



# J-QAF in empowering Muslim Malaysian national primary school students: issues and challenges

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## ABSTRACT

j-QAF system was introduced in 2005. Despite it's aimed at developing characteristics and comprehension of Muslim students in *Jawi*, *Al-Quran*, *Arabic Language* and *Fardhu Ain*, there are still some issues and challenges occurred. This article aimed at identifying factors that hurdle j-QAF program in recent years, and suggests possible solution. Secondary data from *Six Month Khatam Al-Quran Model* and *Tasmik (Al-Quran) Model* Progress Report of year 2005 to 2009 was comparatively and descriptively analyzed. Problem, suggestions and solutions are further discussed. It is hope that it will contribute to enhance the system and therefore empower Muslim students in Malaysia.

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## Introduction

*j-QAF* program was inspired by the then Malaysian Prime Minister Tun Abdullah bin Ahmad Badawi during his visit to the Ministry of Education in 2003. He was then expressed his vision in seeing a primary Muslim student is able to master the Quranic studies before finishing their primary years. These ideas have been refined and further discuss by the Education Ministry, related authorities and agencies. As a result, *j-QAF* program was approved and has been sanctioned by the then Prime Minister. Finally, the program has been carried out in stages commencing from the year of 2005 academic session.

*j-QAF* program is a tool that aims to strengthen Islamic education through specific focus that emphasized on the teaching and learning process in *Jawi*, *Al-Quran*, *Arabic language* and *Fardhu 'Ain*. [1]. The program is carried out using new module and model that specifically developed by instructors, practitioners, educators and expertise in their areas. It must be noted that, such module and model are first of its kind in Malaysia, or in the world perhaps. Instructors are recruited from young graduates and then trained specifically on *J-QAF* courses that aimed to give guidance, enhancement, skills, strengthening, enrichment and appreciation on primary school students. Basically, this program does not amend any of the provisions of existing Islamic education timeframe, but through some adjustment and refinements of the curriculum through improvements and refinements process according to students' progress and capabilities. In brief, the objective of the *j-QAF* program is to maximize all the Muslim primary school pupils to: (1) be able to read and write of *Jawi*; (2) Khatamin *Al-Quran*; (3) be able to comprehend *Arabic*; and finally (4) augment and embrace the practice of *Fardhu 'Ain* their daily life. [2]

### Components of j-QAF

The J-QAF program consists of 4 main components and supported by a number of programs that are:

#### Special Jawi Recovery Model (Jawi)

Special Jawi Recovery Class is performed by the specialized and trained J-QAF instructor to intensively facilitate the underperforming students in learning Jawi. It is conducted

concurrently with the existing timetable in a special room. These students will go through the thorough process with minimum learning outcomes of knowing, able to address and to write single letters, open syllables, closed syllables and able to construct a simple words made from open and closed syllables.

#### Six Months Khatam Al-Quran Model & Tasmik Model (Al-Qur'an)

One part of the current Islamic Education course is the Teaching Tilawah (Reading) Al-Quran element. However, this concept does not emphasize on the learning of the Quran from front to back due to it high requirement of constant guidance and appropriate number of instructors with a ratio of the number of pupils. Thus J-QAF program is geared to finishing the read of Al-Quran through increasing the number of J-QAF Quranic instructors and increased the teaching outside school contact hours. The Khatam Al-Quran model is implemented through two approaches that are 6-months Khatam Al-Quran model and the Tasmik model.

The 6-months Khatam Al-Quran focuses on mastery the reading skills of the Al-Quran in the first 6 months of the first year students and finishing the reading of Al-Quran in their first 6 months in year two students to year five students. It is implemented in 4 hours, which is an equivalent to 120 minutes in Islamic Education subject from their first six months of studies in each year. This model emphasizes on the approach of *Talaqqi* (face to face) and *Musyafahah* (lips reading technique). The process is managed by an Islamic Education instructor and assisted by at least one to three J-QAF instructors per class. The objective of this model is to allow students to read Quran fluently and with *tajwid* (accordingly and correctly) and able to finish all 30 *juzuk* (chapters) in the Al-Quran.

While the Tasmik (read-and-check) model is a program that designed to record the reading development of individual students based on the scheduled programs that enable pupils to finish fluently and correctly reading the Al-Quran with the presence of their instructors. It must be noted that it is done as out-of-class activity. The Tasmik Model is conducted by the J-QAF instructors and assisted by the Islamic Education teachers

and other reliable and capable academic teachers to act as mentors for students. All mentors have to record the progress of their mentee when examined. It signifies cooperative efforts by all instructors involved in the module.

