

Online Al-Qur'an learning for adult *asnaf-mualaf*: analysis of issues for recommendation

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Sep 13, 2023

Revised Mar 3, 2025

Accepted Mar 19, 2025

Keywords:

Asnaf-mualaf

Issues

Online

Qur'an

Teaching

ABSTRACT

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a hitch in Qur'an education, signalling a need to shift to online learning. When the Islamic learning centres ceased to operate due to the lockdown, adult *asnaf-mualaf* (reverts who are eligible to receive zakat or other forms of Islamic aids) were held back from physically attending Al-Qur'an lessons. The measure has disrupted their ongoing learning of the Qur'an, and prolonged disruption is feared to cause disengagement among the *asnaf*. Hence, this study arranged five meetings over three weeks for online Qur'an lessons, each lasting an hour, for eight *asnaf-mualaf*. A qualitative exploration of the online lessons was conducted to determine suitable mechanisms, issues, and challenges faced by the *asnaf* in online Qur'an learning. Interview protocol refinement (IPR) was employed to ensure the method was executed ethically, and the data were coded and analysed thematically using ATLAS.ti. The findings revealed a preference for WhatsApp, while low internet quality and accessibility were the expected apparent challenges during the restriction. The study underscores the importance of catering to the participants' needs and addressing their lack, indicating a shift towards an andragogical approach of learner-centredness. Several actionable recommendations are forwarded to enhance the online Qur'an instructions for *asnaf-mualaf*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on Al-Qur'an education and its relationship with *asnaf* (individuals eligible to receive zakat or other Islamic charity) [1], *mualaf* or "becoming Muslim," where the convert (or revert) returns to their fitra, a natural, pristine state of belief in and obedience to God in which all humans are created [2], are still limited. Most scholarly work on *mualaf*, or reverts to Islam nationwide, focuses on various aspects, including radicalism, legal literacy, dream interpretations, and Islamic teaching practices and understanding [3]–[5]. This results in a lack of sufficient information about the level of understanding and awareness of rights and legal implications among most *asnaf-mualaf* who have embraced Islam [4].

When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2020, it had a profound impact on every aspect of education. This phenomenon

prompted the Malaysian government to implement the movement control order (MCO), where all nurseries, government, and private schools, primary, secondary, pre-university, and all public and private institutions of higher learning and skills training nationwide were immediately closed (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2020) from 18 to 31 March 2020 (phase 1), 1 to 14 April 2020 (phase 2) and 15 to 28 April 2020 (phase 3). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recommends using various alternatives and platforms, including e-learning, to ensure the continuity of learning for students worldwide.

The restriction also halted the operation of Islamic learning centres worldwide [6]. In Malaysia, Muslim students were not allowed to physically attend Islamic religious schools, locally known as *Kelas Agama* and *Fardhu Ain* (KAFA) [7]. The restriction has also restricted adult *asnaf-mualaf* students from receiving input and support in learning the religion, especially the Qur'an. The cessation or suspension of activities at Islamic learning centres hindered the ongoing Islamic guidance, as one of the primary hubs for Qur'an education offered to the *asnaf* in the country. A prolonged disruption in the learning process is feared to cause disengagement and demotivation in learning the Qur'an among the *asnaf-mualaf*, leading to dropout.

Reading the Qur'an is a highly recommended practice for Muslims, and it should be performed carefully to avoid mispronunciation. A Qur'an reader must follow the rules of pronunciation, intonation, prolongation, stress, stretching, and tempo to recite correctly, known as the *tajweed* rules [8]. Because of this, reading the Qur'an can be challenging for many non-Arab-speaking Muslims, including those in Malaysia. Non-native Arabic speakers may struggle with understanding the precise meaning of individual words, and the irregularity in recitation significantly contributes to misreading or improper recitation of the Qur'an among new Muslims [9]. According to Hussin *et al.* [10], it is essential for students who wish to begin reading the Qur'an to have proper guidance for interpreting its verses. The presence of Qur'an teachers is necessary to ensure students can follow every guideline and procedure, allowing the Qur'an to be understood clearly and the messages to be fully grasped when read correctly [11].

