Contemporary Islam
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-023-00513-0

Experiences of listening to the Qur'an in Egypt: A qualitative phenomenological study of therapeutic and recreational listening

Mohamed Hossam Ismail[1]

Accepted: 3 January 2023
© The Author(s) 2023

Abstract

This is an interdisciplinary study that explores the impact of listening to the Qur'an on the physiological and psychological statuses of an average Egyptian Muslim. It is a transcendental phenomenological study that intersects with theories and concepts from different disciplines including reception studies, media, and popular culture analysis. The study uses two tools that are common in transcendental phenomenological studies: journals, memoirs, and in-depth interviews. Such tools help investigating the experience of listening to the Qur'an as an ongoing stream of consciousness. The study aims at exploring the phenomenon of listening to the Qur'an from the points of view of six participants who are heavy listeners of the Qur'an and are in the habit of writing memoirs and diaries, as a multi-case study purposive sample. The study reveals that the ritual practice of listening to the Qur'an differs from one person to another depending on several factors mainly gender and educational background. Analysis of the replies of the study respondents sheds light on the positive influence of listening to the Qur'an, and the characteristics of a good reciter from Muslims' point of view. Future studies on a bigger sample are highly recommended so as to gain deeper insights into the influence of this Islamic ritual, leading to possible generalization.

Keywords Media phenomenology · Qur'an recitation · Religious studies · Qualitative studies · Psychology and media audience · Self-disclosure · Muslim culture

✉ Mohamed Hossam Ismail
hosamedn@cu.edu.eg

[1] Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University, Giza 12613, Egypt

Published online: 25 January 2023

Introduction

This study explores individual experiences of listening to the Qur'an as a daily ritual and situational response in the life of an average Muslim. The experience of listening to the Qur'an is ethnographically related to concepts of grace, expulsion of evil spirits and envy, and bringing clouds of calmness and tranquility in places where the Qur'an is played (Galal, 2008).

Moreover, listening to the Qur'an is psychologically associated with Aristotle's concept of catharsis, which includes immersion in listening as well as weeping and releasing tension, which helps in healing psychosomatic pains and clinically reduces physical pains. Because of the tragic exegetical stories of the Qur'an especially the section that was revealed in *Mecca*, Qur'anic catharsis involves not only the idea of emotional relief, but also the further idea of purifying the soul.

Listening to the Qur'an is also connected to the notion of *Tarab, a* term that is borrowed from listening to music, and refers to the emotional status of being captivated by the performance of a singer or a reciter. This is associated with a mode of recitation called *tajweed*, which is a "verbal noun (maṣdar) of the active verb jawwada, which literally means to "do well," but also includes the richer connotation of "to embellish," in the case of recitation by means of the voice. *Tajweed* does not occur in the Qur'an but came later to mean the art of recitation in the sense of the phonetic rules and other related aspects" (Denny, 1989: 21).

The intellectual and artistic advancements of the Arabs in the Middle Ages led to a "specific manner of reading the Quran, modifying it from the recitation-like reading of *Al tartil* to a new, original and specific method of singing: *Al tajweed*. Thus, *tajweed* is thought to be "an offspring of the spiritual, cultural and social progress of theological society" (Al-Bakri & Mallah, 2016: 135).

Qur'an can be defined as the recited words of Allah Almighty and labeling it "the reminder" gives implications about the religious, atheistic, and social meanings of the experience of re-reading. Prophet Mohammed's (PBUH) illiteracy did not stop him from becoming the bearer of the revelation by virtue of persistent memorization. This justifies why this glorious text is called the Qur'an ("recitation") and revealed "with the opening command, recite" (Denny, 1989: 8).

Reciting and listening to the Qur'an is not only an individualistic worshiping ritual but is also a social collective practice that has been scrutinized throughout centuries of Islam. The best Muslim, as the famous saying of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) reads, is "the one who learns the Qur'an and teaches it." The saying shows the significance of reciting and listening to the Qur'an as "a centralized cultural practice" (Gade, 2006: 12).

Some researchers such as Talmon-Heller (2012) and Abou Mourad (2009) stated that group reading of religious texts exists in other religions such as Judaism and, to a lesser degree, Christianity. However, "listening to the recited text is almost an exclusive characteristic of the Qur'an, and the creative art of this reciting is unparalleled with any other religious texts" (Abou Mourad, 2009: 11).

Listening to the Qur'an has a time span that differs from one person to another. It is an experience of a stream of consciousness that holds an internal monologue

that differs according to the listener's age, gender, socioeconomic status, and intellectual level as well as his/her physiological condition. It also differs with a single listener across his/her different phases of life (Baars, 1997).

This study examines the experience of listening to the Qur'an as expressed by its audience, at either the exegetical, aesthetic, functional, or ritual level. It uses a transcendental phenomenological approach borrowed from sociology as a theoretically appropriate model. The study aims to describe different individuals' profound and detailed perceptions about the experience of listening to the Qur'an, the central text in the Arab-Islamic culture.

This study is significant as it adopts an interdisciplinary approach to explore the impact of the Qur'an. It employs not only textual, but also social, cultural, and historical analysis to show how the Qur'an contributes to shaping Muslims' lives.

Literature review

The various impacts of reciting/listening to the Quran have been extensively explored in many studies from different perspectives depending on the discipline or concept these studies draw on.

Psychological and medical studies have been conducted by specialists in clinical psychology, child psychology, and internal medicine from different parts of the world. However, the greatest attention to this ritual has been given by Muslim scholars in Arab and Islamic countries such as Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Iran. A number of these studies will be highlighted is in this section.

Most of the studies that highlighted the positive psychosomatic impact of listening to the Qur'an on human body were quantitative, and experimental which outside the scope of that research. They argued that listening to the Qur'an calms the soul and increases the response to treatment. This is mainly attributed to the fact that listening to Qur'an adjusts the electromagnetic fields of brain cells, which increases the body's immunity (Zulkurnaini et al., 2012).

Bringing down anxiety levels is one of the benefits of listening to the Qur'an that as has been proved by some studies. Fitri Hamidiyanti and Pratiwi (2019) examined the effect of this religious practice on anxiety level among Indonesian pregnant women. The study showed that listening to *Surat Ar-Rahman* (The Merciful Chapter) significantly decreased anxiety. Similarly, Abadi et al. (2020) proved that listening to the Qur'an could lower anxiety levels among university students. In the same vein, Nadimah (2018) studied the effect of reciting and listening to Quran on human mental health. The results indicated that the Qur'an has a positive impact on mental health as it contributes to memory enhancement and delays cognitive aging. The study suggested that the Qur'an "can be used as a therapy for mental emotional disorders" (Nadimah, 2018, 20).

Mariza and Anggraini (2020) explored the effect of listening to the Qur'an during labor pain. They found that it reduced pain considerably and recommended playing the Qur'an at hospitals as an alternative to pain killers.

Ohtsuka (1990) and Bedford (2001) studied the Qur'an recitation from an anthropological point of view. They proved that the Qur'an's special rhythms have a healing power, and could, therefore, be used to cure diseases.

Moreover, Salam et al. (2013) made use of *taubah* (Islamic repentance) and listening to the Qur'an as stimuli in psychophysiological research via galvanic skin response (GSR), an objective method for realizing the changes of emotional response of subjects. The results showed that GSR can be used to measure mental states while listening to the Qur'an. They concluded that "listening to Holy Quran recitation and *taubah* nominally reduce stress, anxiety or any other pessimism, which has a remarkable effect on GSR" (Salam et al., 2013: 34).

