

LET'S SIMMATCH: AN INTERACTIVE AND FUN METHOD IN LEARNING ARABIC (HIJA'YYAH) LETTERS

(Jom SIMMATCH: Kaedah Menarik dan Interaktif untuk Pembelajaran Huruf Hijaiyah Bahasa Arab)

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Abstract

Language barrier and conventional methods are among the factors that contribute to the challenges in learning Qur'an recitation among young Muslims in Malaysia. This has led to the creation of SIMMATCH, a teaching method in which learners were introduced to *Hija'yyah* (Arabic) letters by associating them to similar sounding objects that bear almost similar shapes to the letters. The SIMMATCH method was developed by integrating the VARK (Visual, Audio, Reading/Writing, Kinesthetic) modalities. In order to determine the effectiveness of SIMMATCH method, it was piloted to 25 preschoolers from a public school in the district of Jerantut in Pahang, Malaysia. The study adopted a collaborative action research approach and data were obtained by means of a pretest and two posttests. Data were analyzed using SPSS 25 and the results of the *t*-test indicate significant difference in the mean of the pretest and posttest 1 and 2; $p < 0.004$, $p < 0.000$ respectively, suggesting overall effectiveness of the SIMMATCH method in increasing learners' ability to recognize and memorize *Hija'yyah* letters. The study concludes that the SIMMATCH method has great potential in preparing young learners to the mastery of *Hija'yyah* letters.

Keywords: Association technique; *Hija'yyah* letters; Qur'an; VARK modalities.

Abstrak

Halangan bahasa dan metod konvensional adalah antara faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada cabaran dalam mempelajari cara bacaan al-Qur'an dalam kalangan kanak-kanak Muslim di Malaysia. Hal ini membawa kepada terciptanya produk SIMMATCH iaitu teknik pengajaran dimana para pelajar diperkenalkan kepada huruf *Hija'yyah* dengan menghubungkait objek yang mempunyai bunyi dan bentuk yang seakan sama dengan huruf. Teknik SIMMATCH dibangunkan dengan menggunakan modaliti VARK (Visual, Audio, Reading/Writing, Kinesthetic). Seramai 25 orang pelajar tadika daripada sekolah rendah harian di Jerantut Pahang telah terlibat dalam kajian ini untuk menentukan keberkesanan Teknik SIMMATCH. Kajian ini telah menggunakan pendekatan penyelidikan tindakan secara kolaboratif dan data diperoleh menggunakan satu pretest dan dua posttest. Data kajian dianalisa menggunakan SPSS 25 dan hasil *t*-test mendapati ada perbezaan ketara pada min pretest dan posttest 1 dan 2; iaitu *t*-test pretest dan posttest 1 mencatatkan keputusan $p < 0.004$, manakala *t*-test pretest dan posttest 2 pula mencatatkan keputusan $p < 0.000$. Ini menunjukkan teknik SIMMATCH adalah berkesan dalam meningkatkan kebolehan pelajar mengenali dan menghafal huruf *Hija'yyah*. Kesimpulannya, teknik SIMMATCH mempunyai potensi besar dalam memberi persediaan kepada pelajar-pelajar muda terutamanya untuk menguasai huruf *Hija'yyah*.

Kata kunci: Teknik hubungkait; huruf *Hija'yyah*; Qur'an; modaliti VARK.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The teaching of the holy Qur'an has been and would always be the center of the dynamic of Islamic education in the entire Muslim world. Learning and memorizing the words of Allah has become prerequisite in the pursuit of learning Islam in general (Ramdane & Souad, 2017) and becoming devoted Muslims. In Malaysia, the process of reciting the Qur'an begins very early. Children at the tender age of four (or even younger) will be sent to public or privately run pre-schools or *madrassahs*, which specialize on Qur'anic education in order to learn the fundamentals of Qur'an recitation. Lessons would generally begin with the mastery of the basic Arabic letters and gradually increase to reading words, phrases and verses from the holy book (Yusof, Zainuddin & Yusoff, 2011). There exist several approaches on Quranic teaching in Malaysia such as *Muqaddam/Baghdadiyyah*, *al-Myassar*, *Qiraati*, *al-Iqra'*, and *al-Barqy*, *Kalam* (Muhammad, 2003; As'ad, 2005). Among these approaches, Malaysians are generally accustomed to *Iqra'* and *Muqaddam/Baghdadiyyah* methods.

