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Tahfiz Education in Malaysia: Issues and Problems in Memorising Quranic *Mutashabihat* Verses and its Solution

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Abstract

Among the biggest challenge faced by a tahfiz student in memorising the Quran is to remember the *mutashabihat* verses which appear to be similar to one another. The difficulty in memorising and remembering the *mutashabihat* verses require specific teaching and learning methods from the tahfiz institutions, teachers and students. However, to what extent this matter is addressed seriously at tahfiz institutions still remains a question. Therefore, the objective of the study is to identify the issues and problems in teaching and memorising the *mutashabihat* verses among tahfiz lecturers and students. The study selected Darul Quran Jakim and Department of al-Quran and al-Qiraat, Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor as the research locations. This study was developed based on the qualitative method using semi-structured interviews as the research instrument. Four experienced tahfiz lecturers and 30 tahfiz students from both institutions were selected as participants. Among the issues and problems that has been found regarding to the *mutashabihat* verses are: 1) no specific reference book to assist students to identify *mutashabihat* verses, 2) lack of focus given on the verses during tasmi' sessions. This study has proposed an appropriate solution for each of these problems.

Keywords: Quranic Memorisation, Mutashabihat Verses, Darul Quran Jakim, KUIS, Tahfiz Education

Introduction

Linguistically, *mutashabihat* is defined as resembling and vague (Ibn Faris, n.d; Ibn Manzur, 1994). Muslim scholars divided *mutashabihat* verses in the Quran into two main categories which are:

1. *Mutashabihat* verses from the aspect of meaning, which is the antonym for *muhkam* (verses that are accurate and clear in terms of their meaning).
2. *Mutashabihat* verses from the aspect of pronunciation, which appear to be similar to one another (al-Zarkasyi; 2006; al-Samirra`ie, 2005; al-Hunain, 2008).

This study focuses on the second type of *mutashabihat* which is from the aspect of pronunciation. *Mutashabihat* verses refer to similar verses in the Quran which are mentioned

repeatedly with a slight difference in the form of *taqdim* (bring forward) or *ta'khir* (bring backwards), *ziyadah* (addition) or *naqs* (reduction), and *ibdal* (conversion) words or vowels (al-Iskafi, 2012; Shukri & al-'Auratani, 2013; al-Kirman, n.d.).

Among the challenges faced by those who memorise the Qur'an is to remember the *mutashabihat* verses clearly (Shukri & al-'Auratani, 2013). The problem is further complicated with the amount of *mutashabih* verses in the Quran which exceeds 1200 ayah (al-Warraqi, n.d.). Meanwhile, Bilal (2003) stated that based on the compilation by Abd Halim al-Jashti, the number of locations where similarities occur stands at 7500 locations. The huge difference between the two amounts is due to the fact that more than one similarity may occur in a verse (al-Hunain, 2008). This requires lecturers and students to apply an effective way of teaching and learning to further strengthen their memorisation.

Literature Review

Memorising the Quran has its own challenges and difficulties. Therefore, there is a need for an effective and systematic method of learning to facilitate the process of memorising and recovery as well as to avoid the Quran from being forgotten (Ahmad Murad, 1999). Among the biggest challenges faced by students is the recovery of *mutashabihat* verses. It is proven through a study by Abdullah et al (2005) that more than 60% of 368 respondents among tahfiz students were not able to remember these verses clearly.

Among the methods suggested to strengthen the memorisation of *mutashabihat* verses is to identify them prior to memorisation. Many scholars have written various books that compile the *mutashabihat* verses throughout the Quran with different methods of writing. They are all suitable to be made as references for students in memorising the Quran. According to Bilal (2003), the number of books that have been written in compiling the *mutashabihat* verses is 62 books.

Furthermore, making a specific note and mark on *mutashabihat* verses in a mushaf or a logbook is also suggested to strengthen the memorisation of these verses. This facilitates the students to identify the *mutashabihat* verses and may also serve as a reference in case of confusion or inability to remember (Shukri & al-'Auratani, 2013; Bilal, 2003; Abdullah et al., 2005). The important information that should be written about the *mutashabihat* verses are the number of pages, surahs, verses' numbers, chapters and the specific words that may cause confusion (Ahmad et al., 2019; Abdullah et al., 2005).

In addition, there are also other methods regularly used by students in memorising *mutashabihat* verses, which are; frequent revisions with a special focus on *mutashabihat* verses, referring to Quranic interpretations or translations to understand the meaning of the verses involved (Ahmad et al., 2019; Abdullah et al., 2005) and identify specific keys and tips for memorising the *mutasyabihat* verses (Abdullah et al., 2005). Based on previous studies, methods to memorise *mutashabihat* verses are as described in Figure 1.

