

MEMORIZING AND UNDERSTANDING THE QUR'AN IN ARABIC LANGUAGE AMONG MALAYSIAN STUDENTS OF THE AL-AZHAR INSTITUTE OF QIRAAT SHOBRA, EGYPT

Ashraf Ismail¹, Nurul Hudaa Hassan², Akhdiat Abd Malek³, Abur Hamdi Usman^{4*}

¹Islamic Heritage Center, Faculty of Islamic Study, National University of Malaysia, Malaysia, ²The Center of Excellent Arabic Language, Pedagogy Institute of Teacher Education, Islamic Education Campus, Malaysia, ³Faculty of Major Language Studies, University Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Bandar Baru Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, ⁴Faculty of Islamic Civilization Studies, Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), Malaysia.

Email: *aburhamdi@kuis.edu.my

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The objective of the study was to analyze the perceptions of *tahfiz* students in understanding the meaning of the verses and their knowledge of the Arabic language syntax and morphology in memorizing the Qur'an.

Design/methodology/approach: For this article, the study sample is comprised of 30 *tahfiz* students at the Azhar Institute of Qiraat in Shobra, Cairo, Egypt. They were chosen as a minimum sample of 30 population *tahfiz* students who had followed an Arabic Course in Malaysia. The survey method uses a Likert scale-based questionnaire which measures the levels of understanding among *tahfiz* students, which includes the overall mastery of Qur'anic understanding and the structure of the Arabic language's syntax and morphology. The data were then analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics to identify the mean values of each item.

Findings: The results of this study reveal that the level of understanding of Arabic grammar and morphology of the Qur'an amongst *tahfiz* students is high.

Research Implications: This study recommends to explore the possibility of establishing a curriculum framework that gives provision for the Arabic language to be mastered by students in *tahfiz* institutions. Once this curriculum is implemented, the tasks of Qur'anic educators will be made easier.

Social Implications: The study throws light on the integrated approach in memorizing the Qur'an will produce *tahfiz* students who are able to master the memorization effectively.

Originality/Value: Only a very few have examined the proficiency of the Arabic language and its function to the *huffaz* in memorizing the Qur'an effectively. Most of the issues often faced by *huffaz* who are non-native Arabic speakers are closely related to their mastery, or lack thereof, of the Arabic language. Since memorizing the Qur'an involves proper understanding of the purpose and structure of the language, there is a need to carry out a study concerning the same.

Keywords: Arabic Language, Translation, Memorizing, Arabic Morphology, Arabic Syntax.

INTRODUCTION

The development of Qur'anic knowledge has evolved in a manner that allows one to experience Islamic culture while simultaneously strengthening one's faith towards building a Muslim nation (Jana-Masri & Priester, 2007). As in the case of those who are not of Arabic lineage, the Malay people are not native Arabic speakers. Nevertheless, although the Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language among the Arabs (Bazna & Hatab, 2005), it was with the persistent efforts and assistance of Islamic preachers that Islam reached the Malay Archipelago (Mohamad, et. al. 2015). The process of accepting Islam itself had a profound effect on the mastery of Islamic knowledge and in turn it gave rise to the field of Islamic knowledge study in the region. In Qur'anic education for example, the ability to memorize the Qur'an is a major focus in today's educational field, especially in Malaysia. The field of *tahfiz* education in the nation is ever-growing, with many educators and parents choosing to send their children to such a learning centre. According to Ashraf (2018), among the many *tahfiz* institutions in Malaysia, *tahfiz Qur'an wa al-Qiraat* is one of the preferred programs of students and their parents before proceeding to continue their studies at the Azhar Institute of Qiraat in Shobra, Cairo, Egypt.

The process of learning the Qur'an involves being able to read, memorize and understand the Qur'anic verses. The initial stages of this learning process require the students to be proficient in knowledge pertaining to the Qur'an. The importance of studying the verses contained in the Qur'an is stated in verse 82 of sura *al-Nisā'* and verse 29 of sura *al-Šād* which affirm the importance of understanding the contents of the Qur'an. The Qur'an as God's book is the first and only source major of all Islamic teachings and serves as guidance or guidelines for humanity in achieving happiness in the world and in the hereafter. Therefore, Muslims are required to learn it well and true. Because of the Qur'an is derived in Arabic, so to study it with well, we are required to understand Arabic (Kawakip, 2011). As is known, the Qur'an is written in Arabic, and here is the special Arabic language as the Qur'anic language. Therefore, the understanding of Arabic is something absolutely for everyone who wants to study, explore, understand and interpreting the Qur'an. Because no ones has a right to interpret the Qu'ran without knowing Arabic (Hafid, 2016).