### **The Extension of Arabic Communication Language (Arabic)**

The implementation of the Extension of Arabic Communication Language model is aimed at the expansion of all Muslim students are compulsory to learn Arabic Communication Language, but to non-Muslim students are given an option to study the course. The subject aims to cultivate the interest in learning Arabic to the students, as well as to be able to communicate in simple Arabic language.

### **Smart Solat Model (Fardhu 'Ain)**

Smart Prayer Model is co-curricular activities that are carried out to make certain that students are able to perform their daily *solat* (prayer) properly in terms of reading, action, knowledge and appreciation. It was conducted four times in one academic year for 10 hours for each camp or program. Its implementation are very much depends on the cooperation and commitment of all parties involved, including the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA or PIBG), the instructors in the school itself, and the local community members.

### **Methodology**

Although the *j-QAF* program consist 4 different main components, this study however, only focus on the Al-Quran component, that is the 6-month khatam Al-Quran model and *Tasmik* Model. This study is specifically conducted in SekolahKebangsaanDatukHj. Baginda, Merlimau. It is located in Jasin district of Melaka state area. The school was established in 1st January 1890. [3] The school has been categorized as National Primary School, with classification of Rural School and categorically considered as Grade A school. The school is located 50 kilometers from the city center of Melaka state. It has currently a total of 489 pupils and 42 instructors including school management staffs. Demographically, the majority residents around the school are Malays. Most of the family can be considered as a middle-income group serves in a variety of sectors including governments, private and self-employed.

The *j-QAF* program has started since 2005 to date, whereby almost all of 489 total numbers of pupils has been involved in this program. There are 4 of total numbers *j-QAF* instructors while another 4 are the Islamic Education instructors. The 6-months Khatam Al-Quran Module has been conducted in accordance with the implementation guidelines of the Ministry of Education. On the other hand, The *Tasmik* module was conducted 8 times in a week, which was pre arranged by the school. In this paper, comparative analysis of data of the 6-Month Khatam Al-Quran Model and *Tasmik* Model (Al-Quran Components) Performance Reports from 2005 until 2009 are examined. [4] [5] [6] [7] [8].

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Issues of Teaching and Learning**

6 months period for year one pupils to mastery the reading skills and technique of the Al-Quran was not practically enough. Referring to the *j-QAF* curriculum policy implementation, year one students will be exposed to the skill to read the Al-Quran through the *Iqra'* methods. The syllabus provided by the ministry, specifically mentioned that students must master the skills of reading Al-Quran by reading 2 up to 5 pages of *Iqra'* books on a weekly basis. In a very limited timeframe, coupled with a variety of school activities, it resulted that the pupils did not able to follow the reading skills in the allotted time. This can be evidenced by reports that ends in February 2010 showed that

only 19 of 90 students of year one have been mastering the book of *Iqra'* 1, while according to the syllabus and target, students should have mastered the book *Iqra'* 2 before the timeframe. This is due to Teacher Transition Care Program that lasted for 2 weeks and other school activities, including the annual sports and so on.

Students in year 2 to year 5 are enforced to follow the syllabus of reading the Quran although they are not mastered the reading skills. This was due to their inability to master the Al-Quran reading skills during their year one studies. Although these students are enrolled to Read Follow Instructor (Baca Ikut Guru (BIG), but their reading quality is very, even some of them are still unable to recognize *hijaiyah* (alphabets) letters. According to *j-QAF* reports in year 2009, 36 students have yet to master the *Iqra'* level 1 to 3. This concerned may affect the quality of the students, although they have *khatam* Al-Quran reading but they did not necessarily mastering the reading of the Al-Quran.

*Tasmik* Model, which was conducted outside of the school hours, burdened the instructors, students and school administration. In SekolahKebangsaanDatukHj. Baginda, the *Tasmik* model has been conducted in 3 session, that is the morning session (7.10-7.40 am), lunch hours (12:35 to 1:05 pm) and evening (1:05 to 1:35 pm). This is most of the times, troubling for students and instructors to come early to school to conducting the *Tasmik* session. If the *Tasmik* session carried out during the evening hours, some of the students are already involved with the People's Religious Schools (Melaka Islamic Department (JAIM), co-curricular activities and extra classes for examination years' students. All these issue and challenges complicates the administration and the *j-QAF* instructors to arrange a suitable time for *Tasmik* session for all students.

