

“I Can Know More Vocabularies and Their Meanings”: EFL Students’ Perceptions on the Impact of English Translation of Islamic Verses on Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition in English Lessons about Nature

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ABSTRACT

There is a paucity of knowledge on the use of Islamic holy references in English on learners’ Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition (IVA). This study aimed to investigate English students’ perceptions regarding the use of English translations of Islamic verses related to nature on students’ IVA. The study involved 77 senior high school students, consisting of 48 females and 29 males, from three schools in Surabaya and Pematang, Indonesia. A case study design was employed, incorporating quantitative and qualitative data. Closed and open-ended questionnaires were the instruments, and the data were analyzed through descriptive methods and content analysis. The integrated findings showed that students viewed the potential effectiveness of English verses from the Qur’an and Sunnah in developing their understanding of IVA, Islam, and nature. Moreover, they expressed satisfaction with this approach to learning. In conclusion, students perceive that English verses from Islamic references offer significant benefits for their IVA.

KEYWORDS:

Eco-ELT;
Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition;
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Introduction

Incidental vocabulary acquisition (IVA) was initially proposed by Nagy, Herman, and Anderson in 1985 (Zhu, 2015). It explains how language learners acquire vocabulary in their second language (L2). IVA posits that language learners acquire new L2 vocabulary incidentally or

unconsciously (Van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013), whether through reading or listening (Hulstijn, 2012) or speaking or writing (Rott, 2013). IVA is a foundational aspect of L2 learning, playing a crucial role in developing L2 fluency and expressive abilities among language learners (Teng, 2021).

When discussing IVA and its concept of picking up L2 vocabulary unconsciously, it is important to clarify the term “vocabulary”. Hasbun (2005) points out that no universal definition of vocabulary is used by all scholars in the language learning and teaching field. However, it has been noted that vocabulary refers to knowing a word from the form, meaning, use, and collocation (Hasbún, 2005). Similarly, a recent scholar on IVA, Teng (2021), agrees that vocabulary deals with understanding a word's form, meaning, and use. Nation (2013) further elaborates on vocabulary as having three aspects: form, meaning, and use, and the knowledge of these aspects encompasses both receptive and productive knowledge. The form deals with the sound or pronunciation, spelling, and word parts. The meaning includes the form and meaning, concept and referents, and association. The use encompasses grammatical functions, collocation, and constrain on use such as register, frequency, and so on.

Considerable ways have been made to develop IVA since its inception in 1985, resulting in diverse findings. There are at least four approaches to developing language learners' IVA. The first one is through reading various texts. Joe (1998) has shown that reading and retelling a text can promote IVA or vocabulary development. Moreover, in-depth research by Daskalovska (2014) suggests that authentic texts such as fiction (see Reynolds, 2015), e.g., novel (see Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt, 2010) can also enhance IVA. Additionally, simply engaging in extensive reading (see Kweon & Kim, 2008) as a part of assignments can foster language learners' IVA. Besides, it is important to note that the process of reading, *from* and *while* reading, can also contribute to IVA development (Pellicer-Sánchez, 2016).

The second approach to enhancing IVA is through listening. Penno et al. (2002) discovered that listening to a story explained by a teacher could develop L2 words or items. Additionally, engaging in academic listening, such as attending to lecturers, can also promote IVA (see Vidal, 2003). However, the language used by teachers in instruction, often referred to as “teacher talk,” provided limited support for IVA (see Horst, 2010). The advancement of technology enables the third approach to IVA development. Recent IVA research by Teng (2022) found that watching captioned videos can enhance learners' IVA. In similar success, playing L2 video games (see Qasim, 2021) and watching L2 TV programs (see Peters & Webb, 2018) could facilitate IVA. Moreover, employing L2 flash stories with pictures and pronunciation (see Mousavi & Gholami, 2014) and L2 videotext, which is dually coded (verbal) and non-verbal with words and pictures (see Lin, 2010), have also proven effective in promoting learners IVA.

In addition to reading, listening, and multimedia approaches, storytelling and reading aloud (see Lenhart et al., 2018) have proven to be effective techniques for developing learners' IVA. Furthermore, Teng (2016) conducted a comparison between reading only and reading while listening to assess their impact on IVA. The findings revealed that both methods can enhance IVA. However, reading while listening could provide better IVA for learners. Traced back in 2001, Laufer and Hulstijn (2001) introduced the Involvement Load Hypothesis (ILH) to promote language learners' IVA. According to this hypothesis, learners can achieve maximum IVA if they engage with the vocabulary tasks through three stages: search, evaluation, and need (a motivation to get to know or use the word).

