

## **The New IFTaR Method of Basic Qur'an Reading for Beginners in Malaysia: A Case Study among Muslim Converts**

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### **Abstract**

The skill of reading the Qur'an and its understanding is obligatory and basic for every Muslim including Muslim converts. Three prevalent methods are used in teaching to read the Qur'an in Malaysia, namely, the *Muqaddam*, the *Qiraati*, and the *Iqra'*. The researchers analyzed the three methods in the literature and presented their pedagogical weaknesses. This study examined the Iqra' Fast Track Rosnani (IFTaR) method of Qur'an reading for beginners by first explaining its theoretical and pedagogical framework and then explores its application among nine Muslim converts for a period of about two months. The study employed the qualitative research method using online in-depth semi-structured interviews via Google Meet and online open-ended written questionnaires via Google Form. The main research question was how do Muslim converts view IFTaR as a method to learn to read the Qur'an? The results of the study showed that the subjects favoured and viewed the IFTaR method positively, since it helped the Muslim converts to recognize *hijaiyah* letters easily. It was a better and faster method in learning to read Qur'an compared to the other methods which they used previously. They also recommended its use among new converts.

**Keyword:** *Iqra'*; *Iqra' Fast Track Rosnani (IFTaR)*; *Methods of Qur'an Reading*, *Muslim Converts*, *Qiraati*

## INTRODUCTION

Qur'an literacy is a skill that is obligatory upon every Muslim because the Qur'an contains guidance (*huda*) for life, criterion (*furqan*) for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, healing (*shifa'*) of many forms of spiritual, mental, and physical diseases, and wisdom (*hikmah*) to think and act wisely. The Holy Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and it was a great miracle. The Qur'an had succeeded in transforming generations of mankind with excellent characters, wisdom and good deeds as evident from the Prophet's (peace be upon him) companions and followers. Recitation of the Qur'an is also an important element of Muslim prayers. Thus, without the skill of reading and understanding the Qur'an, the life of a Muslim is incomplete.

The Qur'an was revealed in the language of the Prophet (peace be upon him), which was Arabic. At the beginning of Islam, though not many Muslims were literate in the Qur'an, they were still able to memorize it. With the increase of study circles (*halaqa*), elementary schools (*kuttab*) and encouragement from the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself who offered freedom to prisoners of war if they could teach Muslims to read and write as ransoms, the number of literates increased enabling the Islamic civilization to lead the world in all sciences during the Abbasid period. The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself had initiated the step in promoting literacy among Muslims even though he was illiterate. It was mentioned in the Qur'an that Allah swt did not send the Qur'an to burden His mankind: "We have not sent this Qur'an down to you so that you may be in difficulty" (Surah Ta Ha: 2). In fact, He stated four times in Surah Qamar verses 17, 22, 32 and 40: "And indeed We have made it easy to learn the Qur'an, then is there anyone who takes the lesson?" These verses indicated that He facilitates its learning so that we can take lessons from it.

Malaysia is populated with Muslim at 63.5% followed by, Buddhist 18.7%, Christian 9.1%, Hindu 6.1%, other religions 0.9% and no religion 1.8% (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2020). The Muslim population consists of born Muslims and converts. According to statistics from the Malaysian Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM), the number of Muslim converts who registered from 2000 to 2012 was 106,747 (Siti Adibah & Siti Zubaidah, 2018). The number is actually far lesser than the actual number because some Muslim converts choose not to register for personal reasons such as security of their lives in that they sometimes had to hide their new faith, or how, where and with whom to study Islam. In this context, social support from fellow Muslims, Islamic centers and institutions is essential. The establishment of Baitus Salam Center by MAIS (The Selangor Islamic Religious Council) was primarily aimed to provide shelter for them for example, is essential. These centers are also helpful in providing Islamic knowledge, way of life and economic assistance when their family or employer ostracize them. The Hidayah Centre Foundation Report (2021) stated that there are 763 students in HCF converts guidance classes encompassing 8 states in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak (which alone has 329 students). Apart from Baitus Salam and PERKIM there are several non-government organizations (NGOs) such as Islamic Outreach ABIM, Hidayah Centre Foundation, MACMA (Chinese Muslim Association of Malaysia), and Multiracial Reverted Muslims (MRM) which provide facilities for registration of Islam and study of *fardu ain* covering al-Qur'an studies, *aqidah*, *fiqh*, *akhlak* and *sirah*.

