

Effect of Presenting the Holy Quran Verses on Grammar Achievement and Motivation Enhancement of Iranian High School EFL Learners

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Abstract

Muslims believe that the The Holy Quran is the message of God Almighty which has been transmitted to His messenger, Prophet Mohammad (PBUH), through revelation in the Arabic language. This Holy book has been translated into many languages, including English. Although the content of the The Holy Quran has been translated into the English language, few studies have been conducted to explore the beneficial effects of The Holy Quran verses on learning English. This study investigated whether using the The Holy Quran's verses to teach English grammar improves the grammar learning and enhances motivation of high school EFL learners. To this end, 40 homogeneous participants were selected from a high school and then were assigned into two different groups (experimental vs. control). All the learners in the two groups took a grammar pretest, as well as a motivation questionnaire. The experimental group learners were exposed to Quranic verses in their English classes, while the control group learners attended their regular language classes. Finally, the participants took a grammar posttest as well as a motivation and an attitude questionnaire. The results of the one-way ANCOVA showed that the performance of the participants in the experimental group outweighed that of the control group. The statistical analysis of the attitude questionnaire showed that positive attitudes were formed in the students towards this technique of teaching grammar via The Holy Quran verses in English.

Keywords: Motivation, attitude, the Holy Quran, explicit grammar instruction

Introduction

For Muslims, the The Holy Quran is the message of the Almighty God which has been transmitted to His messenger, the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h), through revelation. This was in response to God's command: *Read*. Muslims are required to read Quran, reflect on its verses, and act accordingly. Since the Quran is in Arabic, it has been translated into many languages in order to convey the message of God to people across the world. This holy book has raised the status of Muslims all over the world; the more they read, reflect on its verses and make it part of their life, the more God will raise their status in this life and afterlife. As the Prophet said: "Verily Allah raises some people by this Book and lowers others by it".

Considering the high importance of the The Holy Quran for Muslims, it is necessary to learn about it and pass on the information to our children. A good way to gain this information is by reading the stories of the Quran. Through these stories, the reader will be introduced to past nations and ancient civilizations, the prophets and their people, the believers and the disbelievers, and the oppressors and their fates. This holy book describes various categories of people with different characteristics and gives the choice to the reader in terms of the path s/he should follow for salvation in this life and afterlife.

Furthermore, because of the status of English as an international language, these stories have been translated into English to convey the message of God to a great number of people. It is possible to use these stories for learning English in general and grammar in particular, especially

the past tenses. In this way, it might be possible to teach English and Islamic theology at the same time.

Teaching of grammar

The term 'grammar' is a complex term having several meanings and definitions. Grammar is at the center of language teaching and learning. Different scholars define grammar in different ways. In general, grammar is defined as the combinations of word groups in an acceptable unit. Grammar, as one of the main aspects of language, should be instructed and learned. According to Ur (2012, p. 76), grammar is "the way words are put together to make correct sentences".

In the early 1970s, Stephen Krashen proposed a theory of second Language (L2) learning that diminished the importance of teaching grammar. However, the findings of a great deal of empirical research has demonstrated that explicit teaching of grammar has actually resulted in significant gains in L2 proficiency (Cowan, 2008). The teaching of grammar plays a crucial role in L2 teaching. Grammar is one of the most important aspects of a language. However, it is more important for foreign language (FL) learners than the native speakers. The reason is that in the process of acquiring the first language (L1), the native speakers internalize the grammar of the language, whereas the L2 learners have to devote a great deal of effort to learn the grammatical aspect of the language (Harmer, 2008).

Tabbert (1984) in his article, "Why Teach Grammar?", attempts to highlight the importance of grammar. According to Tabbert "students confuse lie and lay, do not choose who and whom correctly, say infer instead of imply, mismatch subjects and verbs, mix up pronoun reference, use double negatives, etc., and that these mistakes are evidence of their need to study grammar" (p.39).

