Needs and Preferences of Qur'anic Arabic Vocabulary Learners Regarding Learning through Qur'anic Arabic Mobile Applications

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Abstract--- This preliminary research intends to discover the needs and preferences of Qur'anic Arabic learners regarding learning Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary through mobile applications. Specifically, we would like to identify what features are required by Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary learners in a Qur'anic Arabic Vocabulary mobile application in order for them to be able to learn Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary effectively. This study uses the phenomenology research design with semi-structured interviews as data gathering instruments. The collected data were analyzed in Nvivo 12 plus software using thematic analysis. The findings from this study indicated that novice learners need to learn vocabulary items, have access to the tafseer of the word or verse being studied, and be given ample vocabulary exercises so that they can internalize the vocabulary items being studied. Added to this, vocabulary items contained in Juz 30 of the Qur'an should be emphasized due to their familiarity with them (for recitation in their daily salaah). As for their preferences, they would like the app to be interactive, be equipped with progress indicators, and preferably include audio of the pronunciation of the studied vocabulary item. Learners are also willing to spend from thirty minutes to an hour in one sitting. For advanced learners, lessons on grammatical inflection analysis or I'rab should be given for them to advance further in Qur'anic Arabic learning.

Keywords--- Qur'anic Arabic, Vocabulary Mobile Apps, Vocabulary Learning, MALL, Thematic Analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the world today, most Muslims are non-native speakers of Arabic.This is due to the small percentage (roughly 20%) of Arab in Muslim population in the whole world (Desilver & Masci, 2017).As for the rest of the Muslim population (roughly 80%) who are not Arabic native speakers, only a small proportion had the opportunity or the inclination to learn Arabic during their years of schooling. When these Muslims starting to work, they would not see the importance of learning Arabic in their lives. However, when they get older, and approaching the middle age, many of them would start to be more pious and more inclined to make preparations for the afterlife. Such preparations are related to finding ways to improve their devotional activities which include the recitation and understanding of the Holy Qur'an.

Unfortunately for these Muslims who are becoming interested and motivated in learning Qur'anic Arabic, they do not have the luxury of time, energy, or financial resources to attend Qur'anic Arabic classes. Therefore, there

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must be a way for them to be able to learn Qur'anic Arabic at their own leisure and pace. In this digital age, mobile applications seem to be the answer to the problems mentioned above (McQuiggan, McQuiggan, Sabourin, & Kosturko, 2015; Udell & Woodill, 2014). Through mobile apps, Muslim adults can learn Qur'anic Arabic anywhere, at any convenient time to them, and at their own pace (Shamsuddin et al., 2016; Kovachev, Cao, Klamma, & Jarke, 2011). In fact, there are already a few Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary mobile applications (apps) available on Google Play Store. However, if compared to English vocabulary mobile apps, their number is far fewer. A recent search in Google PlayStore reveals less than 40 android mobile apps dedicated to teaching/learning Qur'anic Arabic. In fact, many of these apps are just translations. At the time of this writing, there are only eleven apps which can truly be categorized as MALL vocabulary apps(Mustaffa, Salam, Maskun, & Abdullah, 2019); apps which teaches learners about Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary by giving learners planned lessons, then testing learners' understanding/mastery of the lessons by giving them appropriate assessments.

Out of the estimated 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide, about 80% of them are non-Arabs whose first language is not Arabic (Abdullah &Pathan, 2013) and even though many of them learned how to read the Arabic text of the Qur'an when they were young, they generally donot understand what they were reading. This is unfortunate because understanding Qur'anic Arabic will make a Muslim's acts of worship much more meaningful especially during the performance of salaah (ritual prayers), when reciting and listening to the Qur'an, when listening to the Friday sermon, when making supplications etcetera.

As we are living in a world where smart phones are ubiquitous, some mobile apps developers have tried their best to tackle this problem by introducing the apps to educate lay Muslims on the topic of Qur'anic vocabulary. Even though there are already a great number of apps dedicated to the learning of English vocabulary (Wu, 2015; Ahmad, Armarego & Sudweeks, 2017; Deng & Trainin, 2015; Mindog, 2016; Wang, 2017; Zou, Yan, Li, 2018), the same could not be said with Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary apps. Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, empirical research in this area is almost non existent in English research literature. For example, there has not been any research to determine the needs of Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary learners for a mobile application and the content and components needed in a Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary mobile application in order for it to be able to satisfy those needs. This study intends to fill the gap mentioned above.