Like any provisions from the almighty Allah SWT, Muslims are encouraged to utilise challenges to develop their character and strengthen their faith. The Qur'an states, "*And We have certainly made [the trials] a means of manifesting [the truth]. And indeed, Allah is with the patient*" (Qur'an, 29:2-3). The lockdowns and social distancing measures have enabled Al-Qur'an teachers to improve and familiarise themselves with digital methods. The digital platform is viewed as a significant solution for learning the Qur'an at that time, which can minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19 infection [12]. The emergence of virtual Qur'an study classes, such as Facebook Live, Instagram Live, WhatsApp video conferences, Telegram calls, and even phone calls, has made Qur'an learning more conveniently accessible and has attracted widespread interest. Online Al-Qur'an learning can provide benefits similar to face-to-face teaching as it is simultaneous and centred on learners [13], [14].

Hence, the primary objectives of this study become twofold: first, to explore various mechanisms employed in online Qur'anic learning, particularly among *asnaf-mualaf*; second, to determine issues and challenges encountered in teaching the Qur'an online. By addressing these objectives, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of online Qur'anic education. The research outcome aims to illuminate effective instructional design strategies and identify areas that require ongoing improvement.

To situate the study within the broader academic discourse and identify gaps, this section discusses the two main approaches to instruction that are subtly contrasted: Qur'an education for *asnaf*, which is teacher-centred, and online Qur'an learning, which is learner-centred. Foremost, the *asnaf-mualaf* is a group mentioned in the Qur'an whose hearts have accepted Islam [15]. According to the dictionary Al-Mu'jam Al-'Arabi Al-Basasi, the word *mualaf* is derived from *alafa-yualifu-mualafatan*, which means benign or tame, indicating something that is tamed [16]. A-Marbawi (1350H), a scholar from the Malay Archipelago, stated that the term *mualaf* can be interpreted in two ways: as an individual who has recently converted to Islam or as a term used in a written context, such as a book [17]. The word *mualaf* does not have a fixed pronunciation; therefore, it is likely that the reader pronounces it as *muallif*, which reflects the author's intended meaning [18]. In a plural society like Malaysia, *mualaf* refers to individuals who have recently reverted to Islam [19], regardless of whether they are Chinese, Indian, or from other races [20]. At the same time, it distinguishes between two categories of *mualaf*: those who are persuaded and guided by their hearts to remain steadfast in Islam, and those who are nurtured to be attracted to convert to Islam [18]. These notions include their right to receive Islamic education, especially Al-Qur'an education.

For Muslims, the Qur'an is the primary source of knowledge in human life. The Qur'an encompasses all aspects of life, including faith, sharia, morality, and fiqh, covering the affairs of both this world and the hereafter. At the heart of knowledge-seeking is learning and studying the revealed knowledge set out in the Qur'an, believed to constitute the final message of Allah to humankind as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad SAW for the last 23 years of his life and passed on by him through recitation [21]. Therefore, reading and reciting the Qur'an is an ability that every Muslim must master. The correct recitation of the Qur'an is especially pertinent for Muslims when performing obligatory salah [8]. Although the Qur'an is written in

Arabic, it contains signs and guides that are distinct from those found in ordinary Arabic texts [22]. Students, especially the *mualaf*, who are learning the Qur'an, need proper guidance from a teacher; the teacher must pay attention to the reading.

The teaching and learning method of the Qur'an begins with *talaqqi musyafahah*. *Talaqqi musyafahah* refers to a face-to-face meeting between a teacher and student, where the student observes the movements of the teacher's lips and follows the teacher's reading [10], [22]. This method is a traditional practice of transmission, dating back to the first revelation given by Allah SWT to the Prophet Muhammad SAW through Jibril AS [11]. The presentation of Allah's words through the practice of *talaqqi* continues to expand globally, spreading Islam's teachings and practices in human life [23]. This form of teaching is often linked to the traditional or behaviourist approach to education. It is sometimes referred to as the teacher-centred or transmission model, in which the teacher plays a central role in delivering information, guiding the learning process, and assessing students' progress. Students are expected to listen to the teacher, follow instructions, and complete tasks as specified.

Furthermore, this approach is rooted in the belief that effective teaching involves transmitting knowledge from the teacher to the students, who are viewed as passive recipients of information. Teachers' instructional practices are shaped by their epistemic and pedagogical convictions: epistemic beliefs pertain to the nature of knowledge and the learning process, while pedagogical beliefs encompass educators' perspectives on teaching and learning, influencing their instructional methods and strategies [14]. In a teacher-centred classroom, memorisation (remembering), drilling, traditional tests, the presentation of knowledge by the teacher, and the completion of individual tasks are among the main characteristics which make it a product-oriented approach [24].

