

IQRA' AS PEDAGOGY: A SOCIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SURAH AL- 'ALAQ (96: 1–5) AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

*This position paper examines the need to reposition teacher education in universities in Northern Nigeria through a sociological interpretation of the first five verses of Surah Al- 'Alaq (Qur'an 96: 1–5). It argues that contemporary teacher education programmes in the region emphasize technical competence and certification requirements at the expense of ethical purpose, social responsibility, and epistemological grounding. Drawing on Qur'anic epistemology and classical insights from the sociology of education, the paper conceptualizes *Iqra'* (Read) as a foundational pedagogical command framing teaching as a moral, social, and transformative enterprise. It situates teacher education within the socio-cultural and religious context of Northern Nigeria, where Islam remains a powerful source of moral authority and social organization. The paper recommends that aligning teacher preparation with Qur'anic principles of purposeful knowledge, human dignity, literacy, and social accountability can strengthen teacher professionalism, enhance university relevance, and address decline, inequality, and cohesion challenges.*

Keywords: *Iqra'*; Islamic Pedagogy, Qur'anic Epistemology, Sociology of Education, Teacher Education

DOI: <https://doie.org/10.10318/SER.2026394071>

Introduction

Teacher education occupies a strategic position in national development, social cohesion, and moral formation. Across societies, teachers serve not only as transmitters of formal knowledge but also as key agents in the socialization process through which values, norms, identities, and aspirations are reproduced and transformed (Rachmad, 2025.; Johnson & West 2022) The quality of teacher preparation therefore has far-reaching implications for the moral health, intellectual vitality, and social stability of any society.

Despite this central role, contemporary teacher education programmes, particularly within university systems, have increasingly emphasized technical competencies such as subject matter knowledge (content knowledge), instructional methods, assessment techniques, classroom management, and certification requirements.

While these competencies are essential, their dominance has often resulted in the marginalization of ethical purpose, social responsibility, and epistemological reflection in teacher preparation (Kotsis, 2026; Hofer, 2017). From a sociological perspective, this

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technocratic orientation risks reducing teaching to a neutral technical activity, thereby weakening the teacher's role as a moral authority and social leader.

In the context of Northern Nigeria, this challenge is especially significant. Universities in the region operate within a socio-cultural environment where religion, particularly Islam, continues to play a central role in shaping moral values, social organization, and educational expectations. Yet, teacher education programmes often draw predominantly on secular, imported pedagogical models that inadequately engage indigenous ethical frameworks and religious epistemologies. This disconnect has contributed to growing concerns about moral decline, declining respect for teachers, educational inequality, and weakening social cohesion (Ahmed & Ayoola, 2024).

Within Islamic intellectual tradition, education is inseparable from morality, social obligation, and human development. Knowledge is viewed not as an end in itself, but as a trust (*amanah*) that carries ethical and social responsibility (Herijant, 2022). Within Islamic intellectual tradition, education is inseparable from morality, social obligation, and human development. Knowledge is viewed not as an end in itself, but as a trust (*amanah*) that carries ethical and social responsibility. This orientation is powerfully articulated in the first revelation of the Qur'an, Surah *Al-'Alaq* (96:1–5), which inaugurates human engagement with knowledge through the command *Iqra'* (Read). These verses foreground reading, teaching, literacy, humility, and learning as foundational principles of human and societal development.

From a sociological standpoint, Surah *Al-'Alaq* presents education as a socially embedded and value-laden process. The emphasis on reading “in the name of your Lord,” human equality in creation, teaching through the pen, and learning what was previously unknown aligns with classical sociological conceptions of education as a mechanism for moral regulation, cultural transmission, and social empowerment (Chang, Ji, Cai, & Feng, 2026). Teaching, within this framework, is not merely instructional but transformative, shaping both individual consciousness and collective life.