In terms of Qur'an reading, there are currently three prevalent methods used in Malaysia namely, the Baghdadi *Muqaddam* being the oldest, the *Qiraati* of Kyai Dahlan Salim (1993), and the *Iqra'* Method of Ustaz As'ad Humam (2012) which is currently adopted in the national or public schools. The two latter methods arose to help improve the oldest method which required a long period to attain reading competency.

### Statement of Problem and Purpose

Several studies (Mohd Yusoff & Nur Átiyah, 2013; Mohd Yakub & Saidi Mohd, 2008) have shown that many Muslim children and adolescents were not yet competent in reading the Qur'an as indicated by frequent faltering in reading, incorrect *tajwīd* and improper pronunciation of the *hija'iyah* letter with respect to its *makhraj* (sound production). Imran Kamal (2010) also found that 31.3% of the Hulu Langat mosque congregation members were weak in reading the short first chapter of the Qur'an.

Recent statistics also revealed that the mastery of Qur'an reading among students in elementary and secondary schools is unsatisfactory. According to research conducted on the completion of reading the Qur'an within the primary school level through the *Iqra'* and Khatam al-Qur'an programmes, 9.2 per cent which equals to 1804 students failed to master the first to sixth *Iqra'* Level until they proceeded with their secondary school (Raja Ismail, 2015; Shamsuddin, 2011). In a national survey of 370 National Secondary School (SMK) teachers, the vast majority (86.2%) agreed that their students could not read the Qur'an fluently while 70.8% of the 801 National Primary School (SK) teachers agreed that their pupils had problems reading the Qur'an. Teachers employed the *Iqra'* method of the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) and some used a modified al-Baghdadi method where a stick hits the desk to count the tempo (*harakat*) and avoid sleepiness (Jawatankuasa Penyelidikan Pendidikan Islam [Committee on the Research of Islamic Education] IKIM, UIAM, and KPM, 2018). Another survey of 881 primary school students who attended the supplementary Al-Qur'an and Fard 'Ain (KAFA) classes found 92% of them agreed that Qur'an lessons in the KAFA classes helped with Qur'an reading lessons in SK and 79.5% agreed they learned to read the Qur'an more in KAFA than SK (Jawatankuasa Sukatan Pelajaran dan Kurikulum LEPAI, 2017). These statistics indicated that the Qur'an reading method of the KPM is inadequate, hence the need for additional lessons in KAFA classes.

Research on the competency of Qur'an recitation as well as the methods used began to develop in the late 20th century. According to Abd Halim et al. (2006), the approaches used for teaching were diverse, but these principles were not fully utilized. It was only until recently that a lot of effort taken by various parties to improve the teaching of the recitation of the Qur'an. In addition, Abdul Hafiz and Nor Hidayah (2010) evaluated the Baghdadi method and found that although this method had produced many Malaysian Muslims who could recite the Qur'an, it has some disadvantages, namely (a) the method of identifying *hija'iyah* letters, the connected letters, and those with vowels was somewhat lagging and incompatible with the contemporary method of learning a language; (b) it emphasized only one aspect of the Qur'an, that was

reading, while aspects of writing, memorizing, and understanding were not considered; (c) the reverse order of the chapters in the 30<sup>th</sup> *Juzu*’, from *an-Naba*’ to *an-Nas* might confuse students; and (d) the students had difficulty in reading the Qur’an which was published by a different publisher and that was new to them. Although these studies were from schools, similar experiences can be expected from the Muslim converts because their teachers employed the same methods and textbooks.

Abdul Hafiz and Nor Hidayah (2010) also examined the teaching and learning (T&L) process in a convert Qur'an study class under the Johor Religious Department through observations, interviews, and questionnaires. They found that the students rated the techniques used and the motivating factors at a high level of satisfaction, while they rated the challenges at a moderate level or less satisfactory (2.59). Almost all (93.9%) agreed that the *Iqra*’ method was the most widely used; the majority (86.6%) found Qur'an study programmes on television were helpful; and more than half (64.6%) romanized the Arabic letters to facilitate learning. Another study (Faezy et al., 2020) conducted at the Baitus Salam convert center found that the converts faced several challenges in T&L namely, the absence of a special and systematic syllabus, the weak mastery of Malay for communication with teachers, and the inability to read and write due to their low education level.