Moreover, it is believed that grammar is a prerequisite for learning other language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In reading, grammar helps learners to understand the discourse relations existing among sentences. In writing, grammar enables the learners to transform their ideas into coherent sentences so that they can clearly communicate in a written form. In listening and speaking, grammar plays a significant part in grasping and using spoken language because it is believed that learning the grammar of a language is a necessary condition for developing the ability to produce grammatically well-formed utterances in the language (Widodo, 2004; Corder, 1988). Finally, learners need grammar to combine lexical items in order to form clear and meaningful sentences and expressions. Furthermore, Long and Richards (1987) stated that the significant role of grammar in the development of vocabulary and four language skills cannot be ignored.

Motivation in L2/FL learning

There is a general agreement among researchers and educators that motivation plays a significant role in L2/FL learning. Motivation is the primary factor to initiate L2 learning and it is the driving force that sustains learning. Motivation is a prerequisite for achieving long-term goals and without it, even highly talented individuals are unlikely to fully succeed. Because of the significant importance attached to motivation, great many studies have been conducted to uncover the role of motivation in FL/L2 learning (Dörnyei, 1998).

So far, many definitions have been proposed to define the term motivation. However, none of these definitions provide a comprehensive meaning of it. As Dörnyei(1998) stated "although 'motivation' is a term frequently used in both educational and research contexts, it is rather surprising how little agreement there is in the literature with regard to the exact meaning of

this concept (p. 117). However, Dörnyei proposed a good definition of motivation. According to Dörnyei, motivation is a “process whereby a certain amount of instigation force arises, initiates action, and persists as long as no other force comes into play to weaken it and thereby terminate action, or until the planned outcome has been reached” (p. 118).

Several studies have demonstrated that L2 learning motivation may differ with the context in which learning is taking place. As Schmidt, Boriae, and Kassabgy (1996) stated, learning motivation may differ with learning contexts to which L2 learners are exposed. In other words, this means that the amount of exposure to L2 and the amount of motivation for L2 learners are much higher in English as a second language (ESL) contexts than the amount of exposure to L2 and the amount motivation for L2 learners in English as a foreign (EFL) language contexts.

It is possible to classify motivation into four types (intrinsic & extrinsic vs. integrative & instrumental). Here, a brief discussion of these four types of motivations is provided. Intrinsic motivation is an internal willingness to do something because it is satisfying and enjoyable to do. According to Deci (1975), intrinsically motivated activities are “the ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself” (p. 23). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is related to a behavior that is performed as a means to some instrumental end, that is, to receive some extrinsic reward (e.g., good income) or to avoid punishment (Dörnyei, 1998).

Gardner (1985) proposed two types of motivation (Integrative and instrumental). Intrinsic motivation and integrative motivation are very similar concepts (Gardner, 1988). However, the two concepts are different in that the intrinsic motivation refers to positive attitudes toward the learning process and the learning situation. Integrative motivation differs from the intrinsic motivation in that it addresses attitudes towards the L2 community (Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999). As it was mentioned, the integratively motivated learners learn an L2 to become closer or a part of the target community, whereas the instrumentally motivated learners learn an L2 to achieve practical goals (Gardner, 1985).

Learners' attitudes on L2/FL learning

Lambert (1963) developed a 'social psychological model' of learning in which he highlighted the role of cognitive factors such as intelligence and language aptitudes as well as affective factors such as motivation and attitudes. Lambert stated that the degree to which a learner learns an L2 may depend on motivation and attitudes towards the target group and orientations towards L2 learning.

According to Atchade (2002), attitude is the set of opinions and beliefs that the L2 learners hold towards the members of the L2 community, the L2 culture, and in the case of real-world classroom learning, towards the teachers and the learning process. To put it simply, attitude refers to the way of behaving, thinking, or feeling of the learners. Moreover, the attitude in L2 learning can also be regarded as the way L2 learners feel about learning a target language especially because this influences their learning ability.

It is believed that L2 learners' attitudes reflect their opinions or beliefs about the L2 and culture. It is also believed that there is a close relationship between motivation and attitude. Some researchers believe that integrative and instrumental motivations are the reflection of language culture (Atchade, 2002).

In recent years, English has become the dominant FL in Iran in both private and public sectors. There are many language institutes, universities, and schools teaching this language. In the public educational settings, the textbooks are written in the classic grammar-translation format. In the private language schools, however, communicative textbooks are being used to teach English. Mastering grammar has always been an important goal and ambition of many

Iranian EFL students. However, many Iranian students complain that grammar, as one of the most difficult aspects of a FL, has always troubled them. Many of them complain that the grammar's difficulty leads them to make a great many mistakes. They also complain that they need a great deal of practice to appreciate its nuances. As Celce-Murcia (2002) stated, mastering grammar involves a set of decisions regarding "when and why to use one form rather than the other" (p. 121).