The purpose of this preliminary study is to identify Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary learners' needs and preferences pertaining to Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary mobile applications. Specifically, we would like to identify what features are required by Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary learners in a Qur'anic Arabic Vocabulary mobile application in order for them to be able to learn Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary effectively.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary Learning

In the past decade, numerous applied research on MALL and especially in vocabulary instructional apps have indicated that vocabulary learning apps can assist adult learners in their vocabulary learning (Zengning, 2011; Song & Fox, 2005; Nation, 2013; Wu, 2014; Guo,2013). Learning through mobile apps is especially useful for adult learners because of the affordances that they provide such as "learning anytime, anywhere" (McQuiggan,

McQuiggan, Sabourin, & Kosturko, 2015; Attewell & Savill-Smith, 2005; Baharom, 2013), learning in an informal, less apprehensive setting, and with persistent connection to the internet (Kukulska-Hulme,2005).

As regards the Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary, through our own experience and interactions with other Muslim adults, we can surmise that generally Muslim adults need to learn more receptive vocabulary knowledge rather than productive vocabulary use. Theydonotneedtolearntobeproficientinspeakingorwritingthelanguage.They need only to be able to understand the language when they read, recite, or listen to the verses of the Qur'an (Abdullah & Pathan, 2013; Wahba, Taha & England, 2014) because their need to understand Qur'anic Arabicis primarily dueto religious and devotional purposes. Furthermore, the majority of Muslim adults would have memorized a number of surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an in order to recite the min their prayers (salaah) and be quite familiar with the recitation of certain other surahs such as surah YaaSi in which would often be recited in regular religious

gatherings. Most of the above they learned through the method of rote memorization, which is the prevalent method of learning the recitation of the Qur'an. Even though, for the longest time, due to the influence of linguists such as Krashen and his influential Monitor Model (1981), and the influence of the Communicative language teaching approach championed by Halliday and Hymes, where language teachers and practitioners have favoured meaningful and active vocabulary learning strategies rather than memorization, others have argued that, especially in the case of learning the Qur'an, memorization has always been (throughout the ages), and will continue to be an important learning technique to be employed (Azeez, 2004; Iqbal & Ahmad, 2015; Moore, 2006; Moore, 2011; Shamsuddin et al.,2016).

Furthermore, starting in the 1980s, a growing body of research has shown empirical evidence that cognitive based vocabulary teaching methods such as the direct teaching and learning of vocabulary as opposed to 'incidental learning' can be very effective (Fitzpatrick, Al-Qarni, & Meara, 2008; Laufer & Shmueli, 1997; Nation &Waring, 1997; Webb, 2009) and efficient (Fitzpatrick, Al-Qarni & Meara, 2008; Mondria & Mondria-De Vries, 1994, Mondria & Wiersma, 2004). Moreover, the direct teaching and learning of vocabulary items through decontextualized pair-associated learning such as by using the flash-card technique has also been shown to be effective (Bahrick, Bahrick, Bahrick, & Bahrick, 1993; Bahrick & Phelps, 1987).

In sum, for this study, in terms of vocabulary learning theories, we will be informed by the behaviourist theory of rote learning which is also supported and has been proven to work (for more than 1400 years) for the teaching and learning of Qur'anic knowledge, and the cognitive theory of focusing on form through the direct teaching and learning of vocabulary items by using cognitive based strategies such as using the flash-card. Furthermore, since the needs of Muslim adults are focused more on obtaining receptive vocabulary knowledge rather than for productive vocabulary use, this study will be informed by studies which focus on this area (Webb, 2005; Webb, 2009; Mochida & Harrington, 2006).

Mobile Learning

The term Mobile learning, also known as M-Learning, is usually employed to refer to the activities of learning and teaching with mobile technologies. There are two important implications denoted by the word mobile in mobile learning. The first is learner mobility. Using mobile learning, learners are not restricted to any physical location in

order to engage educational activities. Learning can happen anywhere outside the classroom, as long as the learners have the motivation to do so. The second implication of the word mobile in mobile learning is the mobile device. In order for learning to take place anywhere, the mobile device needs to be small enough to fit in a pocket or handbag, or can fit in the palm of one's hand. Examples of this type of mobile devices are mobile phones, smartphones, the iPad, or PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants).

