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Abstract

Recently, the science of Qira'at is seen to be gradually developing from time to time, in line with the current mainstream growth. However, its development is still seen to own its shortcomings. The misunderstanding among Muslim scholars related to connection and differences between al-Quran, *Sab'atul Ahruf* and Qira'at is a weakness that should be appropriately overcome. This research paper tries to see the level of knowledge among Terengganu Muslim scholars pertaining to the epistemology of Qira'at. It is considered to be important as the basic information on the science of Qira'at should be well-comprehended before going beyond into deeper discussions. This research identified that the level of Muslim scholars is still at a level of moderate and requires improvement from the aspect of its exposure in the future. Besides, this paper proposes few solutions to manage and enhance the level of knowledge of Muslim scholars in related to this issue.

Keyword: Al-Quran, Qira'at, *Sab'atul Ahruf*, Muslim Scholars

Introduction

Al-Quran will continuously being preserved until the last day as how promised by Allah in chapter al-Hijr; "Indeed, it is We Who have revealed it and it is indeed We Who are its guardians" (Al-Hijr, 9). The historical account shows the conflicts of Quranic recitation started since the day of Prophet Muhammad until the era of *tabien* and ended during the days of Ibn al-Jazari who was successfully gathered *mutawatirah* Qira'at. After his era, that kind of conflict was never relapsed among the Muslim society. However, recently, there are misunderstanding among Muslim scholars pertaining to connection and difference between al-Quran, *Sab'atul Ahruf* and Qira'at. The phenomenon of Quran as the supreme miracle for the people before the Judgement Day is definitely attracting them to study and examine its content and truth. Started from the historical account of al-Quran that was revealed based on *Sab'atul Ahruf* (literally translated as 'seven letters'), it is continuously circling unending discussions and its meaning is debated among the scholars. This polemic revolves around the definition of *Sab'atul Ahruf* and Qira'at. There are many theories presented by the scholars.

Ironically, this situation entails various of wrong perceptions towards their correlation to each other.

Even though the scholars have properly defined its terminology, still it seems that the questions are arising endlessly among the society and even also occurs among scholars which entails a wrong perception towards this science. There are also among scholars who think that the seven Qira'at is *Sab'atul Ahruf*. According to the majority of scholars, this kind of perception is regarded ungrounded and a weak opinion (Amni, 2011, 1). Based on the findings of the research, it indicates that the level of knowledge and mastery of Qira'at among scholars is at a worrying level and need to be clarified hence this science able to be comprehended and be on its right track (Muda, 2010).

Other than that, there are criticism towards the assessment validity on the science of Qira'at that are often being disputed (Al-Banna, 2008, 14). Among them, the polemic that was tried to be raised by a liberal thinker such as Jamal al-Banna on the differences of recitation as how also being disputed by Western Orientalist, Goldziher in his book entitled *Mazahib al-Tafsir al-Islamiy*. He criticized al-Quran as confusing and inconsistent due to various styles of Qira'at (Al-Najjar, 1955, 29). This chaotic situation was probably arising due to the lacking of knowledge and historical exposure on the root of Qira'at and it is possible that this kind of allegation may exist among the community, especially from the Muslim intellectuals if this issue is not properly explained.

Qira'at is one of the branches of Quranic science that is very important and extensive to be explored and indeed, it is supposedly received a massive attention by Muslim scholars. Mastery in this science will inevitably make it easier for Islamic scholars to interact with the Qur'an properly. Introduction to Qira'at from the basic until its extensive scope able to bring an individual to be a scholar in the field of al-Quran. However, their weaknesses in this science will create many negative perception and confusion, either in the aspect of epistemology, role and its relationship with other Islamic sciences, especially in *fiqh*.

This kind of situation is happening among the general society, including the Muslim scholars if they are not given a clear and appropriate explanation. Muslim scholars are the reference centre of the laymen in any religious issues. Hence, they are supposedly acknowledged, understand and master this science and capable even ready to convey and share all their understanding related to religious sciences because this is also their responsibility to do so. Henceforth, a research must be conducted to examine how far the understanding and exposure of Muslim scholars on this science, how widen the exposure received by them and the exposition given to the society for the sake of ensuring the appropriate understanding in securing the continuity of this science in the academic world. The researchers are optimistic and confident if the mastery of Qira'at among Muslim scholars is perfectly established, it is indirectly able to bring the genuine understanding towards the society effectively and efficiently, and definitely this atmosphere guaranteeing the rapid cultivation of Qira'at sciences in the academic and knowledge world.