The present textbooks which are currently being taught in educational places in Iran are not appropriate enough since they are not designed to reflect Iranian and Islamic culture. Therefore, it is greatly essential for Iranian teachers, curriculum designers, and material developers to use materials that enhance language learning. Therefore, an idea came into the researcher's mind to see whether using Quranic verses would lead to the learning of English grammar. To date, several researchers have attempted to use Quranic lessons for teaching English (e.g., Salehi, Davari, & Yonus, 2015).

Although the primary focus of Quranic studies is on theological research, fewer studies have been conducted in real educational settings. Within the existing literature, only a few studies have explored the effects of Quranic lessons on language learning. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no research has been conducted yet to examine the usefulness of Quran's verses for learning and teaching grammar. Therefore, investigating the effects of Quranic verses on grammar learning of Iranian EFL learners is worth considering.

Literature review

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In a case study, Zhang and Hung (2014) attempted to examine the effectiveness of integrating language awareness into grammar teaching in an EFL context. For this aim, they gave EFL learners language awareness teaching interventions. They had EFL learners to conduct questionnaires and interviews. The results revealed that EFL learners had a positive attitude towards receiving grammar instruction in general and applying cognitive-affective grammar strategies in particular.

In another study, Miles (2014) attempted to use spaced grammar learning in an educational context. The study had three phases: pretesting, treatment, and posttesting. For this purpose, he randomly assigned participants to two groups (spaced and massed) based on their pretest scores. Next, the participants in both groups were given instruction on three grammar items. Finally, the participants received two tests: a translation task and an error identification/correction task. He concluded that the performance of spaced group was better than the performance of the massed group.

The studies which have investigated the role of The Holy Quran in education are rare. In this section, some of the recent studies related to the use of The Holy Quran in education are provided. For instance, Pouralkhas, Rajabi, and Pishgar (2012) investigated the rate of Quran reciting by Persian language and literature students in comparison with students of other fields. For this purpose, they asked male students to respond to a questionnaire in order to explore their depression, anxiety and stress. The results demonstrated that there was a meaningful difference among students who recited Quran and who do not in depression, anxiety, and stress.

In an attempt, Salehi, Davari, and Yunus (2015) attempted to evaluate English for specific purposes (ESP) course book on “the ESP Course of Quranic Sciences and Tradition” taught at some educational settings in Iran. For this aim, they had master students do a questionnaire and an interview. Six teachers were involved in this study. Furthermore, they evaluated the book in terms of topics, content, teaching methodology, skills and strategies. The results of the study

demonstrated the appropriateness of the book for those who wish to pass the Quranic Sciences and Tradition course.

In a study, Chen and Kraklow (2015), investigated Taiwanese university students' motivation and engagement for English learning in the context of internationalization at home. To this end, they surveyed undergraduate students from four classes from the IC. The survey lasted 2 months during the semester of 2012. The analysis of obtained data indicated substantial differences in both intrinsic motivation and English learning engagement between the learners participating in different programs.

The findings of this study will yield invaluable information from the real classrooms to improve the English courses by bridging the gap between theory and practice. This study will provide important insights for the learners and the teachers for the applied learning and teaching of English language in Iran.

The findings of this study have a major impact on the theory and practice of English Language Teaching (ELT). At the theoretical level, the results of this study can encourage researchers to go beyond the boundaries of L2 research to Islamic and Quranic domains to come up with new ways of fostering English grammar learning. At the practical level, the findings of this study will be of a great help to teachers, learners, curriculum developers, textbook writers, and the whole educational system. The findings of this study will be beneficial primarily for the English teachers. In the context of Iran, the concept of using Quranic lessons for teaching English is emerging. This study would be of great importance for the EFL teachers since they can apply its methodological techniques in real-world classrooms. Furthermore, the findings of this study will provide EFL teachers with invaluable information concerning learners' beliefs and attitudes about using Quranic lessons for teaching grammar. Learners will also benefit from the findings of this study. The learners can use English Quranic verses and stories, both for practicing L2 grammar and for strengthening their religious beliefs. Moreover, the findings of this study can be beneficial for curriculum developers and syllabus designers in that they can use the teaching methodologies and the activities used in this study to implement Quranic lessons into EFL classes. Finally, textbook authors can write and replace the present textbooks which are affected by cultural damages with books using Quranic stories and verses.