The researchers analyzed Baghdadi *Muqaddam* text (Muqaddam, n.d.), the *Qiraati* (Dachlan, 1993) and the *Iqra*’ (As’ad, 2012) six-volume texts and found that none of these have a table of content or information for readers to know its objectives, content sequence or organization, and method. Most teachers followed the given sequence without any thought or question. Thus, it was not friendly to the teachers and learners. In terms of pedagogy, it seemed there was no adherence to scaffolding or gradation levels from the simple to the difficult. The methods did not apply the stages of social cognitive theory of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. None of these three texts used color to distinguish the letters and vowels, pictures to attract students or relieve their vision, and activities such as tracing and writing to increase memory retention. The texts used in other methods were overcrowded with letters and words in every single page. Learning using these texts only involved reading and speaking, but not writing and listening such as through spelling and dictation. In fact, students were often stucked and spent weeks repeating similar lessons just to recognize and remember the 28 Arabic letters. This was demotivating because the learners did not feel progression in learning. From the behaviourist theory of learning, this method translated into more punishment or negative reinforcement instead of reward or positive reinforcement.

Based on the review of literature, there are substantial research on problems and challenges of Muslim converts about learning Islam and teaching of the Qur’an in general but scanty on the methods of teaching to read the Qur’an, hence the gap this study attempts to fill. The literature shows that there are still weaknesses and like the national school students, the converts faced problems mastering the recitation of the Qur'an because teachers or volunteers who taught them applied the same methods that are in vogue or in which they are familiar with or used when they were in school regardless of its effectiveness. Moreover, very few studies focused on the texts and teaching methods employed. Hence, this study explores the application

of the IFTaR method of Qur'an reading that was developed by Professor Rosnani Hashim of the Kulliyah of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia, as an alternative method to learn to read the Qur'an. This method was developed in 1983 for personal use of the developer's children and was only published for public use especially school children in 2010 (personal communication with the founder). Since the publication of the book, the Kulliyah has conducted several training workshops on its theory and application to Islamic education teachers in the primary schools, pre-school teachers, members of the public and volunteer teachers for Islamic NGOs. The method is currently in use in a private Islamic primary school in Johor, the Islamic International School Malaysia in Kuantan, a private kindergarten in Kuala Lumpur and Hidayah Foundation Center. Thus, the present study aims to investigate the Muslim converts' views on the IFTaR method in terms of its efficiency, simplicity, and effectiveness in enabling them to read the Qur'an.

### **Theoretical Framework of IFTaR**

From the psychological perspective, there are a few general theories of learning which are helpful for learners. These are: (i) the cognitive theory which examines how our thoughts influence learning; (ii) the behaviorist theory which is the effects of external factors such as reward and punishment on behaviors; (iii) the constructivist theory, in which an individual constructs his own understanding based on previous experiences, assimilation and accommodation; and (iv) the social cognitive theory in which an individual learns through observation and his or her social experience interacting with others (Zhou & Brown, 2015). The social cognitive theory consists of four stages which are, (a) *attention* to help students focus; (b) *retention* to digest the information and to recall; (c) *reproduction*, that is the generation of behaviors that have been previously learned whenever appropriate; and (d) motivation from observing peers being rewarded or punished (Bandura 1971, 1986). Teachers can translate these theories during their teaching according to its appropriateness.

From the pedagogical perspective, Abd Halim et. al (2006) explains a few principles that could be applied while teaching, such as from the concrete to the abstract principle, from the simple to complex, from the whole to the part, from the general to the specific, from nearby to faraway and from the known to the unknown. According to Husbands and Pearce (2012), effective pedagogies include: giving space to students' voice; depending on the teachers' behaviors, knowledge, understanding, and beliefs; clear thoughts on long term learning goals; building upon students' experience and what they have learned previously; organize learning in graded steps; the use of various techniques including group and individual; focus on developing higher-order thinking skills and metacognition - through dialogue and questions; assessment for learning; and being inclusive and consider diverse students' needs equitably.

The ability to read the Qur'an requires three stages, (1) the skill of reading connected letters fluently and correctly, (2) pronouncing words in proper *makhraj* (sound), and (3) correctly applying *tajwīd*. In a lesson of reading any language there will be alphabets or consonants, and vowels. In Arabic there are (i) 28 consonants or alphabets from <sup>ا</sup> to <sup>ح</sup>; (ii) three

types of vowels – three short vowels: *fathah* َ , *kasrah* ِ , *ḍammah* ُ , *tanwin*: *fathatani* ً , *kasratani* ٍ , *ḍammatani* ٌ , and 3 long vowels – *mad* ِْ , *mad* ٍْ and *mad* ُْ, (iii) words form from the combination of alphabets and vowels; (iv) verse or sentences, and (v) spelling, reading and writing of words and verses. In Arabic *sukūn* ْ , *shadda* ّ , *hamza* ء , *alif maqsura* ى , *alif lam* (ل) *ash-shamsiah* (ش), and *al-qamariah* (ق) are added. Furthermore, a good language lesson includes four skills namely reading, writing, listening, and speaking and there should be room for practice. Therefore, the above elements should be considered in designing the syllabus and in organizing the sequence of lessons. Once the student can read Arabic fluently, then Arabic language with grammar, *jawi* (Malay language written in Arabic script) or *tajwīd*, the proper recitation of the Qur'an can be introduced.

