

## Towards a New Approach in the Teaching of the Holy Qur'an

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### Abstract

*From the early days of Islam, dynamics of Islamic education in the entire Muslim world have always been associated with the teaching of the holy Qur'an. At the basic elementary level, institutions which provided Qur'an education were often supervised by the ruling authorities, private charitable philanthropists, or pious and people. This educational experience offers a fertile field for those who want to take a closer look at the Islamic education instructional and teaching approaches, such as dictation and memorization, through which the instructor is the only one who explains and analyzes, and the learners' passive role is relegated in most of the cases to the mere acceptance of what the teacher says. Because a big part of the curriculum, pedagogical programs, and scientific heritage of Qur'an education are in practical oblivion, the researchers are going to review the major approaches of Quran education, and their utility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational arena, then propose 'what is to be done' to overcome the shortcomings of the traditional methods.*

**Keywords:** Qur'an, Study circle, Teaching- methods, Memorization

### *The centrality of Qur'an in the Muslim collective consciousness*

Though brief and fearful, the encounter of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) with Archangel Jibril -Gabriel in his retreat cave of *hira* on 21<sup>st</sup> Ramadan (613CE) at the age of 40 was a momentous event. The simple five verses burst upon Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) which started with the single word of command *iqra* - Read signified the beginning of a magnificent story of Allah's *wahy* - revelation that will last twenty three years more. From that moment on words, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) surrendered himself completely to the universal task of conveying the true religion of God to his family, intimate friends, clan, Arab people and the rest of humanity. At his own house<sup>1</sup>, the main priority of the Prophet then was to teach his companions the tenets of the religion, reciting the Qur'anic passages and interpreting its meaning.

Given the fact that the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the early years of the Islamic *da'wah* – preaching was a fraction of the complete collection of divine texts, it was quiet ordinary for the Prophet Muhammad to be the main source of the Qur'anic knowledge, judge its truthfulness and the reference for emulation in terms of the pedagogy. On a daily basis, the Prophet took upon himself the task of explaining the meaning of the Qur'anic verses to his followers, faith's qualitative superiority, and also demonstrating that through words and actions.<sup>2</sup> Gradually, studying and memorizing Qur'anic passages constituted what could be informally considered as a syllabus for a burgeoning curriculum of Islamic education.

In *dar al-arqam* -a house in the outskirts of Makkah- Muhammad (pbuh) used it as a safe place to meet his followers, pray and teach them about the new faith. Although, we cannot claim that it literally produced what later was termed as *hafiz* - memorizer of Qur'an by heart, *dar al-arqam* was the first educational institution in Islam which provided some forms of Qur'anic education.

<sup>1</sup> The Role of Schools in Islamic Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. al-Otaibi, Moneer M; Rashid, Hakim M. American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences 14.4 (Winter 1997): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Islamic Education and Islamization: Evolution of Themes, Continuities and New Directions. Sarfaroz Niyozov and Nadeem Memon. Journal Of Muslim Minority Affairs Vol. 31 , Iss. 1,2011

It also produced the early Qur'an memorizers such as the first ambassador of Islam Mus'ab bin Umair, a devoted companion who was deployed by the Prophet to *Yathrib* -Madinah after the *al-aqaba* pledge<sup>3</sup> to call the Arab community of that town to the new religion. One major character that privileged Mus'ab over the other companions was his perfect memorization of the revealed passages of Qur'an, a fundamental requirement which was utilized in the selection of Islamic *da'is* - preachers. Besides reciting Qur'anic revelations to his motivated followers in Mecca, the Prophet employed *dar al-arqam* as a center for other Qur'an related activities including explaining the meanings and memorizing them. The memorization of Qur'an was emphasized because Arabia at that time was an oral society. People relied on their memorizing dispositions to commit words and passages to their memory and quote them years and even decades later. In such oral culture, the Prophet felt that the training was indispensable for both *da'wah* and preservation of the revelation.

