

Our Children at School Part 2

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Outline of the Course

1. Selection of quality schools
2. Factors affecting the quality of education
3. Qualities of good learning
4. Features of good curriculum
5. Reasons to favour software over books
6. Features available in software but not in textbooks

Course Objectives:

1. To be able to identify good schools based on well-defined criteria
2. To be able to compare between good and bad curricula

QUESTION & ANSWER BUCKET

TRANSCRIPTS

ASSESSMENT

Multiple Choice Questions

Match the Columns

True or False

COURSE DURATION

Video – 2 hours 30 min

Study Guide – 30 min

Assessment – 15 min

Total Duration – 3 hours 15 mins

Lesson 1: Our Children at School - Part 7

1. Selecting High Quality Schools

All of us have children who study at schools, but really, if we do not have the criteria to differentiate between good and bad schools, we will not be able to choose the right school for our children. Here are a few tips for the parents to help them find the right school.

i. Visit the school, get the brochures and see what the school offers. In the visit, make relationship with the teachers, and see some of the classes in order to be able to judge whether it is suitable for your children.

ii. Get equipped with information in order to judge the schools you visit. The more equipped we are to judge a school, the better future it is for students.

Some schools do not make balance between knowledge and skills. Some schools mainly focus on knowledge at the expense of the skills.

To give you an example, a grammar lesson, when the teacher focuses on the grammatical rule, makes students to memorise and spends most of the time explaining it, but when they want to put the language in actual use, they make a lot of mistakes, because of the lack of practice.

A fair balance should be maintained between the two. If the rule is understood, allow the students to practise it in reality in their conversation, in their speeches and in their writing, to guarantee that there is a transition from the theoretical knowledge to application.

iii. Full immersion in language

Do the students have the experience of full immersion in language, or just they study it from textbooks, not from real life situation?

A wise teacher will definitely arrange for visits to actual places after preparing them for the children to have the opportunity of living the language, in order to immerse into the language. And this cannot be done just inside the classroom, unless the teacher would equip the classroom with the necessary objects that are needed for the lesson so that students would have an opportunity to practise the language in real life situations.

iv. Gradual Transition

When we read the textbooks of the students, do we see gradual transition, or just big shifts and big gaps between a lesson and another? This can be seen in the reading

texts. You can observe it, for example, in the difficulty and the repetitiveness that you find in the textbook.

The teacher who has an expertise in this area, knows when to skip some pages or some lessons in the book, or when to give them a secondary focus, and when to give them a primary focus. We want the teachers to be the masters of the textbooks, rather than the textbooks having full control over the teachers.

It should be known that the textbook is only one part of the curriculum. The curriculum is much wider than the textbook. So, read the book with the intention to find out whether there is a gradual transition. This is something common in different books in whatever subject you may think of.

v. Tracking students' progress

One of the most important practices that we expect to see the teachers doing in their classroom is tracking the student's progress through tracking the assignments in terms of the proficiency attained.

vi. Does the school provide help for the students who need that?

This help can be in the form of extra lessons or special attention to them inside the class. Then we give attention to the average students and at the same time, the help also is needed to be given to those students on the high end simply because if we do not give them the proper attention, they will not progress at the level of their intelligence or their capacity.

vii. Intensity of tasks

And then, in order to achieve this feature, one of the things that a parent would look into is the intensity of the exercises, especially when we talk about learning a language. All languages require a lot of exercises in order to strengthen the skill that the students acquire.

There is no standard textbook in the world for teaching the language; there are always some textbooks better than what is available. And here is the role of the teacher to add extra material from other sources.

Parents should pay attention to how many exercises a teacher does for the students in the class?

viii. The analysis of the results

This gives a full picture of every single student's performance along the schooling months. The right of a low achiever is to get more attention from the teacher, in particular, and from the school in general. The right of a high attainer student is the same. He needs more attention, because he progresses at a rate that is little bit quicker than the average rate of the other students.

Lesson 2: Our Children at School - Part 8

2. Factors affecting the quality of education

- i. The relationship between the teacher and the students brings about positive results
- ii. Level of interaction of the students. In some classes you will find the teacher is talking and the students are listening and no wonder that close to the middle of the lesson, we will find most of the students sleeping.

Ideally, the teacher is a supervisor or a guide, who directs the students to the right way of learning. Of course, this requires the teacher to be very well trained.

In this interactive method, the students ask each other; or the teacher asks and students answer. Furthermore, what determines the quality of education besides this interaction is the type of questions the teacher asks; is it the type of closed questions that require maybe one word answer like yes or no, or is it a type of question that requires a lot of thinking from the students?

it is very essential to develop a higher level of thinking among our students, rather than giving closed ended questions.

Within this method, a closely related factor is whether the teacher gives the students some time to think and to work independently. Does the teacher divide the students into groups and give them tasks and questions that need to be answered, that require some discussion among themselves, in order to reach the higher level of thinking.