This study will be an invaluable work for the department itself in the sense that no research has been conducted on this topic in the faculty of English Teaching. Furthermore, the teaching methodology which is designed for this study will be served as an example to modify the existing teaching methodologies or design new ones. Those methodologies would also help the Ministry of Education in planning teaching training programs for novice L2 teachers in a practical way. Moreover, the high school students' insights will add value to the literature on Quranic lessons and EFL grammar instruction. Further, the study will produce practical recommendations on improving ELT methodology in educational contexts in Iran.

In a study, Nabi Karimi (2013) attempted to explore the relationship between EFL students' Internet-specific personal epistemology and the grammar achievement in a hypermedia context. For this purpose, he asked EFL learners to respond to an Internet-Specific Epistemological Questionnaire to select a homogenous sample. He then assigned 24 EFL learners into 2 groups of 12 participants each. Further, the participants in both groups received online grammar instruction and were then tested on the several weeks later. They also received an Internet-Specific Epistemological Questionnaire once more. The results showed that Internet-specific epistemology did not lead to further learning.

Research Questions

The aim of the present study was to examine the impact of Quranic verses on L2 grammar learning. Furthermore, it was an attempt to investigate if the Quranic verses have significant effects on Iranian EFL learners' motivation in learning English. Moreover, it aimed at investigating the attitudes of high school students' learning of English towards the use of Quranic verses for learning grammar. So, the following three research questions were addressed:

RQ1: Does presenting The Holy Quran verses in English positively affect grammar achievement of Iranian high school EFL learners?

RQ2: Does presenting The Holy Quran verses in English lead to motivation enhancement of Iranian high school EFL learners?

RQ3: What is the high school EFL learners' attitude towards presenting The Holy Quran verses in English at the beginning of English classes of high school?

Methodology

Design

This study used a quasi -experimental research with a pretest-posttest design. In this study, the independent variable was grammar instruction through Quranic verses and the dependent variables were the changes in the grammatical competence as well as changes in the motivational level of the participants, which were determined by means of the scores on a survey questionnaire and a grammar test.

Participants

The participants of this study were Iranian pre-university school EFL students (all male, between 17 and 18 years old). They were all Iranian, and their first language was Persian. The participants had different English backgrounds. Some of them had received English instruction at private language institutes. In order to select participants at A2 level, a Quick Placement Test (QPT, see Appendix A) was administered to 70 learners out of whom 40 participants who scored 18-29 were selected. These forty homogeneous male High schoolers were then divided into two groups: Quranic Verses Group (QVG), and Control Group (CG), each consisting of 20 learners.

Materials and instruments

In order to have a homogeneous sample, a QPT was used. QPT is an English test that focuses on general knowledge of English. It focuses on students who are able to handle simple situations and simple English communications. This test demonstrates language proficiency at different levels. For the purpose of this study, the students who scored 18-29 were selected. This range of score represents Level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL) that fits our participants' level of proficiency best. This test encompasses 2 parts and has a total number of sixty questions.

Moreover, the participants received a pretest and a posttest. The purpose of this test was to check grammar proficiency of the students before and after the treatment. In order to determine the reliability of the grammar test, it was piloted on a group of 10 students with the same characteristics as the participants of the study. Then KR-21 formula was applied. The result was 0.76 which means the test was reliable. To make sure about the validity of the test the comments of three experienced English teachers were obtained. Furthermore, in order to check whether teaching grammar through Quranic verses had a positive impact on participants' level of motivation, the students were asked to do a motivation survey before and after the main study.

