

CHALLENGES FACING SCHOOL STUDENTS IN QUR'AN MEMORIZATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: This article explores the challenges faced by students in Qur'an memorization in the Tahfīz class setting. A qualitative study through semi-structured In-depth interviews through one-on-one interactions were used to investigate participants' views about their challenges on memorizing the Qur'an. The researchers used open-ended interview structure which included specific questions, followed up by probing questions to investigate the phenomenon in details. Participants in this study were made up of 6 Tahfīz students (3 females and 3 males), whose ages ranged between 15 to 17-year olds, Findings from the study suggests that time constraint, lack of motivation, inability to recall, emotional challenges and external noise were among the problems that students faced in their journey to memorizing the Qur'an. The researcher also found that the students had less attachment to the Qur'an which make it difficult for them to memorize the Qur'an. Implications from this study raises awareness among teachers, students and parents and guardians who have send their children to Tahfīz schools to memorize the Qur'an. In addition to this, the students themselves and teachers also were the source of motivation to memorize. By knowing the challenges in memorizing, this study can serve as reference in narrowing the gap on motivation in Qur'anic memorization. Hence, the researchers believe that this study will be much help for others to continue and elaborate more on the field of Qur'anic memorization in relation to motivation.

Keywords: *Challenges, Qur'an Memorization, Case Study, Secondary School Students*

INTRODUCTION

In recent times there has been an increased interest in memorization of the Qur'an due to parental demand for their children to memorize the Qur'an as well as the increasing number of programs on Tahfīz and da'wah on the Television and Internet (reference). In addition, many people have developed more awareness about the importance and positive impact of memorizing the Qur'an in the Muslim's life; therefore, this motivates them to search for people or programmes that enhance their competency in Qur'an recitation and memorization (reference).

In Malaysia, particularly, there has been a rise in the number of people undertaking Qur'an memorization at various schools, mosques as well as at homes. The ultimate purpose for memorizing the Qur'an should be to fulfill the inherent need of human beings in seeking Allah's (s.w.t) pleasure. As Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) said: Memorize the Qur'an, for Allah will not punish the heart which contains the Qur'an (Norkhairilizah Hamzah. (2005). This statement highlights that Allah (s.w.t) has promised, that those who memorize the Qur'an will not be punished in the Hereafter. Statistics shows that 278 Tahfīz schools are registered as public and private institutions in Malaysia. According to Jabatan Pembangunan Al-Qur'an, the approximate number of Huffāz is close to 13, 000 students (Jabatan Pembangunan Al-Qur'an, 2011). In the State of Selangor, there are around 80 Tahfīz institutions in all districts. Table 1 below shows the distribution of Tahfīz institutions in all districts in the State of Selangor.

Table 1 Distribution of *Tahfīz* institutions in Selangor

District	No of <i>Tahfīz</i> Institutions
Sepang	3
Hulu Langat	16
Kuala Langat	7
Hulu Selangor	7
Kuala Selangor	7
Klang	8
Petaling	15
Sabak Bernam	5
Gombak	12

Sources: Persatuan Institut Tahfīz Al-Qur'an Selangor, 2016

The path of memorizing the Qur'an might not always be smooth and easy. But Allah (s.w.t) has promised His help in this matter in the Qur'an, "as for those who struggle for Our sake, we will guide them in Our ways. For God is with those who do good" (Qur'an 29:69). While in another verse, Surah Ali Imran: 159 and 160, Allah (s.w.t) motivates people to put their trust in Him as He is the one who can help us during difficulties. "Put your trust in Allah. Allah loves those who trust (in Him). If Allah helps you, none can overcome you. If He forsakes you, who is there, after that, that can help you?" These verses clearly state that students need to trust Allah (s.w.t) and rely on His help when reciting and memorizing the Qur'an as Allah will help clear their path from any hindrances and difficulties. (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 1996)

A research done on memorizing the Qur'an in Ma'had Nahdhotul 'Ulum Yala, South Thailand found that one of the barriers which hindered students' interest in memorization of the Qur'an was poor concentration during learning (Waenalai, K, 2009). Another study on strategy of memorizing the Qur'an in Darul Qur'an concluded that there are 13 challenges that faced by the ḥāfīz while memorizing. These include lack of motivation, emotional attachment, and bad peers pressure as well as lack of teacher involvement in the subject taught (Nik Md Saiful Azizi, 2014).

