

The Quranic Planchette in Question; the Case of Zaid Ibn Thabit Primary School in Meknes, Morocco

العودة إلى اللوحة في التعلم القرآني العتيق: حالة المدرسة الابتدائية زيد بن ثابت في

مدينة مكناس - المغرب

Youssef ARMOUZ: Teacher of English pursuing a doctoral degree at Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University- Fes-Morocco.

Email: Youssef.armouz@gmail.com

Omar Boulaouz: Student and a researcher in an international master in Religion, Politics and Global Society- Padova University- Italy.

Email: omarboulouz@gmail.com

يوسف عرموز: أستاذ باحث في سلك الدكتوراه، تخصص أدب انجليزي، جامعة سيدي محمد بن عبد الله - فاس - المغرب.

عمر بولوز: طالب باحث في ماستر دولي في الدين والسياسة والمجتمع العالمي، جامعة بادوفا، إيطاليا

Abstract:

This article attempts to investigate the phases involved in memorizing Quran as well as the tools and techniques employed at Zaid Ibn Thabit School in Meknes. The research method used in this study bases its data on an ethnographic study that relies on a systematic observation. The research findings indicate that the procedure is divided into six stages. Firstly, it begins with writing Quranic verses onto the board, followed by correction, reading with correction, memorizing, recitation, and lastly revision. In fact, the process of memorizing Quran begins and does not stop. Forgetting the learnt verses of Quran makes learners get worried. This is why memorizing should be practiced on a regular basis, either via the use of a board or straight from the Quran-book. It should be mentioned that 'Fqih' is crucial to this process of Quranic learning.

Keywords: Learning, Quranic School, Ethnography, Memorization, Morocco

ملخص:

هدفت الدراسة لبيان خطوات حفظ القرآن، بما في ذلك الأدوات والأشكال المعتمدة في عملية التعلم القرآني. وهي تلخص أحد أهم نتائج البحث الميداني لمشروع التخرج من سلك الماستر، عنوانه إثنوغرافية التعلم القرآني. ولتحقيق هدف الدراسة فقد استخدم الباحثان منهج كفي، ينطلق من تقنية الإثنوغرافية، والتي تسمح بجمع المعطيات والانتباه إلى التفاصيل الدقيقة، ثم الوصف المكثف لها، وتحليلها. وتبين من خلال المسح الميداني لحالة مدرسة زيد بن ثابت (مكناس، المغرب)، أن هاجس النسيان، يظل مصاحبا للتعلم القرآني. ولذلك، تخضع عملية الحفظ إلى تمرين منتظم، باعتماد اللوحة القرآنية، كما يحتل الفقيه مكانة مركزية في عملية الحفظ هذه، ذلك أن الأمر يحتاج مصاحبة مستمرة وتدقيق وتصويب مفتوح. تبتدأ عملية حفظ القرآن بكتابة آيات على اللوحة القرآنية، تتوزع بين الثمن والرابع إلى نصف الحزب، بحسب تمكن كل متعلم، يليها التصحيح، فالقراءة مع التصحيح، ثم الحفظ والاستظهار، وتختتم بالمراجعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعلم، المدرسة القرآنية، الإثنوغرافيا، الحفظ، المغرب.

Introduction:

The Quranic School occupies an important place in religious dynamics, notably in the empowerment of Ulamas, Fuqaha, Guides, etc. In Morocco, this school has undergone many changes affecting the learning process. This article commences with presenting the research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. Then, it deals with the methodology adopted in terms of setting, participants, procedures and instrumentations. The following point reports and interprets the findings of the study. Lastly, the article ends by a general conclusion about the study emphasizing on recommendations and implications based on the results obtained through the analysis.

Research Methodology

Zaïd ibn Thabit is a private primary school for traditional education, located at Rehal Al Meskini Street, Touarga district in Meknes. It is equipped with a classroom and a large memorization room. To achieve my research objectives, we observed the peculiarities of this teaching and we kept an eye on the different stages of memorization attempting to identify the tools and forms adopted. Additionally, we adopted the ethnographic approach. Besides, we relied on the situational observation technique. We also conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 learners and 4 teachers.

Purposes of the study

The present research paper attempts to investigate the Quranic learning processes implemented at Moroccan Islamic education schools, mainly at Zaid Ibn Thabit primary School in Meknes. Thus, this study aims at:

- 1) Investigating the manifestations occurring in contemporary religious dynamics?

2) Exploring and analyzing the learning processes at Quranic Schools?

Research Questions

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the trajectories of the learner and their learning contents?
2. By what means, tools, and forms is learning at Quranic Schools taking place?
3. What is the memorization process students go through?

Significance of the Study

The importance this study lies in the fact that it defines the aspects and phases of learning that are essential for Quranic Schools. It also gives students the chance to express their perceptions and reflect upon their learning of Quran as well as for instructors in their teaching. This would enable them make any necessary adjustments to the program implemented and adapt their teaching materials and objectives to students' real needs. Thus, it is hoped that the results of the study will provide valuable insights and guidelines into the learning processes of Quran and the importance of the planchette in particular.