While this approach has been widely used in traditional Qur'anic learning settings, there has been a shift in recent decades towards more student-centred approaches that prioritise active engagement, critical thinking, and student autonomy in the learning process [25]. These newer approaches, such as constructivism, social constructivism, and inquiry-based learning, emphasise students' participation, collaboration, and the construction of knowledge through meaningful interactions and experiences [26]. Nevertheless, the Qur'an teachers face challenges in their duties. Students' backgrounds, heavy teaching workloads and lack of instructional training are among the challenges reported. Time constraints on teaching Al-Qur'an recitation notably have contributed to the impediment of teachers' effective teaching in various teaching and learning activities [25].

Online learning, also known as e-learning, utilises information and communication technology (ICT) tools and platforms to deliver educational content and facilitate learning experiences over the internet. The shift from traditional education to online learning predictably requires changes and adjustments in devices, as well as in the attitudes of teachers and students [27]. Though the asynchronous instructional approach was more effective in improving students' achievement and stimulating their interest in learning than the synchronous instructional approach [28], synchronous Qur'an learning could allow more opportunities for students to interact with teachers and other students. Qur'an students must be more independent than in a traditional classroom because online learning requires active participation to understand the material and achieve good learning outcomes [29].

An online perspective suggests that the learner-centred approach supports collaboration among learners through meaning-making and the presentation of understanding via technology [30]. A teacher may be in a transitional position, where the teacher-centred perspective refers to the behaviouristic approach, whereas the learner-centred perspective refers to constructivism [14]. Similarly, online classroom practices can be considered teacher or learner-centred [24]. However, not all teachers profess to hold constructivist beliefs in technology in purely constructivist ways, such as during the pandemic. Etmer asserted that it is plausible that these teachers tend to use technology by implementing both traditional and constructivist approaches in a "blended" manner [24].

Howard *et al.* [31] argued that ICT could act as a persuasive factor for the transition. The idea aligns with perceptual control theory (PCT) [32]. In PCT, teachers who believe that technology can promote the achievement of higher-level goals when implemented without causing disruptions are more inclined to change their practice. From a PCT perspective, teachers with traditional, teacher-centred beliefs need to be convinced that adopting constructivist, learner-centred principles is worthwhile and that using technology will help them achieve higher-level goals. Additionally, since good technical support and physical resources are crucial [33], teachers must believe that when the tools are implemented, they will assist them in achieving those higher goals, surpassing traditional practices. The shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred approaches is feasible, despite potential issues related to ICT or technology, although it may require time.

Hence, this study investigates online Qur'anic learning among *asnaf-mualaf* from the viewpoints of their Qur'an teachers. For online Al-Qur'an lessons, the teacher can apply the *talaqqi musyafahah* method in the classroom by giving an example of Qur'anic recitation [22] to an individual or a group of students. Then, the students follow the teacher's recitation, or the teacher provides an example of Qur'anic recitation to one student, and the student recites individually according to the teacher's example. All these methods have

elements of the *talaqqi musyafahah* method [10], [17]. Notable aspects include the continuity of religious education, skills coaching, and specific aspects of the Islamic religious lesson content [18].

Studies analysing students' performance during the pandemic concluded that students performed significantly better in online education than their performance reflected in records from face-to-face classes from the previous year [13], [34]. Conversely, several adverse effects have also been identified, including distractions and reduced focus, heavier workloads, problems with technology and the internet (such as signal issues), and inadequate support from instructors and friends [35], [36]. Yet, Yahya *et al.* [6] uncovered no significant difference in students' performance between Qur'an reading classes in face-to-face and online classroom settings. Though the students and instructors experienced some changes, they generally recognised the need for Qur'an classes online during the pandemic. These inconclusive findings have motivated this study to explore the proper mechanisms and challenges of online Al-Qur'an education for *asnaf-mualaf*.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research design

The study is carried out qualitatively because the aim is to understand the subjective experiences of the interviewed *asnaf* in learning the Qur'an online and the obstacles they face throughout the process. It employs non-probability sampling, which involves open-ended interview questions with no predetermined assumptions. Eight Qur'an teachers were interviewed after conducting online Qur'an teaching sessions for a revert. The online Qur'an learning took place over five meetings, spread across three consecutive weeks, totalling one hour. The interviews were recorded, transcribed in a text form and analysed thematically with the aid of ATLAS.ti software.

