



Understanding Arabic in Determining *Waqaf* and *Ibtida'* in Students' Quranic Recitation

Elsa Sepputri¹, Ghina Syauqina¹

¹STIT YPI Payakumbuh, Indonesia

 sepputrielsa@gmail.com *

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of Arabic language understanding in determining *waqaf* and *ibtida'* in students' Quranic recitation. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The participants consisted of eight fourth-semester students selected purposively based on their ability to apply *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that students who were able to apply *waqaf* and *ibtida'* accurately demonstrated better understanding of Arabic, particularly in recognizing word boundaries, understanding sentence structure, and identifying semantic relationships within verses. In contrast, students with more limited understanding of Arabic tended to experience difficulties in determining appropriate places for *waqaf* and *ibtida'*, including stopping or resuming recitation at inappropriate parts of words. The findings also indicate that fluency in Quranic recitation does not always ensure accurate *waqaf* and *ibtida'*, as accuracy in both is associated with an understanding of the linguistic structure underlying the verses. These findings indicate that strengthening Arabic language understanding, particularly with regard to word boundaries, sentence structure, and semantic relationships, is important for supporting accurate *waqaf* and *ibtida'* in Quranic recitation.

INTRODUCTION

The Quran is the primary source of Islamic teachings and is not only meant to be understood in terms of its content but also recited in accordance with established rules. Accuracy in Quranic recitation is not limited to the correct pronunciation of letters and the application of tajwid rules but also includes the ability to determine appropriate points for stopping (*waqaf*) and resuming recitation (*ibtida'*) (Engkizar et al., 2026; Ibrahim et al., 2013). These two aspects play an important role in preserving the integrity of the meaning of Quranic verses so that their intended messages can be properly understood. Errors in *waqaf* and *ibtida'* may lead to misunderstanding and, in certain circumstances, may affect the intended meaning of a Quranic verse (Engkizar et al., 2025; Numan et al., 2025; Ummah et al., 2025).

In the study of '*ulum al-Quran*, *waqaf* and *ibtida'* are closely related to an understanding of linguistic structure and the meaning of verses. Determining where to stop is not merely a matter of pausing to take a breath but also requires consideration of semantic completeness and the relationships between words and

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sentences within a verse. Similarly, determining where to resume recitation requires consideration of whether the word or phrase chosen as the starting point has an appropriate structure and meaning within the context of the verse. Therefore, accurately determining *waqaf* and *ibtida'* requires an understanding of the linguistic context so that readers can preserve the integrity of meaning when stopping and resuming their recitation (Abishev et al., 2025; Eltoukhi et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2026).

Arabic, as the language of the Quran, has a complex and interconnected linguistic system. Elements such as *nahwu* (syntax), *sharaf* (morphology), and semantic understanding play important roles in explaining relationships between words and sentences (Khanalizadeh et al., 2023). Mastery of these aspects enables readers to understand the structure of Quranic verses more deeply, including recognizing word boundaries, understanding sentence structures, and distinguishing between parts that convey complete meanings and those that remain syntactically or semantically connected to what follows. Thus, Arabic language understanding is a relevant aspect to examine in relation to the ability to determine *waqaf* and *ibtida'* accurately (Alsokari et al., 2026; Faddhia et al., 2025; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Khairunisa et al., 2025).

This issue becomes particularly important when students who have prior experience learning Arabic and reading the Quran still demonstrate differences in their ability to determine *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. Initial observations revealed that some students were able to recite the Quran fluently and apply tajwid rules correctly but still experienced difficulties in determining appropriate points for *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. These difficulties became apparent when students were asked to explain the reasons for their choice of *waqaf* and *ibtida'* or to resume their recitation after stopping. Some students were unable to recognize Arabic word boundaries and consequently stopped at parts of words that should not be separated or resumed recitation from parts of words that could not stand independently (Saminu et al., 2025).

For example, when reciting Surah Al-Baqarah verse 49, one student stopped at the word *يَسْأَلُكُمْ* (*yasumu*), even though this form constitutes part of the word *يَسْأَلُكُمْ* (*yasumunakum*). The same student also resumed recitation from *عَوْنٍ* (*'aun*), which constitutes part of the word *فِرْعَوْنَ* (*Fir'auna*). This error indicates that accuracy in *waqaf* and *ibtida'* is not solely associated with fluency in Quranic recitation but is also related to the ability to recognize Arabic word structure and boundaries.

These initial findings indicate a gap between fluency in Quranic recitation and the ability to accurately determine *waqaf* and *ibtida'* (Saprun, 2020). Students may demonstrate proficiency in the phonetic aspects of Quranic recitation and tajwid while still being unable to explain or apply *waqaf* and *ibtida'* based on linguistic structure and semantic relationships within the verses. This condition suggests that fluency in Quranic recitation should be distinguished from an understanding of the linguistic elements underlying the determination of appropriate points for stopping and resuming recitation. In this context, understanding word boundaries, sentence structure, and semantic relationships is relevant to explaining differences in students' ability to apply *waqaf* and *ibtida'*.