As far as the Qur'an is concerned, the Makkan period of the Islamic message can be divided into two phases. During the first phase, which lasts about five years, the prophet had only a handful of followers who clustered around him, and he preached to them in secrecy. The short and replete with rhyme and assonance verses revealed during this period were mainly concerned with the inner substance of faith...This followed by a period of eight years during which the Prophet openly and actively propagated his message and faced a hostile reception from the Quraysh, the dominant tribe of Makkah.<sup>4</sup>

In the Islamic tradition, learning Qur'an and teaching it is regarded as a unique act that is not comparable to any other one. In many locations the Qur'an underscores the majesty of God's verses: [*those who rehearse the book of Allah, establish regular prayer, And send (in charity) Out of what we have provided For them, secretly and openly, Hope for a commerce That will never fail: For He will pay them Their meed, nay He will Give them (even) more Out of His Bounty: For He is Oft- Forgiving, Most Ready to appreciate (service)*]<sup>5</sup>.

Commenting on these two verses Yusuf Ali explains the man of God in first part of the verse as the one who "takes Allah's revelation (the book) to heart."<sup>6</sup> The importance of Qur'an is mainly derived from the conviction that it is the words of God revealed to salvage mankind and protect God himself from any kind of corruption, either by imitation or forgery. Unlike the other scriptures which were corrupted with God's will, God preserved the Qur'an against any form of corruption. It asserts: [*We have, without doubt sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)*]<sup>7</sup>. Allah also confirms the uniqueness as another characteristic of the Qur'an, and challenges the jinn and mankind to come up with something similar to the book. [*Say: if the whole of mankind and the jinns were gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support*]

According to Muslims' belief, this revelation (Qur'an) is the central reality in the life of Islamic society. As the articulation of God's plan for humanity, it serves both as the generator of Islamic civilization and as its highest authority - on the one hand, the primary source of law, on the other hand, the attributed if not actual referent of custom.<sup>8</sup>

The Qur'an is not just a religious book which provides the believers with news, theological commands, and descriptions about what pleases the divine and angers Him, it does offer extraordinary comprehensive and informative as it offers historical, legislative, moral and scientific information on top of its primary purpose that is to guide mankind to the right path. [*Verily this Qur'an doth guide to that which is most right (or stable), and giveth the glad tidings to the believers who work deeds of righteousness, that they shall have a magnificent reward*]<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Mohammed Tal'at Abu Sir. *AL-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah (Islamic Education)*. (Al-Matba'a al-Arabiya al-Haditha. Cairo. 1983), 73

<sup>4</sup> Ziauddin Sardar, *Reading the Qur'an: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred Text of Islam*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2011, P. 16.

<sup>5</sup> (*Fatir* 29-30)

<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Qur'an; Text Translation and Commentary*, by Yusuf Ali. New revised edition. (Amana Corporation Brentwood, Maryland, USA. 1989), 1110

<sup>7</sup> *Al-Hijr*; 9

<sup>8</sup>Kristina Nelson. 1988. *ibid* pg. xiv

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Isra*, verse 9

Part of that guidance is its provision of rules organizing man's relationship with God, with himself and with his physical milieu. Basically, the Qur'an emphasizes three dimensions:

- a. Fundamentals of the faith, including *tawhid* - the oneness of Allah, prophethood, the scriptures, and hereafter.
- b. Fundamentals of the jurisprudence which involves commands and interdictions.
- c. Individual and collective morality and character traits, such as trust, honesty, justice, compassion, and worthiness.

The Qur'an regards man as an intelligent being who is capable of edging closer to God more than any other being. One of the beautiful names of God which is highlighted in the Qur'an is *wadood* -the affectionate or the one who is full of loving kindness human beings. God's affection and love has two dimensions:

- a. An essential love to all beings which emanates from his Mercy, thus, He allows all creations to live and enjoy the bounties of this world.
- b. Conditional love which is exclusive for those who follow His Path [Say (O' Muhammad to mankind): "*If you (really) love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you...*"]<sup>10</sup>

The Qur'an offers itself as a framework or a blue print for man's salvation and success. It does not decide and manage everything for humans; it rather trusts their judgments and provides them with authority to find their own way. This is not conflicting with the supreme and comprehensive power of the divine that is depicted in the Qur'anic passages over surrendering and obedient Muslim individuals and community. Nevertheless, man remains responsible and cannot divest himself of this responsibility through a reliance on fatalism or historical determinism...man has the responsibility to correctly recognize the norms of society and to improve those norms for the advancement of his society by means of his own knowledge. This knowledge is normally based on the Qur'an itself as a main source, followed by the *sunnah* (the prophet's traditions), and any other useful means of legislation. Indeed, "every word of the Qur'an is regarded to be the direct utterance of the Almighty, communicated in his actual words by angel Gabriel...to the prophet."<sup>11</sup> It is a treasure of learning wisdom and all possible sciences which led to magnify human thought. It contains the truth, allegories, description, blessings and shows light as to where right and justice lie...it contains the shari'ah principles which are perfect and complete. The principles of law, governmental and state administration are fully dealt with by the Qur'an.<sup>12</sup>