Muslim scholars have done research on memory, sensory memory, short-term memory and long-term memory as in modern Psychology. However, they used different terminologies. For instance, Al-Farabi used formative faculty to describe sensory memory, while Al-Ghazali used estimative faculty to explain short-term memory. In addition to this, Ibn Sina also used storage or retrieval faculty to define long-term memory (reference).

When modern psychology found that selective attention on input influenced sensory memory, Al-Ghazali had actually discovered it long ago along with the additional influence of repetition and imagination of an individual (reference). Ibn Sina and Ibn Qayyim even added the influence of interest and motivation in helping storing the information longer (Reference). Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi discussed how emotions could affect memory long time before modern psychology (reference).

Western psychology has also discussed forgetfulness as being caused by two factors, decay and interference. However, they failed to explain why forgetfulness occurs. The Qur'an mentions the different types of forgetfulness in three forms; normal forgetfulness (such as forgetting someone's name or formerly memorized information), concealed forgetfulness (such as forgetting due to ignorance), and unfocused or distracted forgetfulness (forgetting or losing focus in performing 'ibādah to a certain extent departing from Him). (Reference or verses from the Quran)

Satan is regarded as agent of forgetfulness. Allah (s.w.t) says, "He replied: "Sawest thou (what happened) when we betook ourselves to the rock? I did indeed forget (about) the Fish: none but Satan made me forget to tell (you) about it: it took its course through the sea in a marvellous way!" (Qur'an 18: 63). He engenders man's need to follow his desire and influences man to be occupied until he slowly departs from Allah (s.w.t). This is one of Qur'anic facts that studies in the West have overlooked. The question then arises as to why Muslims need to repeat praying and memorizing the Qur'an even though it is already engraved

in their heart. This question can be explained in the ḥadīth of the Prophet from the narration of Abū Mūsū al-Ash‘arī (May Allah be pleased with him), “Read the Qur’an regularly. By the One in Whose Hand Muhammad’s soul is, it escapes from memory faster than a camel does from its tying ropes.” From the ḥadīth, it is clear that even though we may have memorized the Qur’an, the memorization can be lost as human is forgetful.

In essence, the mind plays an important role in decision making and controlling other parts of the body of the individual. This is evidenced as Allah (s.w.t) placed the mind in the top most position just to make people realize its importance. Learning should also be given priority and importance as Allah (s.w.t) has stressed that our memory is one of the best bestowals.

As students need motivation in learning, a study on the challenges behind their eagerness to learn is necessary. Statistics from Darul Qur’an shows that one out of 10 students who memorize the Qur’an, tends to forget their memorization after a while. While there are some students who do not finish their memorization at scheduled period and do not continue memorizing after that. There is still a need for a study on the challenges faced by students in the journey of memorizing the Qur’an and how they overcome these challenges. Thus, this paper aims to investigate the challenges that impede students’ motivation while memorizing the Qur’an.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional Islamic schooling predated all modern formal schooling. And Qur’an memorising has been giving the utmost priority above all subjects in Islamic education. This makes memorizing the Qur’an the noblest achievement that the Muslim learner can make. This is because the Qur’an is the first source of legislation in Islam. Furthermore, the Qur’an stands as the backbone which gives the second source of legislation, Sunnah, its validity. Thus, the more verses one can reproduce by memory from the Qur’an, the better he can grasp the core tools to Islamic knowledge. This will enable him to understand the religion of Islam better and guide himself as well as others.(reference)

This explains why all the great Islamic and Muslim scholars over the centuries have memorised the Qur’an at early ages. For instance, Imām al-Shāfi‘ī memorized the Qur’an at age of seven while Imām al-Suyūṭī memorized it at the age of eight (reference). Among other great Muslim scholars who memorised the Qur’an are Ibn Khaldūn, al-Ghazālī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīna, memorised the Qur’an at early as 7 years. This also includes Imam Al-Bukhārī, Imam Muslim, Imam Ibn Taymiyah, Imam ibn al-Qayyim, Imam Ahmad and many others. (Reference)

Al-Maymuni once asked Imam Ahmad, whether one should start teaching his child the Qur’an or the Hadīth, and he replied: “No, start him with the Qur’an.” He then asked, “should I teach him all of it?” He replied, Yes, unless he finds difficulty in doing so.”(Ibn al-Mufliḥ). In the same way, Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī says, “A learner must start by memorising the Qur’an, as it’s the noblest of sciences and the first one should prioritise.”(Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī,).