The IFTaR method is accompanied by a book, *Let's Read Arabic* (Rosnani and Hassanein, 2018) which applies and illustrates the method. The book has instruction for teachers, and a detailed table of contents that provides the sequence of the lessons, the letters and vowels. The sequence of lessons to recognize the *hija'iyah* letters is different from the *Muqaddam*, *Qiraati* and *Iqra'* methods which sequenced it from ا to ي, following the regular order of the Arabic alphabets and then adding all the vowels to all letters beginning with *fathah*. In IFTaR the sequence of letters begins with the letter *kaf* ك and ends with the letter *hamzah* ء. The sequence of study is arranged in a manner where one or several letters are interspersed with vowels (in rectangular boxes) as shown in Table 1. Each new letter or vowel is provided with one page for writing exercise (eg. Table 2) and another accompanying page for word spelling and reading practice (eg. Table 3) for reinforcement.

**Table 1**  
Sequence of Lessons in the IFTaR Textbook (p. 1-80)

ك	ل	م	ن	ر	ب	ت	مد	ا	ع	د	و	مدو	س	ج				
ش	ق	ز	ي	مد	ي	ط	ه	ح	ال	ث	غ	خ	ص	ذ	ظ	ض	ى	ء

**Table 2***The Letter ك and Fathah (p.1)*

 ك كَلْبُ ك					
ك	ك	ك	ك	ك	ك
ك	ك	ك	ك	ك	ك
الْفَتْحَةُ (ـَ)					
كَ	كَ	كَ	كَ	كَ	كَ
كَ	كَ	كَ	كَ	كَ	كَ
كَ	كَ	كَ	كَ	كَ	كَ

**Table 3***Combine ن and the Previous Letter (p.14)*

نَ نِ نٍ نُنْ نِنِ نِنْ
نَمَ نِمُ نِمْنِ لَنَ
أَنِ أَنْ إِنِّ فَنَ
فَنَمَ = فَنَمَ
أَمِنَ لَكَ مَكَنَّ
نَمَ نِمُ نِنِ لَنَ


The IFTaR method applied solid pedagogical, psychological and scientific principles, namely, (a) moving from simple to difficult; (b) constructing new words from prior learned letters; (c) engaging learning using meaningful words; (d) using pictures to motivate and attract attention; and (e) applying all four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) for greater retention and reproduction. Table 2 shows one letter ك with two forms then followed by *fathah*, which shows that the IFTaR method starts from simple to difficult. Table 3 shows an example in constructing new words from prior learned letters such as ف – أ – م – ل – ك and the previous three short vowels with the letter ن (new and in red), that is from the known to the unknown. This is consistent with the constructivist theory and the social cognitivist theory of reproduction. Moreover, Table 4 shows how learning can be more engaging when it is associated with meaningful words. For example, ضَرَبَ and أَرْضُ which means hit and ground respectively. Pictures are also used to motivate and attract students' attention. For example, each page that introduces a new letter such as Table 2 for dog and Table 4 for the word frog. This is consistent with social learning theory of attention, motivation, and retention. By providing writing boxes for letters as in Table 2 and tracing lightly shaded or grey words as in Table 2 and 3, students are able to not only improve their reading, listening and speaking skills, but also writing skills to enhance students' memory and fluency. Teachers are encouraged to give spelling and dictation of simple words too at the end of each lesson. This shows that the IFTaR applies all four language skills for greater retention and reproduction. Scientifically, the method (a) discriminates by using colors or different shades of grey, (b) dissects words for clarity and shows the changes of each new letter introduced when it changes position from the beginning, middle, and end of a word, for example, Table 4 rows 3-5 for ض, which is important for retention and reproduction; and (c) gives the meaning of some words through pictures.