To conclude, it is safe to say that, for Muslims, the Quran is much more than scripture or sacred literature in the usual Western sense. Its primary significance for the vast majority through the centuries has been in its oral form, the form in which it first appeared, as the "recitation" chanted by Muhammad to his followers over a period of about twenty years.<sup>13</sup>

### ***The Islamic Tradition of Memorizing Qur'an***

As a means which enables them to preserve their identity, adhere to their religion, live according to the Islamic traditions, and intergenerational transmission and maintenance of local knowledge, Muslims worldwide, irrespective of their sectarian differences treated Qur'an with immense respect and revered it as a main source for guidance, enlightenment, blessing and inspiration.[*those who believed and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah; for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction.*]<sup>14</sup>

The impact of the divine Qur'anic words on the hearts of the faithful is clearly described in another location: [*for believers are those who , when Allah is mentioned feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear his signs rehearsed, find their faith strengthened, and put (all) their trust in their Lord*]<sup>15</sup>Therefore, Muslims regarded the forms of interaction with the Qur'an by way of recitation, memorization, analysis and interpretation as a key part and prerequisite for learning and spiritual salvation. "Naturally, to recite it correctly is the first prerequisite of the man of learning as well as the worshipper."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Holy Quran, 3:31.

<sup>11</sup> Anwar Ahmad Qadri, *Islamic Jurisprudence in the Modern World*, (Delhi: Taj Company, 1st edn., 1986), 176.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 177.

<sup>13</sup> The Encyclopedia of Islam, The Qur'an in Muslim Life and Thought.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Ra'd; 28

<sup>15</sup> Al-Anfal ; 2

<sup>16</sup> Ismail Raji al-Faruqi & Lamy al-Faruqi. *The Cultural Atlas of Islam*. (Macmillan Publishing Company & Collier Macmillan Publishers London.1989), 240

The Prophet (pbuh) himself was told about the immense significance of reading the Qur'an when he first met the Archangel Jibril. "The first words recited by Gabriel to Mohammed in the cave are the first verses of the Qur'an revealed to him. The first word *iqra* meaning "read" or "recite."<sup>17</sup>

It is a well-known fact for all Muslims that before his death, the Prophet (pbuh) passed on all of the Qur'an he received through revelation to his companions. To ensure that as many as possible of his companions have memorized the Qur'an the way he taught them, the Prophet (pbuh) used different instruction methods. The Qur'an was preserved in writing right from the beginning. Khalid bin Sa'eed, one of the first few people who embraced Islam was the first scribe of the Prophet. His daughter Umm Khalid relates:

My father was the first one to write, bismillahi ar-Rahman ar-Raheem... All that was revealed in Makkah was put into written record even though Muslims were collectively under pressure... In Madina, it appears from different reports; initially the responsibility was mainly on the emigrants (muhajirin). At-Tabari (d. 310 AH) reports. "Ali bin Abi Talib and Uthman bin Affan used to write the revelations. And if they were both absent Ubayy bin Ka b and Zaid bin Thabit used to write it." Among the Ansar (the Helpers) at Madina, Ubayy was the first scribe of the Prophet. The blessed Prophet had more than 40 Companions who usually worked as scribes.<sup>18</sup> Under instructions and direct supervision of the Prophet (pbuh) the *huffaz* - memorizers who were selected to write down the Qur'anic *wahy* were doing their duties. The Prophet in person used to dictate and check for any scribal errors. Zaid bin Thabit, one of the chief scribes, relates: "I used to write down the revelation for the blessed Prophet - may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. When the revelation came to him he felt intense heat and drops of perspiration used to roll down his body like pearls. When this state was over I used to fetch a shoulder bone or a piece of something else. He used to go on dictating and I used to write it down. When I finished writing the sheer weight of transcription gave me the feeling that my leg would break and I would not be able to walk anymore. Anyhow when I finished writing, he would say, 'Read!' and I would read it back to him. If there was an omission or error he used to correct it and then let it be brought before the people."<sup>19</sup>

As for the prophet's instructional teaching methods, it was reported that he used different techniques and strategies such as reciting various passages of the Qur'an loudly in the congregational prayers. Through this method the companions learned the proper recitation, pronunciation and memorization of many chapters of the Qur'an. Furthermore, new converts were required to learn some amounts of Qur'an which enable them to perform their individual daily prayers. Thus, the early Muslim community was constantly busy by either learning or teaching various sections of the Qur'an. The Prophet also motivated his followers to take interest in learning Qur'an by informing them that the best among them were those who learned and taught the Qur'an.