2.2. Interview protocol refinement

An interview protocol was also carefully developed for this study using interview protocol refinement (IPR) [37]. The protocol is suitable for this study because it systematically improves interview questions. IPR has four phases: i) ensuring interview questions match research questions; ii) creating an inquiry-based conversation to develop an interview protocol that balances inquiry with dialogue; iii) gathering feedback on interview protocols to collect input (possible activities include close reading and think-aloud exercises); and iv) piloting the interview protocol with a small sample.

IPR supports the evolving nature of qualitative research, which often requires researchers to be responsive to emerging data and, therefore, adaptable to changes. An interview protocol can be customised to ensure a well-developed instrument and the trustworthiness of the research [38]. Figure 1 illustrates each step in the process of the interview protocol used in this study. Throughout all four steps, the study interview questions were carefully reviewed and consulted with experts and participants to produce a finely tuned interview protocol with the Qur'an teacher.

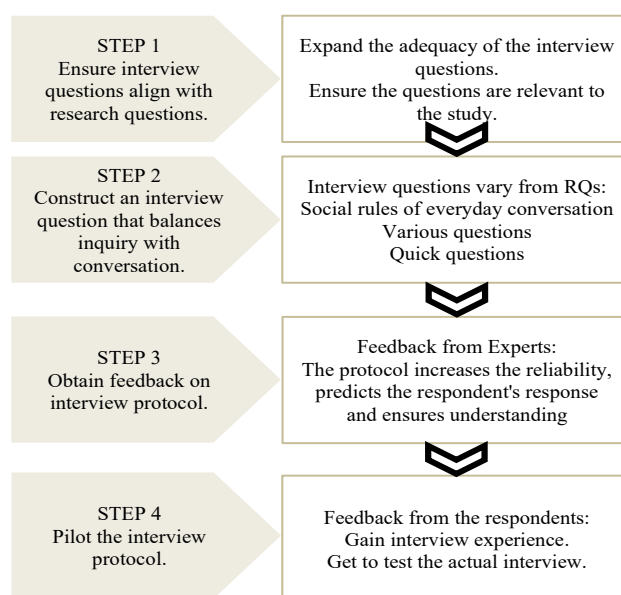


Figure 1. The adapted IPR in this study

2.3. Data analysis

The interview transcripts were coded based on emerging themes and patterns. An index code was then assigned to each participant's transcript to aid data retrieval. Next, the interview audio files were transcribed into text. Both the audio recordings and texts needed to be checked and read multiple times to familiarise oneself with the data and gain a clearer understanding. Meanwhile, each research question's response was given a different colour code to facilitate data analysis. This approach helped the researcher better understand the respondents' answers about the study's requirements.

Subsequently, the transcriptions were uploaded into the ATLAS.ti software to be thematically analysed. Thematic analysis (TA) is a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data [39]. This study conducts TA in five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding [39]. When compiling, the audio has already been transcribed, and the researchers are familiar with the data from the transcriptions and transparent about the research questions after checking and reading them several times.

At the disassembling stage, the data were broken into groups. The process is often done through coding, where the raw data are converted and categorised into themes or subthemes [40]. ATLAS.ti software was used to help identify code patterns and find links between codes across the data. Although the software still requires manual coding, mainly when creating themes from sub-themes, it saves time because researchers can easily and quickly find the total frequency of code analysis through generated reports. These reports enable the organisation of the resulting themes according to the two research questions: the mechanisms and issues of learning the Qur'an.

Then, the codes were contextualised at the reassembling stage to form themes. A theme highlights a vital aspect of the data related to the research question and conveys meaning within the dataset [39]. The data were organised within themes and subthemes in a matrix arranging participant roles, themes, variables, emerging concepts, and data sources into rows and columns creating a broad visual representation that grounds findings in the data and context [40]. Table 1 displays the matrix of the interview data, with the eight Qur'an teachers identified as 'participants' (P) and the six themes on *asnaf-mualaf's* online Al-Qur'an learning in response to the two research questions.

