

## *MEMORIZING THE QURAN: OPENING THE RESEARCH AGENDA*

### ABSTRACT

Faris Keblawi  
Al-Qasemi Academy

fariskeb@gmail.com / faris@qsm.ac.il  
P.O.Box 511, Umm-el-Fahem, 30010, Israel

Keywords: Quranic studies, memorization, memorization of the Quran

Venue: Antalya, Turkey, January 14-16, 2013

Many Muslims around the world exert tremendous efforts in memorizing and learning the Quran. These deeds are highly valued since Muslims believe that such practices draw them closer to Allah. Memorization of the Quran began at the inception of Islam and was one of the first and most important strategies applied by early Muslims to save the Quran from loss. Interest in the memorization of the Quran continued and strengthened throughout the coming centuries. However, it has not evolved into a distinct field of enquiry as has been the case with other sciences that were particular to the Quran like the science of qira'at (modes of reading) and recitations; or other sciences, such as linguistics, which were inspired by the growing interest in the Quran. This paper calls for the establishment of a new, interdisciplinary scientific field for the study of issues related to the memorization of the Quran, its characteristics and particularities.

The study begins with a short introduction outlining the uniqueness of the phenomenon that involves the meticulous memorization of a long holy text by millions of Muslims around the world. A number of reasons for the importance of studying this process are discussed. It is first argued that the mere interest of such a huge number of people in memorizing the Quran and the uniqueness of the phenomenon warrant close investigation of the process. It is a process that requires the investment of much effort and time and can induce significant, lifelong changes in the personalities and lives of memorizers and those teaching them. Understanding the verbatim learning of the Quran might contribute to our understanding of how people memorize texts in general, and how texts are stored in the brain and retrieved when necessary. Despite the substantial advances in technology, there are fields that still require people to memorize texts, as is the case with performing on stage. In addition, the memorization of texts and information, notwithstanding the criticism often levelled against it, is still widely practiced in many educational institutions around the world.

Studying the memorization process can be tackled from different angles. Estimating the size of the phenomenon by generating relevant and meaningful statistical data can be a good first step. It is vital, for example, to have an estimation of the number of people who memorize the Quran fully or partially, their ages, gender, and origins. Essential data on the most memorized chapters, the most problematic verses and the like can be useful as well.

Another important aspect that deserves close attention is the one related to the memorization strategies applied by memorizers. Finding out these strategies has the potential to help memorizers improve their memorization skills and it can shed much theoretical light on how the human brain functions. Such data can lead to genuine contributions to the fields of psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics. At the state of the art, little is known about these strategies.

There are also numerous psychological aspects pertaining to the verbatim memorization of the Quran. Memorizing the Quran might exert a far reaching impact on the memorizers' personalities and it might positively affect their well-being and mental health. Studying concepts like personal satisfaction, pessimism, optimism, distress and loneliness and how they relate to the memorization of the Quran can yield crucial data on the process. It is also meaningful to

examine concepts like attitude, motivation, anxiety, depression, self-esteem and self-confidence since they might affect and be affected by learners' engagement in the practice and their degree of success and commitment. Other individual differences like age and gender are likely to have substantial impact on the memorization process.

Memorization of the Quran does not happen in a vacuum and, many times, it involves social aspects that might crucially influence individuals' dispositions and motivation to engage in the process. The respect shown to memorizers and the social status they enjoy, as well as family and peer pressure are likely to influence the memorization process in different directions. Understanding these aspects can both contribute to and benefit from social studies and other relevant fields.

The educational aspects of the teaching and learning processes are not of less significance and it becomes essential to consider the formal and informal teaching of the Quran. In many countries around the world, learners join Quranic schools or classes that specialize in the verbatim learning of the Quran. In some countries, learning occurs in public and private schools and weekly hours are dedicated to the practice. Education theories and findings from educational studies on the role of schools, teachers, group of learners, family, curriculum and other educational factors can contribute much to understanding how the process takes place in the diverse learning settings.

Establishing a unique scientific field for the study of the memorization of the Quran might be a promising development in Quranic studies. Findings from research in this field may lead to significant contributions to those attempting to memorize the Quran and those who teach them do so. It also has the potential to unveil the best practices that might make the process easier for memorizers. Investigating the above issues and other relevant matters in this field can, *inter-alia*, contribute to our theoretical understanding of many related concepts from a wide range of fields including neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, psychology, sociology and education.