Some of the parents are no longer sent their children to *tilawah* classes. Since the *j-QAF* program was introduced, parents have begun confident with the system of Islamic education in primary schools. There are around 20% of students are no longer go enrolled with *tilawah* classes that are normally conducted outside of schooling times. This exact situation is in fact affected poorly to *j-QAF* program itself. A *Tilawah class* does actually helps to enhance the reading skills of Al-Quran to students unswervingly.

Lack of materials, specifically the *Iqra'* books and the Al-Quran in the classroom, also contribute to the challenges of this module. Every school will be provided with *Iqra'* books and each student will be provided an Al-Quran for the use on 6 month khatam Al-Quran model. But inadequate numbers of *Iqra'* books is due to an increasing number of enrolling students in every year. This situation also worsened as some of the *Iqra'* books and the Al-Quran has been barely damaged due to frequent use and unconcerned pupils. When this happens, students will borrow the Al-Quran from another student and make the situation more complicated and it does not help the pupils in smooth reading the Al-Quran.

### **Teaching and Learning Challenges**

Previously, teaching and learning Al-Quran was conducted through traditional method which was take place at teacher or instructor house with various methods and technique which was vary from one to another. The emergence of *j-QAF* program has changed the existing scenario, which brought teaching and learning Al-Quran into the mainstream. Methods of teaching the Al-Quran was structurally in a systematic and organized by using *Iqra'* book as the basis of reading the Al-Quran, and following a specific procedures and appropriate pedagogy. Instructors are given special and intensive training and be given

recognition in teaching students. For new instructors who teach, this current situation is whole different as compared to their previous experience. Teaching Iqra' in the classroom is very much different as compared to Tasmik model which was implemented individually.

A short period as compared to a lot number of students is another challenge in teaching and learning. On the average, a *j-QAF* teacher will guide about 122 students in a Tasmik model. Having assisted by the Islamic Education instructors, this number reduced to 100 people. With a total of 240 minutes of teaching hours per week, a student can only be coached for about 2 minutes and 20 seconds in a week. This situation is not conducive to reading proficiency of students. The main concern is that the students may not achieved the primary objective of the *j-QAF* program that is student will be able to finish their reading of Al-Quran before they finish their primary schooling years.

Too long and too many school holidays disrupt the proficiency progress of students. An average schooling days per year is 200 days. This does not helps the students where some of these students have been forgotten and not yet mastered reading the Al-Quran. They did not continue read and studying while on school holidays. But this case is not happen during the traditional method of teaching and learning Al-Quran. This situation makes the instructors had to repeat the previous progress when the school resume or in the beginning of new school term. It somehow disrupted the new syllabus of learning Al-Quran in the new school term.

The lack of cooperation and communication between the national school curriculum and religious schools curriculum also contribute to the challenges of teaching and learning Al-Quran. The *j-QAF* program and religious school curriculum is not much different. Both kinds of schools offer the same subject of Al-Quran, but the syllabus is different. This difference has caused confusion among students, because the Al-Quran module in *j-QAF* program starts with Surah al-Baqarah while the religious school begins with a short *surah* (verse). For the weak students, they might be confused on knowing their proficiency level in reading and learning Al-Quran.

#### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

From the above issues, problems, and challenges, we believe that by extending the period of learning and reading Al-Quran from 6 months to 11 months or equal to one year of year 1 student's studies years might allow the various level of student's proficiency to be accommodated. Having said that, the 6-months Khatam Al-Quran model should be restructured so that the first year students may have an ample time to really master the skills of reading the Quran.

Increasing the number of *j-QAF* instructors in the public school not based on the number of classes in a school, but rather based on the total number of students in a school. This is due to the fact that, some school has 40 pupils in a single class, but

others are less. But some school, total numbers of students are less, but the class number is high. A number of students are actually having a great influenced in scheduling Tasmik module.

Collaboration between the religious schools and the national school should be established through a special committee involving both sides. In addition to coordinating the curriculum, collaboration can also be helping each other to build a balanced generation spiritually and physically. This partnership is not only limited to the *j-QAF* program, but can be extended to the curriculum and co-curriculum. The establishment of smart school ( SekolahBestari) could be a better model to realize the cooperation and collaboration between these two bodies. Perhaps, all national school can be considered as smart school, whereby they incorporate the syllabus of national school with religious school in one session. But it may extending the school hours, but at the same time it also contributing to parents in terms of only one session of school as compare as recent system. *j-QAF* program aimed at developing Muslim students holistically, but all issues, problems and challenges is make the program to be better. It may paves to the new structure of schooling system in Malaysia where integration of knowledge could be materialized, enhancing young generation holistically, and maybe become a model to the Muslim world.

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