Table 1. The matrix of *asnaf-mualaf's* online Al-Qur'an learning

Participant (P)	Conversion duration	RQ1 (mechanism)		RQ2 (issues)		
		Teaching platform	Teaching aids	Internet connection	Issues/problems	Teaching recommendation
P1	x	xx	x	x		x
P2	x	xx	x		x	x
P3	x	x	xx	x	x	x
P4	x	xx		x	x	x
P5	x	x	x	x	x	
P6	x	xx	x	x	x	x
P7	x	xxx	x	x	x	x
P8	x	xx		x	x	x

Note: 'x' represents a cod

The transcriptions were sent back to the participants for approval. The developed themes and sub-themes were also checked and endorsed by the participants and an appointed rater to ensure the authenticity and trustworthiness of the study data. The subsequent interpretation step is critical because it involves making analytical conclusions from the codes, themes, and subthemes [40]. As there is no conclusive criterion for sound interpretation, Yin's five qualities that constitute reasonable interpretation were applied [41] to the study themes and subthemes: i) The interpretation should be complete. Readers should be able to see how the interpretations were drawn at the beginning, middle, and end. ii) The interpretations should be fair because other researchers should reach the same interpretation if given the same data. iii) The interpretations should also be accurate and representative of the raw data. iv) Good studies will add value to our understanding of the topic in the current literature. v) Data methods and subsequent interpretations should be credible and gain respect from colleagues.

Finally, the concluding stage addresses the study's purpose: to explore issues and recommendations related to *asnaf-mualaf* online Qur'an learning. The emerging themes, derived from the two objectives, are interpreted and connected to elements of learner-centredness during three weeks of online Qur'an lessons for the eight *asnaf*. The findings from the five-step analysis are presented in three main sections: participants' duration of conversion, the two reasons for conducting the study, and the developed themes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section comprises three main parts: the duration of the participants' conversion, the mechanism, and the issues facilitating online Qur'an lessons. Two themes emerged for the mechanism: the teaching platform and teaching aids. Three themes emerged for internet quality, issues, problems, and teaching improvements.

3.1. *Asnaf-mualaf* students' conversion period to Islam

Table 2 presents the duration it took for the eight participants to convert to Islam. Most participants (three students) have embraced Islam for between 16 and 30 years. Two students have been Muslims for six to 10 years, while one student converted within five years. Additionally, one participant has been Muslim for 11 to 15 years, and another for over 31 years. The range of conversion durations among the students spans from five to 30 years, reflecting the actual population of *asnaf-mualaf* from diverse backgrounds at the learning centres.

Table 2. Duration of the participants' conversion to Islam

Years	n
<5 years	1
6-10 years	2
11-15 years	1
16-30 years	3
>31 years	1

3.2 Mechanisms to learn Al-Qur'an online

The study's primary aim is to examine various mechanisms used in online Qur'anic learning among the *asnaf-mualaf* from the perspective of Qur'an teachers. Two themes emerged from the interview data: teaching platforms and teaching aids. Firstly, Table 3 shows the teaching platforms employed by Qur'an teachers during online lessons. The analysis indicates that WhatsApp is the most used platform among instructors. The WhatsApp app is the most widely used platform (eight students), likely due to its familiarity and frequent use.

Additionally, participants emphasised the need for a quality internet connection to ensure smooth online communication, efficient data transfer, and uninterrupted access to digital resources, enabling students to benefit fully from the lessons [42], [43]. Therefore, WhatsApp was preferred because it required less bandwidth and was more stable. Nonetheless, participants with reliable internet access utilised Google Meet (four), Webex (three), and Zoom Meeting (one).

Table 3. Teaching platform

Platforms	Materials	n=16
WhatsApp	Image and audio via WhatsApp	8
Google Meet	Video meeting via Google Meet	4
Webex	Video meeting via Webex	3
Zoom Meeting	Video meeting via Zoom Meeting	1

The choices of various platforms demonstrate a certain level of digital skills and the participants' willingness to learn the Qur'an online. The findings indirectly highlight the increased awareness of Al-Qur'an culture in contemporary Muslim society [10], leading to a greater understanding of, and interest in, learning, reading, and applying the Qur'an in daily life. The participants were prepared to transition to online Qur'an studies, even via phone, as long as they received proper guidance to continue learning the Qur'an, which they found convenient and versatile.

Secondly, teaching aids are a recurring theme in the study question on the mechanism of learning the Qur'an online. As shown in Table 4, several teaching materials are used by Qur'an teachers to assist their lessons during online Qur'an learning sessions. The Qur'an teachers mainly use *Iqra* (a standard textbook used by Muslims in Indonesia and Malaysia to learn to read Arabic letters and pronunciation) and the Qur'an during these sessions [23]. These traditional teaching aids are commonly preferred among Qur'an teachers for facilitating both physical and online Qur'an instruction [11].

