Change Through Improved Arabic Reading in Early Grades

Enhanced Arabic reading in the early grades and student-centered, active learning (SCAL) are priority objectives of the Girls’ Improved Learning Outcomes (GILO) project in Egypt. GILO provides teachers with supplemental teaching materials, lesson plans, classroom routines, and extensive training in phonemic awareness, phonics, and strategies to enhance reading comprehension and reading fluency. Student scores on standardized reading assessments show considerable improvement after their teachers receive GILO support. The behaviors of students change when their teachers adopt SCAL strategies and techniques. Teachers themselves discern change after their GILO training – in both themselves and their students:

“My name is Hussein Mostafa and I am a First Grade teacher since six years at Nazla Aqfahas Primary School in Beni Suef. Until I received training in phonics from GILO, I always relied on the traditional methods to teach reading: memorization and dictation. Yet despite all my efforts, the result was always disappointing. Not more than 30% of my students each year learned to read. The other students did not participate and their absences from school became more frequent. In the teaching of reading, I typically ended the school year feeling defeated!

Then I attended the GILO training in Early Grade Reading and in the different strategies of Student-Centered Active Learning and Classroom Management. For me and my colleagues, these trainings were a wonderful gift! We learned how to teach using new techniques and strategies that promote students’ active participation and effective techniques of phonics instruction. Applying these techniques and strategies in my classroom, I very soon saw a marked change in my students. In reading skills, they could now readily distinguish letter sounds and the short vowels, the fatha, kasra and damma, and much more quickly easily decode and read new words. And they were much more interactive and positive in class, absent less often and much better behaved! My colleagues and I are delighted with this positive and unexpected change!

Now 100% of my students are learning to read – not just the best 30% students, as before. I never thought that possible! With much less effort than before, my results are much better! Before, not a single one of the 24 students in my classroom could read or write at the level expected of grade one. Now all of them do!

My students have changed – and so have I! Once the classroom “dictator”, unsuccessfully trying to enforce and maintain an unruly classroom, I am now a relaxed “facilitator” of children participating actively with discipline and eagerness in their own learning. GILO has helped us all – teachers and students alike – to enjoy the learning process and our class time together. My wish is that GILO continues. It has changed my life – and catalyzed big changes in our school!