In Egypt, El-Hady and Kandeel (2017) investigated the effect of listening to the Qur'an on the physiological responses of mechanically ventilated Muslim patients. Their results suggested that "listening to the Qur'an is an effective intervention for improving hemodynamic parameters, respiratory functions and the level of consciousness. They recommended that nurses taking care of critical cases should consider integrating listening to the Qur'an into the care plan to speed up recovery" (El-Hady & Kandeel, 2017: 85).

Cultural Studies is one of the disciplines that tackled the impact of reciting/listening to the Qur'an as a central text in Arabic popular culture. Galal (2008) studied the rituals of listening to the Qur'an in Arab societies to break malicious magic spells and expel demons and evil spirits. The study focused on the concept of mediatization of Islam through analyzing TV Islamic programs and their role in shaping Islam.

Muslims link listening to the Qur'an to a kind of popular religiosity. Although the practice of listening to a religious book being recited is also known, to a lesser degree, in other religions, the recited audio Qur'anic texts have a unique function. This practice is a mix of entertainment and spiritual comfort. Although conservatives in the Islamic world reject such a view, the Qur'an has become a popular audible text in the Arab-Islamic culture for a wide array of purposes. It has been instrumental in "preserving identity, resisting foreign intruders, deprivation, socio-economic inequality, and political despotism" (Galal, 2008: 171).

Hirschkind (2001) studied the response to the Qur'anic recordings by comparing it with the response to songs and music. He touched upon the concept of *"Tarab* or *Saltana* as a state of spiritual ecstasy expressed in words of approbation such as *Allah* (God), (*Ya Salam* means Hurrah) or (*Ahsant* means perfect) uttered by listeners of recited Qur'an. These same words are usually uttered while listening to the songs of Arab icons such as Umm Kulthum and Mohamed Abdel Wahab" (Hirschkind, 2001: 630).

Approaching Qur'an recitation from a similar perspective, Abbasi et al. (2011) explored listening to the Qur'an as a central ritual in Sufi groups, a sub-culture in Islam. Although listening to the Qur'an is not limited to them, Sufis influenced the aesthetic aspects of the Qur'an recitation. Musical forms used in both singing and reciting the Qur'an are the same, especially according to the Egyptian school that uses *makams* (a system of melodies used in traditional Arabic music) such as Al-Bayati and Al-Hijaz. *Maqams* have five origins: Arab, Persian, Turkish, Azeri,

and Uzbek. As the names suggest, these melodies belong mostly to the era in which Sufism flourished in Iran (Abbasi et al., 2011).

Rasmussen (2001, 2012) ethnographically inspected recitation of the Qur'an by Indonesian women—a phenomenon that appeared at the end of the Suharto era and the beginning of the reform era. She found that this practice has become the heart of religious traditions in the country that contains the largest number of Muslims. Besides the masculine school of reciting the Qur'an, which is common in Arab countries and most of the Muslim world, women's recitation has become a sign of the auditory soundscape and national scene in Indonesia. It "aesthetically creates new roles for women there, as it invented a glocal experience, a combination between the local and globalized, a way of reciting centered on Muslim feminine" (Rasmussen, 2012: 107).

In another study, Khalifa (2015) described Palestinian Muslim women's gatherings of reciting the Qur'an in Nablus in the West Bank as a form of aesthetic communication. Those gatherings, attended by children and women, are considered a "social practice during which they have some rest to drink, eat, tell jokes and exchange the city updates and presents" (Khalifa, 2015: 22).

Denny (1989) found that the motives behind learning the Qur'an recitation may seem religious, but this practice extends to the aesthetic, cultural, and social dimensions. In Indonesia, for example, there are annual recitation competitions that begin at the local level but grow later at both the regional and the national levels to attract the attention of the media, schools, and universities. Moreover, he noted that Muslims prefer to listen to recitations by Sheikhs with delicate and soft voices. He maintained that "a good voice is a prime requisite for reciting the Qur'ān" (1989: 9).

It is to be noted that most of these culture-based studies look at the Qur'an not as a divine text, but rather as a part of popular culture that is associated with music and songs. Our recent study adopts this perspective concentrating on study a case study sample retrieving their own responses regarding new dimensions of the experience of listening. Western researchers are prominent in studying musical and melodic forms of reciting the Qur'an especially reciting it at a slow pace, which is called *tajweed*, to the degree that some of them spent more than 25 years inspecting the musicology of reciting the Qur'an (Nelson, 1985).

Nelson's fieldwork showed the perception of Muslim scholars in religious institutions like Al-Azhar Islamic University in Cairo. She noted that these scholars affirm that there are three divisions when it comes to conceptualizing the categories of performance: secular music, religious music, and Qur'anic recitation. She mentioned that Western scholars have ignored this point in their academic canons, which tend to only distinguish between religious and non-religion forms of music.

The Arabic word *tajweed* is a "verbal noun (*maṣdar*) of the active verb *jawwada*, which literally means to "do well". It is used to refer to embellishing the recitation of the Qur'an by following certain phonetic rules. *Tajweed* as a concept did not exist in Islam, but it was developed later for the sake of guaranteeing correct Qur'ān recitation" (Denny, 1989: 21).

Adopting the theory of Michael Hoover, Meyer (2006) studied commoditization of religious experiences in public domains, stating that audible Qur'an in forms of cassette tapes and discs are linked to goods which are signs of Islamic identity such

as Muslim rosaries and calendar, headwear, prayer rugs, posters of Qur'anic verses, and artistic arabesque ornamented frames of Quranic texts.

Oral activities, such as listening to/ reciting Qur'an, are a central characteristic of Arab-Islamic civilization throughout its history, unlike the European modern civilization, which gives priority to written texts. However, only a few Arab scholars ventured to investigate this area. In addition, while some Western and Asian researchers conducted quantitative and qualitative studies to analyze the impact of the Qur'an from a psychological, medical, or cultural perspectives, studies on this phenomenon through the lens of Muslims themselves are still very limited.

The studies reviewed so far support a conclusion that very limited attention has been given to the phenomenon of listening to the Qur'an and its place in the lives of Muslim individuals. Hence, the significance of this study lies in investigating the influence of Qur'an citation from the perspective of the individuals who practice this ritual themselves. A phenomenological approach is adopted to attain this goal in an attempt to glean new insights into this religious practice and its various dimensions.

Phenomenology as a theory for media studies

In a sociological sense, phenomenology mainly studies human consciousness. The key assumption is that the world in which we live is made in our heads. The outside world does not make sense to us only through our eyes. How we know the world depends on how we experience it. Therefore, phenomena "are the building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994: 26).

Phenomenology, as a research methodology, is an approach that enables researchers learn from the experiences of others. It is a form of qualitative research that is centered on the study of individuals' experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). It provides scholars with "a comprehensive and humanistic understanding of a phenomenon by analyzing the lived experiences of the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (Ferrucci et al., 2015: 177).

Thus, in order to better understand the impact of reciting/listening to the Qur'an, we must first understand how people feel when they practice this ritual, and whether this feeling is common among all Muslims or differs according to individual characteristics. One of the main goals of phenomenology is to describe "what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007: 58).

Qualitative phenomenological research, in general, is divided into two types: "hermeneutic explanatory and interpretive research and descriptive transcendental one" (Ferrucci et al., 2015: 180). The primary objective of the latter, which is applied in this study, is to describe and analyze the experiences rather than interpreting them as is the case with the former type.

Phenomenology has gained popularity among media researchers in the last five years to the extent that it seems we are approaching what could perhaps be called "the phenomenological turn."