Aside from their recitation, two teachers used YouTube videos to enhance the facilitated recitation method. This approach is admirable because the participants were directed to reliable online sites and materials, preventing them from being misled or scammed by unauthorised sources on the internet. Meanwhile, two

students utilised ‘SlideShare PowerPoint provided by Ustazah Maria’, ‘notes in PDF’ (one student), voice recordings, and videos (two students) to demonstrate the versatility of online lessons in accommodating different learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading/writing [14]. Auditory participants might prefer a ‘voice recording’ shared via WhatsApp to assist their recitation. Conversely, visual learners might choose videos and images to learn familiar verses.

Table 4. Teaching aids

Materials	Descriptions	n=7
<i>Iqra</i> books	<i>Iqra</i> books	4
Al-Qur’an	Al-Qur’an	3
YouTube	How to recite from YouTube	2
SlideShare PowerPoint	Slide share from Ustazah Maria	2
Voice recording	Reciting a voice recording	1
PDF note	Tajwid note in PDF	1
Videos and images	Videos and photos of common surahs	1

3.3 Issues and challenges in online teaching of Al-Qur’an to *asnaf-mualaf*

The second research objective is to identify issues and challenges faced in teaching the Qur’an online. Three themes emerged: internet connection quality, problems encountered, and recommendations for improving online teaching for *asnaf-mualaf*. The main challenge highlighted is technical issues related to internet connectivity. Participants unanimously agreed that a poor internet connection can hinder smooth online learning and teaching of the Qur’an. The internet is viewed as a vital “source of expanding horizons” due to its fast access to information technology [44].

Furthermore, students admitted they rely solely on internet data from their smartphones because of the lack of a Wi-Fi network at home. The dependence on mobile data alludes to a potential gap in internet access infrastructure among the participants. The analysis also shows that most students experienced moderate to poor internet connectivity, especially during rainy days. Only two students reported stable internet connections, and one had excellent internet quality as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Internet connection quality

Level	Internet connection	n=7
Excellent	Excellent internet connection	1
Stable	Stable internet connection	2
Less stable	Less stable internet connection	1
Moderate and severe	Moderate and severe internet connection when it rains	4

The findings suggest that online Qur’an teaching is feasible; however, internet access remains a significant obstacle to practical learning. Addressing issues related to internet connectivity, such as enhancing infrastructure and stability, is crucial to providing equal educational opportunities for all students. A dependable and high-speed internet connection is essential for students and teachers to access learning resources, participate in real-time communication and collaboration, use effective teaching and learning tools, stay informed with the latest information, and engage with digital media [45]. Future research may investigate potential solutions to improve internet connectivity during online Qur’an classes.

Apart from that, the Qur’an teachers identified several other issues and challenges. The most common challenge was the clash of the students’ other commitments (six of the seven students) when the teacher tried to schedule dates for their online classes. The teachers reported that the participants’ busy schedules (six students) were the most noticeable obstacle to studying the Qur’an online. Despite their motivation to learn the Qur’an, the participants admitted they had to manage their time to attend the lessons. Family and professional commitments are among the factors that can distract students from staying dedicated to their lessons. Nevertheless, the participants demonstrated perseverance in learning, reflecting the level of faith they had embraced as *asnaf-mualaf* students.

Four students repeatedly highlighted an unsatisfactory internet connection experience when learning the Qur’an online, a problem that requires resolution. They felt the poor quality of the internet was an obstacle to smooth Qur’an learning. The students cannot access video meetings or join online Qur’an recitation lessons because the application requires a strong and stable internet connection. Three students also encountered issues with inadequate technological devices, which prevented them from attending the classes. Some had to share devices with their children for home-based teaching and learning. This limitation caused the participants to delay their Qur’an learning to prioritise more critical reasons, mainly related to their children’s school work.

The Qur'an teacher faced two uncooperative participants who were unresponsive during the class. The students' status was only confirmed via a blue tick on WhatsApp. Conversely, teachers require more varied teaching techniques and materials to engage students better. Another challenge is the unpredictable class schedule, as teachers often have different classes to conduct. Additionally, the teachers' limited experience in facilitating online *talaqqi* sessions becomes an issue for participants because the online lessons do not have the same impact as learning in a physical, face-to-face class. Table 6 highlights seven issues and includes a sample of the Qur'an teacher's responses for each, ranked by the frequency with which they are mentioned.