Prior to *tahfiz* students pursuing their studies at the Azharic Institute of Qiraat in Egypt, they would normally have partaken in *tahfiz* lessons at one of the various *tahfiz* institutes in Malaysia. *Tahfiz* students in these institutes would have undergone the process of learning the Qur'an according to the system specified at the said institute, which normally requires the students to recite several chapters and verses of the Qur'an within a prescribed time frame. This is done in order for the students to attain the ability to successfully memorize up to 30 parts of the Qur'an. Because the emphasis is placed on successfully memorizing chapters from the Qur'an, hence it is entirely possible that students are evaluated only on their memorization skills without considering various other aspects of their language ability.

This viewpoint was also expressed by [Eickelman \(1978\)](#) that one of the many weaknesses of students using the standard Qur'anic memorization method is that they do not understand the translation and meaning of the Qur'anic verses that they have memorized. During the memorization process, it would be advantageous to know the meaning of the words that are being committed to memory, as being able to understand the meaning of the memorized word will not only facilitate the memorization process but also enhance proficiency in the language. The question now is: do *tahfiz* students understand the meaning of the Qur'anic verses that they memorize?

Furthermore, a significant factor that is able to encourage one to memorize Qur'anic contents is their actual proficiency of the target language. Here, proficiency in the language entails knowing the word form and the associated Arabic grammar which consists of the syntax and morphology of the word. It can be said that the patterns of transformation present in the Qur'anic alphabet provides a significant impetus to try and master the language. In the structure of Qur'anic verses, there are changes in words and diacritics that are able to assist *huffaz* in trying to comprehend what the verses are actually trying to convey. These changes also allow *huffaz* to be adept in the verses, sentences, and words that they are attempting to memorize correctly. The structure of the word-change and diacritics could also help hypocrites to understand the meaning of a sentence. Needless to say, in efforts to understand the Arabic language, the morphological and syntactical structures such as the diacritics of a sentence, play a significant role in assisting users to correctly speak the language.

Furthermore, the ability to understand the structure of Arabic grammar, in particular, its syntax and morphology, signifies a very useful knowledge and useful resource to those who wish to master the Arabic language and to memorize the Qur'an. [Hassan \(2015\)](#) stated the importance of Arabic grammar as one of the strategies to memorize the Qur'an. Thus, the question is: do *tahfiz* students master the structure of Arabic syntax and morphology rules in the Qur'anic verses that they memorized?

Preceding studies that examine and identify Arabic language proficiency issues among *tahfiz* students are very limited. Therefore, the need for an exploratory study concerning Arabic language proficiency that takes into consideration the meaning and structure woven into the Arabic language grammar is highly recommended.

CURRENT STUDIES ON QUR'ANIC MEMORIZATION

Preserving and protecting the Qur'an seeks not only to ensure against its words from being misappropriated, exchanged, exaggerated or minimized, it includes the preservation of linguistic meanings and the associated guidance, as the Qur'an is essentially composed of words and meanings. To fulfil these demands, the mastery of Arabic knowledge is necessary for those who want to wade the deep of Qur'anic exegesis. Thus, Muslim scholars have agreed that the Arabic language constitutes the primary source to understanding the meaning of the Qur'an, appreciate the secrets of linguistic eloquence and emphasize its miracles. Put differently, advancing knowledge of the Arabic language is the central requirement enabling a person to understand the Qur'an ([Usman, Ibrahim, & Ali, 2014](#)).

A study on Qur'anic *tahfiz* students and their level of Arabic language proficiency is significant because the process of memorizing the Qur'an involves the said *tahfiz* students mastering the Arabic language. In a study by [Ku Azizan, et. al. \(2017\)](#), it was determined that the mean perception of Arabic language learning was moderate with a mean of 2.56. Generally, students are very confident that by memorizing the Qur'anic verses, they will somehow indirectly master the Arabic language. However, a study by Ahmad Zulfihar Shah & Mohd Abdul Nasir (2016) obtained modest responses from students with regards to applying their perceived advantage of memorizing Qur'anic verses on their ability to master the Arabic language. Nevertheless, [Ku Azizan, et. al. \(2017\)](#) acquired contrary and inconsistent findings, namely that *tahfiz* students' Arabic language proficiency remained high although their usage of the language in the memorization process was not strong enough.

According to [Nasimah, et. al. \(2017\)](#), translating the meaning of the Qur'an into Bahasa Malaysia is a commendable effort towards properly understanding the contents and messages contained therein. Meanwhile, the results of a study conducted at Pondok Pesantren Tahaffudzul Qur'an Purwoyoso Ngaliyan, Semarang by [Sofiah \(2013\)](#), indicated that there exists a positive relationship between the mastery of Arabic vocabulary and the ability to memorize the Qur'an. The use of the method of understanding the meaning of the Qur'anic verses in the study of [Mustafa and Basri \(2014\)](#) had also identified how the method of understanding of the Qur'an is crucial in strengthening and thus maintaining the students' allegations. Their study successfully established that properly understanding the meaning of Qur'anic verses is crucial in strengthening and more importantly maintaining the levels of memorization of the Qur'an amongst students.