The influence and impact of social media on users have received a great deal of attention on the part of the scholars interested in conducting phenomenological studies. Wilcox-Ugurlu (2011), Lucero (2013), and Cortesi and Gasser (2015) explored

this area in relation to young adults, while Woodfalla and Zezulkovaa (2016) focused on children.

Introna (2004), Introna and Ilharco (2006), Cook (2015), and Pinxit (2016) studied the ontological and social meanings of visual experiences related to digital "screeness." Their results showed that digital screens nowadays are much preferred by people than other types of media.

Nicholl (2010) studied the experiences of listening to music by women with chronic diseases. She interviewed six chronically ill women who consider listening to music a major part of their daily lives. Results revealed that those women view music as a companion that help them manage the chronic illness.

Droumeva and Andrisani (2010) examined cultural phenomenology of mediated aural practices, addressing the auditory experience and the particularities of listening culture. The two researchers proposed a perspective for developing a cultural phenomenology of technologically mediated aural practices.

Other phenomenological studies analyzed the impact of listening to Christian music and hymns. White (2014) tackled how Christian music experiences affect the faith development among adolescents. He highlighted the role of "emotion, as a relatively brief and intense state in reaction to a specific experience or event that lasts a few seconds to several minutes, in shaping psychological drives of listening" (White 2014: 33).

Jones (2013) sketched out an approach that highlights the role of the mass performance of Christian rituals in building up the ethical conscious of individuals.

Drawing on the phenomenological approach, Williams and Banjo (2013) examined the reasons Christian music listeners engage with different types of Christian music. They classified the listeners into three main categories: reactionary, instrumental, and ritualized.

Welz (2019) Schnapp (2008) and Ihde (2007) analyzed the auditory field in comparison to the visual one, which remains in front of the spectator. They believed that listeners could get totally immersed in the auditory field, allowing it to simultaneously invade their consciousness. This makes consciousness an ongoing process or a "stream of thought rather than a static fixed state; just outside of this horizon is a fringe consciousness or sub-consciousness that we can become aware of, sometimes unexpectedly, lending an air of mysteriousness to the experience" (Ihde, 2007: 89).

This study attempts to fill the gap of not having many studies describing and analyzing the experiences of listening to the Qur'an from a phenomenological perspective. This is done through interviewing a small sample of Qur'an audience after asking them to write diaries and memoirs about their listening rituals. This study adopts a transcendental descriptive approach.

Objectives and questions

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Determine the ritual practices of listening to the Qur'an in terms of the preferred time and place

Table 1 Initial sample characteristic

Criteria	Gender		Age		Type of education	
	Male	Female	16–23	24–40	Secular	Religious (al-Azhar)
N	27	23	20	30	31	19
Percentage %	54	46	40	60	62	38
Total	50		50		50	

2. Identify situational motivations of listening to the Qur'an
3. Pinpoint the type of ideas contained in the accompanying stream of consciousness while listening to the Qur'an
4. Identify audio preferences for listeners represented in Sheiks who recite the Qur'an, and the nature of their voices

The study aims to answer the following questions.

Q1. What are the spatiotemporal settings associated with listening to the Qur'an (i.e., preferred time and space)?
Q2. What are the situational motivations behind listening to the Qur'an?
Q3. What ideas included in the accompanying stream of consciousness while listening to the Qur'an?
Q4. What are the basic vocal features of the respondents' preferred Sheikhs?

Methodology and tools

This research relies on two tools used in phenomenological approach: reviewing diaries and memoirs and conducting in-depth interviews. Storytelling is crucial in recognizing the essence of experiences as it upholds the respondents' language vital in the production of knowledge of qualitative and ethnographic research. In-depth interviews helped the researcher dig further into certain points mentioned in the diaries.

After an initial interview with nearly 50 people (Table 1), six respondents with heavy exposure to the Qur'an were selected as a multi-case study purposive sample. The sample included males and females, whose age ranged between 28 and 40. They are all residents of Cairo and have the expertise in recording feelings. As for their educational background, some of them are graduates of Al-Azhar University, the most prestigious university for Islamic teaching, while others are graduates of non-Islamic universities. This distinction, though was not intended at the first place, is believed to be quite significant as it will probably indicate some discrepancies among the subjects regarding their religious rituals. Of course, choosing only six members denies the existence of generalization of this study's findings. This is because the main aim here is not to come up with a general conclusion, but rather to reach in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon.

Phenomenological research tradition depends on small samples because, practically, it is important for any researcher to establish rapport with participants. Using a variety of research techniques offers more opportunities to deepen that rapport (Buser & Parkins, 2013). Reflexivity, multiple voicing, and literary styling among the intended points of qualitative phenomenological studies.

Members of the sample were chosen with a purpose to represent a heavy listening in relation to Qur'an recitation. This has two principal aims. The first is to ensure that all the key constituencies of relevance to the subject matter are covered. The second is to ensure that, within each of the key criteria, some diversity is included so that the impact of the phenomenon concerned can be explored. Thus, the study resorted to purposive sampling as it is mainly associated with "the development of grounded theory, ethnography, or phenomenological studies" (Ritchie & Louis, 2004: 85).

The study's sample could be considered a heterogeneous one. It is recommended in phenomenological studies to choose a sample with individual differences in order "to identify central themes, which cut across the variety of cases or people," and to reveal "the extremes within a specific age group" (Ritchie & Louis, 2004: 80).

Furthermore, all the selected participants are heavy listeners to the Qur'an. This was an intended target to collect rich and diverse knowledge about this under-researched topic.

Writing diaries is a research tool that is useful for registering the activities and feelings of respondents usually during a certain period. It provides social research with access to the emotions, experiences, and ideas of the study participants in a way that can never be guaranteed even via in-depth, personal interviews, especially in research involving sensitive issues such as sexual behavior (Watts, 2008).

It is designed to "retrieve self-revelation or self-disclosure accounts that describe the inner life of the human soul, and which are associated with the mechanism of a stream of consciousness. In ethnographic and phenomenological studies, it opens the door wide to enter the terrain of psychological inner life intersecting with receiving media contents" (Watts, 2008: 9).

Diaries not only provide information about a certain behavior, but also offer an interpretation of it. The respondents in this study were encouraged to have daily record of their experiences, assuring them data confidentiality to ease self-revealing. "Researchers usually use pseudonyms for respondents, initials of their names, and they even use aliases for places of recording diaries" (Ferrucci et al., 2015: 178).

The respondents of this study were provided with a two-page guide for writing diaries and memoirs. This is an acceptable procedure because it helps the respondents focus only on the desired outcome and reduce distraction.

Following the principles of qualitative research, it was important while discussing the findings of this study to quote the exact words the respondents used in their diaries and memoirs. The respondents were given the choice between handwritten notes or electronically typed ones. The process of recording journals took one month (March 2020).

It is common for the "diary method to be used in combination with other methods, such as a semi-structured in-depth interview. An advantage of the interview method is the 'wealth of details that it provides" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011: 139). It enables

people to provide stories, accounts, and explanations. This method is appropriate for studies that seek to understand the social actor's experience, knowledge, and worldviews. Interviews also allow researchers to get a glimpse into the past and present of the interviewee (Weiss, 1995).

The researcher read the diaries of all the respondents to fully understand the experience recorded and to steer the interview questions accordingly. The interviews were conducted in the period from 5 to 25 May 2020 after finishing with writing the diaries and memoirs. Each interview lasted from 45 to 60 min.