Table 6. Issues and challenges of online Qur'an learning

Issues	Samples from transcripts (translated)	n=7
Student's other commitment	Students are busy working and managing families	6
Internet connection	Unsatisfactory internet connection	4
Devices/tools	Inadequate devices for holding classes	3
Student cooperation	No cooperation on the students' part	2
Class schedule	Unpredictable class schedule	1
Instructor's schedule	Instructors are busy with other activities	1
Teaching technique	No diversity of ways of teaching	1

Lastly, the Qur'an teachers offer some recommendations to improve the situation. The findings reflect the teachers' self-reflection in their efforts to provide meaningful learning to the *asnaf*. Seven themes of recommendation, corresponding to the seven issues discussed earlier, are shown in Table 7. Three of the Qur'an teachers suggest that online instruction should focus on learners' needs. Two teachers each recommend practising the Qur'an in groups and providing aids for students to have personalised devices for learning the holy Qur'an. The remaining four recommendations address the following areas: the program's schedule, study materials, notes, and the teacher's instruction.

Table 7. Improvement recommendations

Recommendation	Description	n=7
Student's needs	Teach according to students' needs	3
Reciting in groups	Conduct Qur'an recitation in groups	2
Device aids	Provide a device for personalised learning to aid the recitation	2
Time planning	Schedule time planning for the whole program	1
Study materials	Provide a variety of study materials	1
Hardcopy notes	Prepare a hard copy note	1
Teacher teaching	Instructors need to increase their instructional knowledge and skills	1

The main improvement relates to the teaching approach, which addresses students' individual needs. Each participant has a different background, level of readiness, and understanding. Some individuals cannot be taught simultaneously, while others quickly grasp concepts. The Qur'an teachers believed that they needed to know the participants personally to tailor their learning styles and effectively teach the Qur'an. For example, only when a student requests to be taught memorisation in prayer can the instructor accommodate the request, since memorisation requires more effort and takes longer than simply learning to recite verses in the Qur'an.

Furthermore, teachers can organise Qur'an recitation sessions in groups. Study classes can be conducted in small groups, typically consisting of four to five people per group. The figure enables Qur'an teachers to provide more individualised attention and encourages participants to learn from one another. Online classes require devices and a reliable, stable internet connection. However, some participants reported sharing devices with their children during the lockdown. They took the opportunity to request additional device support to facilitate more personalised learning. Such support can help students stay more committed to attending scheduled classes and remain focused on their pursuit of learning about the Holy Book and its associated religion.

Additionally, teachers and students should discuss time management for the classes. This suggestion followed several lesson postponements caused by the participants' and teachers' other commitments. Teachers are advised to propose dates for upcoming online classes and discuss them with participants to reach a mutually agreed-upon agreement. They are also recommended to share learning materials for the entire course so participants can revise independently. Teachers can offer a variety of teaching aids aligned with the earlier identified learning platforms to suit the participants' preferred learning styles and strategies, especially when they are unable to attend the live class. These *asnaf-mualaf* participants were presumably adult students who favour hardcopy notes, enjoying tangible objects for viewing compared to those on phone screens.

Finally, the participants suggested that Qur'an teachers develop more knowledge and skills in facilitating online Qur'an learning. Notably, since the participants are adult students, they plausibly sense their teacher's need to enhance their expertise in online teaching. The shift towards online education has introduced new expectations for educators, requiring a combination of subject knowledge with interactive teaching methods that leverage technology's capabilities [33]. The challenge lies in understanding the aspects of online pedagogy, the competencies educators must possess to succeed in online environments, and the theoretical principles that explain the importance of these skills [30]. The core principles of online teaching are rooted in prioritising the learner, constructivist theories, and learning within authentic contexts [26].

This study was generally conducted to assess the appropriateness of online Qur'an teaching mechanisms for adult *asnaf-mualaf*. It also explored the issues and challenges faced in teaching the Qur'an online. The findings showed that participants used various teaching platforms, with WhatsApp being the preferred choice for interactions between teachers and students. WhatsApp remains the most popular and widely used platform worldwide in 2022. It has even been frequently utilised in universities as a formal academic guidance platform [42], [46] due to its accessibility for quick and easy communication from anywhere with an internet connection, versatility in sharing educational content in different formats, feature group chats to promote peer learning and foster a sense of community among students, and support personalised one-on-one interactions between teachers and students to address individual learning needs [43], [46].

