

The Implementation and Outcome of “Arabic To Understand Qur’an” Program
at Bayaan Academy Tampa FL 2015-2017

A presentation of Program Objectives, Teaching Strategies, Learning Activities,
Assessment Models, and Learning Outcome Analysis

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Abstract

Understanding the Holy Qur'an and strongly bonding with it is an essential need for Muslim children raised in the West. A language barrier can greatly hinder the formation of such bond. With time limitation and - in many instances - lack of interest on behalf of the students, it becomes a must for Islamic schools to adopt well-crafted Tafseer programs that address this language barrier. This session presents Tafseer strategies used by Ahlul-Qur'an Academy at the full time Academics and Hifdh program at Bayaan Academy, Tampa FL. A main feature is Arabic To Understand Qur'an (Ar.TUQ), a self-developed program designed to allow students to understand the Holy Qur'an in the language of its revelation, providing understanding of the language syntax. Starting at the KG, the Ar.TUQ program aligns content standards with desired learning outcome for each grade or level, providing bench-marks for elementary and middle school students. It provides clear objectives, recommendations for vocabulary selection, reading/comprehension material, engaging learning activities, and assessment models. The Nurania method is used to enhance reading. Ar. TUQ introduces Arabic grammar, Word Morphology, and Rhetoric skills essential for understanding the Holy Qur'an. Results of the Ar.TUQ have exceeded our expectations in the areas of reading/comprehension, Arabic grammar, Word morphology and figurative speech. Although it was not targeted, students reach satisfactory levels of mastery of conversational Arabic with accuracy and sound pronunciation. We recommend the use of Ar. TUQ as a supplement to Arabic curricula to maximize comprehension of the Holy Qur'an.

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Raising Muslim children in the west comes with a number of challenges. One such challenge is establishing a connection with the Holy Qur'an. As the main source of Islamic beliefs and principles, the Holy Qur'an is meant to be a book of life that Muslims need to read/recite and contemplate on to adopt its morals and benefit of its guidance. However, we see that a great percent of Muslims raised in the west have incomplete grasp of the essence of their religion mainly because they have no or a limited access to the Holy Qur'an. Many Islamic schools and after school/weekend programs have done a good job raising the interest of their students in memorizing some or all of the Qur'an. In most instances however, students feel Qur'anic Arabic is not something they can understand, and they largely count on translation to understand the ayas. Truth is, their understanding continues to be deficient and their bonding with the Holy Qur'an does not reach its potential. Badawi E. M., and Abdel Hakeem M. (2008) in the preface of their Arabic/English Dictionary of Qur'anic usage bring a statement of John Penrice, the author of the first Arabic/English Qur'anic dictionary published in 1873. He said, "Beauties there are, many and great; ideas highly poetical are clothed in rich and appropriate language, which not infrequently rises to a sublimity far beyond the reach of any translation." The language barrier could have been alleviated by teaching Arabic in Islamic schools. However, the focus in the majority of programs is on the conversational Arabic. Arabic speaking families are greatly interested in conversational Arabic for their children to keep their heritage. Mastery of conversational Arabic in one or another slang of the Arabic speaking countries is not sufficient for the purpose of understanding the Holy Qur'an and is not geared towards understanding the Qur'an in the language of its revelation. Failure to address Arabic syntax and word morphology deprives the learner of a complete appreciation of a unique language with special features, that was chosen by Allah SWT to communicate His final word, the Holy Qur'an, to humanity.

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Special Features of the Arabic Language:

Arabic language possess a large number of roots and a generally reproducible way of modifying the word morphology to derive an exponential number of words from such roots measuring بالمقياس to the word morphology scale الميزان الصرفي. Another special feature is that pronouns associate closely with the verbs, looking like one word. However upon translation the verb turns to be a sentence, carrying the subject and may be also one or two objects of the same verb. The word أعطانيه when translated says: “He gave it to me”, “it” being an object and “me” is another. Communicating meanings in Arabic can be achieved with the use of a few eloquent and precise words that will correspond to many more words upon translation to other languages.