The researcher followed the steps developed by Clarke E. Moustakas, the leading researcher of phenomenal research, especially in the "descriptive transcendental approach, which includes focused self-reflection" (Hein & Austin, 2001: 5). The researcher began the study by writing about his own experience of listening to the Glorious Qur'an. Assumptions were made about such experience, which helped frame the experiences of others in light of his own. The qualitative approach is adopted in reporting the findings of the study as phenomenological theoretical frameworks tend to have a specific objective of an "accumulation of knowledge that can only be achieved by gathering qualitative data" (Ritchie & Louis, 2004: 10).

Then, the researcher read the diaries of the respondents about their experiences in listening to the Qur'an. This formed the stage of, to use Moustakas' words, "expansion of horizons" (1994:120) in which the researcher highlighted key words related to the phenomenon in question from the diaries of the subjects. Then, these words were grouped under certain themes or ideas that helped develop a characterization. The researcher then wrote a description of how the phenomenon happened, which is called structural or structural characterization. The study then concluded with a complex description of the phenomenon that comes from the integration of the textual and structural descriptions.

The researcher went through these processes with each of the six participants. In doing so, it was possible to organize a composite description of the phenomenon by integrating the textual and structural descriptions of the six respondents based on what they wrote in their diaries and memoirs about listening to the Qur'an, and the results of the in-depth interviews conducted with them. Thus, the researcher managed to reach the stage that Moustakas (1994:121) termed the "essence of the experience."

It should be noted that the age of the respondents ranged between twenty-eighth and forty. After conducting interviews with 50 people from different ages, the researcher has noticed that those who are below the age of 28 did not show the ability to write memories and diaries about their experience of listening to the Quran. Perhaps this is because during the early and mid-20 s, people do not have enough life experience to be able to write self-understanding diaries in a way that can serve the purpose of this study. Therefore, this sample is confined to the age between twenty-eight and forty.

Findings

The six knowledge partners or respondents of this study were, according to the pseudonyms they chose, Akram 32 years (a media researcher), Ahmed 36 (a journalist), Fathi 40 (a high school teacher), Mona 28 (a graphic designer), Rabab 31 (a

housewife), and Nadia 32 (a social worker). They are middle-class Egyptians who graduated from Cairo and Al-Azhar universities. As has been mentioned earlier, having male and female listeners with different age groups and educational background (secular and religious) was intended to compare between the responses and gain deep insights into the phenomenon under consideration.

All the respondents began to listen to the Qur'an during distinct life stages: childhood, adolescence, and youth. This allowed them to write about unforgettable memories and ideas they associate with listening to the Qur'an. In what follows the findings that have been reached at by reading the memories of the knowledge partners and recording their replies during the interviews conducted by the researcher.

Rituals of listening to the Qur'an

Timings of listening to the Qur'an, according to the respondents, are early in the morning, after work in the afternoon, on their way home, in late evening before going to sleep, and while trying to fall asleep. Timings are varied and they depend on age, gender, and nature of work.

Women tend to listen to the Qur'an in the morning more than in the evening. The recited Qur'an accompanies housewives while doing the house chores. The Qur'an is usually played in the background while they move from one room to another. Men, on the other hand, tend to listen to the Qur'an mostly while going to work or on their way home. They usually turn the recited Qur'an in the background while they are driving.

Respondents see their older parents accustomed to sleep while listening to the Qur'an, as it also awakens them up. This habit, which is linked with availability of ample time, is common among older people: grandparents, parents, and mothers. However, the partners of knowledge reported that some of their friends and colleagues could not fall asleep unless the Qur'an is on although not all of them are regular pray-doers.

The respondents unanimously agreed that listening to the Qur'an is not linked to a specific time. They listen to it whenever and wherever they like or need to. This is the most important thing from their perspective.

Moreover, the respondents showed preference to listen to the Qur'an on Fridays rather than on the working days of the week. They also noted that the time span of listening to the Qur'an increases during the month of Ramadan, as fasting people tend to listen to some Qur'anic recitations while waiting for *Iftar* (i.e., a meal after sunset that ends Ramadan daily fast).

Regarding *places of listening to the Qur'an*, in most cases, the respondents said they listen to the Qur'an at home. For them, this is the best available opportunity to focus, enjoy reciting, and reflect on the meanings of the Qur'an. In addition, as has been mentioned in the previous paragraph, they listen to the Qur'an in the car while going to work or returning home.

Ritual experiences intersect with ethnographic observations in this respect. Male respondents confirmed that coffee shops are places of permanent listening to Qur'an recitations. In the morning before going to work, men like to listen to the Qur'an

for an hour or so in the cafes via satellite channels, which broadcast the Qur'an 24/7 such as *Al-Majd* or *Glory TV*. Many Muslims who are deeply and emotionally affected by listening to the recited Qur'an do not understand the meaning of the text. That takes place more in less-developed rural areas in Egypt as well as in the poor urban places in Cairo.

Although many *Fatwas* (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority such as *al-Azhar* knowledgeable Sheikhs) stated "dedicating oneself to the listening of the Quran when it is recited is among the characteristics of the believers acting on the verse of Allah which reads (what means): {So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy},[1] many experienced listening to Qur'an while sitting in café shops, studying, or even doing domestic chores like cooking and baking.[2] Owners of café shops and small groceries believe that playing recited Qur'an, especially in the morning, gives them grace from Allah Almighty that might increase their *rizq* or revenues.[3]"

The new media has offered listeners more flexibility to listen to the Qur'an. Young respondents noted that they tend to download the recited Qur'an recordings on their smartphones, which allows them to listen to it anytime and anywhere. Some others find easy accessibility in CDs and YouTube channels. Satellite radio channels also offer flexible listening chances, as respondents said they can easily turn to the Glorious Qur'an radio channels after periods of watching television. Listening to the Qur'an radio increases with age, as respondents pointed out that this seems to be a widespread habit among parents and grandparents.

Regarding the time span of listening to the Qur'an, the respondents' replies show that it could extend from half an hour to an hour per listening session. The span is much longer in cases of housewives and the elderly who are used to listen to the Qur'an for several hours, as well as among people who suffer from chronic pain such as Rabab, the knowledge partner whom God healed of cancer.

[1] "Devoting oneself to the listening of the Quran will have a great effect on the listener contrarily to when he is busy doing something else when listening to it." See: https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/92444/listening-to-the-quran-while-playing-or-working

[2] "When the Quran is being recited, it is waajib (compulsory) to listen attentively to the recitation of the Quran. Attentive listening refers to the undivided attention given to the recitation of the Quran. When one is busy in the kitchen (cooking, baking, etc.) and the Quran is being recited through any medium, radio, cd, etc. and one is also listening attentively to the Quran and the cooking, etc., is not obstructing the listening of the Quran, then attentive listening is found, and it would be permissible to listen to Quran at that time. On the other hand, if the Quran is being recited while studying, then attentive listening is not found as in studying the mind is consumed in reading and understanding. In that case, one cannot give undivided attention to the reciting of the Qur'an and it will not be permissible to listen to Quran at that time. Also keep in mind that it is disrespectful to listen to the Quran as a secondary option and to simply past time." See: https://islamqa.org/hanafi/themufti/152551/is-it-permissible-to-play-the-quran-whilst-cooking-in-the-kitchen/

[3] "Invoking Allah by virtue of good deeds, such as reciting the Quran to bring goodness and repel evil is lawful. The evidence for this is the Hadeeth of the three people who were trapped in a cave and could not get out of it, so they invoked to Allah by virtue of their good deeds so that Allah would make a way out for them." See: https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatwa/390457/reciting-chapter-ya-seen-upon-starting-a-shop

Responding to the question of whether they prefer individual or collective listening, most respondents stated that they prefer to stay alone while listening to the Qur'an. This helps create the best atmosphere of contemplation, forethought, and enjoyment. Collective listening was preferred in a few cases and as part of a family tradition such as the case with one of the respondents who like to listen with her parents to the recitations by a certain Sheikh.