Researchers have differently defined the meaning of M-learning and the most common definition of M-learning is that it makes learning possible anywhere and anytime (Hwang and Tsai, 2011). O'Malley et al. (2003) have defined mobile learning as taking place when the learner is not at a fixed, predetermined location, or when the learner takes advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies. Wexler, Brown, Metcalf, Rogers, and Wagner (2007) holds M-learning as conveyed through a device that is portable, compact, has internet connection, provides productive activities for users and makes the users become more productive when using it. These three different definitions of M-learning actually share the same main point which is a mobile device has a vital role in the learning area inside or outside of classroom (Hwang and Tsai, 2011).

Mobile Assisted Language Learning

Mobile Assisted Language Learning takes advantage of the mobile learning features and affordances mentioned in the previous section for language learning purposes. Research in the field of Mobile Assisted Language Learning started roughly from the past two decades and have accelerated since 2008, contributing to a wide body of knowledge in this area. Kukulska-Hulme (2014; 2013; 2012; 2010; 2009; 2005), one of the leading researchers and writers on mobile learning technology, for instance, has written on the prospects, aspects, the futures, culture, content delivery and on many more topics of interests in mobile learning. Earlier, Kress and Pachler (2007), reported how mobile language learning is about personalizing learning and that by personalizing or customizing our own learning, we could plan our own learning time, pace and place. Kukulska-Hulme (2009),believes that mobility encourages more active language learning and spontaneous interaction among users. Thus, this will not only change the way language is arned (Kukulska-Hulme,2009), it will also transform how students participate in mobile learning (Ally, 2009).

Since then, numerous applied research on MALL and especially in vocabulary instructional apps have indicated that vocabulary learning apps can assist adult learners in their vocabulary learning (Zengning, 2011; Song & Fox, 2005; Nation, 2013; Wu, 2014; Guo,2013). Learning through mobile apps is especially useful for adult learners because of the affordances that they provide such as "learning anytime, anywhere" (McQuiggan, McQuiggan, Sabourin, & Kosturko, 2015; Attewell & Savill-Smith, 2005; Baharom, 2013), learning in an informal, less apprehensive setting, with persistant connection to the internet, and opportunities for assistance and interaction through social networking (Kukulska-Hulme,2005).

In short, this study will also be informed by MALL theories, especially those espoused by one of the leading researchers in this area, Kukulska-Hulme. Specifically, the study will examine the affordances accorded by mobile learning such as personalized learning, learning anytime, anywhere, learning at own pace, and active learning.

III.   METHODOLOGY

For this preliminary study, we approached it from a phenomenology research design. Creswell (2012) defines a phenomenological study as describing "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (p. 98). For this preliminary study, the phenomenon under study is 'the study of Qur'anic Arabic among Muslim adults". This qualitative study seeks to find out the experiences of Muslim adults in learning Qur'anic Arabic and their needs and preferences in learning it through the medium of mobile applications.

This preliminary study used purposeful sampling in order to sample the respondents. We chose two Qur'anic Arabic students who were one of the researchers' fellow students when he attended face-to-face Qur'anic Arabic classes in Language Academy, UTM. One of the researchers attended two classes by two different Qur'anic Arabic teachers. The two respondents for this preliminary study also attended the same two classes as he did. To triangulate the data, we also chose one of the Qur'anic Arabic teachers as a respondent.

This preliminary study used two instruments for data collection. The first instrument is an interview sheet for interviewing Qur'anic Arabic learners. The second is another interview sheet for interviewing the Qur'anic Arabic teacher. Both interview questions are semi-structured.

In order to collect data, we firstly identified the respondents through purposeful sampling. Because this is a preliminary research, we decided to only have three respondents which include two Qur'anic Arabic learners and one Qur'anic Arabic teacher. After the identification, we contacted and made appointments with the respondents for the interview. The interviews were conducted in the months of October and November, 2019. The interview with the Qur'anic Arabic teacher was done on 19th November 2019. Data were collected using video which were later transcribed.

The transcriptions of the interview sessions were uploaded to the qualitative analysis software, Nvivo 12 in order to facilitate data analysis. The transcriptions were then coded using the method of thematic analysis popularized by Braun and Clarke (2006). The thematic content analysis is chosen as the method to analyze these mobile applications because of its ability to generate meaning-based patterns and themes from the data collected (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2018).

IV.   FINDINGS

The objective of this study is to determine the current needs and preferences of Muslim adult learners regarding their Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary learning through mobile applications. Based on the data collected from interviewing three respondents, the following findings are discovered.