Another feature that is unique to the Arabic language is the use of Harakat, accent marks referred to as short vowels. The “Harakat” “حَرَكَات” are a set of symbols introduced by Abul Aswad Ad Du’ali that were coupled with the letter symbol in the written Qur’anic text to direct the pronunciation of each letter of the word in accordance with the proper pronunciation of the Prophet peace be upon him (Al Degli F. A. (1979). Variation of the pattern of Harakat indicates new meaning. The difference between an active verb such as “خَلَقَ” or “He created” and the passive verb “خُلِقَ” or “He was created” is merely in the pattern of Harakat on its letters.

Moreover, the Arabic language possesses the system of “I’raab إعراب” or clarification of the intended meaning with the use of the terminal Harakat of words as a grammatical sign علامة الإعراب to reflect the grammatical state of each word حالة الإعراب, that in turn is caused by its grammatical job in the sentence وظيفة الكلمة. This allows changing the order of the words in the sentences – something seen extensively in the Qur’an – yet keeping proper comprehension of the intended meaning. For the Arabic language therefore, comprehension is greatly supported with reasonable grammar orientation (Arabic Nahow النحو) and a good grasp of word morphology (

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Arabic Sarf (الصرف). This is true for any Arabic text and is particularly true for Qur'anic text (Al Ibrahim M. T. 2006). Therefore, we felt the need for developing a supplementary Arabic program, we called it "Arabic to Understand Qur'an".

Arabic to Understand Qur'an (Ar.TUQ) Program introduces classic Arabic to children in a particularly effective yet enjoyable and activity-oriented method. The purpose of the Ar.TUQ program is to enable the learners to understand the Qur'anic teachings and appreciate the miracle of the Holy Qur'an in the language of its revelation. We designed Ar.TUQ with attention to all Arabic language sciences that contribute to enhanced comprehension of the Holy Qur'an. The program focuses on Qur'anic vocabulary. Attempts are made to prepare reading/ comprehension material that exposes the child to Qur'anic expressions and figures of speech in early age in the context of stories. So where do meanings come from in the Arabic language?

At the level of the word, the meaning of an enhanced conjugated past tense verb such as **أستغفروا** comes from:

1. The meaning associated with the three base letters ر غ ف , to forgive.
2. Added connotation of "seeking or الطَّلَب " because of the additional letters أَسْتَد .
3. Past tense is understood from the absence of the present tense prefix.
4. Active voice is indicated by the pattern of vowels on the letters.
5. 3rd Person speech is understood from the verb ending.
6. Masculine gender is understood from the verb ending.
7. Plurality is understood from the verb ending

So, **أستغفروا** is a past tense verb, that means "they sought forgiveness" It gives such predication about a group of men that they asked for forgiveness. Now you can combine the verb with an object of the verb **مفعول به** to state whom did they ask for forgiveness, or with an adverb of time or place **ظرف زمان ، ظرف مكان** to say when or where they asked for forgiveness, you can give the

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reason for which مفعول لأجله or the manner in which الحال they asked for forgiveness, and so on.

Then more meanings are created at the level of the sentence. Even more meanings can be relayed if you used the nouns in the sentence not as isolated words but as compounds or phrases such as descriptive phrases مركب وصفي or possessive phrases مركب إضافي , to enrich the sentence.

Suppose you resorted to figurative speech and gave a metaphor, you can take the sentences to further other dimensions.

If we take the root ق ط ع , which means to cut, the three letters can be identified in an exponential number of words that share the root and carry a variant of its meaning, with word morphology clearly indicative of the shared root. Check the list of words below, and notice the degree of change in the English words if we were to translate the word family derived from ق ط ع. The verbs are only listed in the past tense, for the singular masculine 3rd person. Fourteen 14 possible conjugations of each verbs indicate the person (3rd, 2nd, and 1st person), plurality (singular, dual, and plural) or gender (masculine and feminine), each can be presented in the past, present, and command. Keeping in mind the verb forms and the passive voice, verbs can be modified to a quite big number of words.