In terms of Teaching and Learning, each time after the introduction of a new letter or vowel, the teacher gives a spelling activity involving the new letter or vowel with previously studied letters or vowels, coupled with the writing of the letter and its dictation exercise for listening, depending on the age of the student. The vowel is taught by emphasizing the sound

and shape of the lips. All these are for recognition, attention, retention, and reproduction of the letters and words. Consonants are taught by emphasizing the *makhraj* (output) of the letters at the mouth, lips, tongue, and throat. The shape of the letter is also elaborated for its identity and remembrance such as the letter م has an eye and the letter ل looks like a fishing hook, the letters ت - ب - ن are distinguished by the number of dots above or below it, and so on. This process of learning continues until the student can recite several verses from the Qur'an (p. 82), short chapters (p. 83), and make a simple Arabic conversation (p. 84).

**Table 4**

*The Letter ض & 3 Long Mad (p.72)*

ضَا ضِي ضُو
ضَ رَبَّ = ضَرَبَ ضَرَبْنَا
عَ رَضٍ = عَرَضٌ
هَدَفَ ضَحِكَ ضَرْبًا
أَرْضٍ مَرَضٍ تَضَرَّيْنِ ضَاعَفَ
ضَفَدَعٌ ضُيُوفٌ 

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed the descriptive research using an open-ended online questionnaire on Google Form where participants wrote their views based on 11 questions and an online interview with two participants – one newly converted and another was a convert for about nine years. The participants consisted of 9 converts from the Hidayah Centre Foundation who volunteered for the study. One of the researchers who founded the method was the teacher and due to the pandemic, teaching was conducted online using the Google Meet platform with Paint app as the whiteboard. The teaching materials were the IFTAR textbook, the whiteboard, and PowerPoint slides of the lesson. The researcher was assisted by a Master student in Islamic Education. Teaching and learning took place on Wednesdays and Fridays from 8.30 pm to 10.00 pm for 8 weeks or a period of 24 hours.

## Instruments and Analysis

The instruments of the study consisted of a questionnaire and an interview protocol. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions about their opinions on the IFTaR book and teaching methods in terms of strengths and weaknesses, while the interview questions probed



deeper the participants' view of the method. Both the questionnaire and interview protocol were validated by two lecturers from the Faculty of Education. Data was collected from the students at the end of the study.

Data collected from the questionnaire and the interview were analyzed using content analysis. The content of the responses from each student for each question were analysed and then compared across those of the rest as discussed further in Table 7. The interview employed open-ended and semi-structured questions related to the items in the questionnaire. The results of the interviews and teaching process were obtained from written transcriptions.

## FINDINGS

### Demography

The study initially involved ten participants, comprising of one male and nine female converts. However, at the time of the study, a female convert did not respond to the questionnaire, which left the researcher with nine participants instead. The participants were aged in the following range: two people aged between 21 - 30 years, four people in the range of 31-40 years and three people aged over 40 years (Table 5). Their highest education level was PMR or Junior High (1), STPM or Senior High level (3), diploma (2), and degree (2). Five people were housewives and four have careers. They comprised of Chinese, Indians, Kadazan Dusun, Native Aborigines, and Filipinos. They converted to Islam between 1 to 28 years (0, 1, 4, 5, 5, 9, 22, 27, 28) while one has not changed her faith yet.

**Table 5**

*Demography of the subjects*

Subject	Sex	Age	Race	Highest Edu Level	Occupation	Years Reverted
1	M	31-40	Indian	Master	Manager	1
2	F	31-40	Dusun	Diploma	Asst. Admin	5
3	F	31-40	Chinese	Bachelor	QA Engineer	Not yet
4	F	21-30	Dusun	Diploma	Asst Students' Admin	4
5	F	31-40	Dusun	PMR	House wife.	5
6	F	61-70	Filipino	A LEVEL	House wife	27
7	F	21-30	Native	STPM	House wife	9
8	F	41-50	Native	STPM	House wife	22
9	F	51-60	Filipino	-	House wife	28

The students' learning progress throughout the 8 weeks can be seen from Table 6. It is evident that students were able to master 3 to 4 letters and vowels in one lesson. By the eighth week or the 16th lesson, all students were able to spell and write but with different fluency (speed, smoothness, and accuracy in reading).