Does he differentiate between the low achievers and the high achievers? Does he involve all the class?

iii. Clear Objectives

A conscientious parent looking for a good school for his kids should verify the following:

- ❖ Does the teacher have clear learning objectives? Are they measurable?
- ❖ Does he write them on the board and at the end of the class checks whether he achieved them?
- ❖ How well the lesson plans are detailed and to which extent the teacher applies them in the class?

- ❖ Is there a group work in the classroom?

This is because there is an important psychological fact that peers learn very well from each other, more than they perhaps learn from the adults and the grown-ups.

- ❖ Does the teacher allow students to do some independent work to make sure that the student is able to work independently?

The teacher should make a balance between the group work and the independent work because we need to develop this ability of students to work independently, in order to face real life challenges.

- ❖ Does the teacher assess the performance, the degree of understanding and the level of skills of the students, or he just end up the class before assessing students' understanding?
- ❖ Does he track the student's progress in classroom? For example, how well has the student become able to pronounce the sounds he was unable to in the beginning.
- ❖ Does the teacher allow the students to make some research using available technology, especially if you are in a classroom that is well equipped and has access to the internet? Do not deprive the students from exploring the internet to get the answer for the problems that you made.

Lesson 3: Our Children at School - Part 9

3. Qualities Of Good Learning

i. One of the things that we need to ask is the involvement and the participation of the students inside the classroom. For example, you can observe this by the depth of the discussions carried out by the students, or by the application of what they learn in the daily life.

ii. Another issue is whether students make connections between subjects, for example, between the Qur'aan and Hadeeth, between the Hadeeth and poetry, etc.

as regards the participation of students, the teacher should bear in mind that it is important that the students be able to communicate their understanding and the ability to present it to others in a good way.

iii. Another quality of good learning is the degree of student group collaboration and cooperation. One of the aims achieved here is to learn how to work in a group.

iv. Effective use of technology

This means employing it in connecting the students with research on the internet.

v. Developing the critical thinking of the students. For example, ask students to evaluate the performance of the leadership of the school, or the teacher or any other person involved in education.

Lesson 4: Our Children at School - Part 10

4. Features of Good Curriculum

With relation of the curriculum, the parents should find out the following:

- i. Whether the school provide the quality curriculum that prepare our students to work in life when they finish their high school? Would the students be equipped with the skills and the talents and the knowledge that may help them work after the end schools?
- ii. Whether the curriculum provided by the school help our students connect and continue their education in colleges and universities? It is possible to find the curriculum is so narrow, that it does not prepare the students to continue their studies, or it does not make them qualified to work when they finish the high school.
- iii. Another feature of good curriculum is the balance that it provides between the elements of the curriculum. For example, when you go to some schools, you will find the curriculum of the Qur'aan either focuses heavily on the recitation and memorisation of the Quran, or it focuses heavily on understanding the Qur'aan.

it should be noted that the curriculum includes the courses and programs and the projects, field trips, and all other activities the students are made to participate in.

- iv. Whether the curriculum provides the students with enjoyment. The more interesting the curriculum is, the more the students will be interested to get involved in it.
- v. Whether the curriculum is relevant to us, as individuals living in a particular community or society. This is because some school would borrow the curriculum from a different country, and they would use this curriculum and apply it fully in their society wherein some of these elements do not fit into the culture of the students or into the environment that the students are raised in.

It does not necessarily mean that we change the whole curriculum, because it links the students to international standards, and to an international culture, but it necessarily means that the teacher should modify some parts of this curriculum, in order to relate the life of the students to the society that they are living in.

- vi. Whether there is gradual transition between one year and another. Sometimes, you find the same thing repeated on this grade, and other grades. There is no problem in repeating the same concept as long as it is enriched and enlarged.
- vii. Whether the curriculum challenges the abilities of the students. It should not give the same for all levels of students. They should follow this formula: one step ahead of the student.

Lesson 5: Our Children at School - Part 11

5. Reasons to favour software over books

Comparison between textbooks on the one hand, and software, the internet and computer programs on the other hand, in terms of their effectiveness in education.

i. **The cost.** Even if these two instructional materials cost us the same thing in their preparation and production, the cost per copy for books for and the cost per copy for software is a world of difference. Transporting books to other countries cannot be compared with transporting software. This is because what matter here is the weight. Besides, to make amendments and corrections and make new versions in books cost much, whereas in software there is hardly any cost.

ii. But the other element is the **content**. The textbooks contain silent texts, with no audios or videos. When you compare this with the software, software is much more vivid and attractive.

iii. When you have a software that has **sound and video**, it enriches the skill of listening, speaking and reading. And even sometimes, it enriches in most cases the skill of writing. So, there is a balance between the skills in the software, whereas when you look at the textbooks, usually the main focus is the reading.

iv. To make the silent texts a little bit **vivid**, they require a teacher, whose salary increases the cost. This is not the case with the software, where you can use it by yourself because if it is well prepared, it will do the job of the teacher.