Meaning	Verbs	Form	Meaning	Verbs	Form
Intersected	تَقَاطَع	VI	Cut	قَطَعَ	I
Stopped, seized	انْقَطَعَ	VII	Shredded	فَطَعَ	II
Took a portion	اِقْتَطَعَ	VII	Boy-cut	فَاطَعَ	III
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Sought taking a portion	اسْتَقْطَعَ	X	Became torn apart	تَقَطَعَ	V

Objectives of the Ar.TUQ Program:

1. For Pre-school - Lower Elementary and Beginners of Older Age:

The objective is to set the foundation that can be systematically further developed in subsequent years of the program with the ultimate goal of appreciating the miracle of the Qur'an in Arabic.

We prepare the KG and 1st Grade students to attain Novice-High levels in listening

comprehension and in reading comprehension (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012), keeping

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in mind the Qur'anic vocabulary and linguistic expressions. Students are able to understand short, learned utterances and some sentence-length utterances, particularly where context strongly supports understanding and speech is clearly audible. Students comprehend words and phrases from simple questions, statements, high-frequency commands. Students understand the main idea and supporting details in short stories with simple underlying language structure. Students have sufficient control of the writing system to interpret written Arabic where vocabulary has been learned. Students can write all the symbols of the Alphabet letters, separate and combined in simple words coupled with Harakaat and Tanween, They can write practiced material and supply information such as name, date, and numbers on simple forms. Students can write words to fill in the blanks or answer simple questions in writing. They can write phrases or short sentences to describe picture. Finally, students can copy short ayas or parts of ayas coupling the letter's symbol with Harakaat. They can identify learned commonly repeated words when it occurs in the ayas and attempt explain words, phrases, or sort ayas for example بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ ، الْحَمْدُ لِلّٰهِ ، حَسْبَدَ ، إِذَا حَسْبَدَ ، فَعَلَّ ، كَيْفَ فَعَلَّ ، رَبِّ ، رَبُّكَ ، كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبِّكَ ، أَصْحَابُ الْفِيلِ

Teaching Strategies and Learning Activities:

The Arabic word is presented first in its simplest forms (under the three parts of speech اسم فعل , with greater interest in Qur'anic vocabulary) and then further developed with guidance to how the words are modified. Extensive introduction to the sound of the language and its vocabulary through rehearsals of dialogues, songs, stories, games, and use of the language in natural daily activities in non-instruction time. This is in Addition to the Qur'anic Arabic. Besides words selected from the ayas at hand, we systematically introduce commonly repeated words in the Qur'an. We taught our students in the KG a bit over 50 verbs the majority of which are commonly repeated verbs (CRV) encountered in the Qur'an 10 or more times. The selected

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verbs were of the simple three-letter verbs, verb form # I **الفعل الثلاثي المجرد الصحيح** to start building their foundational knowledge of Arabic roots. The verbs were then further developed in the subsequent levels, practicing the 14 verb-conjugation in three verb tenses. The verbal noun and derived nouns were also developed.

The program provides picture vocabulary practice and Three-Part Card games to facilitate practice. Total Physical Response (TPR) (Asher J. J. 2009) is extensively Implemented. Students are coached to pretend acting the studied verbs, to demonstrate their listening/comprehension.

Listening to the **ع ج م** in the verb **جَمَعَ** prompts the students to demonstrate collecting objects while listening to the **ك ت ب** in the verb **كَتَبَ** would prompt them to pretend writing. The students mastered writing the same verbs in the second half of the KG and ended the school year by

competing in a school Arabic spelling Bee. It is important to clarify that the selection of simple past tense verbs was observed only in the 50 + verbs selected for reading and writing practice and for further development of the verbs in subsequent levels. Class discussions, practiced oral dialogues, and questions/answers were not restricted to a certain verb tense or form. Level one

nouns (simple naming words) and level 1 pronouns (the separate pronouns **ضمائر الرفع المنفصلة**)

were also introduced and practiced using TPR. The use of the demonstrative pronouns

هذه/هذا helped introduce the word gender during practice. Nouns are presented in different forms

(definite and indefinite, separate then as part of a descriptive phrase, a possessive phrase, or a

sentence e.g. **هذا كتابٌ كبيرٌ ، هذا كتابٌ كبيرٌ ، أهدا كتابٌ صَغُرٌ؟ لا، هَذَا كِتَابٌ كَبِيرٌ ، هذا كِتَابٌ أَحْمَدٌ.**