**Table 6***Converts' Progress in 8 weeks*

Date	Lesson Content	Date	Lesson Content
1) 21 Oct	p 1-4: ك ل م	2) 23 Oct	p 5-12: ا ف
3) 25 Oct	p 13-22: ن ر ب ت ل	4) 30 Oct	p 23-29: ع
5) 04 Nov	p 32-35: و د	6) 06 Nov	p 36-42: ش ج س و
7) 11 Nov	p 43-48: ق ز ي	8) 13 Nov	p 49-56: سُ ط هـ
9) 18 Nov	p 57,74-78: ح ال ال	10) 20 Nov	p 59-66: ص غ خ ث
11) 25 Nov	p 67-70: ذ ظ	12) 27 Nov	p 71-72,79-81: ض ي ء
13) 02 Dec	p 81-85, app al-Tanzil	14) 04 Dec	p 83, al-Asr, app al-Muqri
15) 09 Dec	<i>Al-Fatihah &amp; AnNas</i>	16) 11 Dec	Read short chapter & <i>tajwīd</i>

### Results from the Written Open-Ended Questionnaire

The survey was conducted using Google Form and nine students responded. The students' responses were recorded as shown in Table 7. From the study, it was found that eight of the respondents had experienced learning to read the Qur'an before taking IFTaR classes. However, there were five respondents who tried to learn on their own via youtube, while two of them learned from a teacher by using the *Muqaddam* and another one independently.

**Table 7***Converts' Responses to Several Relevant Questions in the Questionnaire*

No	1. Learn to read al-Qur'an before IFTaR?	2. How did you learn to read al-Qur'an?	3. After IFTaR, more confident in reading al-Qur'an?	4. IFTaR book different from other books?	5. How was the IFTaR teaching method?	6. What is interesting with the IFTaR method?	7. Weakness of IFTaR teaching method?	8. How did the teacher detect students' progress?	9. Is IFTaR fast, efficient, and effective?
1	No	Never	Yes	Uses teaching format that is easy to understand & remember	a Very simple and easy to understand & remember	Sense of humor and teach till we understand. Very patient	None. Maybe more fluent if face to face	Through revision and reading the words	Yes because the system is simple to remember and refer
2	Yes	Learn by my own, through youtube, ZOOM	Yes	Interesting, not boring, enjoyable	I am satisfied	A fast method, rarely seen in lqra' book.	Not sure	Through reading individually – one by one	Yes
3	No	Through youtube, etc.	Yes	Understd many meanings	Excellent	Understand what I am reading	Waiting student... Should start on time	Keep asking the weak students to read	Yes
4	Yes	Through youtube, and others	Yes	Very different. Other books take a long time to complete.	Used ppt slides and asked students to read one by one.	Easy to understand. The teacher helped until the student can read properly.	Weakness on internet (sometimes voice broke) and noise from the microphone.	Students can read properly and fluently.	Very fast because the IFTaR book is unlike other books.
5	Yes	Learn by my own	Yes	Different from the lqra' book. Can understd this one.	More time correcting the letters and reading	A firm teacher but friendly with students	None	Through reading, letter recognition and others.	Fast and effective
6	Yes	<i>Muqaddam</i>	Can, Inshaallah. We should have the spirit .	Fast track book a lot simpler.	Ustazah made us read the letters one by one.	Interesting when the teacher did spelling & dictation to practice writing.	For me no weaknesses. Ustazah's teaching is excellent.	Maybe from how fast students learned with the teacher.	Yes Easy to understand
7	No	Learn by myself through youtube, etc.l	Yes	Ya berbeza	Very satisfied	Easy to understand	None	Through questions	Fast track is excellent
8	Yes	Through youtube	Yes	ya	best and enjoy	Simple Understand. The best	No weaknesses	In reading	Quick to understand
9	Yes	<i>Muqaddam</i>	Yes	ya	Like and enjoy it	Easy to understand	None	Ask students to read in turn	excellent

All of the respondents were more confident to read the Qur'an after using IFTaR text. They all stated that there was a noticeable difference between the IFTaR textbook and other textbooks they had used. They found IFTaR used *"teaching formats that are easy to understand and remember"*, *"interesting, not boring, enjoyable (fun)"*, *"Very different. Other books took a long time."*

Furthermore, they were all satisfied with the ways IFTaR was taught and the technique used made it easy to understand and remember the letters and vowels. They were in the opinion that the teacher was proficient, fun, firm and patient while constantly focussed on the weak students to progress like others. Some of the differentiated instructions employed by the teacher to ensure the students mastered the technique and progressed well include peer evaluation of individual reading and spelling during online class, consistent revision of previous lessons and dictation.