In line with this early interest in Qur'an education, Muslims across history continued to revere any related to Qur'an activities; and memorization in particular was maintained as a primary educational tradition. It is also understood that: Learning by heart is the most sustainable method of preserving any text because it involves human being as a tool and it assures that this method will continue as long as the humanity itself continues. Muslims have been using this human technique for preserving the Quran from the first day of its revelation and hence the Quran has been surely the most and probably the only memorized book throughout the human history.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Traditional/conventional methods and institutions for Qur'an memorization***

Memorizing the book of Allah has always been a significant act of learning and devotion. Al-Qabsi<sup>21</sup> a medieval Maliki jurist considers the main objective of learning in Islam in general is to know the religion.

<sup>17</sup> Ingrid Mattson. The story of the Qur'an, its history and place in Muslim Life. (Wiley Blackwell. A John Wiley & sons, Ltd, publication . 2nd. edn 2013), 21

<sup>18</sup> Waqar Akbar Cheema, Qur'an Preservation and Compilation during the Prophet's Lofetime. Journal of Islamic Sciences. Vol.1 Issue. 1. June 14, 2013, 30-31

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 32

<sup>20</sup> Saifullah Bhutto. Traditional and Modern Methods Used for Memorization of Quran in Turkey. Ma'arif Research Journal (July – Dec. 2015) Traditional and Modern Methods...91-100.

<sup>21</sup> He is Abu al-Hassan Ali bin Muhammed Khalaf al-Ma'afri, Known as al-Qabsi, born and lived in Tunisia between (930-1012). He was a Muslim jurist, who specialized in *fiqh*, *hadith* and he also wrote about learning in Islam especially in his book "*al-Risala al mufasalah li ahwal al muta'alimimnwaahkam al- mua'liminwa al muta'alimin*"

One of the most crucial prerequisites in the pursuit of learning according to him is to learn Qur'an, memorization in particular. The latter must start in an early age, because, children usually memorize in a mechanical way, and memorizing in an early age normally occurs faster and remains for life time.<sup>22</sup>

*Talqin* - directed repetition according to Al-Qabsi is the most suitable method. The pedagogy of *talqin* he asserts is the most efficient method in which the teacher would read the verses and the students repeat after him until they memorize. According to him this pedagogy is based on three main techniques, *tikrar* - repeating, *al-raghbah* - desire and *al-fahm* - understanding, *al-tadarujj* - graduation and *istikhdam al-hawaas* - using senses. The first requirement is that students must have the desire to memorize, and they must keep repeating the verses after their teacher. Repeating should not be only during the process of *talqin* but shall be used even after mastering the memorization; that is in order not to forget. Al-Qabsi maintained that these techniques of memorization were developed in light of the *sunnah* of the Prophet (pbuh), practices of his companions and the tradition of prominent scholars working in this field. The main learning objectives of Qur'an memorization according to Al-Qabsi are:

- a. Memorizing the verses correctly without looking into the *mushaf*.
- b. Understanding what is being memorized by the students.
- c. Recalling what they have memorized with proper pronunciation.

As far as the history of Islamic education is concerned, authors ascertain that Qur'an was the main subject of the early schools' curriculum. *maktab* or *kuttabs* (place of writing) are according to Munir-ud-Din Ahmed<sup>23</sup> "two names used for elementary education",<sup>24</sup> which are normally located outside the mosque and managed by highly qualified educators who took up teaching for a living. These institutions were prerequisite phases which the learners must go through before embarking in higher education levels. "There are no records telling us at what age the children were admitted into elementary school nor do we know when they usually left *al-Kuttab*."<sup>25</sup> However, it is agreed upon that teaching Qur'an, *tilawah* - recitation, *tahfiz* - memorization drill, brief *tafsir* exegesis of the ambiguous verses and its sciences, *tajwid* and *tartil* (chanting and modulation) were the main subjects in the *maktab*'s curriculum.

