



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i5/13126>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i5/13126

**Received:** 07 March 2022, **Revised:** 29 March 2022, **Accepted:** 16 April 2022

**Published Online:** 04 May 2022

**In-Text Citation:** (Ishak et al., 2022)

**To Cite this Article:** Ishak, H., Farqan, E., & Ismail, A. (2022). Issues and Challenges of Teaching The Quran to Children with Down Syndrome. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(5), 157–171.

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**Vol. 12, No. 5, 2022, Pg. 157 – 171**

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[www.hrmars.com](http://www.hrmars.com)

ISSN: 2222-6990

## Issues and Challenges of Teaching The Quran to Children with Down Syndrome

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### Abstract

This article is a concept paper that discusses the teaching of the Quran towards children with learning difficulties, known as Down Syndrome. The ability to recite the Quran is important to children with Down Syndrome because the Quran can be a connection with Allah Almighty and therapy to them. The teaching process of children with disabilities is not an easy job. Various challenges need to be addressed as children with Down Syndrome have their own privileges and need instructors who are experts in dealing with these groups. Among the difficulties faced by children with Down Syndrome are learning difficulties, forgetfulness problems, speech and language disorders, hearing problems and poor communication. Therefore, teachers need to be prepared and competent to carry out the teaching of the Quran to children with Down Syndrome. This article also discusses aspects that need to be given attention in the process of teaching and learning the Quran towards children with Down Syndrome such as approaches that determine the effectiveness of teaching and learning i.e. teaching objectives, materials or resources, teaching methods, facilities and physical arrangement and assessment. The effectiveness of the Quranic teaching is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to focus on these aspects and continue to achieve the goal of Quranic teaching.

**Keywords:** Down Syndrome, Quran Teaching, Children, Learning Disabilities

### Introduction

The importance of learning the Quran among Muslims is indisputable. This is because the Quran is the authentic source of reference to every Muslim as well as human beings in general. The Quran serves as a guidance to man, connecting man with his Creator. The Quran has its own variety of wisdoms, serves to soften the soul, shapes virtuous characters and as the sanctify the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). Thus it is an obligation for Muslims to learn the Quran and teach it. In this regard, it is not an exception for students with special needs in general and including children with Down Syndrome to be given Quranic education.

The ability to recite the Quran is important to children with Down Syndrome because Quran can be a way to connect with Allah Almighty, the defense and therapy to them. The Quran contains cure and grace that is able to eliminate anxiety and sadness experienced by a

person. The Quran is the link between Allah Almighty and the hearts of His servants. This relationship presents a sense of serenity in human daily life. Therefore, the emphasis on the teaching and learning of the Quran is important in helping children with special needs such as children with Down Syndrome. They will gain good by learning the Quran such as increasing their faith, gaining peace and others.

Teaching means channeling information and knowledge from teachers to students, while learning refers to students' ability in mastery any skills and knowledge that benefit themselves (Jasmi, 2016). The results of learning the Quran should bring changes to the students that are manifested through the behavior, knowledge and attitude of the students.

The method of teaching the Quran in Malaysia has long been evolving and has produced many teachers who are competent in the field of the Quran. The teaching of the Quran also uses various methods such as *talaqqi*, *musyafahah*, *tasmi'* and question and answer sessions (Ishak et al., 2021). However, these methods are not suitable for applying to children with Down Syndrome due to their different abilities. According to Marta (2017), children with Down Syndrome suffer from cognitive problems that to some extent interfere with the process of teaching and learning. Among the cognitive problems are slowness to learn, no ability in coping with problems and less social interaction in its own environment. Therefore, the teaching and learning methods of the Quran for children with Down Syndrome need to be modified according to the capabilities and abilities.

### **Methodology**

This study was a qualitative study, and the design of the study was a concept study. The systematic and in-depth collection of information was done on the teaching of the Quran towards children with learning difficulties, known as Down Syndrome. The main method to obtain in-depth data on the Quranic teaching for the children with Down Syndrome was from document analysis.

The findings were analyzed in two main discussions that involved in the issues and challenges of teaching the Quran to children with Down Syndrome. The first part were about the problems faced by the children with Down Syndrome; learning difficulties, poor memory, speech and language disorders, hearing problems, and communication problems. The second part were the main factors in determining the effectiveness of teaching and learning which consists of five aspects; the objectives of teaching, materials or resources, teaching methods, facilities and physical arrangement and assessment.