Anthropologist's task in a field work

An anthropologist's task in a field work, according to Clifford Geertz (1973) is to figure out how to get anything done. There were two possible paths: an official and an unofficial one. At first, we contacted a friend, a religious education inspector known as "Atîq". He advised us to take permission from the delegate, the direct head of the Quranic schools, under

the direction of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. In vain, this process was unsuccessful.

Following this disappointment, we decided to submit a report directly to Zaid ibn Thabit School, where we used to attend over 15 years ago as students. Quranic teachers and school authorities immediately noticed us due to our aptitude to memorize Quran at that time. This facilitated the first step into the field. Our request, which was signed by both the supervisor and the Master's coordinator, was immediately accepted.

We enthusiastically engaged in class at school. Learners see us as guests; so, we intended to study with them and adopt their habits. This is how our ethnography began. We have observed that the number of students is dropping remarkably according to their grade level (See graph -Figure 1). This decline could be understood, among other things, based on the pre-selection of students' profiles (for example: a student in family disintegration is rarely admitted).

The reason is also due to the poor quality of memorization processes of Quran. According to the school's Scholars or as they are called in Morocco 'fuqha', the problem lies in the transition from writing on a board to learning directly from the Quranic book, an oblong wooden board where the writing is done by a felt-tip pen and washed with water. This is why "The use of the plank has become a necessity", as they say, in order to achieve good memorization.

The development of students' number at Zaid Ibn Thabit Institution per School level

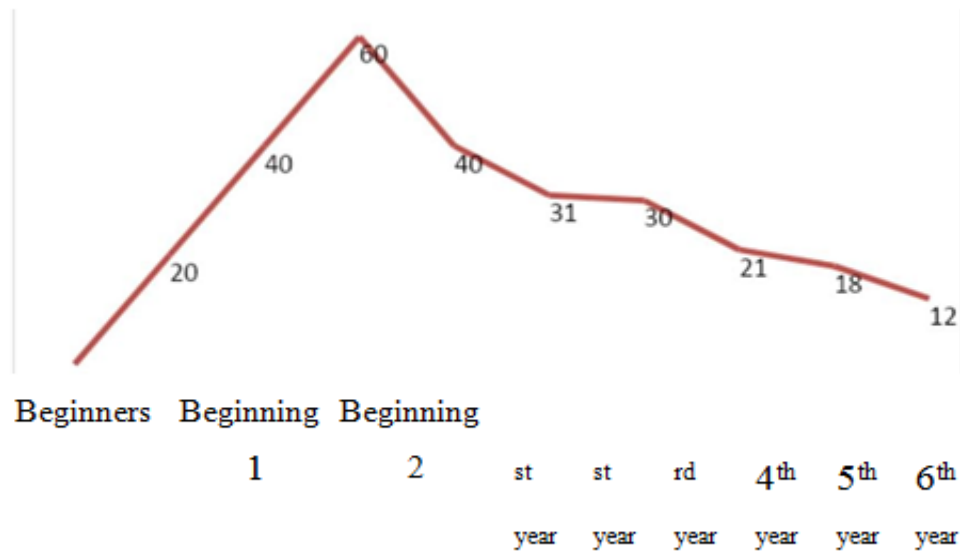


Figure 1: Statistics of the School year 2019-2020

The memorization process at Zaid Ibn Thabit School

Although new methods for memorizing Quran have emerged, the Quranic planchette remains a useful tool in this process. For instance, Zaid Ibn Thabit School has opted to reinstate the usage of the planchette after years of marginalization in order to ensure a high standard of memory. This fact has encouraged us to call these dynamics into question.

To document the learning process on a regular day, we alternated between two spaces: classes and the main room dedicated to memorize Quran. Students form a circle around their teacher 'Fqih', each of these circles represents a certain academic level: 1st year, 2nd year... etc. The 1/6 of the Quranic sections (Aḥzâb) is allocated to each level in order to complete it in the 6th year of the primary level. Most of them arrive in school wearing a uniform (a blue suit for boys and a pink one for girls).

Additionally, the observer is instantly drawn to the graphic drawings and paintings on the wall of the room. Some are decorative, such as the

national flag, flowers, and trees, while others serve as explanations, such as certain 'Hadiths', Quranic texts, the alphabet, and mathematical procedures. When the available rooms for memorization are insufficient, classrooms are used. The Professors of Quran are no longer males this time, but women, who continue to study under the tutelage of two Meknassi Professors 'sheikhs' to this day: Sheikh Benaissa Chelih at the Al-Suri Mosque and Sheikh Bouchachi at the At-Tawba Mosque. These female Quranic teachers are the designers of wall graphics.