In actualizing this research, the main instrument used was a set of questionnaires. The researcher had conducted this research by distributing questionnaires to selected respondents that are regarded as representative of Muslim scholars. They were chosen

among the religious officers in Islamic Departments, Terengganu Islamic Foundation, officers in Mufti department, religious teachers in selected schools, Islamic Affairs officers in mosques, lecturers of selected universities, Institute al Quran of Terengganu, selected Teacher's institutes and *madrasah* or *pondok* (informal religious institution) in Terengganu.

Research Question

This research is done based on few rationales:

How far the level of Qira'at's knowledge from the aspect of terminology and development in the discipline of Qira'at science among Terengganu Muslim scholars?

Importance

From the aspect of policy, this research able to help the authorities, especially in Terengganu and generally in Malaysia in constructing comprehensive action plan in their effort to widening the scope of disseminating science of Qira'at hence it is able to be seen at par with other Islamic sciences.

Al-Qira'at from The Aspect of Language and Terminologies

Al-Qira'at From the Aspect of Language

Al-Qira'at is a plural pronunciation from the term qiraah that means styles of recitation of al-Quran such as Qira'at Sab'. This terminology brings the meaning of الجمع او الإجتماع, gather or gathering. It is a derivative verb from قرأ، يقرأ، قراءة. Al-Qiraah derives from the word (قرأ) means read or accumulate. Al-Mu'jam al-Arabi al-Asasi defined al-Qiraah from the derivative word of (قرأ) means styles of recitation of al-Quran. According to Lisan al-'Arab dictionary means (قرأت القرآن) that means 'I pronounce collectively'.

Al-Qira'at from the Aspect of Terminology

From the aspect of terminology, there are many definitions on it among scholars that discusses this science. Among the definitions as follow:

- 1) According al-Zarkashi (d. 798) in his book, Qira'at is a *khilaf* (disagreement) in pronouncing the revelation of Allah SWT pertaining to its letters from the aspect of thickness, thinness and sundries (Zarkashi, 2001: 318).
- 2) Al-Suyuti (d. 911) stated that Qira'at is a *khilaf* that is happening among the seven imam or ten or other than them and the agreement of way of recitation and its narration (al-Suyuti, n.d: 165).
- 3) According to Syakh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Banna (d. 1117H), Qira'at is one of the science branches in knowing the similarities and differences that are found among individuals that are narrating al-Quran from the aspect of *hadhaf* (missing), *ithbat* (affirmation), sign, separate, continue and others. Besides, it is also considering the aspect of pronunciation such as *ibdal*, *tashil*, *raum* and others which are derived from its narrator via the way of *talaqqi mushafahah* (method of learning face to face) (Al-Banna, n.d.).
- 4) Ibnu al-Jazari (d. 833) said that Qira'at is a science that is discussing ways of reciting words of al-Quran and the disagreements by attaching it to the narrators that were recounting it until reaching its chain to Prophet Muhammad PBUH.
- 5) According to Abdul Fattah al-Qadi (d. 1403H), Qira'at is one of the sciences to know on how the ways to pronounce the words in al-Quran and practice in pronouncing them whether there are similarities or disagreements by stating each styles of

recitation along with its narrators (by completing its chain of recitation up to Prophet Muhammad PBUH).

- 6) Muhaisin (d. 2001AD) explained that Qira'at is a branch of science that discusses on how to reciting words of Quran in term of its thickness, thinness, disagreements in recitation where all of the narrators have an authentic *sanad* that are linked to Prophet Muhammad PBUH.
- 7) According to Al-Zarqani (d. 1376H) Qira'at is one of the schools of reciting al-Quran that is believed by *imam* from the *imams* of *Qurra'* as one of the stances that have similarities and disagreements to each other, either similarities in term of *riwayah* and *turuq* or disagreements in term of way of recitation or its condition (Al-Zarqanim, 1996).
- 8) Reviews:

By all of the definitions of Qira'at quoted by the above-stated scholars, despite that there are similarities and slight of disagreements between each other, yet they are seen to complement as well. However, researchers are more inclined to the definition brought by Syakh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Banna as it encompasses what is being discussed in science of Qira'at itself. It is generally acknowledged that al-Quran has been reached us as how revealed to Prophet Muhammad PBUH and it was transmitted to us perfectly in term of its pronunciation as similar as how taken by Rasulullah taught by Jibreel AS and directly from what Allah SWT bestowed to him. The disagreement of narration that is happening between the members of *Qurra'* in their recitation is not fictitious but all of these styles are referring to how Prophet Muhammad SAW recited al-Quran. Hence all of these recitations are considered *mutawatir* and believed to be certainly valid. The existing Qira'at is a continuity from al-Quran and it is part of *Sab'bat al-Ahruf*.