Such resemble how the predecessors of the Ummah tackled the Qur’an, and how seriously they took it. However, as much as we are encouraged to learn and memorize the Qur’an, we lack studies that outline the challenges one may face in the journey of memorizing the Qur’an.

On the other hand, research on visually impaired students’ attitudes towards learning Al-Qur’an recitation and its relationship with the mastery of reading the Qur’an demonstrate that the students had low motivation. The reason seemed to be that the element of awareness, motivation and encouragement were absent for them and there was a lack of teachers’ involvement in motivating them to read the Qur’an properly (Hajarul Bahti Zakaria, Ab Halim Tamuri, Norshidah Mohd Salleh & Mohd Huzairi Awang, 2014).

In addition to studies mentioned earlier, a study on identifying learning disabilities among students in a language class found that there were eight challenges; some of which included insufficient knowledge among the personnel who were involved in the learning process, as well as a lack of assessment provided to differentiate between those who were fast and slow learners.

Another study done by Sedek Ariffin (2013) on the effective techniques of memorizing the Qur'an at Madrasah Tahfiz al-Qur'an in Terengganu found that students could reproduce the whole Qur'an by heart within 15 hours without looking at the muṣḥaf through four methods: sabak memorization (new memorize), para sabak (post memorize), ammokhtar, and halaqah dauri (revision).

Other studies on how to select a good module for Qur'an memorization in accordance with one's capability showed that students should spend more time repeating the memorization of the old verses and only a little time to memorize a new verse. While age turned out not to be an obstacle for someone to memorize the Qur'an, only their interests, abilities and actions were considered as obstacles (Sedek Ariffin, Mustafa Abdullah & Khadher Ahmad, 2013). Another study, on the relationships between etiquettes of Tahfiz and Tahfiz achievement, (Aznil Hashim et al., 2014) showed that there was a need to pay attention to the curriculum drafting for the teaching and learning Tahfiz so that student achievement in memorizing the Qur'an could be improved.

While an analysis on learning methods and problems of Malay and African reciters of the Qur'an found that when they are able to understand Arabic language, the level of fluency, understanding of Qur'anic words and even remembering rules of tajwīd could be increased (Raja Jamilah Raja Yusof, Roziati Zainuddin & M.Y. Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff, 2012).

In addition to the study on the use of mim-mem (mimicry and memorization) done in Tahfizul Qur'an class in Kampar, Indonesia found that students were more motivated to learn al-Qur'an as they did not have to focus only on memorization but they could also learn from listening to their teachers' pronunciation (Rifka Zahera, 2012).

Meanwhile, Muhammad Yusuf (2010) concludes in his study of 2010 that that students should use at least one of the learning styles in memorizing the verses of the Qur'an. In addition to this, students should also memorize the verses line by line from every page in the Qur'an. This is to ensure that the students do not lose motivation while memorizing as well as to help them to recognize each word without leaving anything out. The result of this finding had been supported by Abdul-Hameed in his book on Qur'an memorization (Abdul-Hameed, A. 2011). He stated that Qur'an can be memorized line by line to enable students to comprehend the verse better and able to memorize faster.

From the study on obstacles to learning, the researchers identify 12 difficulties in the journey of memorizing the Qur'an such as : 1) being unable to admit we don't know, 2) having the pretense of knowing, 3) not granting permission to others to teach you anything, 4) needing to look good, 5) being blind to your cognitive blindness, 6) needing too much clarity, 7) not having time, 8) not willing to dive deeply, 9) being overly serious, 10) judging yourself as you attempt to learn, 11) confusing knowing with learning, 12) excluding the body from learning and some others (Metamorphosis, Teaching Learning Communities, 2010). Thus, by seeking the challenges behind students' motivation, it will help to minimize the gap of the study in the field of Qur'an memorization. Since Tahfiz program in this Tahfiz class are basically based on the parents' wish for their children to memorize the Qur'an, it is important to seek the challenges faced by students' that affect their motivation in memorization of the Qur'an.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study utilized the qualitative case study to explore the challenges facing students in Qur'anic memorization in a Tahfiz class at a high school setting. This case study permits the researchers to explore a phenomenon within its context through a variety of angles that helped them to further understand the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews through one-on-one interactions were used to investigate participants' views and share their experiences in memorizing the Qur'an. The researchers used open-ended interview structure which included specific questions, followed up by probing questions to investigate the phenomenon in details. Participants were asked a standardized set of questions.