Despite early exposure to Qur'anic education, Malaysian Muslims, who are generally from the Malay ethnicity; thus, non-native speakers of Arabic, would generally encounter problems reciting the Qur'an due mainly to the language barrier and the difficulty remembering *tajwid* rules (Yusof, Zainuddin & Yusoff, 2011). Yusof, Zainuddin and Yusoff (2011) found that Malay learners of all ages encountered problems comprehending the words in the Qur'an (59%) and remembering *tajwid* rules (43%). A study conducted by Zulkarnin et al. (2018) also found learners attributed their inability to recite the Qur'an to the approach and syllabus to Qur'anic teaching practiced in schools. Islamic Education at the public school focused mainly on the teaching of religious components which include *tauhid* (faith), *fiqh* (rules) and history, while the Qur'anic reading lessons are shelved to after school hours (Ahmad Bazli et al., 2017; Halim et al., 2013; Roqib & Ag, 2009). Normally the Qur'anic classes aim for the students to complete the reading the whole Qur'an (*khatam*). Zulkarnin et al. (2018) also listed low self-motivation as one of the major causes learners were unable to perform well in Qur'anic studies. Yusof, Zainuddin and Yusoff (2011) emphasize the need to further improve the pedagogical methods of teaching Qur'anic recitation. Some of the methods currently practiced like *Baghdadiyyah* despite their effectiveness, are still considered very conventional. Typically, learning sessions involve an individual student being called to recite in front of an *ustadz* (religious teacher), who would then correct the student's reading (pronunciation and *tajwid*) and assign him more reading for the next lesson. Normally students are required to repeatedly read and memorize the Qur'an without any understanding of its content.

There should be more effort invested on providing alternative methods on learning the Qur'an, one that preferably incorporates latest technology and a more holistic approach to teaching. Realizing the importance of the mastery of Arabic letters for young learners of Qur'an, the research team has developed an innovative method of teaching and learning the letters by matching the letters to similar sounding objects or SIMMATCH (Similar Matching) (refer to Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). The method was developed following the Visual, Aural/Oral, Read/write, and Kinesthetic (VARK) sensory modalities, which was developed by Neil Fleming (in Fleming & Baume, 2006). Emphasis was given on all four modalities in ensuring that children would be able to learn, memorize and pronounce the Arabic letters in a lesser speed that they would when undergoing training using other methods (i.e. *Iqra'* and *Muqaddam/Baghdadiyyah*) and more importantly provide an interesting alternative to the conventional Qur'anic teaching methods practiced in Malaysia at present. Interesting and colorful visuals, coupled with interactive learning activities, which include flash card and card games, are some of the key features of SIMMATCH.

This study reports the findings of a pilot test conducted on SIMMATCH method with its main objective:

- a) to determine the effectiveness of the SIMMATCH method in teaching pre-school pupils to recognize and memorize *Hija'yyah* letters.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Quranic Teaching in Malaysia

In the Malaysian school system the teaching of Qur'an recitation is included in the Islamic Education (henceforth IE) of the then New Curriculum for Primary Schools (KBSR). Lessons on Qur'an recitation or known as Tilawah Qur'an (henceforth TQ) is one of the compulsory components in the IE. The component includes recitation, memorization and comprehension of the Qur'an (Modul Pengajaran Pendidikan Islam, 2005). The Ministry of Education later introduced the J-QAF program, which among its

objectives is for all Muslim students to be able to complete reciting (*khatam*) the Qur'an in primary schools. TQ was then conducted during the J-QAF classes. J-QAF sessions are conducted in the afternoon after the formal school hours, usually from 2.30pm to 5.00pm daily. Previously, TQ was only focused on the reading of the Qur'an, while *khatam* was the community's responsibility. Ideally, after completing TQ classes, learners should be able to complete reciting the Qur'an by the time they reach Year 6.