### **Introduction to Down Syndrome**

The first case of Down Syndrome was introduced by Dr. John Langdon Down in 1866 because he found there were unique features such as relatively short height, a shrunken head and a flat nose (Rina, 2016). Down Syndrome is also known as a category of learning problems caused by lacking good muscle pressure that it is difficult to perform daily tasks like other normal children. Down Syndrome children also experience memory problems, especially when remembering something spoken by another individual. The problems faced by Down Syndrome individual are due to difficulty in speaking fluently in verbal and having other problems such as reading, writing and difficulty receiving proper education (Kazemi et al., 2016).

Down Syndrome is not a disease but a genetic problem. Chromosome 21 is the smallest human chromosome and contains about 225 genes. However, the type of chromosomal pattern does not significantly change the learning patterns and difficulties faced by Down Syndrome individuals (Roslinda & Halimah et al., 2009). A person with Down Syndrome has a high chance of developing leukemia as well as Alzheimer's disease, but can lower the risk of getting high blood pressure, stroke, tumors and others (Hafsah, 2020). The population with Down Syndrome tends to increase but it can be overcome with a high level of awareness in the community with the treatment taken (Wajuihian, 2016).

Down Syndrome has three types, including Trisomy 21 as many as 95% cases, translocation as much as 4% and mosaic as much as 1%. Trisomy 21 Down Syndrome is the most common in Down Syndrome patients because there are additional chromosomes on chromosome 21 (Irwanto et al., 2014). Translocation Down Syndrome generally has a fixed number of 46 chromosomes, but there are full or additional copies of chromosome 21 attached to other chromosomes and have many characteristics of Down Syndrome. Meanwhile, the mosaic type of Down Syndrome is a combination of cells containing 46 ordinary chromosomes. This type of Down Syndrome has few other characteristics of Down Syndrome (Wardah, 2019).

Chromosomes are also composed of genes. The function of the gene is to produce proteins from amino acids in the food taken. The additional genetic element in the chromosomes means that the protein dose is increasing which leads to the growth and development of the body. Genes are also capable of preventing faulty genes from continuing to function or to interfere. The biochemical process is also caused by excessive production and due to this there is still no cure or treatment for Down Syndrome patients. Variation, in turn, depends on human characteristics and is caused by environmental factors and genetic factors. Variation also occurs among Down Syndrome (Barbara et al., 2014).

Down Syndrome children also suffer from health problems such as having problems with congenital heart defect, flu, inflammation of the throat, pneumonia, and respiratory system. This is due to the fact that the body is unable to process nutrients. Therefore, children with Down Syndrome need to perform activities that can respond to stimulating the sensory, muscle control training and physical skills training to improve their ability to be independent and mentally developed activities (Wahid, 2008). These children are categorized as Special Education Needs Pupils of learning difficulties due to being at an IQ level (intelligence degree) of 40 - 70 and still need a detailed study from the point of view of their innocence (Ab Rahman et al., 2015).

### **Characteristics of Down Syndrome**

All these characteristics indicate that Down Syndrome should be given attention in self-management, level of brain intelligence and methods of teaching as well as detailed learning to enable the child to learn the Quran with teachers. These are the following characteristics of Down Syndrome (Fergus, 2021; Fidler, 2005):

- i. **Head/face**
  - Flattened face.
  - Short nasal bone.

- Almond-shaped eyes that slant up.
  - Small and lowered ears.
  - Small head.
  - Small mouth.
  - A tongue that tends to stick out of the mouth.
- ii. **Hand Palms**
- Single transverse palmar crease.
  - Small pinky fingers that sometimes curve toward the thumb.
- iii. **Leg**
- Short toes.
  - Small feet with a larger than normal space between the big and second toes.
  - Wide footprints.
- iv. **Muscle**
- Weak and flaccid muscles of the body and limbs

Other problems faced by Down Syndrome are the muscles of hypotonia (weak) causing difficulties in chewing, swallowing and saliva constantly drooling, frequent constipation, often irregular body movements, congenital heart disease, getting ear infections and having hearing problems. Other than that, their problems also involve vision problems, blood cancer and hypotirodism (lack of function of the thyroid gland). They also faced late growth and development (Lee & Leow, 2012).