Analysis Level of Knowledge Among Respondents Related to Qira'at Epistemology

The level of respondent's knowledge in the science of Qira'at was assessed through five main indicators which are a) knowledge related to epistemology of Qira'at (there are 8 items for each evaluated aspects), b) knowledge related to *khilaf* of Qira'at (there are 7 items for each evaluated aspects), c) knowledge related to the role of Qira'at (there are 4 items for each evaluated aspects), d) knowledge of the relevance of Qira'at to the law of *fiqh* (there are 4 items for each evaluated aspects), and e) knowledge related to connection of recitation of Qira'at *fuqaha* to the law of *fiqh* (there are 6 items for each evaluated aspects).

To further elucidate the description of the data distribution analysis of this study, the interpretation table of mean score used by Nazri Muslim e.t. al. (2011) in explaining the level of knowledge, understanding and acceptance of students towards the allocation of Malays in the constitution was referred in order to give a picture on the level of knowledge among Muslim scholars related to the science of Qira'at. The aforementioned interpretation table mean score as illustrated as follows:

Table 1.1: Interpretation mean score of knowledge related to the knowledge of Muslim Scholars in relation to Qira’at

Mean Score	Interpretation
3.70 – 5.00	High (High level of knowledge)
2.50 – 3.69	Moderate (Moderate level of knowledge)
1.00 – 2.49	Low (Low level of knowledge)

Source: Nazri Muslim et. al, *Tahap Penerimaan Pelajar Terhadap Peruntukan Orang Melayu dalam Perlembagaan dari Perspektif Hubungan Etnik di Malaysia*, in *Jurnal Kemanusiaan UTM*, no. 18 – Dis 2011

Level of Knowledge of Qira’at Terminology

In order to assess the knowledge of respondents pertaining to the terminology of Qira’at, there were eight items presented and the distribution of mean score for those items can be reviewed in the table below:

Table 1.2: Table of Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Qira’at’s Terminology

Indicator	Item’s Number	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
a) Terminology of Qira’at	ii.a.1	4.08	0.845
	ii.a.2	3.42	0.953
	ii.a.3	3.46	0.951
	ii.a.4	3.36	1.038
	ii.a.5	3.78	0.854
	ii.a.6	3.26	0.964
	ii.a.7	4.02	1.010
	ii.a.8	3.39	1.083

Source: Questionnaire

As illustrated in the table 1.2 above, in section (a) it is found that all items stated mean score beyond the middle number of Likert scale which is 3.0. Hence, it is generally indicating that the level of respondents’ knowledge pertaining to the terminology related to Qira’at is at a moderate level. Overall, it is clearly indicating that the respondents have knowledge in that aspect. The highest mean score in this section is item (iii.a.1) that stated ‘I know the meaning of al-Quran well’. It stated the highest mean score which is 4.08 with the lowest standard deviation value (0.8949 where it shows a spread out of a quite small value from that mean score. Meanwhile, the lowest mean score is presented by item (iii.a.6) that stated ‘I know the history of Qira’at’s development well’. Mean score for this item is 3.26 is 3.26 with the value of standard deviation 0.964. Overall, almost the whole questions related to terminology, the mean score of the respondents’ knowledge in relevance to that aspect is recorded on the moderate level. Meanwhile, there are three items that are at a high level.

In order to review it in more detail, the data will be presented and analysed according to the percentage and frequency of each of the items in part (a) as how illustrated in the table below:

Table 1.3: Percentages and Frequencies of Level of Terminology Knowledge Related to Qira'at

Items	VP	P	F	G	E	Mean	SD	Level ¹
Definition of Quran (ii.a.1)	3 (1.3%)	6 (2.6%)	37 (16.1%)	107 (46.5%)	77 (33.5%)	4.08	0.845	HK
Definition of Sab'ahtul Ahruf.(ii.a.2)	6 (2.6%)	28 (12.2%)	89 (38.7%)	77 (33.5%)	30 (13.0%)	3.42	0.953	MK
Definition of Qira'at. (ii.a.3)	6 (2.6%)	27 (11.7%)	80 (34.8%)	87 (37.8%)	30 (13.0%)	3.46	0.951	MK
Difference of meaning between al-Quran, Sab'ah al-Ahruf and Qira'at. (ii.a.4)	11 (4.8%)	34 (14.8%)	76 (33%)	79 (34.3%)	30 (13.0%)	3.36	1.038	MK
Development of al-Quran (ii.a.5)	1 (0.4%)	15 (6.5%)	63 (27.4%)	63 (27.4%)	46 (20.0%)	3.78	0.854	HK
Development of Qira'at well. (ii.a.6)	5 (2.2%)	48 (20.9%)	79 (34.3%)	77 (33.5%)	21 (9.1%)	3.26	0.964	MK
Qira'at is not a new science (ii.a.7)	7 (3.0)	11 (4.8%)	39 (17%)	85 (37%)	88 (38.3%)	4.02	1.010	HK
Acceptance of Qira'at as al-Quran based on three tenets. (ii.a.8)	9 (3.9%)	42 (18.3%)	67 (29.1%)	74 (32.2%)	38 (16.5%)	3.39	1.083	MK