The participants also received an attitude questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire was to explore students' beliefs and attitudes regarding learning grammar through Quranic verses and stories. The questionnaire was researcher-made and encompassed 15 items to be responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

Furthermore, the validity and the reliability of the questionnaires were established. At first, the validity of the questionnaires was established. Some experts were asked to read the questionnaire and give their opinions on whether they saw any problem or not. Further, the reliability of the questionnaires was determined. To do so, a group of participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires and to provide researcher with feedback on any difficulties that they had with items. The questionnaire was revised based on the feedbacks and comments of the experts and students. Furthermore, the reliability coefficient (alpha) of the questionnaires was calculated. The reliability coefficient (alpha) of both questionnaires was acceptable (alpha >.70).

Data collection

The study was carried out in a formal school setting. Prior to the start of the experiment, participants received instructions about the nature and the procedure of the study. They were told that they would be asked to fill out questionnaires and they would receive grammar instruction using a new teaching methodology. All the participants agreed to participate in the study. Before running the main study, a QPT was conducted. Further, 40 participants who scored 18-29 were chosen. The score 18-29 is an indication of A2 level. After selecting a homogeneous sample, the main study was started out. At first, a total number of 40 homogeneous male High schoolers were divided into two groups: QVG and CG, each consisting of 20 learners. In order to obtain the most reliable data for the research questions, two different types of questionnaires and a pre-test and a post-test were conducted. The study consisted of three different phases: pretesting, treatment, and posttesting.

In the pretest phase, each student was given a grammar test and a motivation questionnaire. The purpose of the grammar test was to evaluate the grammatical proficiency of the students before receiving grammar instruction and to eliminate the effects of prior knowledge. Moreover, the participants were asked to respond to a motivation survey. The purpose of motivation survey was to measure participants' motivation before receiving treatment. The learning sessions were instructional sessions on the grammatical points that were new to the participants. In the pretest, the grammatical items that the participants had difficulty with were identified (e.g., past perfect verb tense, the modal would) to teach to the students. Examples:

- *But when it had illumined all around him, Allah took away their light. (Quran 2:17)*
- *Then when he had informed them of their names, He said: (Quran 2:33)*
- *Do you then hope that they would believe in you, and a party from among them indeed used to hear the Word of Allah, then altered it after they had understood it,. . (Quran 2:75)*
- *They would say: They are gone away from us... Allah had guided us... (Quran 7:43)*
- *And what would make you know that he would purify himself. (Quran 80:3)*
- *But he would not attempt the uphill road, (Quran 90:11)*

Later, some simple English verses containing the target grammatical points and their Farsi translations were found online. These verses were used as examples to clarify the to-be-learned grammatical points.

The instructional sessions lasted for 6 weeks. The participants in both learning groups received 2 hours of English grammar instruction every week. The teaching methodology followed the standard grammar instruction (i.e., presentation, practice, production) with the only

exception that examples were selected from the The Holy Quran verses. In other words, the The Holy Quran verses were used for presenting and practicing the grammar points.

In the posttest phase, the same motivation questionnaire was done in order to measure the participants' level of motivation. This survey served as a posttest in order to assess the participants' level of motivation after receiving grammar instruction. Moreover, participants were given a posttest. The aim of the posttest was to evaluate the grammar performance of the participants and to check whether learning grammar by means of Quranic verses had any effect on the grammatical proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Furthermore, the participants were asked to respond to an attitude questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire was to explore learners' attitudes towards using Quranic verses for teaching grammar. The timing of the survey was self-paced and participants were given help if it was required. The questionnaire survey included 15 items which were designed in the Likert Scale form. Respondents were required to give responses on a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree).

Data analysis

In order to answer the first question of the study, a one-way ANCOVA was utilized. The motive behind using this test was that ANCOVA controls for any possible pre-existing differences between the groups, and then compares their posttest scores.

The second research question of the study was also answered by means of one-way ANCOVA for the same reason stated above. Finally, to find about the learners' attitudes towards the use of Quranic verses in English classes, their answers to the attitude questionnaire were tallied and mean score of each item was calculated. Since there were 5 options ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1), and since the average value of choices was 3.00, the means of items were compared to 3.00 using one sample *t* test.