### **Issues and Challenges of Teaching The Quran to Children with Down Syndrome**

The teaching process of children with disabilities including learning difficulties such as Down Syndrome is not an easy work. Various challenges need to be addressed as children with Down Syndrome have their own privileges and need instructors who are experts in dealing with these people. It is proven that Down Syndrome has a specific way of learning (Yussof et al., 2016).

Teachers who teach students with special needs need to have high teaching knowledge and skills as well as clear objectives. Therefore, it demands a teacher with high competence, constant professional development of the teacher and a virtuous personality. However, this study shows that there are still many teachers who have problems in the knowledge and teaching skills to teach the students with special needs. A study by Toran et al (2016) found that there are still many special education teachers who lack the knowledge and teaching skills, lack the confidence to deliver effective teaching and have a low level of meta-competence of the subject.

Special education teachers should also be given training consistently and specifically to the problems faced by children with special needs and in accordance with current developments. Zubir (2019) compares the issues and challenges of teachers in Malaysia with the United States and they are faced with the same issue of lack of appropriate training to specific types of disabilities. Therefore, teachers who teach the Quran to these students need to have the skills to teach and understand the characteristics and learning needs of these

special children in order for the approach and teaching strategy used suit with their learning needs. Therefore, teachers need to be given consistent training in order to enhance their knowledges and benefit the students.

The process of teaching and learning the Quran to Down Syndrome children also requires a special approach in accordance with the problems. Among the problems faced by them are:

### **Learning Difficulties**

A significant problem of children with Down Syndrome is mental and psychological development (Shariff, 1998). Slow psychological mental development will make it difficult for them to learn. Previous studies have shown that the reading ability of children with Down Syndrome or other special needs children is rarely focused because most people give low expectations of their developmental potential capacity (Ng, 2016). Whereas literacy skills are very important as a basis in the education and daily life of children with special needs. Numerous studies have shown that early exposure to early literacy will be a great benefit to children either with disabilities or normal children.

It is same for the teaching and learning of the Quran to children with Down Syndrome, where these children should be given early intervention in the recitation of the Quran to enable them to have a foundation before the teaching and learning process is implemented. Teachers need to use a lot of short sentences and easy-to-understand language to stimulate children with Down Syndrome. The activities cannot be carried out continuously and must be depend on the suitable time when they are fresh and active. Teaching process also only focuses on one lesson at a time to make it easier for them to learn.

In this regard, the role of parents is very important in providing the intervention of reciting the Quran to their children before they are admitted to an educational institution. A study by Bari et al (2016) found that an important factor in implementing early intervention was the cooperation of various parties whether teachers, administrators and parents.

### **Poor Memory / Forgetfulness**

Short-term memory is the ability to keep a little information in the mind in an active state for a short period of time. It is important to allow a person to process information received through verbal or visual. Elementary school children are unable to maintain these short-term memories received through verbal because they are easier to remember in visual form. This situation will cause them to face problems when the class is delivered in verbal form.

Children with Down Syndrome become forgetful and need to be repeated several times during the learning session. There are times when teachers have to teach the same thing over and over again for weeks. Their difficulties in this short-term memory make children with Down Syndrome easy to forget and they also do not focus during learning session due to difficulties in receiving information. Nevertheless, this situation is not an obstacle for them to gain knowledge.

### **Speech and Language Disorders**

Children with Down Syndrome always face problems in speech and language. They find it difficult to understand something that is conveyed verbally due to problems with disorders in speech and language. According to Buckley (2000) speech and language problems caused them to lag behind in the ability of reasoning. This is due to the fact that they have to hear all the sounds in one word but at the same time they have difficulties in making sounds, remembering the order of sounds and syllables. The language problems makes these children difficult to study at school. According to Griffin & Hart (n.d.) language difficulties are probably the most significant problem for most children with Down Syndrome at school.