The strategies discussed for enhancing learners' IVA demonstrate that prolific attempts have been made to promote IVA. This aligns with the view of Huckin and Coady (1999) that there is no consensus on the quantity and type of exposures required to foster learners' IVA. It is clear that research on IVA continues to expand. However, it is important to note that the majority of IVA research has not explored the significance of reading and discussing L2 English translations of religious texts such as the Qur'an and Sunnah, prophetic sayings of Muhammad. These English translations of holy book sources play a critical role that deserves attention, as they have the potential to contribute significantly to students' IVA.

The English translation of the verses in the Qur'an and Sunnah may serve as a valuable tool for students to expand their vocabulary. These texts offer authentic and language-rich input within the Islamic context. Consequently, when students read and discuss the English translation of these two Islamic holy references, they are likely to encounter new vocabulary, grasp their meanings, and learn how to use them in context. It is important to note that these potentials have not been thoroughly explored in research.

This area of study holds significance for one important reason: it offers a novel approach for Islamic communities to enhance their English language skills, particularly their vocabulary. They can leverage their Islamic references not only to understand Islam and its principles but also to develop their English proficiency. Consequently, Islamic communities can improve their English language abilities, enabling them to promote and propagate the beauty of Islam more effectively and eloquently.

This study seeks to explore students' perceptions regarding the impact of English translations of Islamic verses related to nature on IVA. It took a unique case of an Eco-ELT practice using Islamic verses about nature in English classes. The Eco-ELT itself refers to the practice and teaching of environmental issues in ELT (Saiful, 2023). In this study, the research question is formulated as follows: *"What are the perceptions of EFL students regarding the impact of the English translation of Islamic holy references (Qur'an and Sunnah) related to nature on students' incidental vocabulary acquisition?"*

Method

The study utilized a case study design that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data. It focused on a distinctive case, which involved teaching English with a specific focus on nature using English translations of Islamic verses sourced from the Qur'an and Sunnah. This unique approach was implemented in senior high schools in Indonesia, comprising two schools in Surabaya, East Java, and one school in Pematang, Central Java. The primary objective of the study was to explore the students' perceptions regarding the use of English translations of Islamic holy references (Qur'an and Sunnah) related to nature on students' IVA.

A total of 77 students participated in this study, with 30 students from a high school in Pematang, 32 students from high school A, and 15 students from high school B in Surabaya. Among these students, there were 29 males and 48 females, all of whom were under 18 years old. To ensure ethical research practices, the parents of these students were provided with a consent form, and they granted permission for their children to participate in the study.

This study employed both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires to gather data on the students' perceptions. The closed-ended questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data and was adapted from the questionnaire of Chen and Huang (2019), which assessed learners' perceptions of the effect of mobile game-based media on vocabulary. It included questions on potential effectiveness, usability, and satisfaction. Before using this questionnaire to collect the formal data, a trial run was conducted with 34 senior high school

students to ensure its reliability. The overall Cronbach's Alpha for all items across the three constructs was 0.964, while within the construct, potential effectiveness had reliability of 0.906, usability was 0.894, and satisfaction was 0.939. The questionnaire contained 7 items in the questionnaire and utilized a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5.

Additionally, an open-ended questionnaire was developed based on the closed-ended questionnaire to collect qualitative data. The questions in this questionnaire were as follows: (1) *what is your opinion regarding the use of English translations of Islamic holy references (Qur'an and Sunnah) related to nature in your vocabulary?* (2) *could you describe your feelings regarding the use of English translations of Islamic holy references (Qur'an and Sunnah) related to nature in your vocabulary?*

The data from both the closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires were analyzed separately, and their results were later combined to derive key findings or meta-inferences. To analyze the quantitative data, descriptive statistics, specifically mean analysis, was performed to determine the level of students' perception in relation to each construct as well as the overall construct of IVA. A content analysis was employed for the qualitative data. A coding system was established for the qualitative data. In this system, SS represented "*student*". Numerical identifiers (e.g., 1, 2, 3... and so on) were used to denote specific students. For instance, "SS1" referred to "*student number 1*". Following the student coding, the study also incorporated codes for the data collection instrument, such as the "open-ended questionnaire," and the three constructs of the IVA questionnaire, including "potential effectiveness," "usability," and "satisfaction." The detailed coding methodology was implemented to ensure data trustworthiness and assist readers in understanding the source of the data. For example, if qualitative data were coded "*SS41, open-ended questionnaire, potential effectiveness*", it indicated that the data originated from student number 41, were collected from the open-ended questionnaire, and pertained to the construct of potential effectiveness within the IVA.