## Results from the Interviews

The interviews were held with two participants, R1 and R7. The participants were selected based on their length of conversion – a new and a mid range convert. R1 is a man of Indian descent who recently converted to Islam for approximately a year and has a master's degree while R7 is a female and a housewife who converted to Islam for almost nine years. The interview was aimed to identify the participants' views of IFTaR method. The analysis of the interview data was guided by the interview questions, which resulted in four main points, which include the motivation for learning to read the Qur'an, the method of IFTaR and techniques of teaching, its effectiveness, and their satisfaction of IFTaR method.

The first question unveiled their motivation for learning to read the Qur'an. R1 attributes it to *"my way of life and the religion of Islam is beautiful. My purpose in learning this was so that I could read and understand the content of the Qur'an."* While R7 states *"a sense of fun. In IFTaR, it is to know the meaning of words. Bābun is a door. I still remember that."* It is evident that the new converts are motivated to learn because they want to understand the Qur'an.

The next question was on how the converts viewed the IFTaR method and techniques of teaching. R1 stated:

*In terms of method, it is easy to understand. I am grateful because I have never been through this method. You cannot find this on Youtube. It's not like the conventional ways. In terms of technique, I don't know much. All this while I had the intention of learning, but it never went to the extent of taking a class. But the technique was very effective on me. The student needs the initiative to review the lesson, to remember all letters with the proper pronunciation.*

R7 explained that *"the technique is ok. Before this, I have studied it but did not understand it much. But this one I feel that it is faster in knowing the letters and sound."* She explained further that this method applied writing for retaining in the memory unlike other classes she had sat in which only just pronounced to try to remember the letter.

In terms of the effectiveness of IFTaR, R1 said:

*In terms of method, if there is a choice of 1-10, I will give 10 because I have once tried to learn on my own from youtube, etc. but .. whether it's fluent or not depends on me. So, in terms of mastery, it's good, but the problem is that I don't do revision.*

According to R7:

*Previously, various methods, such as step by step with many letters. It was slow to understand. This IFTaR method, after a month I can already read [R7 was forgetful, actually two months – Researcher]. The regular Iqra' book I read until Iqra' 2. The connected words or sentences, I don't know. But learning with the ustazah I began to know and can grasp it.*

Concerning the ability to read the *juzu' amma* chapters after acquiring IFTaR, R1 asserted that *“actually, in terms of reading, it is not difficult. Indeed I can read. . . . I can recognize the khat letters but it is not fluent.*

R7 affirmed the view of R1 when she said:

*After IFTaR, I can read a little, read Iqra' book. Getting better. Before this, I had studied Al-Fatihah and the three Qul [chapters]. I pronounced following the ustaz. I don't even look at the book. But now I can read and pronounce the sound. In the past it was just memorization.*

With regards to their achievement, both participants were positive. R1 said, *“Alhamdulillah [I am] very satisfied because I have never been able to read before. .... Now I know how to read and the pronunciation depends on the frequency of revision.”* While R7 seems to affirm this: *“I am satisfied because there is progress from not knowing to knowing how to read.”*

Both recommended the IFTaR method. R1 said, *“I will recommend. Not just the book, but must attend the class. I don't think following the books only is effective.”* While R7 said, *“Of course because with this method one can begin to read within one month.”* The method took two months and not one month as stated by R7.

## DISCUSSION

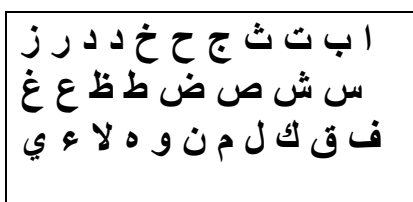
The results obtained from the questionnaire and the in-depth interviews indicate that the converts who attended the IFTaR classes were indeed serious about reading the Qur'an and knowing its meaning. A few of them studied on their own by following relevant programmes on YouTube or attending classes in the mosques. They also learned to read using the *Muqaddam* or *Iqra'* books. R7 stated that the *Iqra'* method was relatively slow and stopped after Volume 2. Both questionnaires and interviews revealed that the methods employed by converts took a long time and yet they still could not read the Qur'an until they joined the IFTaR programme. R1 and R7 stated that after employing IFTaR, they can read a little of *juzu' Amma*. Fluency depends on their own initiative. They used to memorize *surah al-Ikhlās* or *an-Nas* without reference to the text but now they can read the text itself.