After the alphabet, Quran is invariably the first knowledge to be taught, since it is considered the foundation of instruction. The only mode of learning adapted to the Quranic text is through memorization by heart (Fortier, 2003). The process is broken down into six phases; it begins with 'fatya' (Dictation), then 'Es-selka' (Correction), reading Quran correctly, 'hfada' (Memorization), 'arada' (Recitation), and finally 'moraja'a' (Revision).

Memorization begins with writing; learners listen attentively and directly to what the teacher -'Fqîh'- dictates to them. Each learner adopts a pace according to his abilities and skills. A fragment of the Quran ($\frac{1}{8}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$...) for each one is written on the Quranic board. At this level, Mohamed (interviewee 1) explains: "writing through 'Fatya' uttered by the mouth of our teacher 'Fqîh' is preferable than memorizing straight from the Quran; "Writing directly from the Quran is not the best way to memorize. We quickly forget what we memorize" He said.

According to Zakaria (interviewee 2), once everyone finishes writing on their board, you have to wait their turn for the correction. Learners call it "slik Louh". This is to avoid memorizing mistakes. Speech-language reading of Quranic verses aimed at correcting the poor pronunciation of beginner

students (Elahmadi and Kchirid, 2011: 25). Immediately after correcting the handwriting, the learner proceeds to the reading correction stage under the supervision of his teacher. It is then the 'Nafda', or accurate aloud recital.

The final step is the most critical. This is a weekly memorization. Thus, till the end of the Quran. The child memorizes the Quranic passages that the instructor writes on the board. This is referred to as 'khatma'. The instructor 'Fqih' precludes proceeding to the following section without first obtaining the revision 'Moraja'a'. "So that we do not forget what we have learnt" Youssef explains (interviewee 3)

What distinguishes a traditional school is the Quran's importance in its instructional curriculum (Elahmadi and Kchirid, 2011). At the age of five, the youngster begins attending Quranic Schools. The child learns the first verses of the Quran under the leadership of the schoolmaster, the prayer guide (Imam), and the prayer caller (Muadin). In a subsequent stage, the pupil learns to read and subsequently to write.

Around the age of 10-14, a second stage of a deep teaching begins, which consists of learning the basic works by heart: (Ajurrumiya and Alfiya) for grammar, and (Risalat & Mokhtasar). This can be done equally well in mosques or 'zawaya' which could be large or small, urban or rural (Laroui, 2009)

For Lévi-Provençal, once the works have been reviewed and assimilated, the apprentice achieves the goal he set for himself by completing the path to the moucharaka (Omniscience) that he patiently followed. In turn, he becomes a master and begins to teach, in the same way as what he himself has received from listeners of a new generation (Lévi-Provençal, 1992: 14). According to Bourdieu, this path allows him to rise in the hierarchy, to create

a charisma, to accumulate new symbolic and material capital (Bourdieu, 1994: 161).

Laroui (2009) has found based on a comparison of many Quranic schools that there is no common teaching style among various locations, whether in towns, the big mosque located in Fez, or in cities (Medina). The reputation that the learner gains from this instruction is contingent upon the teacher's status. The cycle of study is not uniform for all and is tailored to the learners' abilities. Thus, via the teaching of certain social ethics, the religious studies system served as a method of producing and integrating elite into the country. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1970), this is a collection of institutional systems that assure the transmission of inherited culture across generations.

Main results:

1. The Qur'an memorizing process begins and never ends. To address the issue of forgetting, the student is required to continually memorize and review.
2. The learners are classified according to their degree of memorization, with the gifted being referred to as 'Qashqashi', who is fast to recall and remember, and the incapable being referred to as 'Tmayni', the one who is content with remembering the fewest verses per day.
3. Learners like memorizing with the Qur'anic planchette because it preserves the history of the traditional teachers 'Fuqaha' and ensures a high level of memorization.
4. Returning to the Planchette in traditional Qur'anic learning became a methodological and educational necessity, as other methods, such as memorizing directly from the Qur'an, produce low- memorization

quality, "what is memorized quickly is quickly forgotten," as one of the traditional school's Qur'anic learners stated.

5. The importance of the Qur'anic Planchette in learning is inextricably linked to the 'Fqih' 's importance and centrality, as the back-and-forth process that the learner engages in, as well as the accompanying one, are beneficial in checking, correcting, directing, and memorizing well, thereby ensuring quality in learning.

Recommendations:

1. The importance of focusing on the quality of memorizing that can only be achieved via repeated practice of the memorization process by accompanying the teacher 'Fqih' and going back to the use of the planchette, particularly at schools that have abandoned it.

2. We advocate transferring this unique educational experience from the traditional schools to the modern ones.

3. When conducting research on everyday activities and monitoring educational and learning processes, a qualitative method is advised as well as the use of an observational technique combined with participant observation. The Ethnographic study is critical because it allows for evaluation of the description and opens up a vast range of analysis and correlation between causes and effects.

4- It is essential to recognize the traditional Quranic School's significance in religious dynamics.

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