Even later in the Islamic history when *madrasas* were established in the tradition of *al-madrasa al-Nizamiya* in 459/1067<sup>26</sup> learning Qur'an maintained its leading position. It was reported that "before attending *madrasas*, potential candidates had to memorize the whole or some considerable parts of the Qur'an and be able to read and write"<sup>27</sup> Qur'an, sciences of Qur'an, *hadith* - transmitted traditions of the prophet, sciences of *hadith*, *fiqh* - Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic, history, Genealogy, poetry, narratives, proverbs and maxims, medicine, astronomy, languages were among the subjects that medieval *madrasas* offered.<sup>28</sup> It is noticed here that Qur'an was always at the top of the list. As for the method, the study circle system known as *halaqah* was the main form of learning. *Shuyukh* - teachers were the dominant figures in this style of education as they have a total control on what is to be taught, how is it being taught, when and where it is taught. He is the one who conferred the required *ijaza* -license to his students to prove the completion of their learning program.

<sup>22</sup> Abu Hassan Ali Muhammad Khalaf Al Qabsi. Al-Risaalah al-Mufasssalah li Ahwal alMuta'allimin wa Ahkam al-Mu'allimin wa al-Muta'allimin. (Al-Sharikah al-Tunisiyyah Liltawzii'. Tunis, 1<sup>st</sup> edn 1986), 64

<sup>23</sup> Muniruddin Ahmed, born 1934 in Rawalpindi, was a Pakistani writer. Muniruddin specialized in the history and politics of the Muslim world with emphasis on the Indian subcontinent. He studied Arabic and Political Science at the University of Panjab (Lahore) and the Universität Hamburg (Germany). He taught at Hamburg Universität.

<sup>24</sup> Munir-ud-Din Ahmed, Muslim Education and the Scholar's Social Status up to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century Muslim Era (11<sup>th</sup> Century Christian Era) in the Light of Ta'rikh Baghdad. Verlag Der Islam, Zurich 1968 (without edition), 41

<sup>25</sup> Munir-ud-Din, Ibid, 43

<sup>26</sup> It is often said that the first one to establish schools in Islam was Nizam al-Mulk ... a brilliant vizier minister to one of the sultans of the Seljuq Turks in the eleventh century A.D. Khalil A Totah, The contribution of the Arabs to Education,

<sup>27</sup> Tahraoui Ramdane. Education and Politics; A Comparative Inquiry of the Fatimids and the Ayyubids in Middle age Egypt. (Lap Lambert Academic Publishing. Germany. 2011), 240

<sup>28</sup> For more details refer to *Madrasas Medieval and Modern: Politics, Education, and the Problem of Muslim Identity*, of Jonathan Berkey, *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, edited by Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, and, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and in the West*, of Goerge Makdisi.

Indeed, medieval Muslims themselves seem to have been remarkably uninterested in *where* an individual studied. The only thing that mattered was with *whom* one had studied, a qualification certified not by an institutional degree but by a personal license (*ijaza*) issued by a teacher to his pupil.<sup>29</sup>

Besides their teaching duties, teachers were also in charge of *ta'adib* -guidance and discipline of their students this why they also carried the name of *mu'adib*. The *mu'adib* shall treat them (students) gently and kindly. He should seek their sympathy in whatever he wants them to engage in. If one of them commits inappropriate act, the *mu'adib* should discipline him in a manner that is permitted in the noble *shara'*. (Islamic law). During the golden age of the Islamic empire (between the tenth and thirteenth centuries), teaching Qur'an was always at the top of the academic subjects list. It was during this period that the "Islamic scholarship flourished with an impressive openness to the rational sciences, art, and even literature. It was during this period that the Islamic world made most of its contributions to the scientific and artistic world."<sup>30</sup>

However, during the period of Islamic civilization weakness, when Muslims started to lose the conviction that scientific truths are tools for accessing religious truth and *taqlid* -unquestioning acceptance of the traditional corpus of authoritative knowledge<sup>31</sup> started to replace *ijtihad* -the spirit of inquiry, learning Qur'an started to take the form of an isolated educational practice. In later periods and due to: The lethal combination of *taqlid* and foreign invasion beginning in the thirteenth century (both) served to dim Islam's preeminence in both the artistic and scientific worlds. Religious education was to remain a separate and personal responsibility, having no place in public education.<sup>32</sup>