In addition, there is a relationship between the grasp of grammar with Qur'anic memorization. A study conducted by [Hassan \(2015\)](#), found that Arabic grammar is important in the study of Qur'an as it is a motivation to *tahfiz* students and it

is one of the effective strategies to memorize the Qur'an as well. It was also found a link between Arabic language proficiency and the recitation of the Qur'an (Zaid, 2011), whereby memorization should be in line with mastery of Arabic language skills. Ramadan & Souad (2017) emphasized that the goals and objectives of *tahfiz* education will not be achieved if the method of understanding Qur'anic verses is not properly addressed. This viewpoint has also been reaffirmed by Nelson (2001) who underlined that one of the factors why most students are weak in Qur'anic recitations is because they do not understand the translation and meaning of the Qur'anic verses that are being committed to memory. Hence, the teaching practices of lecturers should be enhanced in order to excel the Qur'an memorization education in Malaysia (Rahim, et. 2016).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Quantitative research methods were used via the application of a questionnaire survey. The study sample consists of *tahfiz* students at the Azharic Institute of Qiraat in Shobra, Cairo, Egypt. The sampling was taken by all the candidates based on the criteria of the students who enrolled in the Qur'an *tahfiz* program and studied the basic Arabic language. The questionnaire survey utilized in this study was designed by the researcher based on the components of the Arabic language learning curriculum such as meanings and knowledge of Arabic language structure consisting of Syntax and Morphology. A set of questions containing three main constructs was used, namely; the element of mastery of the Arabic language in the context of memorization which consists of eight items, the element of mastery of the morphology containing seven items and the element of mastery of grammar consisting of seven items. A five-point Likert Scale denoting the level of influence was used and as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Five-point Likert scale

Score	Level of Influence
1	Extremely non-influential
2	Non-influential
3	Moderately influence
4	Influence
5	Greatly influence

The data obtained were processed and descriptively analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics software package and subsequently described by the mean and the mean score which is based on the Schedule Interpretation minimum score range (Elias 1997) as stated in Table 2. There are 5 levels of the mean score that have been set for all of the items reviewed based on the mean score ranging from Very Low (1.00) to Very High (5.00). The interpretation of the mean score range is specified in Table 2.

Table 2. Levels mean score range interpretation

Range	Levels mean score
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.40	Average
3.41 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very High

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

What are the perceptions of *tahfiz* students towards the mastery of the Qur'an in terms of memorization skills? In order to answer this question, the findings of this study are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. The mean and level of understanding of language proficiency in memorizing the Qur'an

Items	Mean	Level
1 Understanding the meaning of Arabic words translated into Bahasa Malaysia can help me memorize the Qur'an easily	4.26	VH
2 Understanding the translation of verses from the Qur'an encourages me to memorize the said verses perfectly	4.33	VH
3 Understanding the meaning of Arabic vocabulary translation can improve my ability to memorize the Qur'an	4.20	H
4 Understanding the events and stories in the Qur'an enhanced my tendency to memorize the verses fluently	4.33	VH
5 If I know the meaning of the Qur'anic verses that I read, I can memorize it thoroughly and effectively	4.30	VH
6 If I can master the meaning of every verse that I read, I will be eager to memorize it	4.43	VH
7 When I hear the verses of the Qur'an and understand its meaning, it encourages me to memorize the Qur'an	4.26	VH

8	Understanding the translation of sentences encourages me to embrace the Qur'an through memorization	4.10	H
Overall total		4.27	VH

VH=Very High, H=High

As shown in Table 3, there are eight items perceived by *tahfiz* students that has the potential to influence their mastery of translating into Bahasa Malaysia while memorizing the Qur'an. The overall findings show that *tahfiz* students submitted high-level responses with a mean ranging from 4.10 to 4.43. The overall mean value is calculated to be 4.27.

In addition, Table 4 shows the perceptions of *tahfiz* students towards the mastery of Arabic morphology in memorizing the Qur'an.