### **Hearing Problems**

Children with Down Syndrome often suffer from hearing problems such as chronic ear disease and hearing loss. According to a study by McFadden (2014), hearing problems faced by Down Syndrome individuals are by 38% to 75%. Individuals with Down Syndrome get hearing loss by infection in the middle of the liquid ears. Thus, the learning process become disrupted and has implications for children with Down Syndrome. Hearing treatment must be given early to avoid serious case of hearing loss (McFadden, 2014).

### **Communication Problems**

Communication plays a major role in the process of teaching and learning. Problems in communication will interfere with the process of teaching and learning. Communication problems caused by physical factors that make them difficult to communicate and having poor vocabulary (Wahid, 2008). Therefore, they are difficult to accept and understand the information presented as well as affect the ability to express ideas. Speech problems also make it difficult to produce sounds aimed at speaking and communicating. When there is no communication it is certainly difficult to accept the lesson.

However, children with Down Syndrome have strength in spatial visual processing compared to verbal processing skills (Ng, 2016). In general, visual memory and visual-motor integration especially visual imitation are relative strengths in the spatial visual processing of children with Down Syndrome. The strengths of children with Down Syndrome need to be maximized to overcome their weaknesses.

### **Quranic Teaching Towards Children with Down Syndrome**

Teaching means teaching everything that is related to teaching (such as the way or system of teaching, the aspects of interest and others) (Kamus Dewan, 2007). In general, teaching is a process or activity. Teaching is said to be a process because it involves communication and cooperation between teachers and students, and the distribution of information. Teaching also involves activities such as explanation, questioning, listening, storytelling, quizzing, playing and many others.

According to Ishak (2011); Cooper (2006); Alsagoff (1986), teachers play an important role in mobilizing and reviving the teaching and learning process. Based on the role of the teacher as a planner there are five aspects that are the main factors in determining the effectiveness of teaching and learning which are the objectives of teaching, materials or resources, teaching methods, facilities and physical arrangement and assessment.

## 1. Teaching Objectives

Teaching objective is an important aspect of the teaching and learning process. Each teacher needs to plan the lesson to make sure the process are implement effectively. The objectives of the lesson should be clear, specific with no confusion and the learning outcomes at the end of the learning session. The expected learning outcomes need to be expressed in the form of a real measure, that is, a behavior that can be measured, heard and seen. The teachers were encouraged to carry out the documentation of lesson planning through the Individual Education Plan. Individual Education Plan can be referred to as one of the authentic evaluation for teaching and learning process (Ahmad, 2018).

In ensuring that a teaching process achieves its objectives, it is necessary to plan the lesson well. Teaching practice begins with the factors of planning the lesson for the students, the content, the process, the time, the school, the curriculum guidance resources, textbooks, friends, teachers, internet, library and consideration of the teacher are given attention (Ahmad, 2018). All of this factors should be address in planning the lessons to ensure that each of the stated objectives can be carried out in organize.

Besides that, the objective of teaching also ensures that a student does not neglect himself in terms of cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects. According to a study by Kasim & Husain (2008), all these aspects play a role in achieving effective teaching objectives according to the role played by teachers in providing exposure to students. The objective of the lesson also requires the commitment of the teacher to choose the objective that suits the student as there is not a single objective that coincides with the student due to the student's cognitive level. However, teachers are obliged to set objectives according to the ability to achieve at least 80% of students in teaching and learning process (Othman & Kassim, 2017).

A study by Nor & Othman (2011) stated that the objectives of teaching and learning need to be constantly evaluate, therefore any weaknesses can be improved. The objectives of the teaching also show that it is related to conveying the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that bring change to the student's self. Teaching is also carried out in various ways, such as briefing, storytelling, tutoring, conducting discussions, and providing guidance on the student learning process as well as a combination of the above methods (Omar et al., 2014).

### i. Materials or Sources

The use of interesting teaching aids can help with learning proficiency. The use of appropriate and interesting teaching aids can also make it easier for students to understand a lesson. Teaching aids also accelerates the learning process compared to writing and speech guidance. According to Buckley (2000) children with Down Syndrome are human beings who have the same abilities, strengths and weaknesses as normal children. They need teaching aids to make it easier for them to understand the topic of discussion. These children need stimulation to attract their attention and thus make them focus on their studies (Stockall & Gatin, 2002). Therefore, the material needs to be interesting and involve various methods, using real objects and visualized materials. Children with Down Syndrome get bored easily in an activity or a single material (Aziz et al., 2006). The use of augmentative technology and *Augmentative Alternative Communication* (AAC) technology consisting of a variety of intuitive and user-friendly *hardware* and software systems can facilitate communication and

interest of children with Down Syndrome in the process of teaching and learning (Ramli & Zaman, 2009).