Previous studies have examined the importance of *waqaf* and *ibtida'* in preserving the meaning of the Quran and their contribution to the quality of Quranic recitation. However, existing studies have largely addressed Quranic reading instruction from the perspectives of tajwid and recitation skills, as demonstrated by studies conducted by (Abdurroozzaq & Abidin, 2022; Engkizar et al., 2026; Hasibuan et al., 2025; Hidayatulloh, 2022). These studies have not specifically examined how understanding Arabic linguistic structure particularly the recognition of word

boundaries and sentence structures, relates to students' ability to determine *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. Therefore, there remains an opportunity to examine *waqaf* and *ibtida'* from the perspective of linguistic competence rather than solely from the aspects of recitation skills or tajwid application. Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze Arabic language understanding in determining *waqaf* and *ibtida'* in students' Quranic recitation. The study is expected to contribute to the development of Arabic language and Quranic learning by emphasizing the relationship between linguistic understanding and accuracy in determining appropriate points for stopping and resuming Quranic recitation.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This design was selected to provide an in-depth understanding of students' Arabic language comprehension in determining *waqaf* and *ibtida'* in Quranic recitation within a natural context. The qualitative approach enabled the researchers to explore the phenomenon based on the participants' experiences, abilities, and explanations regarding the process of determining appropriate points for *waqaf* and *ibtida'* (Engkizar et al., 2023; Liang, 2019).

The study was conducted in the Islamic Education at university. The participants consisted of eight fourth-semester students selected through purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on the consideration that they had completed Arabic I and Arabic II courses and demonstrated relatively good Quranic recitation skills, enabling them to provide relevant information related to the research focus (Allsop et al., 2022; Assarroudi et al., 2018; Brandler & Roman, 2020; Neale, 2021). Based on the observation results, the participants were subsequently divided into two groups according to their accuracy in applying *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. Group A consisted of four students who were able to apply *waqaf* and *ibtida'* accurately and demonstrated a better understanding of Arabic, whereas Group B consisted of four students who experienced difficulties in determining *waqaf* and *ibtida'* and showed more limited understanding of basic Arabic structure.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to examine students' ability to determine *waqaf* and *ibtida'* during Quranic recitation. During the observation process, students were asked to recite several Quranic verses, including Surah Al-Baqarah verse 49, while the researchers examined their accuracy in determining appropriate points for stopping and resuming the recitation. The observation also focused on students' ability to recognize word boundaries and structural features of the recitation. In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain information about the reasons underlying students' choices of *waqaf* and *ibtida'* and to explore their understanding of the Arabic language structures underlying those choices. The interviews also examined the difficulties students experienced when determining where to stop and resume their recitation. Documentation was used as supporting data, including observation notes, interview notes and transcripts, and other relevant research documents (Mortelmans, 2019; Schenk & Johnson, 2022).

The data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Engkizar et al., 2022; Hitchcock & Hughes, 2020; Namira et al., 2023). During data reduction, the researchers selected, focused, and organized data relevant to students' Arabic language understanding and their ability to determine *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. The reduced data were then presented in descriptive narratives and tables to identify patterns and differences among participants. The final stage involved

drawing and verifying conclusions based on the relationships among the findings obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation.

Data credibility was ensured through source and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different participants to identify consistencies and differences in their experiences and understanding. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. These triangulation procedures were employed to enhance the credibility of the findings and ensure that the results were supported by multiple sources and data collection techniques (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Gorichanaz, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Understanding Arabic Helps Students Recognize Word Boundaries in Determining *Waqaf* and *Ibtida'*

The observation results indicate that Arabic language proficiency contributes to students' ability to recognize word boundaries when determining the appropriate places for *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. Students in Group A, who demonstrated a better understanding of Arabic, tended to be able to distinguish between independent words and parts of words that still constitute a single structural and semantic unit. This ability was evident when students determined where to stop and resume their recitation by considering the integrity of the word form.

In contrast, students in Group B still experienced difficulties in recognizing word boundaries. One informant performed *waqaf* at the expression *يَسْأَلُكُمْ* and then continued the recitation by separating a part of the word that actually remained structurally connected to the following expression, namely *يَسْأَلُكُمْ*. The same informant also resumed the recitation from the expression *عَوْن*, even though this expression is part of the word *فِرْعَوْنَ*. These errors indicate that the informant had not yet fully understood the structure of Arabic words when determining where to stop and resume recitation.