Teaching Qur'an following classical methods on one hand and separating it from other subjects on another hand became the dominant trend in religious schools. Today in the Muslim world however the debate is still on how to revive our Islamic heritage of learning. Such legitimate aspiration motivated Muslim reformists and educators to come up with several alternatives that seek to modernize the inherited traditional system of Islamic education – which has long been labelled as backward, unproductive, and most recently- breeding places of religious intolerance- into a modern, progressive and a moderate system of education.<sup>33</sup> Reforming methods of teaching Qur'an is a paramount in this process.

### **Current trends in the teaching of Qur'an**

Memorizing the Qur'an is still done in many Muslim countries by following the traditional methods of early *kuttabs* and *madrasas*, which normally involves "memorizing (it) by heart and learning the art of reciting (it) in ten different ways."<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that schools teaching Qur'an in the Muslim world differ in names; for example, they are called *zawaya* and *katatib* in North Africa, *madrasas*, *darul Qur'an* or *Darul-tahfiz* in the Indian sub-continent, *pondok* in South East Asia, and *al-madaris al-Qur'aniyyah* and *al-madaris al-diniyyah* in other places...etc. The main focus of these schools is how to teach Qur'an and preserve it in the hearts of Muslims in the same way the Prophet and his companions did. Memorization of the Qur'an is frequently observed even among non-Arabic-speaking Muslims who cannot understand it without a translation. As for the conventional traditional methods they share almost the same general traits: *Tahfiz* memorization based on directed repetition, *Muraja'a* -revision, *tasmii'*-reading for the *shaykh*, however, the development of the lesson may differ from one *shaykh* to another especially in terms of duration, the number of verses memorized by session, how are they memorized, the physical arrangement of the class, individual or collective repetition and maintaining one level in the class or individualizing memorization(competitive memorization).

<sup>29</sup>*Madrasas* Medieval and Modern: Politics, Education, and the Problem of Muslim Identity, Jonathan Berkey, 43. [Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education], edited by Robert W. Hefner, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, Princeton University Press, 2006

<sup>30</sup>Islam - History of Islamic Education, Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education - Knowledge, Religious, Koran, and Muslim - StateUniversity.com Retrieved from:  
<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2133/Islam.html#ixzz4ONG0CxtQ> [31/10/2016]

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup>Merah Souad & Tahraoui Ramdane. Integrated Curriculum: Success and Challenges Review of the Experience of the International Islamic School Malaysia (IISM). The Curriculum of Islamic Education; Theoretical and Practical Challenges. Edited by Tahraoui Ramdane. (Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur 2016),180

<sup>34</sup>Muhammadullah Khalili Qasmi. Madrasa Education: Its Strength & Weakness Published jointly by: Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd. Delhi &Markazul Maarif Mumbai. [www.deoband.net](http://www.deoband.net) . 2

In her study about memorizing Qur'an, Leslie C. Moore asserted that the dominant method is normally guided repetition or 'rote learning'. She observed that: children spend nearly all their time at Qur'anic school learning verses of the Qur'an in Arabic while at public schools they may spend as much as one third of each school day learning French dialogues. In both settings, novices are guided by experts as they memorize a text and master its vocal and embodied rendering, often with little or non-comprehension of the memorized material."<sup>35</sup>

Another example is in Malaysia where *pondoks* are the main centers for Muslim religious education. These *pondoks* follow the same tradition of teaching, and "the most common teaching methods employed were lectures, memorization, reading, *mudhakara* (constant recalling of a lesson) and copying texts"<sup>36</sup> Although "The basic motto of madrasa education is to enable a student to understand Islam from its original sources like Qur'an and Hadith with insight and awareness"<sup>37</sup> directed memorization was and still is the main method of learning which makes "understanding Islam" a vague and shallow process. Directed memorization 'rote learning' usually receives a lot of criticism; it is claimed that this method will lead to the exclusion of reflective thinking, and does not serve the very basic objective of learning Qur'an that is learning Islam itself. It crafts passive, receptive and submissive minds. Critics further highlighted that memorizing Qur'an is not meant for Muslims to do it for religious merit only but "for the reflection on its meaning, and for spiritual refreshment."<sup>38</sup> The effectiveness of this method is also questioned, especially in the cases of children who do not master Arabic, speak it as a second language, or they do not speak it at all.