This position paper, therefore, advances the argument that a sociological interpretation of Surah *Al-'Alaq* (96:1–5) offers a coherent pedagogical framework for repositioning teacher education in Northern Nigerian universities. By conceptualizing *Iqra'* as a foundational pedagogical command, the paper situates teacher education within an ethical, cultural, and social paradigm that resonates with the lived realities of the region. It contends that integrating Qur'anic epistemology with core sociological insights on socialization, cultural reproduction, and human development can strengthen teacher professionalism, restore the moral authority of educators, and enhance the social relevance of universities in Northern Nigeria.

Context and Rational

Across many education systems, particularly in developing societies, teacher education has increasingly been shaped by policy agendas emphasizing social cohesion, equity, and measurable socio-economic outcomes (Green, Preston, & Sabates, 2003).

Teaching is often conceptualized primarily as the acquisition of technical skills, measurable competencies, and performance outcomes, with teacher preparation

programmes emphasizing methods, assessment strategies, classroom management, and certification benchmarks. While these elements are essential, their dominance has resulted in limited attention to the broader moral, social, and epistemological purposes of education.

Specifically, contemporary teacher education programmes tend to marginalize critical concerns such as the moral authority of teachers, the social purpose of education, the ethical use of knowledge, and teachers' roles as agents of social change. From a sociological perspective, this technocratic orientation weakens the socializing function of education and diminishes the legitimacy of teachers as moral and intellectual leaders within their communities (Ucheagwu-Okoye, 2025). When teaching is reduced to technique, the profession risks losing its transformative capacity and its ability to shape values, identities, and social cohesion.

This challenge is particularly pronounced in Northern Nigeria, where education operates within a deeply religious and communitarian socio-cultural context. Islam remains a powerful source of moral authority, social organization, and educational meaning in the region. However, university-based teacher education programmes often rely heavily on secular and imported pedagogical models that insufficiently engage local ethical frameworks and indigenous epistemologies. This disconnect has contributed to concerns about declining teacher authority, moral uncertainty among learners, educational inequality, and weakened social cohesion (Green, Preston & Sabates, 2003).

The Qur'anic framework articulated in the first five verses of Surah *Al-'Alaq* (96:1–5) directly challenges this reductionist conception of education. By foregrounding reading, teaching, literacy, humility, and the divine origin of knowledge, the verses present education as a socially embedded, value-laden, and transformative practice. Knowledge is not portrayed as neutral or purely instrumental, but as a trust that carries ethical responsibility and social purpose.

From a sociological standpoint, Surah *Al-'Alaq* aligns with classical theories that conceptualize education as a mechanism for moral regulation, cultural transmission, and human development (Shenna, 2025). Teaching, within this framework, is inherently relational and normative, positioning teachers as custodians of collective values and agents of social continuity and change. This perspective resonates strongly with the educational realities of Northern Nigeria and provides a culturally grounded foundation for rethinking teacher education.

The rationale of this position paper, therefore, is to argue that teacher education in Northern Nigerian universities requires a deliberate reorientation that moves beyond technical competence toward ethical purpose, social responsibility, and epistemological clarity. By drawing on a sociological interpretation of Surah *Al-'Alaq* (96:1–5), the paper proposes a value-based framework capable of restoring the moral authority of teachers, strengthening the social relevance of universities, and repositioning teacher education as a transformative social institution.

Conceptual Position: *Iqra'* as Pedagogy

This position paper adopts the view that *Iqra'*, the opening command of the Qur'anic revelation in Surah Al- 'Alaq (96:1–5), extends far beyond a simple call to literacy. Rather, it constitutes a comprehensive pedagogical directive that provides a moral, epistemological, and sociological foundation for education. Within this framework, learning is purposeful, ethically oriented, socially responsible, and institutionally grounded. Interpreting *Iqra'* in this manner aligns Islamic epistemology with key insights from the sociology of education.

Purposeful Knowledge Acquisition

Surah Al- 'Alaq (96:1) states: “*Iqra' bismi rabbika allathee khalaq*” (“Read in the name of your Lord who created”). This command situates learning within a framework of meaning and accountability, emphasizing that knowledge is not pursued for its own sake but for higher moral and social objectives. From a sociological perspective, this challenges technocratic models of education that treat knowledge as value-neutral and resonates with the view advanced by Rafiq, T.(2025), who, through a content analysis of the Holy Qur'an, demonstrates that knowledge is inherently moral, social, and purposive, oriented toward the integration of individuals into the collective life of society.