Nevertheless, in Malaysia the Qur'anic teaching among young children is not solely dependent on the school system. It is common practice for parents to supplement the Qur'anic education by sending their children to privately run voluntary aided *madrasahs* and Muslims faith schools, where children as young as 3 years old are systematically taught to recite the Qur'an; or to the neighborhood mosques to be informally taught the Qur'an by the neighborhood *ustadz*. Several approaches to Qur'anic teaching commonly adopted by these institutions include *Muqaddam/Baghdadiyyah*, *al-Myassar*, *Qiraati*, *al-Iqra'*, *al-Barqy*, and *Kalam* (Muhammad, 2003; As'ad, 2005). Among these approaches, Malaysians are generally accustomed to *Iqra'* and *Muqaddam/Baghdadiyyah* methods.

The *Baghdadiyyah* method was introduced by Abu Mansor Hafzul Fikri Al-Baghdadi in the year 376 Hijri (Syamsir, 2010) and it is considered the more traditional approach to the teaching of Qur'an. This method begins with the introduction of the names of the Arabic letters, their pronunciation and the reading symbols; *fat-hah* (vowel point for 'a'), *dammah* (vowel point for 'u') and *kasrah* (vowel point for 'i') symbols; and the *tanwins* (additional suffix), followed by gradual introduction to the *tasydid* (diacritical mark) symbols. Learners move from one or two syllable phrases to more syllables as they move up the *Muqaddam* (a book consisting of Qur'anic letters and phrases to facilitate learning). Once they are able to spell and read phrases in the *Muqaddam*, learners will begin reciting *Juz' Amma* before continuing to the Quran (Nor Dalilah & Mohd Hasbie, 2018). According to Nor Dalilah and Mohd Hasbie (2018), the method, although proven effective, has unfortunately its limitations. It has been criticized as being outdated as the method has not evolved and words and phrases available in the *Muqaddam* are no longer suitable for modern times. It is also criticized for focusing solely on recitation with no attention given to comprehension, memorization and writing. The method also takes longer to master when compared to more recent methods like *Iqra'*.

Iqra' developed by Ustadz As'ad from Indonesia is a method of teaching Quran recitation using a phonetic approach (Yusof, Zainuddin & Yusoff, 2011). Each book focuses on specific lessons, with Book 1 focusing solely on the Arabic letters with only the *fat-hah* symbols. Starting from Book 2 learners would gradually be introduced to more letters and *tajwid* rules, learners are expected to read at least a page at a time and are allowed to move to the next page once they have mastered (or fluent in) the previous page. The same rule applies for moving up from one level to another. The phrases in the package are all extracted from the Qur'an, but sequenced according to the *tajwid* rules introduced in each lesson. The learners would generally be able to recite the Qur'an fluently with correct *tajwid* rules once they have completed Book 6, which is the final level in a 6-book package.

Iqra' is regarded as a systematic, innovative and effective approach to teaching Qur'an, and it has proven effective as many children and adult learning using the method are able to recite the Qur'an successfully after completing Book 6. Nonetheless, the method is not without its limitation. First, it is criticized for not teaching names of the Arabic letters, learners are taught the phonetical presentation of the letters, but not their names. The reading symbols (*fat-hah*, *dammah*, *kasrah* and *tanwins*) are also not exclusively taught. Learners are not exposed to spelling of words, but rather trained to combine sounds. Second, the names of *tajwid* rules are also not introduced, accuracy of recitation is normally stressed upon during the recitation (*talaqi*) sessions. The *tajwid* rules are only introduced once learners are able to recite the Qur'an.

2.2 Visual, Aural/Oral, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic (VARK) Modalities

In 1987, Neil Flemming developed VAK sensory model, which was later modified to VARK in 2006 that stands for Visual, Aural/Oral, Read/write, and Kinesthetic. Through this model, students are classified into four senses which are visual (V), aural/auditory (A), read/write (R), and kinesthetic (K). According to Thomas and Amit (2007), the VARK sensory model is considered as an expansion of the earlier neuro-linguistic model.