Participants in this study were made up of 6 Tahfīz students (3 females and 3 males), whose ages ranged between 15 to 17 year olds, and were, at the time of the study, taking ḥifẓ Al-Qur'an program in Sekolah Menengah Islam Al-Amin Gombak (SMIAAG) and Sekolah Menengah Islam Al-Amin Bangi (SMIAAB). Three of the participants were selected from SMIAAG (1 male and 2 females), while the other three were selected from SMIAAB (2 males and 1 female). Each participant had been exposed to Qur'an memorization for at least for 2 years. Table 2 below sums up demographic characteristics of the sample of study.

Table 2 Participants Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Age	School	Length of Memorization
P1	Male	16	SMIAAG	2 years
P2	Female	17	SMIAAG	2 ½ years
P3	Female	15	SMIAAG	2 years
P4	Male	16	SMIAAB	2 ½ years
P5	Male	17	SMIAAB	2 years
P6	Female	17	SMIAAB	2 ½ years

SMIAAG= Sekolah Menengah Islam Al-Amin Gombak and SMIAAB & Sekolah Menengah Islam Al-Amin Bangi.

The participants were selected by their teachers through purposive sampling. This was seen important as the teachers knew their students better. According to Patnaik (2014), purposive sampling helps the researchers to focus on participants with direct experiences on Qur'an memorization and who are able to share their stories and experiences better. The researchers used purposive sampling as they wanted to probe into students who had been experiencing Qur'an memorization in the schools. The thematic analysis approach was used to analyze the collected data. Baun and Clarke (2006) highlight that thematic approach goes through these stages: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the researchers' interpretation of the data gathered, main themes from the various ideas put forth in the rich data from the interview were extracted. It was found that time constraints, lack of motivation, difficulty in recalling, obstructions by emotions, as well as external noise were the challenges that impeded participants' motivation in memorizing.

More specifically, four out of 6 participants stated that time constraint has always been their problem when memorizing the Qur'an.

Two participants from SMIAAG believed that due to the increasing workload at school, it was difficult to find time to memorize the Qur'an. This was deduced from the response by 'Participant 1, "it's the time constraint. I have a lot of other work to do especially now I am in form 4. The workload is getting bigger.."'". The same reason was given by Participant 3, "maybe it's also due to the time... now that I am in form 4, the workload is getting larger, added to that I have to memorize the Qur'an in the same timeframe..." While Participant 4 agreed that due to her lack of skill in managing her time, she found scheduling memorization to be quite difficult, as she could not find sufficient time to do the tasks that she needed to do all at once. "I think... it's about management of time... I still could not get enough time to recall every single verse that I had memorized carefully...". Participant 6 argued that due to his late admission into the program, he felt rushed as he needed to catch up with friends of similar level who had already memorized a lot. "I just enrolled in this school, so I have a lot of syllabus to cover... friends of my age have already finished 25 juz, but I've only done about 15 juz."

Here, the researchers deduced that the time constraint faced by the participants could be due to the need to improve their management of time. This is in line with the literature that implies that poor concentration serves as one of the obstacles that hinder Tahfız studnets from effectively and productively memorizing the Qur'an (Waenalai, K. , 2009).

Moreover, one of the participants, when asked about the challenges she faced in memorizing, stated that she was more occupied with technology and spent most of the time playing with her gadgets.

“Talking about motivation. I think I am lacking of motivation to memorize. Since technology is everywhere nowadays, I spend mostly on gadgets and more motivated to occupy myself with facebook,twitter and others” (Participant 1).

However, the effect of technology and social media is not common among the participants. The participants said that they did not have any problem in refraining themselves from spending too much of their time on technology. When the researcher asked about whether they have a mobile phone laptops and accounts in on social media websites, they said that their parents provided them with a mobile phone but their usage is limited to a certain amount of time.