Ethical Orientation of Learning

The Qur'an links knowledge with ethical responsibility. Surah Al- 'Alaq (96:2–3) states: “*Alladhee 'allama bil-qalam. 'Allamal-insaana maa lam ya 'lam*” (“Who taught by the pen. Taught man what he did not know”). This establishes that learning must be ethically guided and directed toward human development. Ibrahim et al. (2024) argue that education can reinforce social inequalities when ethical reflection is absent; the Qur'anic mandate counters this tendency by embedding morality directly into the act of learning. Farhana (2025) further demonstrates that Qur'anic epistemology presents knowledge as socially purposeful rather than value-neutral.

Social Responsibility of Teaching

The Qur'anic emphasis on the dissemination of knowledge frames teaching as a socially responsible act. Teachers function as custodians of collective values and agents of social transformation (Farhana, 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2024). In Northern Nigeria, where Islam strongly influences social organization, educators who embody this ethical responsibility can foster social cohesion, moral development, and community trust.

Institutionalization of Knowledge

The reference to “*the pen*” highlights the institutionalization and preservation of knowledge across generations. Writing enables knowledge to be standardized, accumulated, and transmitted, forming the foundation of educational institutions. Sociologically, this aligns with the role of formal schooling in cultural transmission and social continuity (Shennan, 2025; Green, et al., 2003).

Viewed sociologically, *Iqra'* establishes education as a social institution mediating between the individual and society, between values and practice, and between knowledge and power. It reinforces the position that teacher education must integrate technical competence with ethical responsibility, sociological awareness, and commitment to social transformation, particularly within the socio-cultural and religious realities of Northern Nigeria.

Sociological Reading of Surah Al- 'Alaq (96:1–5)

Knowledge with Moral Accountability

The opening command of Surah Al- 'Alaq (96:1) situates knowledge within a moral framework: "*Iqra' bismi rabbika allatheh khalaq*" ("Read in the name of your Lord who created"). This challenges the assumption that education is value-neutral. Farhana (2025) shows that Qur'anic knowledge production is inherently ethical and socially accountable, positioning teachers as morally responsible interpreters of knowledge rather than neutral transmitters. Within teacher education programmes, this underscores the need to cultivate ethical discernment alongside professional competence (Hofer, 2017).

Human Equality and Inclusive Pedagogy

The Qur'anic reference to human creation from a humble origin underscores the equality and shared dignity of all human beings. Surah Al- 'Alaq (96:2–3) emphasizes that knowledge is universally accessible and that all humans possess the capacity to learn: "*Alladhee 'allama bil-qalam. 'Allamal-insaana maa lam ya 'lam*" ("Who taught by the pen. Taught man what he did not know"). This establishes a foundational principle for inclusive pedagogy: education must honor human dignity, reject elitism, and actively embrace diversity. From a sociological perspective, inclusive education promotes social cohesion, reduces inequality, and ensures equitable access to learning opportunities (Green, Preston, & Sabates, 2003). Farhana (2025) further demonstrates that Qur'anic epistemology conceptualizes knowledge as universally oriented toward human development rather than restricted to elite groups. Teacher education programmes must therefore prepare educators to recognize and accommodate learner diversity by developing empathy, cultural competence, and justice-oriented teaching practices grounded in ethical responsibility (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

Knowledge as Social Trust

The repeated emphasis on *Iqra'* frames knowledge as a trust (*amanah*) to be shared rather than hoarded or commodified. Teachers, as custodians of this trust, bear responsibility for its equitable dissemination across social groups. This Qur'anic conception aligns with sociological perspectives that view education as a public good contributing to collective well-being, social cohesion, and community development (Green et al., 2003; Farhana, 2025). In the context of Northern Nigeria, where educational inequalities persist, this principle underscores the ethical obligation of teachers to act as mediators of knowledge, ensuring that learning serves communal advancement and social empowerment (Ibrahim et al., 2024).