VARK deals with perceptual modes, hence, it belongs in the category of instructional preference. It focuses on the different ways that we take in and give out information. The only perceptual modes, or senses, it does not address are taste and smell. The VARK Inventory provides metrics in each of the four perceptual modes, with individuals having preferences for anywhere from one to all four. VARK learning style can be perceived as an individual method of obtaining knowledge, positive skills and attitude. It is closely connected to how a person acquires or understands information or new knowledge. It does not

involve intelligence or inherent skill. In short, VARK learning style can produce an intriguing learning environment to students and arouse students' senses in learning better.

Students with visual inclination favor data in maps, outlines, diagrams, charts and symbolic arrows, circles, hierarchies and different gadgets that individuals use to portray what could have been introduced in words. It additionally incorporates designs, whitespace, examples, shapes and other various arrangements that are utilized to feature and pass on data. For instance, an instructor utilizes a whiteboard to draw charts with significant images to show connection between various things.

Students with aural/sound-related inclination favor data that is 'heard or spoken' and typically they learn better utilizing addresses, group conversation, radio, web-chat and talking things through. They normally would sift through things by talking first as opposed to sifting through their thoughts before talking. So as to see better, they want to state the data themselves and they learn progressively through saying it in their own particular manner.

Students with reading/writing mode tend to lean towards data shown as words. It stresses text-based input and output, which involve reading and writing for every one of its structures, for example manuals, reports, essays and assignments. Students with this modality would be inclined towards the utilization of PowerPoint, the Internet, dictionaries, citations and loads of words.

Kinesthetic modality alludes to perceptual inclination identified with the utilization of experience and practice whether reenacted or genuine. The students are associated with reality through solid individual encounters, models, practice or reproduction which comprises showings, recordings and motion pictures of genuine articles. They esteem the experience of accomplishing something and their own experience of encounters.

For the most part, it is common for students to not have a prominent mode with one inclination, however preferring at least two modalities or linked to multimodality (Mm). They are categorized into two kinds; VARK Type One and VARK Type Two. VARK Type One learners are adaptable in their correspondence inclinations and would change from mode to mode contingent on what they are working with. While, VARK Type Two students will have information or yield in the entirety of their favored modes and typically set aside longer effort to gather data from every mode, which later furnish them with a more profound comprehension of the data.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The participants were 25 preschool pupils (n=25; f=11, m=14) aged between 5 to 6 years old from a public primary school in the district of Jerantut, Pahang. Convenient sampling was used in selecting the participants. The majority of the participants were already exposed to the *Hija'yah* letters at the time of the study, however, their ability to recognize and correctly recite the letters were limited and varied. The pupils were from a single classroom and taught by a single teacher.

3.2 Design

This study adopts a collaborative action research approach. The research team collaborated with a preschool teacher in the target school in conducting the interventions. The action research construct employed in this study is guided by movement through five phases of enquiry as summarized in Table 1.

3.3 Data Collection

In assessing the effectiveness of the SIMMATCH method, the learners were given a pretest and two posttests. The pretest was administered during the first meeting to measure the number of *Hija'yah* letters pupils were able to recognize and correctly name/recite prior to the interventions. In order to measure the pupils' progress after the interventions, the same test was administered after Intervention 1 and 2 (Posttest 1), and after Intervention 3 and 4 (Posttest 2). The tests required the pupils to correctly name/recite all the 28 Arabic letters.

3.4 Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive analysis was administered to the data and results were expressed as means \pm standard deviation. In order to obtain the difference between the mean scores of the pretest and posttest, paired *t*-test was computed. A value of *p* less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Table 1 Collaborative Action Research 5 Phases Enquiry

Phrases of Enquiry	Details
1. Identification of problem area	The difficulty faced by learners in Malaysian to recognize and memorize the Hija'yah letters The lack of innovative techniques in teaching Hija'yah letters in Malaysia
2. Collection and organization of data	Research Instruments Pretest Posttest 1 Posttest 2
3. Interpretation of data	Quantitative Analysis Descriptive statistics to obtain means and standard deviation of pretest and posttest scores. t-test to determine the effectiveness of SIMMATCH method
4. Action based on data	Pretest Intervention 1 Introduction to SIMMATCH Intervention 2 Teaching of Arabic Letters using SIMMATCH method Posttest 1 Intervention 3 Enrichment activities (Interactive Card Games) Intervention 4 Enrichment activities (Matching Exercises) Posttest 2
5. Reflection	Evaluate the effectiveness of the technique based on the results of the t-test of pretest posttest results.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the pretest and posttest results. In order to obtain the mean and standard deviation of the pretest and posttests, descriptive statistics were applied to the data. Table 2 below summarizes the results:

Table 2 Mean and Standard Deviation of Pretest and Posttests

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	25	0	26	6.24	6.978
Posttest 1	24	0	28	11.38	9.586
Posttest 2	25	6	28	15.88	7.661

Table 2 shows increase in the means of letters recognized after the interventions. The mean score for the pretest is 6.24 compared to 11.83 for Posttest 1 and 15.80 for Posttest 2. After two intervention sessions, recognition of the *Hija'yah* letters nearly doubled and increased further after Intervention 3 and 4. These figures suggest that the SIMMATCH method helps to improve pupils' ability to recognize and memorize the *Hija'yah* letters.

Table 3 Results of Paired Sample T-Test of Pretest and Posttest 1 & 2

	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
PreTest PostTest1	5.13	7.89	1.61	8.46	1.79	3.18	23	.004
PreTest PostTest2	9.64	7.02	1.40	12.54	6.74	6.87	24	.000

To further determine whether there is a significant difference between the means of pretest and posttests, paired sample *t*-tests were administered. Table 3 shows that there was a significant difference for pretest and posttest 1 with the values of $p = 0.04$. *T*-test result of Pretest and Posttest 2 indicates the most significant value of $p = 0.00$, showing very clearly higher *Hija'yyah* letters recognition among the pupils after the interventions. The findings suggest that the use of SIMMATCH has effectively helped pupils to learn the *Hija'yyah* letters in the speed faster than they would when taught using the traditional method.

Using the method, pupils were taught to associate the letters to similar sounding objects, which bear almost similar shapes as the letters. Familiar objects were chosen to represent each letter and the Bahasa Melayu names of most objects were used. The use of Bahasa Melayu in the association technique helped pupils to make sense of the Arabic letters and more importantly facilitated in the retention. Studies conducted with Hebrew-speaking children by Share (2004) and Levin, Shatil-Carmon & Asif-Rave (2006) provided empirical evidence supporting the letter name facilitation effect. Share (2004) reported the benefit of pseudoletter learning when names and sounds association were taught to students. Levin, Shatil-Carmon and Asif-Rave (2006) revealed that children who have learned letter names tend to use this knowledge to induce letter sounds.

Another factor contributing to improved recognition is SIMMATCH method involves repetition of letter sounds. The pupils were taught using SIMMATCH flashcards and each lesson was followed by several reinforcement activities encompassing a series of card games. These sessions required pupils to repeatedly identify the *Hija'yyah* letters. This technique was similar to the technique used by Azizah (2010) as cited in Sofiah et al. (2018) on the implementation of repetitive book reading that gives positive effects to the children's learning. This method reduced boredom and motivated slow pace students to work harder in order to improve themselves. The repetition also helps increase children's memory and understanding (Zainiah & Nor Fairizan, 2012 as cited in Sofiah et al., 2018).

SIMMATCH also incorporates card games as part of its reinforcement activities, which has also contributed to the speed of letter recognition and memorization. The findings of the present study are in line with the findings of previous studies (Nurtihah et al., 2019; Muhammad et al., 2012; Ismail et al., 2011) in which *tajwid* knowledge and articulation were enhanced after using gamification learning approaches. Based on a class observation conducted by Juris et. al (2009) as cited by Rhouma (2016), most teachers rarely use activities related to movement and constructing things despite having students who exhibited preference toward tactile and kinesthetic learning style. Miller and Edgard (2001) as cited in Rhouma (2016) stated that tactual learners and kinesthetic learners become better students if taught accordingly as they remember 75% of what they manipulate and the latter need to be bodily involved in the learning tasks. Learners' learning potential can be maximized and their learning autonomy can also be fostered by using several activities like multipart task cards, flip chutes, pic-a-hole and floor games (Missere & Dunn, 2007 as cited in Rhouma, 2016). Plus, the gamification approach will make the students be able to enjoy and emotionally engage in the learning process (Nurtihah et al., 2019). The integration of interactive learning activities like card games has no doubt made learning enjoyable and engaging, hence, has resulted in improved recognition and memorization of the letters as attested by the findings.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we present the results of the use of SIMMATCH method in teaching *Hija'yyah* letters to young non-native speakers of Arabic and the results indicate increased recognition and memorization of *Hija'yyah* letters among the learners. By adapting the VARK modalities, the method was able to promote learners' engagement in classroom activity. The colorful visuals, interesting storyline and interactive card games have added value to the method as they enable learners to escape the monotony of the traditional Qur'anic lessons, providing them with a non-threatening environment where learning can be maximized. Based on the findings, preschoolers exposed to this technique have increased not only their recognition of the *Hija'yyah* letters, but also managed to improve their articulation within three weeks. The findings indicate great potential of the method in teaching *Hija'yyah* letters, particularly to young learners embarking on the journey to Qur'anic reciting education. It is our hope to expand the research and test the effectiveness of the method to adult learners to determine its effects on different age groups of learners.