The respondents' interviews and memoirs reflected some motives for listening to the Qur'an. It seems that the motive itself can affect not only the time span of listening to the recitations, but also the degree of concentration. This is discussed in the coming subsection.

Situational motivations of listening to the Qur'an

Every time Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) went through a tough situation, he used to rush to prayer and Qur'an recitation. This has established a habit among Muslims to recite/listen to the Qur'an during shocks and calamities. These could be classified into four situations: The first one is related to losing beloved ones, getting inflicting with a disease, losing one's job and money, or failing in study or work. The second situation is linked to the feeling of being treated with injustice by others. The third is a person's sense of loneliness and alienation, and the fourth case is pertinent to personality patterns such as anxious personality or dual manic-depressive personality. In all cases, grieves drive people to listen to the Qur'an because it is believed to be a source of hope and happiness in this life and the hereafter.

Moments of joy and happiness, on the other hand, do not seem to trigger the tendency to listen to the Qur'an among the subjects. In happy situations, most people generally prefer listening to certain recitations that evoke *Tarab*.

Some studies, like that of Nicol (2001), suggest potential pairings between the needs associated with chronic illnesses and the effects associated with music listening. Chronic illness evokes feelings of insecurities that lead to a preoccupation with life's meaning and value. Music has a strong association with such feelings. It conveys experiences of socialization, order, structure, and transcendence, and contributes to identity formation. This could also be the case with listening to the Qur'an as the healing sound for Muslims. This is evident in the response of Rabab.

> "My need got intensified for listening to the Qur'an when I was shocked by being diagnosed with cancer," Rabab noted. "I panicked and was terrified. The Qur'an was great reassuring for me. In the past, I used to turn on the recited Qur'an in the background while being busy with other stuff, but now I listen with all my senses and try to stay focused to grasp the meanings of the verses and the wisdom behind them. I started looking for a particular *Surah* (chapter) like *Surat Yusuf* (Prophet Josef), which is characterized by its specific verses of patience and endurance."

"Of course, listening to the Qur'an was a routine practice for me before being afflicted with the disease, but it is only after my agony that it has become a necessity of life. I cannot survive without listening to the Qur'an every day. It has become

my companion, and even more effective in healing my pain than when I recite it myself," Rabab added.

Ahmed pointed out that listening to the Qur'an was his savior during the times of loneliness he spent while living abroad. "Throughout the year I spent working in one of the Arab Gulf countries, I was always listening to the Qur'an to overcome the feelings of loneliness and homesickness—a loneliness that paradoxically increased with the availability of social media," Ahmed said.

Akram talked about a shocking experience that he had while he was studying et al.-Azhar University. "In the fourth year of college, I forgot the date of the Qur'an exam! The exam was on Monday, and I mistakenly thought it on Tuesday. It was a difficult situation. I forgot the Qur'an that I passionate about!" he stated.

Furthermore, the analysis of the respondents' comments show that people also resort to the Qur'an during situations that include injustice being inflicted on them by others. The verses of the Qur'an comforted Mona and helped her overcome the betrayal of the love of her life. "When I was betrayed, I had terrible feelings of injustice. I felt the need to listen to the Qur'an. I used to cry while praying to God to make me overcome this ordeal."

Nadia had another basic motivation to listen to the Qur'an: "my mom calls me *'Nadia the anxious'* as I have inherited this stormy angry personality from my Dad, I guess. I connect more with the Qur'an when I feel oppressed. If there is a problem between me and one of my colleagues or my friends, just like one of them starts to backbite me, I would go listen to the Qur'an seeking justice from our Lord. Also, when I started looking for a job, I felt very much depressed. I could not find a job, and I used to cry while listening to the Qur'an, asking God to help me triumph over my pains of being unemployed and useless."

Five of the respondents noted that listening to the Qur'an was a source of power and comfort during their hard times. Mona, on the other hand, was the only respondent with a distinct viewpoint. She was the only knowledge partner to express her need to listen to the Qur'an in situations of joy. "At those special times, I like to listen to the Qur'an so that I can thank God and show my gratitude, but in sad moments, I feel better staying on my own without doing anything," Mona mentioned.

In the Egyptian context, dire economic disparities and difficulties of living, associated with rupture of relations and social bonds, are nerve-racking, and most people feel comfortable listening to the Qur'an as a source of relief. Such an issue needs thorough investigation for which there is no space in this study and could therefore be covered by future research.

The stream of consciousness and ideas associated with listening to the Qur'an

The level of concentration while listening to the Qur'an varies from one person to another. Naturally, there is a stream of consciousness accompanied with listening to the Qur'an that carries internal monologue and that differs according to gender and age as well as social, economic, educational, and even psychological and physical conditions of the listener. It also varies within one listener at different stages of his/her life.

The term "stream of consciousness" was first used in psychology and then was borrowed by literature to refer to a writing style. It refers to the flow of ideas in a person's mind. This includes both "surface and deep structures of the mind; structures that constitute centers provide the stream with ideas, images, and fantasies" (Baars, 1997: 5, 6).

Al-Mahadeen (2006) state that writings of the stream of consciousness represent a literary tool that portrays the perspective of an individual both in introvert or internal monologue, and in reaction to sensory external occurrences. Researchers conducting phenomenological studies prefer this kind of style. Asking study participants to jot down whatever associations come to their minds while thinking about a certain phenomenon helps researchers consider that phenomenon in a way that covers different angles and dimensions. Contrary to the common belief that the stream of consciousness presents fragments and incoherent ideas, such style produces an interconnected piece of writing (Dainton, 2002). Therefore, in this study, the researcher tried to reach a full understanding of the phenomenon of listening to the Qur'an through probing into the minds of the participants.

The stream of consciousness is more important than the formal narrative stream that describes the outside world, as the former usually combines ideas, though may seem incoherent and fragmented; reflect a deep psychological state (Baars, 1997).

Concerning the ideas that pop up in the minds of the knowledge partners, as shown in their memoirs and diaries as well as the in-depth interviews, it seems that the interaction with the Qur'an triggers all sorts of experiences.

Akram offered a wide range of ideas, starting with "thinking about the meanings of verses that are being recited and why they took those patterns to approach the Almighty God's intentions through knowing the interpretation of the verses."

"Sometimes my mind got distracted. I start thinking about my life or the problems I have. In addition, sometimes I pause for a moment to think about a problem in my study or work, and then suddenly I got a creative solution for it," Akram said.

This is confirmed by Fathi who said: "I always have distracting thoughts while listening to the Qur'an. They are related to events experienced in my life. For example, an engineer listening to the Qur'an might have ideas about his/her engineering drawing or reach a creative plan or design while listening. A teacher might have distracting thoughts while listening because he/she thinks about a lesson and how to explain it well, and so on." He added to the reasons behind swinging attention: "a high concentration requires a likable sheikh whose voice is close to the heart, while poor concentration could perhaps be attributed to the voice of sheikhs whom you do not like to listen to. Being occupied by many concerns of life also decreases the level of concentration while listening."