Source: Questionnaire

Based on table 1.3, for the question related to the definition of al-Quran (item ii.a.1), question on the definition of Sab'ahtul Ahruf (item ii.a.2), question on the definition of Qira'at (ii.a.3) and question related to the difference of meaning between these three elements (item ii.a.4); the obtained data from the respondents indicates that the majority of them or 46.5% - 80% gave response that they were agree or very agree. Thus, it shows that many respondents do have high and moderate level knowledge in this aspect.

However, generally, the acquired mean score and standard deviation from item ii.a.1 (mean = 4.08, s.d =0.845) shows their knowledge is at the high level, meanwhile for item ii.a.2 (mean = 3.42, s.d = 0.953), ii.a.3 (mean = 3.46, s.d = 0.951) and item ii.a.4 (mean = 3.36, s.d =1.038) indicate that their level of knowledge and related aspects are recorded at a moderate point.

¹ Table description: Interpretation of Mean Level: HK= High Knowledge, MK = Moderate Knowledge, LK = Low Knowledge.

Interpretation of Items: VP= Very Poor, P= Poor, F= Fair, G= Good, E= Excellent, SD= Standard Deviation

For item ii.a.5 and ii.a.6 that are related to the development of Quranic sciences and al-Qira'at, the obtained data show that almost half or (42.6% - 47.4%) agreed that they are well-acknowledged on the development of this science.

Obviously, in general, the knowledge among Muslim scholars in this item is at a moderate level. What can be simplified is, five among eight items are showing that the mean values are at a moderate level, recorded between 3.26 – 3.42 which is assumed by the researchers that all of this information is perceived as inclusive for the individuals that embark and have passion in the science of Qira'at only, meanwhile the rest three items that indicate the high level and satisfaction since these items are the basic and well-known information among the Muslim scholars. It is kind of anomaly if they are not well-learned on those topics.

Conclusion of Compute Mean Related to Terminology of Qira'at

Compute mean of respondents' knowledge is an average answer given by them for all items in questionnaire related to terminology of Qira'at. Generally, compute mean of respondents for knowledge towards the 'terminology' of 5 respondents (2.17%) obtained the value of mean 1.38 – 2.25 which is stated at a level of low knowledge (LK), 119 respondents (51.7%) obtained mean value of 2.38 0 3.65 which is at a moderate level of knowledge (MK), meanwhile the rest of 128 respondents (44.3%) obtained mean value between 3.75 – 5.00 is recorded at a high level of knowledge (HK) in that particular aspect.

Based on the above-stated results, generally, majority of Muslim scholars indicate that their knowledge is at a moderate level but quite balance in the term of terminology since most of them are having a good and high understanding on this aspect – as how discussed earlier. Hence, this is showing that the knowledge of Muslim scholars is consider balance in relevance to the terminology of Qira'at. However, this situation is still worrying since there is about 3.9% of them are having a low level of knowledge, even though the questions are relatively common and general in the science of Qira'at. This is undoubtedly showing that these particular Muslim scholars are never being exposed to the basic knowledge in related to that information. The spread-out of the average mean score of respondents on the general percentage for items that are related to Qira'at's terminology can be seen as stated on the table 1.4 below:

Table 1.4: Interpretation of Compute Mean of Knowledge Related to Terminology of Qira'at

Mean Score	Interpretation	N	Percentage
1.00 – 2.33	Low Knowledge	5	3.4%
2.34 – 3.67	Moderate Knowledge	119	51.7%
3.68 – 5.00	High Knowledge	102	44.3%

Source: Questionnaire

In concluding the results of analysis findings from questionnaire, the researchers are asserting:

- 1) The level of knowledge mastery pertaining to Qira'at in general, related to particularly in understanding terminology among Muslim scholars is at a satisfactory level and require a holistic approach in order to ensure that the understanding related to it able to be understood and mastered truthfully.

- 2) Proactive measures and integrated effort from authorities such as educational institution started from lower secondary, upper secondary until higher levels should be appropriately mobilized on its teaching and learning within society, especially among Muslim scholars themselves in order to ensure that the teaching and learning scope able to be widened to the targeted groups that involve in academic field. This suggestion able to further increase the knowledge in relevance to this discussed matter.

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