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Appendix 1: SIMMATCH Poster

FASTEST TAJWID SIMMATCH METHOD

ن Nun	لن Lun	ش Shin	ش Shin	ا Alif	ا Alif	ا Alif
س Sod	س Sod	ص Sod	ص Sod	ب Ba	ب Ba	ب Ba
و Wau	و Wau	ض Dhod	ض Dhod	ب Ba	ب Ba	ب Ba
ه Ha	ه Ha	ط Tho	ط Tho	ت Ta	ت Ta	ت Ta
هـ Hamzah	هـ Hamzah	ظ Tzo	ظ Tzo	ث Tsa	ث Tsa	ث Tsa
ي Ya	ي Ya	ع Ain	ع Ain	ج Jim	ج Jim	ج Jim
ي Ya	ي Ya	غ Ghain	غ Ghain	ح Hah	ح Hah	ح Hah
ي Ya	ي Ya	ف Fa	ف Fa	خ Kho	خ Kho	خ Kho
ي Ya	ي Ya	ق Qaf	ق Qaf	د Dal	د Dal	د Dal
ي Ya	ي Ya	ك Kaf	ك Kaf	ذ Zal	ذ Zal	ذ Zal
ي Ya	ي Ya	ل Lam	ل Lam	ر Ro	ر Ro	ر Ro
ي Ya	ي Ya	م Mim	م Mim	ز Zai	ز Zai	ز Zai
ي Ya	ي Ya	س Sin	س Sin	س Sin	س Sin	س Sin

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Appendix 2: SIMMATCH User Guide

Guide to SIMMATCH method

1. Alif: Combination of Almond and LIFT
2. Ba: Malay: similar to the sound of bawah |
3. Ta: Malay: similar to the sound of tali
4. Tsa: Malay: similar to the sound of sakura
5. Jim: Malay: similar to the sound of jin
6. Hah: Similar to the sound of laughing out loud: hah
7. Khoh: Similar to the sound of snoring: khoh
8. Dal: Malay: similar to the sound of dal
9. Tzal: Malay: similar the sound of lazar.
10. Ro: Malay: similar to the sound of rotan
11. zai: Malay: similar to the sound of zai
12. sin: Malay: similar to the sound of singa
13. shin: Malay: similar to the sound of sneezing ashin
14. 'sod: Malay: similar to the sound of sodap (in negeri Sembilan dialect)
15. dod: Malay: similar to the sound of donat
16. To: Malay: similar to the sound of tomato
17. Tzo: Malay: similar to the sound of zohor
18. 'ain: Malay: similar to the sound of cats fighting ain
19. Ghain: Malay: similar to the sound of an angry cat
20. Fa: Malay: similar to the sound of farmasi
21. Qaf: Malay: similar to the sound of cough qaf
22. Kaf: Malay: similar to the sound of a little cough kaf
23. lam: Malay: similar to the sound of lampu
24. mim: Malay: similar to the sound of mimpi
25. nun: Malay: similar to the sound of lanun
26. wau: Malay: similar to the sound of wau!
27. ha: Malay: similar to the sound of someone laughing ha ha ha
28. Hamzah: Malay: similar to the sound of hamzah
29. Va: Malay: similar to the sound of Tayar