Moreover, distracting thoughts might be related to the Qur'an itself. The rules and skills of recitation are likely to occur in the minds of people who already know them. This is especially the case with Akram and Fathi, who graduated from Al-Azhar University, the famous Egyptian university specialized in Islamic theology.

By contrast, thoughts about rules and skills of recitation rarely occurred in the mind of Ahmed, a young journalist. "When I start listening, I think about the meaning of the verses and then suddenly I get strayed to think about my work, and I get indulged in an internal voice saying to me, for example, that I am very

absorbed in my job to the extent that I do not have time to sit with my wife and kids or to do innovative things like writing novels," Ahmed said.

There is another important factor associated with reception, which can be described as the ideal psychological mood for being influenced and moved by the recited Qur'an. It is a phenomenon similar to the mechanism of tuning into a radio station. In such a mood, the listener gets stirred by the recited verses, just like the case with listening to music and songs.

Naturally, a listener who is plagued by trauma or chronic deep pain indulges in verses related to patience, compassion, and faith, and in ideas reflected on his/her pain. Rabab said, "I get strayed while listening to verses of the Qur'an when l feel that the Qur'an is addressing me, and I begin to cry when I realize the rewards that God saved to those who are patient and able to withstand their pains. God knows well my pain, and He promises me that He will relieve them. Whether you are an orphan, plagued by poorness, or infected by a disease, make sure that God listens to you and will relieve you. If you are sad, He will make you happy; if you are content, He will give you more; if you sinned, He promises you mercy and forgiveness, and that's part of the mystery of the Qur'an."

Thoughts of straying produce human meanings that explain people's experiences, which is the main goal of phenomenological research. Mona said: "when I listen to the Qur'an, I become so much absorbed by the verses that contain moral lessons and stories. They assure me that God Almighty will help me when I feel overpowered. Listening gives me security because God is just. If I have sinned, I listen because I want to cry, get purified, and get rid of guilt."

All the respondents share the common experience of crying while listening to Qur'an recitations. They all agreed that Qur'an can easily bring tears to their eyes. Motivations range from fear of God to hope of overcoming trauma or pain.

Fathi stated: "crying is an integral part of my response to listening to the Glorious Qur'an. I do cry from the fear of God and because Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) promises a great reward for those who cry for fear of God in his saying: (God promises that an eye which has wept out of fear of God shall not be touched by the hell). I honestly like to listen to the Qur'an when I commit sins and then I pray, cry, regret, ad ask God to forgive me."

The same idea is expressed by Ahmed who said, "Despite all the misery and sadness in the world, there will always be hope in the mercy of God and the afterlife. I cry sometimes not only because I fear God, but also because I hope for his forgiveness."

According to the respondents, the rapture of artistic joy or *Tarab* is also achieved by listening to the Qur'an. The researcher has examined this gratification in his virtual ethnographical observation of forums of the Qur'an on the Internet; especially those attributed to legendry classic Egyptian voices that recited the Qur'an. Such mood is evident in the case of respondents with rural background. This observation was confirmed when reading the memoirs of Fathi who is originally from the countryside. "Sometimes listening to the Qur'an becomes my alternative to listening to music and songs because it comforts me, makes me closer to God, and helps me obey the Almighty, unlike songs that sometimes make me feel guilty," Fathi said.

The emotional bonds to a certain sheikh occasionally result in distraction associated with boosting the mood. Akram, who spent his childhood in the countryside said: "on radio, I often hear one of the great classic Egyptian sheikhs reciting a certain chapter or Surah such as *Al-Qiyamah* (the Resurrection), then I remember the remarkable performance of my beloved Sheikh Mohammed Jibril, and I quickly get his recording and start to listen to it."

Replying to the question of why he resorts to listening to the Qur'an radio in his car, Ahmed said "because I sometimes feel I am in need to hear something other than songs to get relieved from the work stress. I just need to unplug from the outside world. However, at other times I do not have the urge to listen to the Qur'an and I prefer listening to classical music or old songs by Fairuz, especially when I am tired and do not have the tendency to communicate with the verses."

The results of analyzing the responses of the knowledge partners showed significant difference between the respondents who come from a religious educational background and those with a secular educational background. Another significant difference is evident between the subjects who were raised up in rural areas compared to those who were raised up in urban Cairo. In addition, the study showed the strong emotional response of people inflicted by a serious disease like cancer and how they indulge in a unique stream of consciousness compared to those who might switch to songs when they get bored from listening to the Qur'an.

Causes of listeners' preferences of sheikhs reciting the Qur'an

Two respondents of the study are attached to the voice of the Egyptian Sheikh Mohammed Jibril and two others are fond of the voice of late Egyptian Sheikh Abdul-Basit Abdul-Samad. One is emotionally involved with the voice of the Emeriti Sheikh Rashid Al-Afasy and another with the voice of the Saudi Sheikh Ahmad Al-Ajmi.

The place where the respondents grew up, their age, and educational background play curial roles in favoring a particular reader. This bond reaches a climax where the voice of the beloved reader becomes, to a large degree, the voice of the Qur'an itself. In other words, the listener becomes very much captivated by the beauty of a certain sheikh's performance and intonation. Sometimes, a listener might preserve the first rank for a certain reciter while can still listen to others.

The relationship between the Qur'an reciter and listener resembles the relationship between an artist and his/her fan. As in singing fandom, listeners of the Qur'an collect the recordings of their beloved reciters and keep playing them repeatedly. Media contents, like biographies, about adored voices are read and preserved. Indeed, the life of well-known sheikhs like Abdul-Basit Abdul-Samad, the Egyptian reciter, resembled lives of celebrities to the extent that "Egyptian media in the late fifties of the last century labeled him (Abdel Basset Brando) after the name of then-Hollywood star, Marlon Brando as Sheikh Abdul-Basit received offers of marriage from a number of admirers in the Arab World, especially from Syria" (Al-Saadani, 1991: 41).

Some listeners become attached to a particular reciter from childhood, and this bond keeps growing with them all through adulthood. Others might admire a certain reciter in their youth, but then start to like another one when they become middle-aged.

One's family plays an important role in preference for a particular reciter. This was specially the case with the respondents close to their parents and who frequently play recordings of their preferred sheikh. Such bond is strengthened if listening to a particular reciter is accompanied by a duty to memorize the Qur'an. In other cases, parents' preference to a certain reciter might turn into a heavy burden on the shoulders of a certain son or daughter, who might like another one. This especially happens when the offspring move away from their family, leaving the countryside to the capital, for instance.

Finding touching voices might take the form of a quest, a beautiful surprise, or a fine chance. Akram described his journey to find a beautiful reciter saying: "I went to pray in *Amr ibn Al-Aas Mosque* once in the holy month of Ramadan. I listened to the call for prayers, and then stood up for the collective prayer. The Imam recited the Qur'an, and then I wished I could get out of the prayer out of joy and shout (I've found what I'm looking for)."

Fathi stated that despite his love for voices of Minshawi, Mustafa Ismail, and Shahat Anwar, his preferred reciter remains Mohammed Jibril due to "his somber voice that looks like a sobbing violin. Such voice makes me closer to God and away from sin."

Ahmed believed that despite his love of voices of classic Egyptian reciters like Mohamed Refaat and Mustafa Ismail, he is fond of the voice of Sheikh Abdul Basit Abdul Samad because "my dad used to love his voice and play his recitations repeatedly. I have grown up hearing his soft gloomy tone in our house since childhood. His invites the audience to meditation."