Consensus of scholarly opinion has in recent years concluded that the Qur'an and Arabic poetry were both composed in the *arabīyah* language that required mastery of *i'rāb*, the desinential inflection characteristic of Bedouin speech, but difficult for speakers not reared in an Arabic environment.<sup>39</sup> Even such persons, especially in urban settings, who could perfectly understand the *arabīyah* of the pre-Islamic poets and of the Qur'an could probably not thereby speak it in any spontaneous way as a vernacular,"<sup>40</sup> Thus, memorization will be a very difficult and painful experience, especially for young learners. Another crucial point to mention here is to what extent this method (memorization) takes into consideration the findings of science vis-à-vis the methods of storing and recalling of the human memory.

It is also observed that focusing on memorization -in general- without any other method to reinforce the cognitive skills of the students is no longer compatible with the objectives of modern education which emphasizes on developing the thinking skills of the students by training them to think critically, creatively and solve problems. The value placed on memorization during students' early religious training directly influences their approaches to learning when they enter formal education offered by the modern state. A common frustration of modern educators in the Islamic world is that while their students can memorize copious volumes of notes and textbook pages, they often lack competence in critical analysis and independent thinking.<sup>41</sup>

Thus "most graduates of these madrasas acquire skills that do not fit well with the job market."<sup>42</sup> In addition to the above mentioned issues, Qur'an education has most recently been associated -for the right and wrong reasons- with the so-called Islamic terrorism. Opponent claimed that most of *madrasas* and Qur'anic schools served in many instances as breeding ground of extremism, and that they constitute locations where blind indoctrination and radicalization took place in the name of God.

<sup>35</sup> Leslie C. Moore. Learning by Heart in Qur'anic and Public Schools in Northern Cameroon. Social Analysis. International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice @2006 Berghahn Books. Vol. 50. Issue 3 Winter 2006, 109-126

<sup>36</sup> Rosnani Hashim, Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice. (Oxford University Press: 1996), 22

<sup>37</sup> Muhammadullah Khalili Qasmi. 13

<sup>38</sup> Frederick Mathewson Denny, Qur'an Recitation: A Tradition of Oral Performance and Transmission. Oral Tradition, 4/1-2 (1989): 5-26. Retrieved from [http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/4i-ii/2\\_Denny.pdf](http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/4i-ii/2_Denny.pdf) [27/10/2016]. 5

<sup>39</sup> see Rabin 1960; Zwettler 1978:160 and passim

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 9

<sup>41</sup> Islam - History of Islamic Education, Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education - Knowledge, Religious, Koran, and Muslim - StateUniversity.com Retrieved at <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2133/Islam.html#ixzz4OMknYpAn> . [28/10/2016]

<sup>42</sup> Zahid Shahab Ahmed: Madrasa Education in The Pakistani Context: Challenges, Reforms, and Future Directions. Madarsa Peace Prints: South Asian Journal of Peace building, Vol. 2, No. 1: Autumn 2009 Available from <http://www.wiscomp.org/peaceprints.htm>. 6-7

True, extreme religious ideologies have thrived in many Muslim countries in general and many religious institutions in particular. However, the critics -especially the westerners- tend to unfairly relegating other important factors which contributed to the Islamic extremism, such as Western colonization and continuous interference, weakness of domestic ruling political elite, poverty, rampant corruption, and injustice to name some.

### ***What can be done?***

In light of the tremendous progress in the modern educational experience, especially those gains in instructional methods, pedagogy and curriculum development, it is imperative for the teaching of Qur'an to adapt these changes and accept reforms. This shall include the following: Reviewing the formation and training programmes of Qur'an teachers. In addition to equip them with modern teaching skills, but most importantly to change the mindset of the Qur'an teachers and make them realize that in order to stay relevant, teaching Qur'an according to an old and single method is no longer sufficient for the students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Adopting new and innovative methods of Qur'an education are not only important, but necessary. Qur'an teachers shall not limit their success in producing *hafiz* graduates only, but they shall instead look forward to produce quality *hafiz*, who are well rounded, productive, and socially committed individuals. To do the Qur'an teachers themselves must benefit from training programs like any other teachers teaching different subjects.