Findings on the Needs of Learners Regarding Learning Qur'anic Arabic Vocabulary through Mobile Applications

Through analyzing the transcripts from the interviews, several needs of the learners have been identified. The first need is obviously the need to learn vocabulary items, especially the vocabulary pertaining to the last chapter of the Qur'an, which is Juz (section) 30. Both Qur'anic Arabic learners interviewed indicated that they need to understand the Qur'anic Arabic words in Juz 30 of the Qur'an. For example, respondent 1 (male learner) indicated

that he not only needs to memorize some chapters in Juz 30 but he also needs to understand them. Similarly, respondent 2 (female learner) also mentioned that she needs to understand the Qur'an. Both respondents 1 and 2 indicated that their current understanding of Qur'anic words are very poor. Respondent 1 said that on a scale of 10, he is at 2 in terms of understanding while respondent 2 stated that her understanding of Qur'anic words is at the A2 CEFR level. The Qur'anic teacher, respondent 3 (male teacher) also indicated that in his more than twenty years of experience in teaching Qur'anic Arabic, the most common problem among his students are their lack of knowledge on the vocabulary of the Qur'an.

Another need mentioned by respondents 1 and 3 is the need for tafseer (Qur'anic exegesis) to be included in the vocabulary mobile application. Respondent 1 wanted tafseer to be included because through them, he would be able to understand Qur'anic vocabulary more deeply. Added to this, respondent 3 mentioned that the inclusion of tafseer is important because some words of the Qur'an must not be taken literally as the intended meaning might not be the apparent meaning of the word. He further stressed that the ulama' (scholars) have made it haram (impermissible) for any lay person to study the meaning of the Qur'an without referring to tafseers by Qur'anic scholars.

Yet another need stated by all three respondents is the need for there to be exercises in the vocabulary mobile application in order to facilitate understanding or memorization of individual vocabulary items. Respondent 3 for example thinks that exercises given on the vocabulary items will help learners memorize them faster. Furthermore, respondent 3 stated that for beginner students, it is wise to let them memorize vocabulary items which are contained in the short chapters in Juz 30 so that when they perform their salaah, they will be able to understand what they are reciting. He also stated that for beginners, they also need to be taught basic Arabic grammar such as mubtada' (subject) and khobar (object) as in the sentence Zaidun Qaimun. Finally, respondent 3 also stated that for more advanced learners, they must learn how to do i'rab (Arabic grammatical analysis) and he has not found this lesson or function in any mobile applications in the Malay or English language.

Findings on the Preferences of Learners Regarding Learning Qur'anic Arabic Vocabulary through Mobile Applications

For the preferences of learners on the Qur'anic vocabulary mobile applications, both respondents 1 and 2 prefer that they be interactive in nature. In fact, even respondent 3 indicated that an interactive lesson would give more benefit to learners. When asked about having 'games' in the lessons, all the respondents seem to indicate that they do not want them. They prefer to have quizzes instead. One of the respondents, respondent 2 strongly felt that vocabulary mobile apps should show students' progress indicators so that they can gauge where they are at with the lesson at hand. Respondent 2 also wants the lessons to include audio files of the pronunciation of the vocabulary items.

In terms of payment for the mobile application, respondent 3 agrees that if the application is of quality and comprehensive enough with its exercises, then the developer should charge a small amount of money for the use of the product. Finally, in terms of the time willing to be spent on learning vocabulary through mobile applications, respondent 1 said that he is willing to spend from thirty minutes to one hour per day to study.

V.   DISCUSSION

As indicated by all the respondents, the vocabulary items are the most important thing to be taught in a vocabulary mobile application. Since respondents 1 and 2 are beginners in Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary, the learning of vocabulary items, especially the ones present in the short surahs (chapters) in Juz 30, are of utmost importance. Respondent 3 thinks that the easiest way to do this is to have the words memorized by doing a lot of exercises. In his opinion, this strategy is very beneficial to beginner students of Qur'anic Arabic. Furthermore, it is also important to include tafseer of studied words or phrases in order to protect the learners from having a wrong understanding of the Qur'anic words being studied because the literal meaning of the vocabulary item might not be the intended meaning of the Qur'an. Besides learning the vocabulary, learners should also learn basic Arabic grammar so that their understanding of the vocabulary items can be made more complete. Finally, for more advanced learners, lessons in i'rab would be very beneficial so that they will know how to inflect the nominal, adjectival, and verbal suffixes of Qur'anic Arabic words and thus gain a deeper understanding of the verse being studied.