Results

Research question 1

Research Question One was: 1) Does presenting The Holy Quran verses in English positively affect grammar achievement of Iranian high school EFL learners? To compare the grammar posttest scores of the QVG and CG learners, independent-samples *t* test could have been used. However, to achieve the same objective, and to make certain that the variances in the posttest scores were not because of the probable preexisting differences among the learners in the two groups, one-way ANCOVA was conducted. This test controls for any possible pre-existing differences among the groups (i.e. the pretest scores), adjusts the posttest scores accordingly, and makes the comparisons. The results of one-way ANCOVA conducted for investigating the impacts of Quranic verses on the grammar achievement of Iranian EFL learners are shown in Tables 1 and 2:

Table1. *Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Posttest Grammar Scores of the Learners in the Two Groups*

Groups	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
QVG	15.12	1.71	20
CG	13.85	1.62	20

Such descriptive statistics as mean and standard deviation are shown for the two groups of learners in Table 1. The posttest grammar mean score of the learners in the QVG ($M = 15.12$)

was the greater than the mean score for the CG ($M = 13.85$). To fret out whether this difference between these two mean scores was statistically significant or not, the researcher needed to look at the *Sig* (2-tailed) column in the ANCOVA table below (Table 2):

Table 2. Results of One-Way ANCOVA for Comparing the Posttest Grammar Scores of the Learners in the Two Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	124.08	2	34.03	86.85	.05	.22
Intercept	65.75	1	45.73	241.08	.08	.19
Pretest	39.35	1	39.65	175.28	.07	.15
Groups	22.92	2	13.45	49.84	.04	.38
Error	10.07	38	.25			
Total	1249.00	40				
Corrected Total	112.17	39				

In Table 2, if you find Groups in the leftmost column and read across this row, under the *Sig.* column, you can find the p value, which should be compared with the significance level. The p value here was smaller than the pretest level of significance ($.04 < .05$), indicating that there was a statistically significant difference between the grammar posttest scores of the QVG and CG. Taking a glance at Table 2 under Partial Eta Squared, in front of Groups, the relevant value in front of Groups was found to be .38. This means that being in one group or another accounted for 38% of the variance in the posttest grammar scores of the learners. Another useful piece of information in Table 2 relates to the influence of the covariate (i.e. the pretest). If you find the line in the table that corresponds to the covariate (i.e. the Pretest), and read across to the *Sig.* level, you can see that the p value here was .07, which was greater than the significance level, indicating that the covariate was not significant, and that it explained 15% of the variance in the posttest grammar scores of the learners.

Research question 2

The second research question of the study was: Does presenting The Holy Quran verses in English lead to motivation enhancement of Iranian high school EFL learners? Again one-way ANCOVA was conducted, but this time to control for any possible pre-existing differences among the motivation scores of the learners in the two groups, and to compare their posttest motivation scores:

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Posttest Motivation Scores of the Learners in the Two Groups

Groups	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
QVG	67.58	3.41	20
CG	57.22	3.36	20

Table 3 shows that the posttest motivation mean score of the learners in the QVG ($M = 67.58$) was higher than the posttest motivation mean score of the learners in the CG ($M = 57.22$). To find out whether this difference between these two mean scores was of statistical significance

one or not, the researcher had to look at the *Sig* (2-tailed) column in the ANCOVA table which follows (Table 4):

Table 4. Results of One-Way ANCOVA for Comparing the Posttest Motivation Scores of the Learners in the Two Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1515.61	2	511.54	95.36	.000	.88	
Intercept	42.83	1	42.83	6.81	.000	.13	
Pretest	789.94	1	789.94	144.34	.000	.72	
Groups	624.82	2	298.44	54.57	.000	.75	
Error	287.61	38	4.21				
Total	243247.00	40					
Corrected Total	1753.26	39					

The *p* value across from Groups was smaller than the specified level of significance (.000 < .05), which indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups of learners on the motivation posttest. The value under Partial Eta Squared, in front of Groups, was .75, which means that being in one group or another accounted for 75% of the variance in the posttest motivation scores of the learners. Additionally, the *Sig.* value for the influence of the covariate (i.e. the Pretest) was .000, which was smaller than the significance level, which means that the covariate was significant. In fact, it accounted for 72% of the variance in the posttest motivation scores of the learners.