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Literacy, Institutions, and Cultural Transmission

The Qur'anic verse "*Alladhee 'allama bil-qalam*" ("Who taught by the pen") highlights the institutionalization and preservation of knowledge through literacy. Writing enables continuity, accumulation, and standardization of learning, forming the foundation of formal educational institutions. Sociologically, literacy functions as a mechanism for cultural transmission and the intergenerational continuity of knowledge, values, and norms (Shennan, 2025). Farhana (2025) illustrates that Qur'anic references to writing anticipate the role of institutions in sustaining moral and social order through knowledge preservation. Teachers therefore serve not only as facilitators of immediate learning but also as agents responsible for transmitting collective memory and cultural heritage. Teacher education programmes must consciously address this dual instructional and societal role.

Teaching as Social Empowerment

The final verse of the revelation, Surah *Al- 'Alaq* (96:5), emphasizes human advancement through learning what was previously unknown: "*Allamal-insaana maa lam ya 'lam*" ("Taught man what he did not know"). Education thus becomes a vehicle for individual empowerment, social mobility, and societal transformation. Teachers are positioned as catalysts of both personal growth and communal development. Sociological research links empowering educational practices to human development, social inclusion, and the strengthening of social bonds (Green et al., 2003; Shennan, 2025). Hofer (2017) further emphasizes that reflective and ethically grounded teaching enhances educators' capacity to foster meaningful learning and social responsibility. Aligning teacher education with these principles ensures that educators are equipped not only with technical skills but also with the ethical and social orientation necessary to create transformative learning experiences.

Implications for Teacher Education in Northern Nigeria

The sociological interpretation of Surah *Al- 'Alaq* (96:1–5) carries profound implications for teacher education, particularly within the socio-cultural and religious context of Northern Nigeria. This paper advances a set of positions aimed at reorienting teacher preparation to balance technical competence with moral, ethical, and social responsibility

Ethical Re-centering

Teacher education curricula in Northern Nigeria should integrate moral philosophy, ethics of teaching, and value education as core components. The Qur'anic injunction *Iqra' bismi rabbika allathee khalaq* ("Read in the name of your Lord who created") underscores that learning and teaching are inherently ethical acts, not merely technical exercises. Sociologically, education functions as a mechanism for moral socialization, shaping norms, values, and civic responsibility (Busara, 2023). By embedding ethics in teacher training, universities can cultivate educators who are capable of guiding learners toward socially responsible and morally informed decision-making.

Teacher as Moral and Social Leader

Teachers should be prepared not only as classroom instructors but also as moral exemplars and community leaders. Surah *Al-'Alaq* frames teaching as a socially consequential practice: knowledge is a trust (*amanah*) to be transmitted for the benefit of individuals and society. From a sociological standpoint, teachers function as agents of socialization, influencing identities, behaviors, and communal values (Mitrova, & Koceva, 2024). In Northern Nigeria, where communities are closely knit and influenced by religious and cultural norms, empowering teachers as moral and social leaders can enhance community cohesion, reinforce ethical standards, and elevate the social status of the teaching profession.

Inclusive and Humanizing Pedagogy

The Qur'anic reminder that all humans share a humble origin emphasizes equality, dignity, and respect for diversity. Teacher education programmes should therefore emphasize inclusive and humanizing pedagogical approaches, training educators to recognize and accommodate diverse learners, engage with empathy, and foster equity in the classroom. Sociologically, inclusive education supports social cohesion and reduces inequality by ensuring that all students have access to meaningful learning opportunities (Mezzanotte, 2022). In Northern Nigerian universities, integrating these principles into teacher preparation can strengthen both the social relevance and moral legitimacy of educational institutions.