The process of teaching and learning is seen to be in order if the Quran teachers use teaching aids to children with Down Syndrome. The use of teaching aids is more effective and efficient in disseminating information related to the Quran. Examples of modern teaching aids nowadays are iPads, tablets and laptops able to attract disabled children with learning difficulties such as autism and Down Syndrome to learn the Quran (Mohamad, 2014). Quranic teachers today need a high level of creativity in attracting the attention of children with Down Syndrome in the process of teaching and learning. By using ICT, teachers are able to increase the interest and attention of students, encourage feedback, offer intellectual learning experiences and assist in the development of literacy (Bidin et al., 2011).

According to Abdulaziz et al (2006), the method of teaching the Quran that can be used by the Quran teachers to attract the attention of children with Down Syndrome is to use colored diagrams and posters in the teaching. Among the examples of activities that can be carried out is showing students the pieces of letters and pictures displayed using a projector. Other teaching aids are through the use of audio and video installed by Quran teachers in learning. Based on the use of audio and video, it is suitable for children with Down Syndrome to learn how to pronounce words with the correct movements of the mouth.

All of these teaching aids help children with Down Syndrome in terms of reading, hearing, seeing, hearing and seeing, as well as doing practical (Abdulaziz et al., 2006). Therefore, teachers should emphasis more on teaching aids to improve the quality of Quranic teaching and learning for children with Down Syndrome. The use of technology is seen as a new dimension in the world of teaching and learning according to the current digital world. Not to deny the use of old traditions in the learning of the Quran, but with the sophistication that it has to be harnessed for the teaching and learning of the Quran especially to the children with Down Syndrome who need more supervision and guidance due to the various cognitive factors that influence them.

## ii. Teaching Methods

The teaching method means the actions performed by the teacher in the implementation of the process of teaching and learning. Teaching methods can be said to be a necessary step to achieve goals or objectives of the teaching.

Teaching on children with Down Syndrome should be simplified by limiting the content of learning. Increase the use of mind maps and visual materials to help children with Down Syndrome assist retention. The use of simple sentences will be able to make it easier for this child to understand what they wants to convey. Teachers should use clear examples and materials that can be seen by children with Down Syndrome as well as using teaching aids containing interesting diagrams and visuals.

In the Quranic teaching, the teacher needs to simplify the teaching by using interesting aids. The use of coloured aids and letter pictures such as hijaiyyah letters should be increased. It is also suggested that the use of tarannum techniques or listening to the recitation of the Quran which can be therapeutic to them. A study by Zulkafli (2020) showed that Quran

recitation becomes a therapy to the children with Autism by reducing behavioral problems such as aggressiveness, sensitivity, hyperactivity and repetitive behavior.

**a. *Talaqqi and Musyafahah***

This method is seen as suitable for teachers and students to use as it is an effective traditional method in the form of its presentation. Since children with Down Syndrome usually have hearing and vision problems, teachers need to make sure they receive lessons face-to-face, speak face-to-face and use simple sentences. This method of *talaqqi* and *musyafahah* is important in the teaching of the Quran and can help students master the learning of the Quran well (Muhammad et al., 2019). The method of teaching the Quran also requires creativity in attracting interest in learning it in order to improve understanding, reading and memorization. This method of *talaqqi* and *musyafahah* should be guided by the teaching by the teacher to be good at reciting the Quran. *Talaqqi* means reciting face-to-face in front of the teacher, while *musyafahah* means the teacher first will recite and the student will listen. This method is the *sunnah* of the *Salaf* practiced by the Companions just as used by the Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) (Nawi et al., 2021).

**b. Using Reading Method**

The method that can be used to help children with Down Syndrome is to assist in reading. Reading is important because by reading various knowledge and information is obtained (Næss et al., 2012). According to Ahmad (2014), children with learning problems especially Down Syndrome, reading is the best and necessary method because children who have mastered reading skills and can be independent are the goal of this inclusive education. Then, teaching children with Down Syndrome also have several methods that teachers can use, among which create a learning environment such as at schools and classrooms. In addition, improving the relevant points in the teaching material as well as creating a social in learning through some of the experiences available. Therefore, this method helps these children learn about diversity and positive things related to each other (Kehe, 2015).