Surprisingly, Ahmed, a novelist and rational "modern" journalist, provided a mystic explanation to his bond to Sheikh Abdel Basset: "Once when I was five years old, I went with my father to El-Hussein Mosque, and then all of a sudden as we stepped outside the mosque, Sheikh Abdel Basset appeared in front of us. He lifted me in arms and kissed me. Maybe, this is why I find myself close to the man."

All respondents of the study unanimously agreed that they feel the Qur'an more when they listen to it from their preferred reciter. That indicates the importance of the human mediator, which conveys the meanings of the Qur'an.

Rabab likes the voice of Emirati Sheikh Afasy because he has a "quiet and slow tone which instigates the feeling of awe. His performance is so beautiful that it touches your heart and gives you the chills." Mona, on the other hand, prefers listening to the recitations of Ahmed Ajmi, a Saudi reciter. "The reason why I do so is because I was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. His voice brings a great reverence and a psychological comfort."

Except for Mona, all respondents highlighted the influence of sober voices upon their souls. Reciting the Qur'an with a gloomy tone can move people to tears. A state that is recommended by Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) who has a famous saying that goes: "When you recite it [the Qur'an], weep. If you cannot weep, then lament."

Egypt's new generations have begun to break away from the Egyptian traditional school of intonation of the Quran. Probably the main reason for this is that those generations have grown up in temporary migration countries such as those in the Gulf region and have got used to the voices of Saudi and Emirati reciters.

There were several reasons for the decline of the once-prevailed Egyptian school of recitation that stretched from the beginning of the twentieth century until the beginning of its eighties.

First, the cultural influence of the Wahhabi ideas, an extension of the school of the hardliner Ahmed ibn Hanbal, distasted musical intonations of the Qur'an as it equalizes that with singing. The second is the decline of the Egyptian economy coupled with a decline in Egypt's cultural uniqueness. Third, the emergence of Islamic educational institutions led to the retreat of A*l-Azhar* status as the central and leading school in religious education. Fourth, the satellite channels, which are mostly owned by Saudi businessmen, favor famous readers from the Gulf countries over their counterparts from Egypt. Finally, there is deterioration in the selection criteria of Qur'an reciters in Egyptian radio and (Mahmoud, 2015).

The bond that most respondents have with a given voice was created in their childhood, a stage described by psychologists as the pre-sexual state that is characterized by purity, innocence, and warmth coming from the parents. It seems that as people grow older, sexual instinct starts to play a pivotal role, especially for males, in fostering a sense of religious alienation. This is a hypothesis that deserves a further inquiry.

Discussion and conclusion

Concerning the preferred *time and space* for listening to the Qur'an, the results of the study showed that both males and females like to play Qur'an recitations in the background while they are busy doing other things (house chores in case of females and driving in case of males). The respondents unanimously agreed that listening to the Qur'an is not linked to a specific time. They listen to it whenever and wherever they like or need to. Moreover, the respondents showed preference to listen to the Qur'an on Fridays rather than on the working days of the week. They also noted that the time span of listening to the Qur'an increases during the month of Ramadan.

Furthermore, female respondents said they like to listen to the Qur'an at home, while the males mentioned café shops as a possible option to enjoy collective listening. Unfortunately, no similar studies have been conducted by media scholars on when and where do Muslims like to listen to the Qur'an. This emphasizes the significance of this research and invites future research on this point.

As for the question of what kind of *situations that motivates* listening to the Qur'an, five of the respondents said that they resort to the Qur'an during hard times (e.g., suffering from a disease, betrayal, or injustice). This goes in line with the findings of research Mariza and Anggraini (2020), Abadi et al. (2020), Fitri Hamidiyanti and Pratiwi (2019), Nadimah (2018), Heidari and Shahbazi (2013), and Zulkurnaini et al. (2012) whose contributions have been discussed in the literature review, and

who all proved that listening to the Qur'an reduces physical and psychological pains and lowers levels of anxiety.

This study found out that the experience of listening to the Qur'an as expressed by its audience, concentrated on either recreational, aesthetic, or functional, namely therapeutical and ritual, level. Only the exegetical level does not appear in the responses of the sample of that study.

Regarding the ideas that occur in the mind of the respondents while they listen to the Qur'an, the respondents' answers suggested that the level of concentration while listening to the Qur'an varies from one person to another. Most of the respondents said that sometimes they go distracted while listening to the Qur'an. Moreover, comparing the answers of the respondents showed that this issue could be related to the educational background. While most of the respondents with secular educational background mentioned that the ideas that occur to them while listening to the Qur'an are related to non-religious context (i.e., home or work problems), the respondent who graduated from Al-Azhar University said that the skills and rules of reciting the Qur'an sometimes get into the way of attentive listening.

Additionally, this research examined the reasons given by the respondents that determine their preference of a Qur'an reciter over another. The place where the respondents was raised up, parents' preferences, and personal experiences governed their choice of the favorite sheikh. Concerning the *vocal features* of the respondents' favored sheikhs, the replies indicated that the place where the respondents grew up, their age, and educational background play curial roles in preferring a particular reader. Most of the respondents mentioned that the gloomier the voice of the reciter is, the easier it becomes for them to reflect on the meaning of the verses. This is very much related to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to cry while listening to the Qur'an. This result agrees with that of Denny (1989) who believes that a soft and pleasant voice is a condition for attentive listening.

It is to be mentioned again that although these findings are based on a limited sample, they are indicative of how a phenomenological approach to the study of listening to the Qur'an can bring about several key under researched issues that worth future exploration.

Aesthetic listening was present also especially for those from religious educational backgrounds and rural areas. The purposes why they resort to Qur'an recitations, especially Tajweed, include seeking grace, expelling evil spirits and envy, and bringing clouds of calmness and tranquility to home. This socio-cultural function of the Quran resonances its equivalent that took place through the centuries of Muslim societies, that highlights the historical dimension of this research.

Knowledge partners from secular educational background are more critical of many of the listening manifestations related to seeking grace and expelling evil spirits, claiming that those undermine the powerful ethical behavior-controlling possibilities of listening to the Qur'an. Some of them even have doubts about the popular perceptions of the hereafter. Those latter are male knowledge partners raising questions about who has the capability of critical accounts of the prevailed popular culture.

In conclusion, the study inspected the phenomenon of listening to the Qur'an from the point of view of a sample that consists of six respondents whose age range between twenty-eight and forty. The two tools adopted by the study, namely,

memoirs and interviews, have helped gain deep insights into the positive influence of the Qur'an on its heavy listeners.

It is to be re-emphasized that the goal of this study is not to make a generalization about the impact of listening to the Qur'an, but rather to highlight certain experiences that are narrated by the Qur'an listeners themselves in an attempt to construct a theoretical model that other researchers might quantitatively apply later.

Finally, it is through such qualitative phenomenological studies, and those that rely also on grounded theory that new theoretical models can be formed to be quantitatively tested in subsequent studies.

Author contribution The paper has just one author.

Funding Open access funding provided by The Science, Technology & Innovation Funding Authority (STDF) in cooperation with The Egyptian Knowledge Bank (EKB).

Data availability Not applicable.

Declarations

Ethical approval Not applicable.

Competing interests The author declares no competing interests.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

References

Abadi, A. H., et al. (2020). Effect of listening to Holy Quran recitation on test anxiety levels of university students. *Komeesh Journal (Iran), 22*(3), 477–482.

Abbasi, H., et al. (2011). Mystics and listening to Quran. *Pazhuhishnaih Ifran, 2*(4), 59–78.

Abou Mourad, N. (2009). "Quelques réflexions sur la cantillation religieuse en Méditerranée." *La pensée de midi/Actes Sud*, Numéro 27, Musique et poésie.