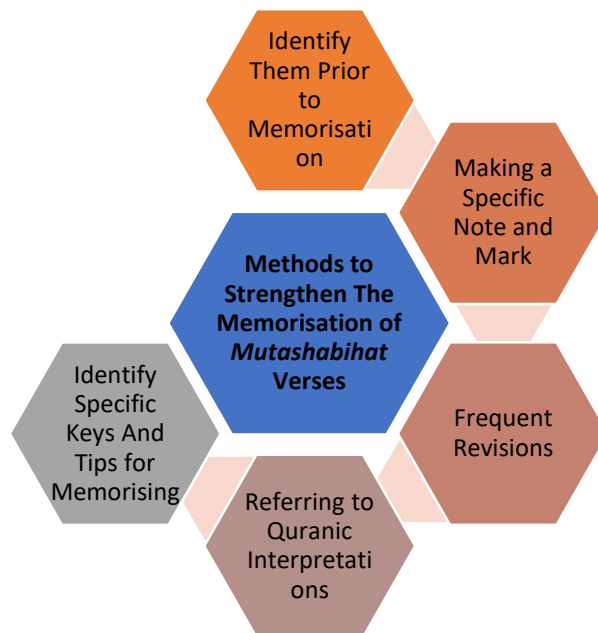


Figure 1: Methods to strengthen the memorisation of mutashabihat verses

Problem Statement

Past scholars had pointed out the difficulties in memorising the *mutashabihat* verses. According to al-Auratani (2013), these verses require a specific learning method to improve students' quality of memorisation.

This suggestion is supported by Abdullah et al. (2005). In a survey, they found that 60% of 368 respondents at the Kuala Lumpur Al-Quran Institute and Madrasatul Quran Kubang Bujuk, Terengganu agreed that the *mutashabihat* verses in Surah al-Waqi'ah dan Surah Yasin can cause confusion to students. 90% of the respondents agreed that it is imperative that each student give extra attention to the *mutashabihat* verses to avoid confusion. In fact, they can accidentally move from one surah to another due to the confusion caused by the *mutashabihat* verses (Shukri & al-'Auratani, 2013).

However, to what extent the matter is seriously addressed at tahfiz institutions remains a question. Thus, this study is conducted to identify the issues and problems in teaching and memorising *mutashabihat* verses among tahfiz's lecturers and students. The study aims to suggest methods that may strengthen and improve the quality of teaching and learning methods in Quranic memorisation courses.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted at Darul Quran, JAKIM and the Department of Quran and Al-Qiraat, Selangor International Islamic University College (KUIS). It was developed based on the qualitative method using the semi-structured interview as the research instrument.

Four (4) tahfiz lecturers with more than five (5) years of experience in teaching tahfiz courses from both institutions have been selected as research participants to provide reliable feedback and information.

In addition, 30 tahfiz students who had memorised the whole Quran were chosen as participants. The justification of the selection is based on their experience in memorising the entire Quran within an institution that offers a specific curriculum on memorising the 30 chapters of the Quran. This experience provides them with a clear picture of the process of memorising the *mutashabihat* verses in the Quran.

The interview method is used to obtain information regarding the methods to overcome the difficulties in memorising, recalling and distinguishing the *mutashabihat* verses. Each respondent was presented with open-ended questions related to the issues and problems pertaining to teaching, learning and memorising the verses.

The data obtained through the interviews was later transcribed and categorised thematically to identify the issues and problems that occurred during the teaching, learning and memorising of *mutashabihat* verses.

Research Findings

The findings from this study were analysed using thematic methods to collect the issues and problems in memorising *mutashabihat* verses based on the lecturers' and students' perspectives and experiences. The details of the findings are as follows:

1. Student's Awareness on *Mutashabihat* Verses

Based on the interviews conducted, the majority of the respondents; 21 participants were able to explain the meaning of *mutashabihat* verses in the correct manner. However, there were seven (7) students who were confused between the *mutashabihat* verses from the aspect of pronunciation with *mutashabihat* verses in terms of meanings. However, upon receiving an explanation, the students understood the subject clearly. There were also two (2) students who did not understand and were unable to provide the correct explanation on *mutashabihat* verses. Most of the students were able to provide the correct example for *mutashabihat* verses upon request.

Even though the finding shows that students' awareness of *mutashabihat* verses is high, there were also a number of students who were not aware of these verses despite the fact that they had memorised the whole Quran. This seems to suggest that their institutions did not include the topic of *mutashabihat* verses in formal courses or the syllabus. As a result, some students were unaware of the subject although they had gone through the whole process of memorising 30 chapters of the Quran for almost three (3) years. This finding is further supported by the response from two (2) students stating that they only received an explanation on *mutashabihat* verses from their fellow colleagues and not from their lecturers.