The questionnaire reveals that the Muslim converts considered the IFTaR method as simple, fun, easy to remember and understand, and a quick way to learn the Qur'an. The results of the interviews supported these views. The interviewed participants admitted that they could read within two months when using IFTaR, compared to the *Iqra'* method. Results gathered from questionnaire and interview highlight the uniqueness of IFTaR lies in the textbook with its logical sequence of letters, vowels and word connections, its framework of a sound pedagogy, and method of emphasizing writing and listening through dictation and relevant exercises. The converts were also satisfied with their respective achievements as described by

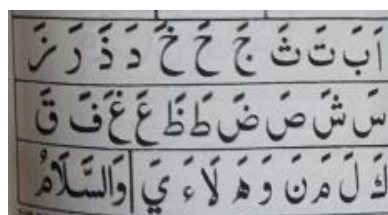
R1 and R7. The studies also found that the new Muslim converts were fonder of IFTaR method, specifically the textbook and teaching method, and recommended it for other new Muslims.

In terms of pedagogical principles, we agree with the view of Abdul Hafiz and Nor Hidayah (2010) that methods other than IFTaR that have been in the earlier discussion are outdated. The Baghdadi method overloads the students' minds because they have to remember all 28 alphabets before even a single vowel is introduced (Figure 1 and Figure 2). We disagree with Abdul Hafiz and Nor Hidayah that the Baghdadi method of arranging the *Juzu' Amma* in reverse order, from *an-Nas* to *an-Naba'* will confuse beginner learners. However, perhaps this is done to accommodate the principle from simple (short chapter) to difficult (long chapter). In fact, it is necessary psychologically to give students a sense of achievement for the completion of a chapter which will motivate them to read more. The Qiraati method is slightly better than the Baghdadi because it divides the teaching & learning into six parts. Similar to the Baghdadi method, Volume 1 is too focused on recognizing all 28 alphabets and only *fathah*, Volume 2 is so loaded with all vowels, Volume 3 is specifically for reading practices and Volumes 4-6 are focused on *tajwīd* which is quite heavy for students who are new to the Qur'an. The third method, the Iqra' method resembles the Qiraati Method in its first volume, so it faces a similar problem. Lessons of all vowels are suspended to Volumes 3 through 5, and this delays the reading process. In contrast to the Qiraati, Iqra' specializes only in Volume 6 for *tajwīd*. Unlike IFTaR, these methods also ignore the writing and listening skills which are very important for remembering letters and this concurs with the findings of Abdul Hafiz and Nor Hidayah (2010) and Zabedah and Irfan (2014). Finally, none of these methods used scientific and psychological principles nor outline its objectives, content, lesson organization and pedagogy as found in the IFTaR method.

**Figure 1**  
*Muqaddam Ppage 1*



**Figure 2**  
*Muqaddam Fathah Page 2*



## CONCLUSION

This study has explained that the IFTaR method of reading the Qur'an is consistent with learning theories (Zhou & Brown, 2017) and pedagogical principles (Ab Halim et al., 2006; Husbands & Pearce, 2012). The IFTaR method has also overcome the weaknesses of the earlier method such as the Baghdadi method as discussed by Abdul Hafiz and Nor Hidayah (2010). It has been able to show the benefits of the IFTaR method for reading the Qur'an among the Muslim converts. It also provides empirical evidence that the IFTaR is effective because of its application of pedagogical, psychological, and scientific principles in Teaching and Learning (T&L). There is ample evidence among the converts that the IFTaR is simple, easy, fast, and motivating. Thus, the researchers recommend the application of IFTaR to new Muslim converts and new learners of the Qur'an. The more frequent the learners read the Qur'an after completion of IFTaR, the more fluent readers they will become. Learners can learn *tajwīd* as they continue to read the 114 chapters of the Qur'an and learn Arabic because there is evidence that the fluency of reading, memory of *tajwīd* rules, and understanding of words in the Qur'an increased with Arabic speaking skills (Yusof, Zainuddin, & Yusoff, 2011). *Tajwīd* is a lifelong process and can be taught with the help of applications and technology (Norizan, Marina, Suzana & Noor Atiqah, 2012).

However, this study has its limitation before its results can be generalized to other contexts due to its descriptive nature, small number of subjects and non-random sampling. Moreover, the teacher who taught the IFTaR classes was also the researcher herself, who founded the method and designed the textbook. This shows that she is skilled, which means that she has more insight to the method and being an educationalist, is also more aware of the effective pedagogies. This method is not limited to converts and is applicable to all group of learners (beginner, intermediate and advanced level).

There is other strong support for the reliability of this method in that it has been applied to several other groups – Year Six primary school students as remedial, and kindergarten students who were taught by teachers trained by the researchers. Both these groups yielded similar positive results. It will be good for future studies to be able to consider an experimental study where they can compare between IFTaR and Iqra' among Year One students.

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