Integrating the Nurania method in our curriculum, beginner students reach the level of proper pronunciation and fluent reading of three to four letters words with Harakat and Tanween in a

matter of weeks. This is when we introduce their first reading/comprehension material, in the

form of self-developed stories composed of simple words with Harkat and Tanween (at the level

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of Nurania lesson 6 words), that they can read and feel great about their achievement. The stories progressively increase in difficulty aligned with Nurania reading skills:

- 1- Reading 3-4 letter words with Harakaat and Tanween, with secondary level words with Madd (Nurania Lesson 6 +)
- 2- Reading 3-5 words with Harakat, Tanween, Madd and Leen, with secondary level words with Sukoun (Nurania Lesson 9 +)
- 3- Reading any word with Harakat, Tanween, Madd, and Sukoun with secondary level words with Shaddah (Nurania Lesson 11)
- 4- Reading any word with Harakat, Tanween, Madd, Sukoun and Shaddah (Nurania L 13+)

The story vocabulary represent all three Arabic parts of speech; **أسم ، فعل ، حرف** . The students learn the Arabic word types and practice sorting the words by word type according to a color code that stays consistent all through the program. Students Start recognizing sentences as verbal or non-verbal sentences.

2. Higher Elementary and Middle school students

The goal is to prepare our students to be life-long learners who can continue to learn and progress on their own in an exponential phase that starts at their middle school. The study of Arabic to understand Qur'an aims at facilitating the student's appreciation and understanding of the Holy Qur'an in the language of its revelation. A task that may seem very remote. However, by Allah's grace we are achieving very promising results. We benefited of the guidelines of the online Shariah program by Yusuf Mullan in presenting the most concise fundamentals of classic Arabic that give our students the largest benefits over a relatively short time. The program introduces the science of Arabic Grammar "Nahw النحو" not only in the context but also as a subject. The program does not shy from addressing such an essential science for the understanding of the Arabic language and hence for