In terms of preferences, all the respondents agree that interactive applications would be beneficial. This is because interactive applications would engage learners more and provide more interesting activities for them to do. Furthermore, student progress indicators would tell students where they stand with the lesson and perhaps motivate them to finish the lesson. Vocabulary applications with word pronunciation features would also benefit learners in that they would know how to pronounce words. However, even though for other applications 'games' would be appreciated, the respondents indicated that for learning Qur'anic Arabic, especially for Muslim adults, exercises and quizzes might be more appropriate.

VI.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions can be made for the study:

1. Beginner students need to learn vocabulary items first, especially those that is used in the shorter surahs in Juz 30.

2. For faster and more immediate beneficial results, students need to memorize the vocabulary items occurring in Juz 30 of the Qur'an, especially the vocabulary items which are in the short surahs.

3. Students need a lot of vocabulary item exercises.

4. Students also need tafseer to be included with the lessons so that they can maintain the correct understanding of Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary items.

5. Students also need to learn some basic grammar in order to deepen their understanding of the vocabulary items they are learning.

6. Advanced students of Qur'anic Arabic need to learn i'rab of Qur'anic verses so that they will learn the meaning of Qur'anic Arabic verses more fully.

7. Students prefer Qur'anic Arabic applications which are interactive.

8. Students prefer applications which include progress indicators.

9. Some students prefer vocabulary items which come with audio pronunciations.

10. Students do not prefer games to be included. Instead they prefer applications to have exercises and quizzes.

11. Some students prefer to spend from 30 minutes to one hour per day to learn Qur'anic Arabic.

The following are recommendations formulated based on the study and recommendations for future research.

Recommendations from the Study

1. Vocabulary items should be the main emphasis of Qur'anic Arabic mobile application developers.

2. For faster and more immediate beneficial results, students should be encouraged to memorize the vocabulary items occurring in Juz 30 of the Qur'an, especially the vocabulary items which are in the short surahs.

3. A lot of exercises should be given to students to facilitate their understanding / memorizing of targeted vocabulary items.

4. Tafseer should also be included alongside the lessons to prevent students from misunderstanding the meaning of vocabulary items.

5. Some basic grammar should also be taught to deepen the understanding of students of the vocabulary items they are learning.

6. For more advanced students, lessons on i'rab must be included.

7. Developers should strive to make their Qur'anic Arabic applications more interactive.

8. Developers should include progress indicators in their apps.

9. Developers should include vocabulary item pronunciation audio in their apps.

10. Developers should include exercises and quizzes in their apps.

11. Developers could charge for their apps but at a reasonable price.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. More respondents should be used to gather more comprehensive data.

2. Researchers should also choose other respondents who could provide more insight into other aspects of this phenomenon such as instructional designers and mobile app developers.

3. Researchers should also study existing Qur'anic Arabic mobile applications in detail in order to find out features which should be included or discarded.

Implications and Limitations of the Study

This study has a real-world or practical significance. The findings of this research which would be converted into suggestions and guidelines for the development of Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary mobile applications would

directly benefit developers of Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary mobile applications by giving them a set of suggestions and guidelines on how to design and develop effective mobile applications for the teaching and learning of Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary for Muslim adults. This would in turn benefit Muslim adults because they would be the beneficiaries of these applications. It should be noted that the understanding of Qur'anic Arabic is important to every Muslim, especially during their adult years where they need Islamic guidance in every facet of their lives such as in their relationships with their family members, co-workers, and the society at large. Qur'anic principles and teachings should govern their behaviour in their homes, at their workplaces, and other public spheres, and their understanding of the Qur'an would facilitate these. Most important of all, the understanding of Qur'anic Arabic would enable Muslim adults to improve upon their devotional and ritual practices such as reading the Qur'an, performing salaah, and understanding Islamic lectures.

The scope of this study will also be limited to the learning of Qur'anic Arabic only. This study is not concerned with other forms of Arabic such as standard Arabic or colloquial Arabic. The target population of this study are Muslim adults who wanted to study Qur'anic Arabic vocabulary items in order to understand what they are reading or reciting in their devotional practices such as during their reading of the Qur'an or during their prayers. Since this study is in reality, a preliminary study, the respondents and instrumentation of the study is also limited due to time constraint. For this study, only one instrument was used, which is the face-to-face interview. For respondents, only three respondents were interviewed which comprise two Qur'anic Arabic learners and one Qur'anic Arabic teacher.

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