In adhering to the ethical research standards, this study received approval from The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, with the ethical approval number 022209054. This rigorous evaluation ensured that the research involving human subjects, especially the vulnerable group of students under 18, was conducted ethically and in compliance with established guidelines. Furthermore, to maintain ethical standards, this study obtained consent forms from both the parents of the students and the participating teacher and school. It is important to note that the study preserved the confidentiality of the students' data and personal information, as well as the identities of the schools.

Results

The perceptions of students regarding the use of English translations of Islamic references such as the Qur'an and Sunnah about nature revolved around the potential effectiveness of the media on students' vocabulary acquisition, usability of the media itself, and satisfaction when using the media. The results of the students' perceptions, both quantitative and qualitative, are integrated and presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *Integrated results of quantitative and qualitative data*

Domain	Quantitative Results		Qualitative Results		
	Items	Domain Mean*	Overall Mean*	Perceptions	Metainferences
Perceptions on the use of English translation of Islamic holy references (Sunnah and Qur'an) about nature on incidental vocabulary acquisition	I get new English vocabularies from the use of Islamic English holy references as teaching materials such as English Qur'an and Sunnah in English learning.	3.61	3.62	"Yes, I got more vocabularies" (SS9, open-ended questionnaire, potential effectiveness)	There is a potential for the use of English translation of Islamic holy references such as Sunnah and Qur'an in ELT about nature on students' vocabulary acquisition.
	The use of Islamic English holy references as teaching materials in English learning help me develop my English vocabulary repertoires.			"Quite effective to increase my vocabulary repertoire, I got new vocabularies I do not know before" (SS41, open-ended questionnaire, potential effectiveness)	
	I can easily access Islamic English holy references such as English Qur'an and sunnah, e.g., in the internet.			"I know more English vocabularies and meanings" (SS64, open-ended questionnaire, potential effectiveness)	
Usability	I can easily get to know many new English vocabularies in Islamic English holy references such as in English Qur'an and Sunnah.	3.61	3.62	"Very good because we can learn vocabularies and their meanings" (SS7, open-ended questionnaire, usability)	English translation of Islamic holy references such as Sunnah and Qur'an in ELT about nature is useful for students to:
	I can use the English vocabularies I get from Islamic English holy references such as English Qur'an and Sunnah in English communication			"Yes, it is because I can get more vocabularies and their meanings and I can understand the verses about Earth in the Qur'an" (SS48, open-ended questionnaire, usability)	
				"Got more English vocabularies and broadened my comprehension about Islam" (SS63, open-ended questionnaire, potential effectiveness)	

	I am satisfied that I can find a new medium for developing my English vocabularies using Islamic English holy references such as English Qur'an and Sunnah.			<i>"I am happy that I can learn English vocabularies using Sunnah and Qur'an"</i> (SS8, open-ended questionnaire, satisfaction)	Students felt satisfied by:
Satisfaction	I am satisfied that new English vocabularies that I get from Islamic English holy references such as English Qur'an and Sunnah are relevant to use in my life.	3.64		<i>"I am very happy because I can get vocabularies from the use of media such as Qur'an"</i> (SS27 open-ended questionnaire, satisfaction)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the use of media such as Qur'an and sunnah in ELT, especially about nature. • the increase on their vocabulary repertoire.
				<i>"Very happy because I can understand the verses in the Qur'an which talks about Earth"</i> (SS47 open-ended questionnaire, satisfaction)	
			The mean score of three domains was all in the excellent category.	The overall mean score was in the excellent category.	Students perceived the use of English translation of Qur'an and Sunnah about nature in ELT facilitate their vocabulary acquisition and is useful for their understanding about vocabulary, Islam, and Earth. Thus, they felt satisfied with the use of the media.
	Metainferences			Students perceived that the use of media such as Qur'an and sunnah in ELT especially about nature show potential for their vocabulary repertoire, the media is also useful for developing vocabulary, learning about Islam and Earth, and facilitate their English communication. They felt satisfied with the use of the media.	Students perceived the use of English translation of Qur'an and Sunnah about nature in ELT facilitate their vocabulary acquisition and is useful for their understanding about vocabulary, Islam, and Earth. Thus, they felt satisfied with the use of the media.