### ***The importance of using advanced teaching and technological tools.***

Teaching how to recite has been done through teachers who pronounce the Quranic sounds accurately. Such method has been considered, since the revelation of the Holy Quran, as the only way to learn how to recite it correctly until the twentieth century, where Technology produced recording systems and electronic devices that are able to keep both text and sound of the Quran with *tajweed* rules of correct pronunciation of the Holy Quran)<sup>43</sup>

In a time dominated by using computational tools and communication gadgets, it is claimed in some researches that utilizing technology in learning may give better results than conventional methods. For example, mobile learning helps to remove some of the formality from the learning experience and engages reluctant learners and it helps learners to remain more focused for longer periods.<sup>44</sup>

Many think that the rapid technological progress will help religions in general and Islam in particular to reach their adherents and supply them with all information and knowledge which they usually get through face to face communication or from different conventional resources such as books, manuscripts, pamphlets and brochures.

With the early growth of Islamic websites, there is now a vying for influence to promote Islamic apps and other programs to the mobile computing and mobile phone markets, which may have the result of expanding influence on matters of religion<sup>45</sup>

“The early rush saw apps offering *qibla* direction, prayer times, Qur'an recitations and readings, *hadith* collections, and biographies of the Prophet Muhammad.”<sup>46</sup> However, most of these programs and apps -if not all- are in fact a digitalized version of the classical methods used in preaching or teaching. It is believed that most of these programs offer the same conventional styles of teaching with the only difference of replacing the shaykh or teacher by a machine. This is confirmed by Yahya O. Mohamed El-Hadj, a designer of *E-Halagat* an E-learning system for teaching the holy Qur'an. He stressed on the fact that: It is important to remember that our proposed system is designed to simulate the usual way to inculcate the Holy Quran either in the Quranic schools or in the Quranic rings at mosques. In the Quranic schools, learners (or simply students) are distributed on different levels according to specific criteria such as age, ability of memorization, etc. In the Quranic rings, learners are organized in a set of groups, called "halagat"<sup>47</sup>

- 1- Varying the teaching approaches, in order to make learning Qur'an an enjoyable moment for young students. This can be done by infusing mobile and immobile images to help the students visualize events or phenomenon narrated in the Qur'anic passages. This method is suitable especially for the Qur'anic address of the creation.

<sup>43</sup>Yahya O. Mohamed El-Hadj. E-Halagat: An E-Learning System for Teaching the Holy Quran: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology – January 2010, volume 9 Issue 1: 54 - 61

<sup>44</sup> (Jill Attewell, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> D. Jurafsky, J.H., Martin, 2000

<sup>46</sup> Gary R. Bunt, 2010).

<sup>47</sup>Yahya O. Mohamed El-Hadj.

Translating the meaning or at least supplying non-Arabic speakers with a summary about the meaning of the verses they are memorizing might help to speed up the process and also generate a cognitive and psychomotor effect on them. In a study conducted by Misnan Jemali & Sadaki Hafidz (2003) about the effectiveness of the methods used in *tahfiz* program in Maahad Tahfiz wa al-Qiraat in Perak Malaysia, it was concluded that students who understand the meaning of the verses and become aware of the events narrated in these verses such as the stories of the Qur'an, memorize better than those who do not understand the meaning of the verses."<sup>48</sup>

- 2- Because of the current public scrutiny which Islamic educational institutions especially, Qur'anic schools have come under, and because of the linkage people usually make between the educational package of these schools and radicalism/terrorism. It is recommended that memorizing for beginners should focus on passages discussing positive aspects of life, wonderful creations and beautiful scenes in order to create a good impression in their hearts and minds about the religion in general, create a positive view about the world, and most importantly to foster the feeling of love for the Qur'an, and motivate the young learners to continue learning it as a way of life before being a way of salvation in the hereafter.

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<sup>48</sup>Misnan Jemali & Ahmed Sadadi Hafidz. (2003). Hubungan antarakaedah meng hafaz al Qur'an dengan pencapaian Kursus Taffidz wa al-Qiraat pelajar semester empat dan lima di Maahad Tahfiz wal Qiraat di Perak. Seminar Kaedah Pengajaran Tahfiz al-Qur'an Peringkat kebangsaan. Kolej Universiti Islam Malaysia.

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