Table 4. The mean and level of influence of Arabic morphology in memorizing the Qur'an

Items	Mean	Level	
1	Mastery of Arabic morphology in the Qur'anic words makes it easier for me to memorize the Qur'an	3.83	H
2	Understanding the structure of the <i>wazan</i> (scales) in the Qur'anic words enhances my tendency to memorize the Qur'an efficiently	3.66	H
3	The mastery of verbal changes in the Qur'an could help me memorize the Qur'an correctly	3.76	H
4	Memorizing the Qur'an can be improved if I am able to identify changes in the verb forms	4.06	H
5	Knowing the changing of verbs (af'āl) in the wording of the Qur'an leads to easier memorization	3.86	H
6	When I hear the Qur'anic verses and understand the structural change of its verbs, it aids me in memorization	3.66	H
7	The ability to understand the Arabic morphological methods encourages me to appreciate the Qur'an by memorizing it	3.70	H
Overall total		3.79	H

VH=Very High, H=High

As shown in Table 4, there are 7 items perceived by *tahfiz* students to influence their mastery of Arabic morphology while memorizing the Qur'an. The overall findings show that *tahfiz* students gave high-level responses with a mean ranging between 3.66 and 4.06. The overall mean value is calculated to be 3.79.

Next, Table 5 lists the findings concerning the perceptions of *tahfiz* students with regards to the mastery of Arabic syntax in memorizing the Qur'an.

Table 5. Mean and level of the influence of Arabic Syntax in memorizing the Qur'an

Items	Mean	Level	
1	The mastery of Arabic syntax in Qur'anic verses allows me to memorize the Qur'an well	3.86	H
2	Understanding the structure of Arabic syntax can help me to enhance my memory in efforts to memorize the Qur'an	3.90	H
3	Understanding the structure of Arabic syntax in the verses of the Qur'an helps me to memorize it effectively	4.50	VH
4	Mastery of the Arabic syntax structure in the Qur'an could help me to remember the verses more easily	3.86	H
5	Memorization of the Qur'an could be improved if I am able to identify the Arabic syntax contained in the Qur'an	3.93	H
6	When I hear the recitation of the Qur'anic verses with understanding of the law of Arabic syntax, it will make it easier for me to memorize the Qur'an	3.80	H
7	Understanding of Arabic syntax encourages me to study the Qur'an through memorization	3.90	H
Overall total		3.96	H

VH=Very High, H=High

As shown in Table 5, there are 7 items that are perceived by *tahfiz* students to influence their mastery of Arabic syntax while memorizing the Qur'an. The overall findings show that *tahfiz* students gave high-level responses with mean values between 3.80 and 4.50. The overall mean value is determined to be 3.96.

Hence, the aforementioned findings indicate that positive responses were attained based on students' perceptions regarding mastering important elements while learning the Arabic language. The important elements are those that are related to Arabic language and Qur'anic memorization, which involves mastery of the meaning of the Qur'an and also the structure of the Arabic language's morphology and syntax. Most *tahfiz* students strongly agree that elements pertaining to the memorization of the Qur'an such as meaning and Arabic language morphology and syntax, do greatly influence the process of and ability to memorize the Qur'an. Thus, this study indicates that students possess a high level of perception towards the mastery of Arabic morphology and syntax that has the potential to assist them in memorizing the Qur'an.

The findings of this study support the study by [Hassan \(2015\)](#), which examined the importance of understanding the Arabic syntax for memorization of the Qur'an as a form of motivation to *tahfiz* students and also as a key strategy to memorize the Qur'an. It is also in accordance to a study by [Nasimah, et. al. \(2017\)](#) in which it was mentioned that the use of the Qur'an in Bahasa Malaysia greatly assisted *tahfiz* students in understanding the contents being committed to memory. In other words, the strong self-drive among non-native adult learners (*tahfiz* students) encouraged and increased the effort towards the Malay language that suits their needs and expectations ([Vathi Muniandy, B. Othman, & Jamaluddin, 2018](#)). In addition, this study is also in tandem with [Ikhwanuddin & Hashim \(2014\)](#) that there exists a relationship between the mastery of the Arabic language and students' memorization of the Qur'an. In sum, the mastery of Arabic was a tool for enhanced knowledge of Islam ([Al-Otaibi, & Rashid, 1997](#)).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study successfully identified the importance of understanding the Qur'an in addition to mastering the morphology and syntax of the Arabic language. This is important because if the current situation persists, then non-Arab Muslims shall continue to read the Qur'an without understanding its intended meaning and the Arabic language. Similarly, *tahfiz* students will only be proud of being able to memorize the Qur'an smoothly without truly ever knowing what they are memorizing and thereby foregoing the ability to apply *tadabbur* (understand and think) about the verses in order to gain a true appreciation for them. Therefore, it could be said that the mastery of the Qur'an is not merely in its reading and memorizing, but it is also important to recognize that it is a very significant element towards acquiring an appreciation of Islam. Based on the findings mentioned above, it is this study's recommendation to explore the possibility of establishing a curriculum framework that gives provision for the Arabic language to be mastered by students in *tahfiz* institutions. Once this curriculum is implemented, the tasks of Qur'anic educators will be made easier.

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