Internet access and connection quality are the most crucial aspects of online Qur'an learning for the *asnaf-mualaf*. It was found that not all participants have Wi-Fi access at home. Most rely solely on smartphone data, resulting in poor internet connections during online Qur'an sessions. This problem worsens, especially in adverse weather conditions such as rainfall. Unstable internet connections disrupt the online teaching process, causing distractions among participants and reducing the quality of learning [45].

Another challenge of learning the Qur'an online was the distractions from other commitments, which were often caused by the uncertain class schedules of both the Qur'an teacher and the participants. These conflicts made it difficult for them to agree on suitable sessions. Furthermore, not having to travel to attend classes physically likely made it easier for them to postpone or be absent. The participants also believed they could rely on recorded videos of the classes, a shift to asynchronous learning, which could be more impactful for them [28].

There is also the expected challenge of the *asnaf-mualaf* participants needing suitable devices to learn the Qur'an. Those who own devices must share them with other family members for various learning purposes. This issue highlights the participants' need to assign a specific device to optimise online Qur'an learning [6], such as a device with a larger screen than a phone. Nonetheless, there is no denying the participants' commitment and perseverance in pursuing the lessons online despite the lockdown. Subtly, the andragogical approach should be emphasised because it shifts the teacher's mindset to a different perspective on learning and teaching, based on a self-directed, independent adult learning method [8]. The findings suggest that the *asnaf-mualaf* are self-driven and responsible for ensuring they receive the best Qur'an learning, despite any restrictions.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that conclusions from qualitative research are context-dependent [47]. The conditions under which qualitative research is conducted can often not be replicated. It is not a hindrance or limitation to the study but rather a feature to be acknowledged.

4. CONCLUSION

This investigation into online adult Qur'anic lessons for *asnaf-mualaf* aims to ensure the continuity of Holy Book learning during periods of restriction. Its objectives include exploring effective methods for online Qur'an teaching and understanding issues and challenges in online religious instruction. The study compared traditional *talaqqi* musyafahah of the Qur'an with online learning, shifting from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach. The identified methods and challenges emphasised the importance of focusing on learners' progress without diminishing the role of Qur'an teachers. Findings highlighted WhatsApp's significance as the preferred platform for instructor-student interactions, offering a globally accessible and user-friendly medium for Qur'an education. The study also underlined the critical need for reliable internet access, especially in areas where students rely solely on smartphone data, which worsens connectivity issues during adverse weather conditions. Such instability disrupts learning and impairs overall educational experiences. Scheduling conflicts and device-sharing further complicate access to Qur'anic lessons for adult *asnaf*. The research emphasises a shift towards adult learner-centredness, promoting self-directed learning where learners are encouraged to actively participate in their educational journey.

In light of these findings, several actionable recommendations emerge to improve online Qur'an teaching for *asnaf-mualaf*. First, ensuring a stable internet infrastructure is essential. Efforts should focus on enhancing internet connectivity to provide a seamless learning experience. Second, establishing technical support systems is crucial for addressing connectivity issues and assisting students when problems arise. Next,

flexible scheduling options are needed to accommodate the diverse needs of adult learners. Addressing device accessibility is also vital, especially for *asnaf-mualaf* who face challenges with shared devices. Clear communication channels between Qur'an teachers and *asnaf-mualaf* are essential to promote effective interaction and support. Ultimately, ongoing professional development for teachers will ensure the delivery of high-quality Qur'anic education. Teachers should be encouraged to develop digital and technological skills, reflecting an approach aligned with andragogy, which is based on self-directed, independent learning for adults and outlines best practices for adult education. These recommendations collectively aim to reduce challenges and create a conducive learning environment. Implementing these measures is expected to revitalise the online Qur'an learning and teaching experience for *asnaf-mualaf*, fostering positive educational outcomes and more effective engagement with Qur'an education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Research and Innovation Management Centre, Universiti Utara Malaysia (RIMC UUM), and the Lembaga Zakat Negeri Kedah (LZNK) or Kedah State Zakat Board for the support and assistance provided throughout the research.

FUNDING INFORMATION

The study was funded by the LZNK and the Institute of Zakat Research and Innovation of Universiti Utara Malaysia (IPIZ UUM) (reference code: SO 21393) research grants.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognise individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study was reviewed and approved by the authors' Institutional Review Board under the reference code: SO 21393. We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, [AN]. The data, which contains information that could compromise the privacy of research participants, is not publicly available due to certain restrictions.

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