This finding indicates that the ability to recognize the form and boundaries of Arabic words is an important element in determining *ibtida'*. Understanding word boundaries enables readers to avoid separating parts of words in ways that may disrupt the integrity of the wording or meaning. This finding is consistent with Ibn al-Jazari's view that *ibtida'* should be performed on an appropriate expression without compromising the intended meaning of the verse (Alsokari et al., 2026; Ikhwanuddin & Hashim, 2014; Mesa et al., 2025).

Understanding Sentence Structure Supports Accurate *Waqaf* and *Ibtida'*

The interview results revealed differences in students' ability to explain the linguistic reasons underlying their choice of *waqaf* positions. Students in Group A were able to explain their choice of *waqaf* positions by considering the semantic relationships between words and sentences. They did not merely consider whether stopping was technically possible, but also considered whether the intended meaning had reached a sufficient level of completeness before stopping the recitation.

In contrast, some students in Group B were unable to explain the linguistic reasons underlying the *waqaf* positions they selected. One informant stated that they performed *waqaf* at the expression *نِسَاءَكُمْ* because they observed a *waqaf* sign in the Quranic manuscript. However, when asked to explain the semantic relationship within the verse, the informant was unable to provide a linguistic explanation for this choice. This condition indicates that the use of *waqaf* signs is not always accompanied

by an understanding of the structure and semantic relationships within the verse.

This finding demonstrates that understanding Arabic sentence structure helps students identify semantic relationships within verses and consider them when determining appropriate places for *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. Thus, *waqaf* is not merely a matter of stopping the voice during recitation but also involves maintaining the integrity and accuracy of the meaning of Quranic verses (Dukes et al., 2013; Hakim, 2019; Kamaruddin et al., 2017; Zulkifli & Rofie, 2024).

Fluency in Quranic Recitation Does Not Always Ensure Accurate *Waqaf* and *Ibtida'*

The findings also indicate that fluency in Quranic recitation is not always directly proportional to accuracy in determining *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. All informants were fourth-semester students who had completed Arabic I and Arabic II courses and demonstrated relatively good Quranic recitation skills. Nevertheless, fluent recitation was not automatically accompanied by the ability to accurately determine where to stop and resume the recitation.

This difference became apparent when students' recitation fluency was compared with their ability to recognize word boundaries, understand relationships between sentences, and explain the reasons for their choices of *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. Students with a better understanding of Arabic demonstrated more consistent abilities in determining where to stop and resume the recitation (Arifin et al., 2024; Malhas & Elsayed, 2022; Wulandari et al., 2025). Conversely, students with more limited Arabic proficiency tended to experience difficulties in recognizing word boundaries and semantic relationships and relied more heavily on *waqaf* signs provided in the Quranic manuscript.

This finding indicates a distinction between phonetic Quranic recitation skills and the ability to understand the Arabic language structure underlying accurate *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. Therefore, recitation fluency represents a different ability from the ability to determine *waqaf* and *ibtida'*, as accuracy in both requires an understanding of the linguistic elements contained in the verses (Basir et al., 2024; Zulharby et al., 2019).

Understanding Arabic as a Supporting Factor for Accurate *Waqaf* and *Ibtida'*

The interview findings reinforce the observational evidence that understanding Arabic is associated with students' ability to determine *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. All informants stated that their understanding of Arabic helped them identify parts of the verses that could serve as appropriate points for stopping and resuming recitation. Students who demonstrated greater accuracy in applying *waqaf* and *ibtida'* associated this ability with their knowledge of Arabic word and sentence structures (Auni & Hermanto, 2020; Herawati & Ainil Mawaddah, 2023). Conversely, students who experienced difficulties in determining *waqaf* and *ibtida'* acknowledged that limited Arabic proficiency was one of the factors contributing to their errors. These difficulties were particularly related to recognizing word boundaries, understanding relationships between words and sentences, and explaining the linguistic reasons underlying their choice of *waqaf* positions.

Overall, the findings indicate that understanding Arabic, particularly the ability to recognize word boundaries and understand sentence structure, serves as a supporting factor in accurate *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. The findings further demonstrate that fluent Quranic recitation needs to be supported by linguistic understanding so that students are not only able to recite verses fluently but also able to determine where to stop and resume the recitation while considering the structural and semantic integrity of the verses.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that understanding Arabic is associated with students' ability to accurately determine *waqaf* and *ibtida'* in Quranic recitation. Students who demonstrated greater accuracy generally had a better understanding of Arabic word boundaries, sentence structure, and semantic relationships within verses. In contrast, students with more limited Arabic understanding tended to experience difficulties in determining appropriate points for stopping and resuming recitation. The findings also indicate that fluency in Quranic recitation does not necessarily ensure accurate *waqaf* and *ibtida'*. Accurate application requires not only recitation fluency and tajwid skills but also an understanding of the linguistic structure and meaning of the verses. Therefore, greater attention to Arabic linguistic competence in Quranic learning may support students' accuracy in applying *waqaf* and *ibtida'*.

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