That's why we call it **self-instructional**, as you can learn from it by yourself, at the comfort of your living room, or the comfort of your desk, or the comfort even of your bed.

v. Another aspect relates to the cost of **making changes** in all versions. The price is very costly, you need to reproduce the whole thing again. Changing the software will cost as much as it cost the first time, which is negligible.

It is much easier to make changes and immediately you would find the product appearing on the internet on websites. It just takes few seconds or a few minutes or maximum few hours to see the changes appearing in the new version or in the program on the computer. This is not the case with textbooks.

vi. **Freedom of choice.** When we learn from a textbook, usually, the choice is very limited because you go in a linear direction, you finish this lesson, you finish the exercise, you move to the second exercise, because this is how the book is designed.

On the other hand, in the computer, when you use the software, it is not necessary to go through a linear movement. You can skip lessons and move ahead.

But in the case of software, it tells you that because of the grading and evaluation system that is available in the software, it can advise you to move or to jump to lesson number five or to lesson number 20, all depends on you. It addresses every student at his own pace.

This is not the case with books that requires an excellent or an outstanding teacher who needs to give you this valuable feedback, which is not the case.

vii. **Feedback.** Although some books may give you feedback by having the corrections at the end of the chapter or the end of the book, the quality of the feedback used in the textbook, and the quality of the feedback given in the software, is far different. In the software you get first of all the immediate feedback once you make the mistake. It is immediate and relevant.

It tells you, perhaps you need to go to exercise number so and so or this slide or that place in the software to get more reinforcement, and be able to understand it. Also, it gives you an explanation of the error or the mistake that you made. So, it is immediate and comprehensive feedback at a very low cost.

Lesson 6: Our Children at School - Part 12

6. Features available in software but not in textbooks

i. When you compare the series of books with a software in terms of the script, the passages, you will find that the texts or the passages available in any books are just silent texts. As they are not human beings speaking, there is no vividness or no life in them.

Conversely, on the software, you will find text is moving, is live and is very **entertaining**, because you have the sounds and even the visuals that are necessary to make the text live.

ii. When you make mistakes and mistakes are inevitable, the software gives more informative feedback.

In the software, there is tracking of errors. Where the students' answers are rated in terms of percentage, areas of weaknesses are identified. For example, it may tell you that you are in this level as regards the correct use of plural but this level in relation to the correct use of gender, etc.

iii. Another quality is the **easiness**. From the first moment you see that the software is very friendly for a user. You hear sounds and see pictures; you get feedback that really makes you feel live.

The book, usually is a little bit dull and boring, because it doesn't have this level of interactivity between you and the textbook.

iv. Another aspect is the **size**. The size of the book, textbooks usually are bulky, and you need to carry volumes. This is not the case with textbooks.

Textbooks are heavy to carry. Textbooks are so bulky that even some series of books, of Arabic for example. In some universities, we have found four volumes that are so bulky, and some other textbooks will find six or seven. Some series of books reached almost close to 14 volumes.

v. In terms of the cost

What is meant here is the cost of reproduction. To produce any software, it may cost you fractions of the cost of producing a textbook or series of textbooks. And everybody in the world knows that money is important. And you can save a lot of money by producing copies and copies from the software. And this is not the situation when you think of producing a series of textbooks.

Question and Answer Bucket

1. Where can we get guidelines as regards good materials to study Arabic?

Ans. This requires some research to be done on the internet, attending conferences, attending book fairs and software fairs. This would open up the area for all of us to benefit from what is available in the market.

It is no longer that it is only our children who can make this change, but by our participation, especially now, when we got all this knowledge and information about the benefits of using software to enrich the learning of a language, the language of the Qur'an, especially when we know how vital it is in understanding the Holy Quran, the book that all of us nourish on. We Muslims cannot live without the Qur'an. And we cannot benefit from the Qur'an unless we understand it. And to understanding the Quran we should learn Arabic.

2. What is the meaning of immersion in the context of language learning?

Ans. Immersion refers to the situation when you put the learner in a real-life situation where the language is used genuinely. He becomes part of the situation and interacts accordingly. He will acquire the language quicker than the student who is studying from a textbook in a school or in a college.

3. How does this curriculum contribute to make our children creative?

Ans. The curriculum should boost the creativity of the students. For example, when students are given an example, at the end they should be able to produce something like it.

For example, when the students are taught some poetry, do they learn the poetry only to memorise and appreciate and evaluate and taste this poetry, or this curriculum provides them with some activities and projects that would encourage them to be poets in the near or the far future? Does it help them to write some poetry?

In one of the classrooms I have visited, I have seen a good practice. The teacher began explaining the lines of poetry to the students, and they understood almost everything in it. Then the teacher started developing this exercise by deleting some of the main words and asking the students to replace these words by words of their own, provided that they would keep the meaning as is. Then he kept one part of the line of poetry, and deleted the other and asked the students to complete the second part. This is really very creative. And then, at the end of the lesson, the teacher asked the students to write two or three lines out of their own thinking that matches this meaning by talking about the same topic of the poem that they studied in class. So, the students ended up working collectively on writing poetry.