2. Methods of Teaching /*Tasmi'* *Mustashabihat* Verses

Concerning methods applied in explaining *mutashabihat* verses to students during teaching sessions, all interviewed lecturers stated that there is no specific method ordained by their respective institutions. Instead, the lecturers use their own method individually which is based on their educational background.

This finding is supported by responses from 20 students who stated that there is no special emphasis given to *mutashabihat* verses during normal teaching/*tasmi'* sessions.

However, eight (8) participants stated that their teachers do provide some explanations on *mutashabihat* verses in teaching/tasmi' sessions, although they do not happen regularly. The students also mentioned that they were occasionally reminded by their teachers on *mutashabihat* verses during tasmi'. The lecturers also clarify to students the correct verses whenever the students recite the *mutashabihat* verses incorrectly. Four (4) respondents mentioned that they gave special emphasis on *mutashabihat* verses during teaching/tasmi' sessions, however, it was out of their own initiatives.

3. References on *Mutashabihat* Verses

In terms of references, all participants (lecturers and students) agree that there is no formal or informal reference materials or book suggested by their respective institutions. However, a majority of the students are aware of books or mushafs which were designed specifically to facilitate students to master the *mutashabihat* verses.

Two (2) lecturers stated that they suggested some books to their students as references. However, students are not obliged to read those references and it is left to them to explore those references without any formal guidance by lecturers.

A total of 13 students had seen the references, but only a few had used and remembered their names. Other four (4) students mentioned that they became aware of the books through colleagues' and students' associations.

Meanwhile, regarding the accessibility of references on *mutashabihat* verses provided in the institutional library, two (2) lecturers stated that their institutional libraries provided several titles on *mutashabihat* verses, but the quantity of reference materials is insufficient. Two (2) other lecturers are not sure whether there are any specific references regarding *mutashabihat* verses provided in their institutional libraries.

4. Student Achievement in Memorising and Remembering *Mutashabihat* Verses

All participating lecturers stated that the majority of tahfiz students are at a weak level and have problems in memorising the *mutashabihat* verses. This problem can be seen in students' recitation where they frequently misread consonant letters and verses. Only a small number of students are able to master the memorisation of *mutashabihat* verses adequately.

Furthermore, the outcome of this poor memorisation can be seen in their examination results, when only a few of the students passed with distinction. A majority of the students passed with moderate levels and the rest did not pass the Quranic memorisation course.

Discussion

Through the analysis of the research findings, it can be concluded that the contributing factors for students' weaknesses in regards to *mutashabihat* verses are no specific and standard method ordained by the institution in teaching *mutashabihat* verses as well as no formal or informal reference used in both institutions. Hence, the lack of awareness among students on *mutashabihat* verses and their poor achievement in memorising *mutashabihat* verses are reflected in their exam results. The relationship between the cause and the effect can be explained by the following figure:

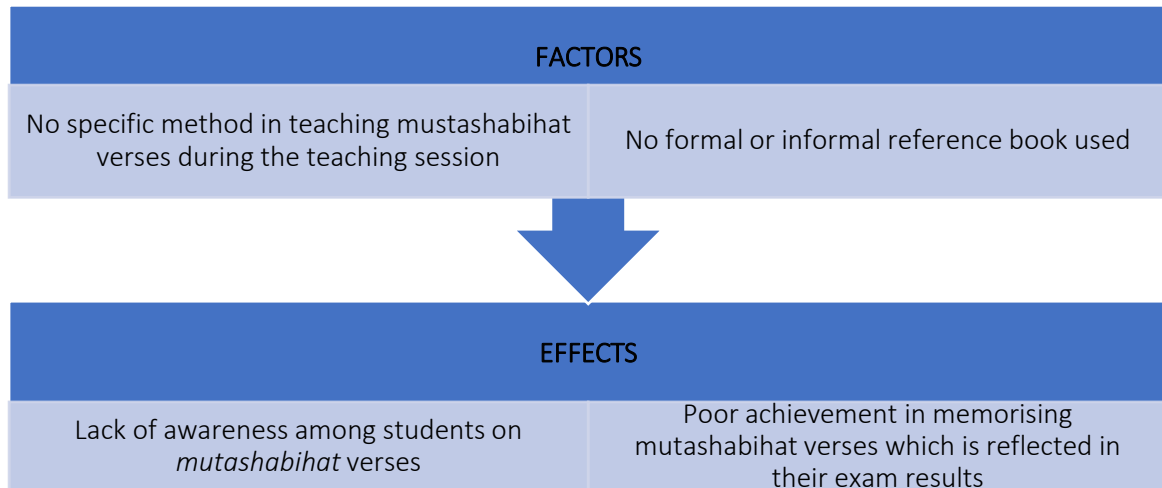


Figure 2: Relationship between the issues and problems in memorising Quranic *mutashabihat* verses

