.

methods that integrate knowledge with character and spiritual development. Exemplary conduct, discussion, and *mujahadah* represent important approaches in this process. Exemplary conduct emphasizes the role of educators as models of good behavior, discussion encourages active intellectual interaction, while *mujahadah* strengthens self-control and spiritual discipline. These approaches remain relevant to contemporary education because modern educational challenges require learners to possess not only intellectual competence but also moral responsibility and spiritual awareness.

The interpretation of Q.S. Al-'Alaq 1–5 further confirms the central position of reading, learning, teaching, writing, and knowledge transmission in Islamic education. The command to read demonstrates the importance of developing intellectual potential, while the connection between reading and the name of Allah emphasizes that the pursuit of knowledge should remain grounded in faith and divine awareness. The teaching of human beings through the pen also highlights the importance of preserving and transmitting knowledge across generations. Therefore, Quraish Shihab's modern interpretation offers a relevant framework for developing Islamic education that is responsive to contemporary developments without abandoning its Qur'anic foundation. Modernization, scientific development, and technological advancement can be integrated into education as long as they remain directed by faith, morality, and human responsibility. Islamic education should consequently pursue a balanced development of intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions so that learners are able to face modern challenges while maintaining their Islamic identity and values.

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