Note. Based on Pahuriray & Algara (2021), the mean score 1:00 – 1.80 = “**poor**”; 1.81 – 2.60 = “**fair**”; 2.61 – 3.40 = “**good**”; 3.41 – 4.20 = “**very good**”; 4.21 – 5.00 = “**Excellent**”

Discussion

The meta-inferences drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data reveal the following findings. Students believe that incorporating English translations of the Qur'an and Sunnah related to nature in ELT is beneficial for their vocabulary acquisition. Besides, students also echoed that this integration is useful for enhancing their understanding of vocabulary, Islam, and the natural environment (Earth). Furthermore, they expressed satisfaction with this instructional approach.

In the context of incidental vocabulary acquisition (IVA) conceptualization, in the study of Zhu (2015), the results of this study reflect that students hold positive views and feelings regarding the use of English translation of the Qur'an and Sunnah for language learning in ELT, especially for improving their English vocabulary. Thus, these results suggest that authentic texts, in this case, the English translation of verses from the Qur'an and Sunnah, can be valuable for enhancing language learners' IVA. Overall, these results contribute to expanding our knowledge about a new alternative source for IVA in the ELT context, using English translations of verses from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The English translations of verses from the Qur'an and Sunnah provide authentic and language-rich content within the context of Islam. Consequently, when students engage in reading and discussing these English translations of these two Islamic holy texts, they are likely to encounter new vocabulary words, understand their meanings, and learn how to use them in context. Previous related studies have not explored the potential of English translations of holy references on language learners' IVA. They have primarily focused on the role of authentic texts (Daskalovska, 2014), such as fiction (see Reynolds, 2015), e.g., novels (see Pellicer-Sánchez & Schmitt, 2010) in developing students' IVA.

The findings of this study also contribute to generating new insights on how to effectively utilize the English translation of Qur'an and Sunnah verses related to nature for IVA in ELT. During the lessons, students were tasked with reading passages about Earth and engaged in discussions within their groups and with the teachers. These two activities, individual reading and group discussion, served as valuable tools for nurturing students' IVA. These strategies of IVA, reading and speaking, align with the perspectives of scholars like Hulstijn (2012), who assert that reading can effectively facilitate students' IVA. Furthermore, Rott (2013) further supports the idea that speaking activities can also play a role in enhancing students' IVA. Thus, English teachers can incorporate reading and discussion activities about nature using English translations of verses from the Qur'an and Sunnah into their teaching to support their students' IVA.

Considering this study's focus on investigating unique cases of Eco-ELT instructions, the teaching of environmental issues in ELT (Saiful, 2023), the findings of this study may indicate that Eco-ELT holds promise for enhancing English learners' linguistics elements and IVA is no exception (Saiful, 2023). Consequently, English educators could consider incorporating topics related to environmental issues, such as the Earth and nature, into their lessons using English translations of verses as instructional materials. This approach aligns with Saiful's perspective (2020), which underscores the potential of Eco-ELT for students' optimization of IVA.

Conclusion

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions regarding the use of English translations of Islamic verses related to nature on students' IVA. The findings show that students view the

incorporation of English translations of the Qur'an and Sunnah related to nature in ELT as beneficial for their vocabulary acquisition. Students also think this integration is useful for enhancing their understanding of vocabulary, Islam, and the natural environment (Earth). Furthermore, they express a high level of satisfaction with this media use.

While this study successfully sheds light on English learners' perspectives regarding the potential use of English translations of Islamic holy references for students' IVA, it is important to acknowledge two key limitations. Firstly, this study primarily focuses on students' perceptions of the potential use of English translations of Islamic green verses on IVA. Future studies should undertake empirical research to examine the causal relationship between engaging with those verses and the development of IVA. Secondly, this study does not empirically investigate the specific roles of reading and discussion of English verses for students' IVA. Instead, it draws conclusions about these roles based on insights from previous related studies. Thus, subsequent studies are encouraged to empirically scrutinize the roles of reading and discussion using the English translation of Islamic green verses on students' IVA.

This study makes valuable contributions to our understanding of IVA and its intersection with Eco-ELT in two ways. First, this study provides novel insights into the potential of Islamic holy references written in L2, such as English, for supporting language learners' IVA. This information is of great significance, especially for English learners in Muslim communities or countries across the globe. It highlights that the English translation of Islamic holy books can serve as valuable teaching or learning materials not only for deepening the understanding of Islam and its teachings but also as a tool for enhancing language proficiency. Second, in the realm of Eco-ELT, this study introduces an innovative teaching approach when teaching environmental topics within English lessons. By reading and discussing English verses related to nature from Islamic holy references, English teachers could potentially develop students' IVA. This approach creatively blends language learning with environmental awareness and religious studies, expanding the repertoire of innovative teaching approaches and resources available to language educators.

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