This figure shows that there is an urgent need for improvement in the method of teaching memorisation of the Qur'an, especially on *mutashabihat* verses. Among the suggestions that can be implemented to resolve these issues are:

1. Special emphasis and explanations from teachers during tasmi' sessions to improve the memorisation of *mutashabihat* verses, especially when a student recites the verses incorrectly.
2. Random questioning techniques can be applied during sessions.
3. Application of a strict approach to ensure student efficiency; only students with an acceptable level of memorisation is allowed to proceed to memorise new pages (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Concerning references that can help strengthen students' memorisation, this study found that both institutions do not ordain any formal references. It is left to the initiative of lecturers to suggest any additional references to students. However, some lecturers were not aware of the books on *mutashabihat* verses in their institutional libraries. This shows that some tahfiz lecturers do not see the importance of these references as additional resources to strengthen students' memorisation. Thus, they did not introduce them to the students.

To improve students' memorisation performance especially on *mutashabihat* verses, it is advisable for tahfiz institutions to provide references on *mutashabihat* verses. As previously stated, according to Bilal (2003), the number of books that have been written on *mutashabihat* verses amount to 62 books and they consist of different methods of compilation. Some scholars compiled the *mutashabihat* verses based on similar words which have been mentioned in different verses. While there are others who have compiled the verses with suggestions on how to differentiate them. Another method adopted by scholars is to compile the *mutashabihat* verses with the focus on different interpretations between those verses.

Some of the compilations which are based on similar words in different verses are:

1. 'Aun al-Rahman fi Hifz al-Qur'an, written by al-Qalmuni (1992).

2. Al-Iqaz fi Tazkir al-Huffaz, written by al-Misri (2004).
3. Dalil al-Huffaz fi Mutashabih al-Alfaz, written by al-Zawawi (2010).

The following are *mutashabihat* compilations with suggestions on how to differentiate them:

1. Mu'jam al-*Mutashabihat*, written by Al-Zawawi (2016).
2. Al-Dabt bi al-Ta'qid li al-Mutashabih al-Lafzi fi al-Qur'an al-Majid, written by al-Hunain (2008).
3. Ighasah al-Luhfan Fi Dabt Mutasyabih al-Quran, written by Al-Warraqiyy (n.d.)

Lastly are the compilations with focus on different interpretations between *mutashabihat* verses:

1. Durrah al-Tanzil wa Ghurrah al-Takwil, written by al-Iskafi (2001)
2. Al-Burhan fi Taujih Mutashabih al-Qur'an, written by al-Kirmani (2016).
3. Milak al-Takwil, written by al-Gharnati (1971).

These books may be considered as references for tahfiz students to strengthen their memorisation of *mutashabihat* verses (Shukri & al-'Auratani, 2013; `Abd al-Sallam, 2015). These references are similar to making notes such as the method well applied by the majority of the respondents. The respondents make notes on the number of pages, name of the surahs, verses' numbers, chapters and the specific words that may cause confusion in a verse (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Through these recommendations, it is anticipated that students' awareness of the *mutashabihat* verses will improve. This will then boost their achievement in memorising the Quran and examination results.

Conclusion

The study found that there are two main issues in memorising *mutashabihat* verses: 1) no specific and standard method ordained by the institution in terms of teaching *mutashabihat* verses, 2) no formal or informal reference used in both institutions. These two factors have resulted in two major problems: 1) lack of awareness among students on *mutashabihat* verses, 2) poor achievement in memorising and remembering them. To solve these problems, it is advisable for tahfiz institutions to suggest a reference on *mutashabihat* verses in their curriculum as a formal textbook or references for students. Moreover, tahfiz teachers should be required to implement a certain way of teaching with special emphasis and explanations during tasmii' sessions to improve the memorisation of *mutashabihat* verses, especially when a student recites these verses incorrectly.

Theoretically, this study has identified two major issues and problems in memorising *mutashabihat* verses among tahfiz students. These issues and problems are related to students' ability in identifying the *mutashabihat* verses, as well as the methodology that should be applied by the tahfiz institution in teaching those verses. Although this study only involves two tahfiz institutions in Malaysia, but contextually the finding of the study can be applied to all tahfiz institutions in Malaysia because both locations of the study represent government and private tahfiz institutions.

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