Research question 3

The third research question of the study asked: What is the high school EFL learners' attitude towards presenting The Holy Quran verses in English at the beginning of English classes of high school? In order to find an answer to this question, the responses to the 15-item researcher-made questionnaire were coded and made ready for analysis. The mean score for each questionnaire item was calculated, and then these mean scores were compared with the average value of the choices (using one-sample *t* test) to see if the attitude scores of the learners were significantly higher than the average (and thus significantly positive towards using The Holy Quran verses in English classes in high schools). The results of one-sample *t* test are presented in Tables.5 and 6 below:

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for QVG Learners' Attitude Scores

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Attitude Questionnaire	15	3.96	.21	.11

The overall attitude mean score of the QVG learners was found to be 3.96, which was larger than 3.00. This implies that the QVG learners' overall attitudes towards the use of Quranic verses in their English classes was positive. To find out whether this positive attitude was of statistical significance or not, the researcher had to check the *p* value under the *Sig.* (2-tailed) column in the one-sample *t* test table (Table 6):

Table 6. *One-Sample t Test Results for the QVG Learners' Attitude Scores*

Test Value = 3						
	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Questionnaire	15.21	14	.000	.96	.68	1.15

Table 6 shows that there was a statistically significant difference between the QVG learners' mean attitude score ($M = 3.96$) and the average value of the choices (i.e. 3.00) because of the fact that the p value was smaller than the specified level of significance ($.000 < .05$). Consequently, it could be concluded that the degree of the QVG learners' positive attitude towards the use of Quranic verses in English classes was statistically significant. In other words, the application of Quranic verses in order to learn English was welcome by the QVG learners.

Discussion

In order to test the first research hypothesis, the posttest scores of the EFL students in Quranic verses and control groups were compared using a one-way ANCOVA. The statistical analysis of the results indicated that the members of the group receiving the treatment (Quranic verses in English) outperformed their counterparts in the control group regarding their performance on the grammar posttest meaning that the use of the sacred verses in English classes highlighting the grammatical points can, in deed, lead to grammatical knowledge progress of the learners. Thus, the first research hypothesis was safely rejected.

The profound effect of Quranic verses on grammatical knowledge improvement of the EFL students could be expounded referring to the fact that the absolute clarity of the Quran, its excellent wording, clarity, impressive and inimitable eloquence, gentle and majestic style, well-balanced verses, and innate melody penetrate deep into a person's heart, stimulating human values, wisdom, and peace of mind (Nassimi, 2008). The Quran itself gives some indication about its language: "We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an in order that ye may learn wisdom" (Qur'an 12: 2). The amazing and unique nature (i 'jaaz) of some of the aspects of the Quran include a totally unique sentence structure and syntax, the choice of the particular words in its perfect context, perfect composing, and the use of different tenses to give deeper meaning to a passage (Beekman, 1988).

The unique genre of the Quran has two inseparable elements: cohesion and rhetorics. Cohesion is the feature that connects sentences to each other lexically and grammatically. Rhetorics means using the language to persuade or please. In the context of the Islamic tradition, rhetoric can be defined as conveying the meaning in the best verbal forms (Alhaj, 2015). Therefore, it is quite axiomatic that these unique features of Quran would lead to language competence enlightenment and then, better learning and performance.

The studies which have investigated the role of The Holy Quran in education are rare. However, the findings of such studies are all in line with the findings of the current research. A case in point is the study conducted by Hussin, Mustapha, Mezah, Toklubok, and Rahim (2016). They investigated the importance of grammar in memorizing the The Holy Quran. To this end, they asked students to respond to a Likert-scale survey questionnaire. The participants filled out the questionnaire through Whatsapp application. The results revealed that students perceived Arabic grammar as an important memorization and motivational factor.

Another study was done by Pouralkhas, Rajabi, and Pishgar (2012). They investigated the rate of Quran reciting by Persian language and literature students in comparison with students of other fields. For this purpose, they asked male students to respond to a questionnaire in order to explore their depression, anxiety and stress. The results demonstrated that there was a meaningful difference among students who recited Quran and who do not in depression, anxiety, and stress.

To test the second research hypothesis, like the first one, another one-way ANCOVA was utilized to compare the posttest scores of the motivation questionnaire completed by the participants in two groups. The statistical analysis of the results indicated that the participants in the experimental group had a higher motivation level after being exposed to the treatment than the members of the control group. Hence, the second null hypothesis was rejected too, implying that the use of Quranic verses in English classes of high schools – could be considered a motivating factor for the students.