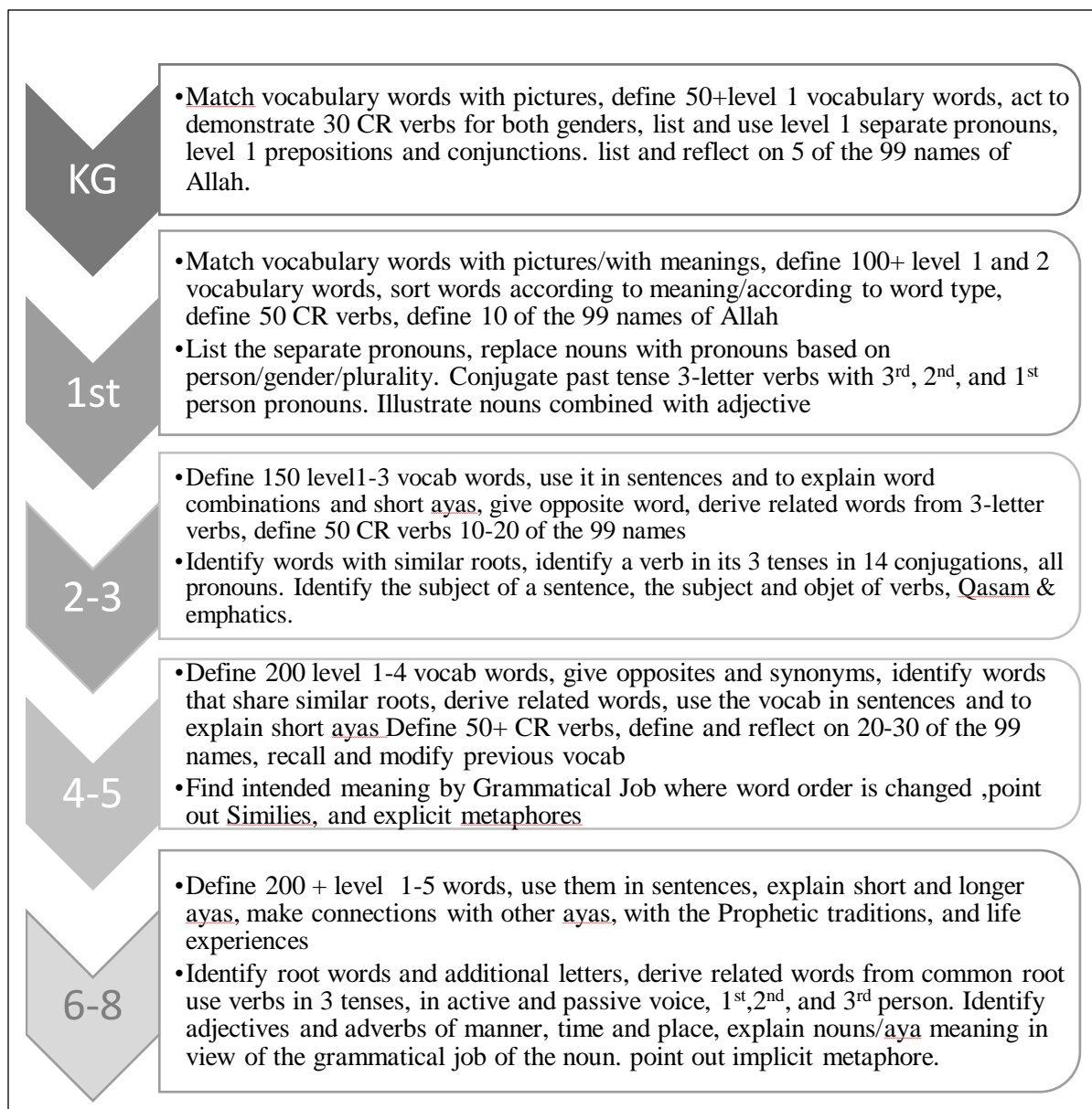
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the understanding of the Holy Qur'an. We presented the knowledge to our students in a palatable way applying up-to-date brain research recommendations for facilitating learning, mindful of their young ages and satisfying their needs to explore and play. Consistency, color coding, spiral approach reintroducing concepts in repeated cycles with rising level of difficulty, and last but not least, self-developed activities and games facilitated practice. The students' mastery was sometimes assessed by assigning them to produce skill-based Arabic games to help younger students practice some Nahow and Sarf concepts. We also benefitted from the bird-eye-view approach of the language presented by El Ghalayeeni M (2006) in his comprehensive collection of Arabic lessons, *جامع الدروس العربية* that gave our students a clear understanding of the Arabic syntax.

Verbs are practiced in the active voice then in the passive voice. Verbs are also practiced with negation (ما ، لن ، لم) and confirmed with “ل” plus the heavy and light emphatic Noon (نون التوكيد الخفيفة والثقيلة). The number of words they can derive from a single root exponentially increases in the subsequent years. Our students in the third year of the program were able to derive over 60 words from three-letter past tense verbs. This provides a great leap in vocabulary acquisition and in understanding of the nature of the language and how it works. It saves plenty of time that is otherwise spent when students are not taught the relation between words in word families and the methods of modifying roots.

Students read the Stories of the Prophets (قصص النبيين Qassasun-Nabiyeen) in Arabic by Imam An Nadwi A. (2012). Reading material also include Qur'anic verses, Hadeeth, material from Arabic Seerah books, and Arabic stories with moral values. Students perform Arabic presentations and play roles in the stories they read. They get a taste of poetry when they memorize lines from ديوان الشافعيّ and lines of the Tajweed poem تحفة الأطفال and, to a less extent, lines from ألفية بن مالك . The next level is reading material also include selected parts of small Arabic Tafseer books for example تفسير الجلالين applying their Nahow, Sarf, and Balagha skills.

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Recommendations for vocabulary selection in Tafseer:

In conclusion, we find teaching classic Arabic of great importance for the understanding of Qur'an. Sample of students work and assessments models will be presented in the lecture. We recommend the use of Ar. TUQ as a supplement to Arabic curricula to maximize comprehension of the Holy Qur'an.

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