Based on the Teacher Professional Development Training Module (Inclusive Education), Special Education Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia 2018, these are the following teaching and learning methods that can be applied to children with Down Syndrome as a guide in teaching:

**c. Full Communication**

Children with Down Syndrome faced with difficulties in communication. They usually have the will to communicate, but they need to be helped to develop their ability to communicate. Among the methods that are suitable to use is using short and understandable words. They also need to be stimulated to communicate and learn. Each child has its own peculiarities and is different from each other. Therefore they need to be given different approaches according to their suitability and needs. There is not a single method that is suitable for all children. The use of full communication consisting of various mediums to communicate such as sign language, cue, and speech can help these children with Down Syndrome to understand the information they want to convey (Special Education Division, 2018).

### iii. Facilities and Physical Arrangement

Children with special needs are easily distracted. The atmosphere of the environment is important for effectiveness teaching and learning process. According to Ahmad (2018), a good and conducive classroom environment is needed by every student, especially for children with special needs. Likewise for the children with Down Syndrome, the teachers need to adopt strategies that work to minimize distractions such as keeping children out of windows, maintaining noise levels, using a conducive environment therefore the students can participate, concentrate and show interest in learning.

Classroom preparation also plays a role in preserving good student behavior and can ensure that the teaching process runs smoothly (Eng, 2014). This is important to ensure that students are in good shape in the classroom to learn. In terms of facilities, children with Down Syndrome should be given comfort in the classroom during teaching and learning process (Kasim & Husain, 2008). Children with Down Syndrome requires a special space to learn because some in this category of children have the ability to follow the teaching sessions easily, some are average and some find it difficult to understand a lesson given by the teacher (Moridan, 2013).

The physical environment of the classroom also affects teaching and learning. According to a study by Ahmad et al (2013), a conducive environment is able to maintain the focus and interest of students in the classroom as a good environment can provide comfort to students. The results of the authors showed that the physical aspects of the learning environment were determined using the Classroom Physical Environment Inventory while the comfort of teaching and learning was determined using the Teaching and Learning Comfort Scale.

### iv. Assessment

When conducting a lesson, teacher has set the objectives to be achieved. Teachers use various strategies and methods to achieve these objectives. In order to know the objectives were achieved during the teaching and learning process, an assessment should be carried out. Assessment is also carried out based on the student's achievement in attending the lesson with the teacher. The teacher will make an assessment in terms of the acceptance of students in the classroom, the focus during the teacher's teaching and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning sessions in the classroom.

As a result of the assessment carried out, the teacher can assess the performance of a student in teaching and learning. Teachers can evaluate students with learning difficulties such as Down Syndrome according to the guidelines set by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (Special Education Division, 2015). Students with Down Syndrome need alternatives and modifications in terms of curriculum and teaching methods. Therefore, these students are in substantial need of modifications in terms of teaching methods, teaching aids and also learning syllabus (Suhid et al., 2015).

### Conclusion

As a conclusion, there are still not many studies related to the teaching of the Quran on children with Down Syndrome. Teaching children with disabilities including learning difficulties such as Down Syndrome is not an easy job. Various challenges need to be address

as children with Down Syndrome have their own privileges and need instructors who are experts in dealing with these groups. In addition, the focus should also be given especially in the aspect of the effectiveness of Quranic teaching to children with Down Syndrome. Based on previous studies, there are still fewer studies related to the teaching of the Quran on individuals with Down Syndrome. Most of research are focused on disabled students in other categories such as vision impairment, hearing problems, speech problems as well as autism and others. In general, teachers should pay significant attention to important aspects of the effectiveness of the lesson such as the objectives of the lesson, materials or resources, teaching methods, facilities and physical arrangement as well as the assessment. The effectiveness of the Quranic teaching depends on the ability of the teacher to focus on these aspects and continue to achieve the goal.

### Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Ministry of Higher Education (Malaysia) for the research grant: FRGS/1/2019/SS109/UKM/02/6.

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