The analyses also showed that the challenges might be due to personal or internal factors. Participant 2 stressed that to be able to recall things that one has memorized might be quite a challenging task when the brain cannot retrieve the information when needed.

”I did have a problem while memorizing...especially when I want to continue reading the verse..”“ I also faced problem in recalling back the beginning of verse or even remember their page..” (Participant 2)

This is similar to the response of participant 5 where he stated that, “Sometimes I can't even recall the verses back when I am under stress..”

It is important to note that students might face problems in recalling their memorization. Sometimes, they get stuck in continuing reciting the verses from their memory and also face other problems related to memory retrieval.

Emotion has also become a challenge to the participants to cope with.

The researchers found it difficult to gain information about the participants' challenges in emotion. Although the researchers tried to get more data by encouraging them to speak and share, they did not want to share their feeling. Thus, only 2 participants answered after some coaxing.

Participant 3 said that she found it difficult to cope with the strict discipline in memorizing the Qur'an while at the same time the feeling of laziness to do anything sometimes made it harder for her to focus on memorizing.

“Just that it's a little emotionally challenging ...” and “If we want to memorize, we need to have strong discipline..when other people go on vacation, we need to continue memorize..so it does not really feel like vacation..there must be homework to be done...some verses that our teacher gave to memorize... so..it's not really fun..” And “that does not include the feeling of to laziness...sometimes I do not feel like doing anything...”

Meanwhile, participant 5, when asked about what hurdles he faced in his memorization, answered that he felt the pressure to set an example for his siblings. “I am the oldest in my siblings, I would like to be an example to my siblings...”

Finally, Participant 6 mentioned the noisy environment at school which distracted her when doing the memorization.

“I think the school environment does not encourage me to memorize the Qur'an..because sometimes it is quite noisy..this class starts after school...the time when primary school students go home...you can see how this school is just beside the primary school...”(Participant 6)

Based on the observation of the condition of the school, the researchers found the noise to be quite distracting. There were some students shouting around when their school was over. The Tahfiz class which started after school was located beside the school field where other students especially the primary school kids play after school. Due to this reason, the researchers have concluded that the environment of the school where the Tahfiz class was conducted needed to be improved as each student has different learning style.

This result is parallel with the research finding by Waenalai (2009) who found that lack of concentration was one of the barriers which impeded students' interest in memorization of the Qur'an.

Another study done on visually impaired students' attitudes towards learning Al-Qur'an recitation and its relationship with the mastery of reading the Qur'an showed students' low level of motivation. The reason seemed to be that the elements of awareness, motivation and encouragement are not there for them as well as there is a lack of teachers' role in motivating them to read the Qur'an properly (Hajarul Bahti Zakaria et al, 2014).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper showed the extent to which challenges influencing students' memorization of the Qur'an. This study can add recent findings on the challenges facing students in memorizing Qur'an which will help teachers, school administration and parents to improve students' Qur'an memorization. From the study, the challenges faced by the student (the respondents) included time constraint, lack of motivation, unable to recall, emotional challenge, as well as external noise.

The tremendous development of Malaysia has brought a lot of changes in the lives of the people. It has also impacted the development of Tahfiz institutions. The latest shows that Tahfiz institutions are divided into three forms. First, Tahfiz institutions are still maintaining the traditional elements that only learn the knowledge of the Quran and fardu ain. Secondly, the Tahfiz institution that combines the knowledge of the Qur'an, qiraat and religious knowledge. And the third, the Tahfiz institution that combines Quranic knowledge, qiraat and science knowledge (Noor Hisham et al, 2014). It exists as a result of modernization process that has formed the discipline knowledge smaller but growing slowly. This makes the efforts to shape the curriculum and the distribution of learning time is becoming more difficult. Similarly, the capability of students on the various disciplines of knowledge becomes more difficult because the study method of such knowledge is different.

This paper proposing the tahfiz tuition concept is a new one introduced in Malaysia. Usually we find tuition classes only involve subjects offered in formal education at school. While Tahfiz education is usually linked to Tahfiz full-time learning through Tahfiz center and institution. However, based on observations and experiences, this study suggests that Tahfiz education is offered part-time or in tuition classes (tuition). With part-time class offering it gives relaxation to the public at various levels following this Tahfiz class.

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