According to (Alhaj, 2015), Quran is more than a total of words, figures of speech, grammatical construction, rhymes, and rhythms. It is a great literary miracle and a direct communication between God and man. Neither the people of the past nor the present were able to face the interesting challenge expressed in the Quran: “And if you all are in doubt about what we have revealed to our servant, produce a single Surah like it...” (Quran 2: 23).

We all need a little motivation from time to time, because life can sometimes bring happiness as well as sorrows. Allah who has created us knows our nature very well. It is why one can find many verses in the Quran that deal with our natural inclinations and bring us peace when it's most needed. Even our beloved Prophet needed motivation at times. It is a fact that the remembrance of Allah brings peace in the heart. It is better to ponder over the verses to bring us even closer to Allah. One can look up tafseer books to see in which context the verses were revealed to get a better understanding. The following are some examples of the sacred verses with the above-mentioned features:

- *Is there any reward for good other than good? Quran 55:60*
No disaster strikes except by permission of Allah . And whoever believes in Allah – He will guide his heart. And Allah is Knowing of all things. Quran 64:11
- *Say, (O Muhammad, to mankind): If ye love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. Quran 3:31*

As it could be clearly observed, the Quranic verses are by nature motivating, thus, when it comes to the language learning in general and learning grammar in particular, the same motivational effect can be transferred to language learners.

The findings of this study are in line with the study conducted by Salehi, Davari, and Yunus (2015), learners' perceptions of their needs and their attitudes towards the Quranic course book were explored. For the purpose of their study, students who had received instructions on Quranic sciences and tradition were asked to respond to do a survey. They also had students conduct an interview. The results of the study revealed that the participants' motivation was well improved.

Since there were only two research hypotheses in the study, it was decided to address and interpret the results of the third research question. In order to answer the third research question and find out about the attitude of the high school EFL students concerning the use of Quranic verses in English classes of the schools, a fifteen-item questionnaire was designed and administered. The analysis of the items unraveled that the participants had an overall positive attitude towards the application of Quranic verses in their English classes.

Different EFL learners in Iranian context seem to have different attitudes toward language learning process. For example, for some of them learning English is considered as a

communication medium in the modern world in which interpersonal communications and interactions occur on the net among a great number of computer users who have access to the Internet. It seems helpful to be aware of EFL learners' attitudes toward English learning via the medium of the religious book Quran. Lin and Warden (1998) in their study investigating students' perspectives about English learning stated that the more we are able to understand language learners and their attitudes, the better we are able to help them in learning language. Fakeye (2010) views learner's attitude as one of the most important factors that has profound impact on learning language. ESL/EFL learner's attitudes toward language learning have effect on his/her motivation in language learning (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009).

Accordingly, Gardner and Lambert (1972) stated that "his [the learner] motivation to learn is thought to be determined by his attitudes towards the other group in particular and by his orientation towards the learning task itself" (p.3). Lifrieri (2005) also mentioned that "attitudes are necessary but insufficient indirect conditions for linguistic attainment" (p.14). This is why the attitudes of the EFL students regarding the presentation of grammatical structures through Quranic verses were investigated, and fortunately, it was found out that the learners had positive attitudes in this respect.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, teaching grammatical structures is one significant goal of all language teaching programs. It is believed that L2 learners' communicative competence involves grammatical competence as one essential component. However, it is more important for foreign language (FL) learners than the native speakers. The reason is that in the process of acquiring the first language (L1), the native speakers internalize the grammar of the language, whereas the L2 learners have to devote a great deal of effort to learn the grammatical aspect of the language (Harmer, 2008). Quran as the most sacred book of all Muslims around the world is the major invaluable source of information and insight. It has guidelines for people in every aspect of their lives. Thus, the researcher was struck with the idea that using Quran verses in English in High school English classes may lead to grammar improvement and motivation enhancement of the students.

After performing the experiments and doing the necessary statistical analysis it was found that: there was a statistically significant difference between the posttest scores of the learners in the Quranic group and the control group, and that the learners in the former had improved significantly owing to the treatment they experienced. In addition, the Quranic group demonstrated a higher degree of motivation and a positive attitude towards the application of the verses in English classes of high schools.

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