Al-Bakri, T., Mallah, M. (2016). Musical performance of the holy Quran with assistance of the Arabic Maqams. *TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 1(12), 121–133.

Al-Mahadeen, A. M. (2006), "Stream of consciousness in the novels of Abdul-Rahman Munif." *PhD Dissertation*, Mu'tah University, Saudi Arabia.

Al-Saadani, M. (1991). *Melodies from heaven* (2nd ed.). Akhbar Al-Youm Publishing House.

Baars, B. (1997). *The theater of consciousness*. Oxford University Press.

Bedford, I. (2001). The interdiction of music in Islam. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology, 2*(1), 1–14.

Buser, J. K., & Parkins, R. A. (2013). "Made this way for a reason": Body satisfaction and spirituality. *Adultspan Journal, 12*(1), 24–37.

Cook, R. J. (2015). Sound lets you see: A phenomenology of hearing screen media. *Coactivity: Philosophy, Communication*, 23(2), 124–138.

Cortesi, S., & Gasser, U. (2015). Youth online and news: A phenomenological view on diversity. *International Journal of Communication, 9*(1), 1425–1448.
Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
Dainton, B. (2002). *Stream of consciousness: Unity and continuity in conscious experience*. Routledge.
Denny, M. D. (1989). Qur'ān recitation: A tradition of oral performance and transmission. *Oral Tradition, 4*(1–2), 5–26.
Droumeva, M. & Andrisani, V. (2010). Toward a cultural phenomenology of mediated aural practices. *Interference Journal*, 1, 1–16, http://www.interferencejournal.com/archives/157. Accessed 5 February 2020.
El-Hady, M. M. and Kandeel, N. A. (2017). The effect of listening to Qur'an on physiological responses of mechanically ventilated Muslim patients. *Journal of Nursing and Health Science (IOSR-JNHS)* 6(5), 79–87.
Ferrucci, P., et al. (2015). The Facebook experience: A phenomenology of Facebook use. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies, 5*(3), 176–197.
Fitri Hamidiyanti, B. Y., & Pratiwi, I. G. (2019). Effect of listening to the Quran on anxiety level in primipara. *Health Spiritual Medical Ethics, 6*(1), 52–68.
Gade, A. M. (2006). Recitation. In A. Rippin (Ed.), *The Blackwell companion to the Quran* (pp. 5–25). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
Galal, E. (2008). Magic spells and recitation contests: The Qur'an as entertainment on Arab satellite television. *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook, 6*(1), 165–179.
Heidari, M., & Shahbazi, S. (2013). Effect of Qur'an and music on anxiety in patients during endoscopy. *Knowledge and Health, Shahrekord: Iran, 8*(2), 37–70.
Hein, S. F., & Austin, W. J. (2001). Empirical and hermeneutic approaches to phenomenological research in psychology: A comparison. *Psychological Methods, 6*(1), 3–17.
Hirschkind, C. (2001). The ethics of listening: Cassette-sermon audition in contemporary Egypt. *American Ethnologist, 28*(3), 623–649.
Ihde, D. (2007). *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (2nd ed.). USA.
Introna, L. D., & Ilharco, F. M. (2006). On the meaning of screens: Towards a phenomenological account of screenness. *Human Studies, 3*(1), 1–25.
Introna, L. D. (2004). The Ontological screening of contemporary life. *European Journal of Information Systems, 13*(3), 221–234.
Jones, C. T. (2013). Christian listening and the ethical of liturgical text. *Literature and Theology, 27*(2), 227–239.
Khalifa, F. (2015). *The emergence and the development of the Women's Piety Movement (WPM) in Nablus City, a practice theory approach*. PhD Dissertation, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester, UK.
Lucero, A. L. (2013). "An exploration of social media use among multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth". *PhD Dissertation*, US: The University of Texas at Al Paso.
Mahmoud, N. H. (2015). Rise and decline of state of recitation. *Al-Helal, 12*(1), 23–38.
Mariza, A., & Anggraini, C. L. (2020). The effect of listening to holy Qur'an recitation on labor pain in the first stage of labor. *International Journal of Nursing and Health Science, 3*(1), 57–62.
Meyer, B. (2006). *Religious sensations: Why media, aesthetics and power matter in the study of contemporary religion*. Vrije Universiteit.
Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.
Nadimah, N. A. (2018). Study on the effect of reading activities and listening to Al-Quran on human mental health. *Journal Intellectual Sufism Research (JISR), 1*(1), 19–23.
Nelson, K. (1985). *The art of reciting the Qur'ān*. University of Texas Press.
Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education, 8*(2), 90–97. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2
Nicholl, H. (2010). Diaries as a method in data collection research. *Pediatric Nursing, 22*(7), 16–20.
Nicol, J. J. (2001). "In the company of music and illness: The experience and meaning of music listening for women with chronic illness". *PhD Dissertation*, US: The University of British Columbia.
Ohtsuka, K. (1990). How is Islamic knowledge acquired in modern Egypt? Ulama, Sufis, Fundamentalists and common people. *Senri Ethnological Studies, 28*(1), 67–82.
Pinxit, V. (2016). "Stillness: A meditation in new media art". *PhD Dissertation*, Queensland University of Technology.

Rasmussen, A. (2001). The Qur'an in Indonesian daily life: The public project of musical oratory. *Ethnomusicology, 45*(1), 30–57.

Rasmussen, A. (2012). Women, the recited Qur'an, and Islamic music in Indonesia. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies, 8*(2), 105–107.

Ritchie, J., & Louis, J. (2004). *Qualitative research practice*. Sage Publications.

Salam, U. B., et al. (2013). Potentiality of *taubah* (Islamic repentance) and listening to the Holy Quran recitation on galvanic skin response. *International Journal of Psychology and Counselling, 5*(2), 33–37.

Schnapp, D. C. (2008). Listening in context: Religion and spirituality. *The International Journal of Listening, 22*(1), 133–140.

Talmon-Heller, D. (2012). Reciting the Qur'an and reading the Torah: Muslim and Jewish attitudes and practices in a comparative historical perspective. *Religion Compass, 6*(8), 369–380.

Watts, J. H. (2008). Emotion, empathy and exit: Reflections on doing ethnographic qualitative research on sensitive topics. *Medical Sociology Online, 3*(2), 3–14.

Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. Simon and Schuster.

Welz, C. (2019). A Theological phenomenology of listening: God's 'voice' and 'silence' after Auschwitz. *Religions, 10*(1), 139–156.

White, R. G. (2014). "Christian music experience in the faith development of adolescence: A phenomenological study". *PhD Dissertation*, Liberty University.

Wilcox-Ugurlu, C. (2011). "Social media, existence, identity dynamics and experiential consumption", *PhD Dissertation*, University of Rhode Island.

Williams, K. M., & Banjo, O. (2013). From where we stand: Exploring Christian listeners' social location and Christian music listening. *Journal of Media and Religion, 12*(1), 196–216.

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2011). *Mass media research: An introduction* (9th ed.). Wadsworth.

Woodfalla, A., & Zezulkovaa, M. (2016). What children experience and adults may overlook: Phenomenological approaches to media practice, education and research. *Journal of Children and Media, 10*(1), 98–106.

Zulkurnaini, N. A. et al (2012), 'The comparison between listening to Al-Qur'an and listening to classical music on the brainwave signal for the alpha band', *Third International Conference on Intelligent Systems, Modeling and Simulation (ISMS)*, Kota Kinabalu: Malaysia.

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.