Knowledge as Social Responsibility

The repeated Qur'anic command to *Iqra'* highlights that knowledge is a social trust meant to be shared. Teacher education should cultivate a culture of openness, intellectual generosity, and commitment to the public good. Teachers must be trained to view knowledge not as a personal asset but as a resource for societal development and collective empowerment. From a sociological perspective, framing education as a social responsibility positions teachers as key actors in shaping human capital, promoting social mobility, and facilitating civic participation (Kravchuk, 2025). This approach aligns with both the ethical imperatives of the Qur'an and contemporary goals of education in Northern Nigeria.

Sociological Consciousness

Prospective teachers should be equipped with sociological insights that help them understand how education shapes identities, power relations, and social change. Recognizing the broader social implications of teaching enables educators to critically evaluate curricula, classroom practices, and institutional policies in light of ethical and societal objectives. By integrating sociology into teacher education, universities can prepare educators who are conscious of the ways in which schooling reproduces culture, transmits values, and mediates social inequalities (Ikpuri, 2023). This sociological consciousness, combined with Qur'anic ethical grounding, ensures that teachers are both competent and socially responsible agents of change.

Recommendations for Teacher Education in Northern Nigeria

Based on the analysis of Surah Al-'Alaq (96:1–5) and its sociological implications, this paper recommends several strategic reforms for teacher education in Northern Nigeria: Teacher education institutions should review and revise curricula to integrate moral philosophy, ethics of teaching, and sociological perspectives on education as core components. This would ensure that teacher preparation is not limited to technical competencies but also cultivates educators' ethical awareness, social responsibility, and critical understanding of how education shapes society. Embedding these dimensions in university programmes would align teacher education with the Qur'anic emphasis on purposeful knowledge and moral accountability (*Iqra'*), preparing teachers to navigate complex social, cultural, and ethical contexts effectively.

Accreditation and regulatory bodies, such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), should explicitly include ethical competence, moral leadership, and social responsibility in teacher standards. Evaluating these competencies alongside technical skills would reinforce the notion that teaching is both a professional and a moral vocation. This policy orientation aligns with the Qur'anic conceptualization of knowledge as a social trust and highlights the importance of educators as agents of transformation within their communities.

Professional development programmes should prioritize continuous ethical and sociological training, emphasizing teachers' roles as community leaders, moral exemplars, and facilitators of social cohesion. Workshops, mentorship schemes, and reflective practice initiatives can help teachers internalize these roles, translating abstract ethical and sociological principles into practical classroom and community engagement. This approach ensures that teacher education extends beyond graduation, fostering lifelong professional and moral growth.

Educational policymakers should actively recognize indigenous and religious epistemologies, particularly Islamic principles, as resources for enriching teacher education. The pedagogical guidance provided by *Iqra'* demonstrates that integrating local moral and cultural frameworks strengthens both the relevance and legitimacy of education. Leveraging these epistemologies allows teacher education programmes to resonate with learners' socio-cultural realities, promoting engagement, inclusivity, and the moral and social development of students.

Collectively, these recommendations envision a teacher education system in Northern Nigeria that is ethically grounded, sociologically informed, and culturally responsive, ensuring that teachers are equipped not only with knowledge and skills but also with the moral and social insight necessary to contribute to the development of just, cohesive, and knowledgeable societies.

Conclusion

This position paper argues that Surah Al-'Alaq (96:1–5) provides an ethical and sociological foundation for teacher education in Northern Nigeria. The Qur'anic command *Iqra'* frames education as purposeful, morally guided, and socially responsible. Learning is positioned as a process that fosters both human development

and collective well-being. Teachers are conceptualized as moral authorities, social leaders, and agents of cultural and intellectual transformation. This approach challenges technocratic models that separate teaching from ethics and social purpose.

The paper emphasizes integrating ethical and sociological dimensions into curricula, professional development, and accreditation standards. Recognizing Islamic and cultural epistemologies as legitimate foundations strengthens the relevance of teacher education to local socio-cultural contexts. Knowledge is understood as a trust (*amanah*) with moral and social responsibilities. This framework promotes inclusive, equitable, and socially conscious pedagogy. Ultimately, it advances a transformative model that prepares educators to foster both personal growth and societal transformation.

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