

Editorial

Introduction to Special Issue: Contemporary Critical Perspectives on Islamic Education

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This special issue focuses on critical perspectives in the emerging field of Islamic education globally. Building on the important theoretical work being done to conceptualise the parameters of Islamic education, this special issue contributes to the urgent need for ongoing empirical studies on the complexities of Islamic education enactments in formal and informal learning settings as well as how Islamic education addresses critical issues that Muslims are facing in different parts of the contemporary world. The field of Islamic Education Studies is blossoming. It includes: the education of Muslim learners in Muslim majority and minority contexts; formal and informal school settings; public/state and private/community sectors, theological study, value-based learning, and identity formation; primary, secondary, and higher education; curriculum, pedagogy, school ethos, and assessment considerations; and educator, learner, parent, and community perspectives, to name a few broader angles from which the field is being approached. Currently, while important empirical studies exist, it is becoming imperative that ongoing research is needed to address the breadth of perspectives required in this emerging field.

In the approach to this special issue, we invited papers that contribute with critical reflection on the field that is responsive to the complex and challenging issues that inform Islamic education. In so doing, the concept of critical included two aspects: The first aspect comprises critical engagement with the theories, concepts and practices around Islamic or Muslim education, an example of which in this volume is a paper by Abdalla et al., where Muslim learners' dissatisfaction with the curriculum and pedagogy of Islamic Studies in Australian Islamic schools is examined. The second aspect included contributions that examine how Islamic education addresses critical issues that Muslims face, such as forced immigration and brutal violence faced by Muslims in Myanmar, presented by Naved Bakali and Shujaat Wasty in this special issue. Our critical attempt also includes, but is not limited to, challenges related to fostering faith in a globalizing educational context of evaluation and performativity, internal differences of theological and lived-religious interpretation, lived realities of educating in increasingly complex educational contexts and settings. Our call for papers of this kind was responded to well, as seen in this issue.

What we offer in this special issue are seven empirical studies from distinct educational contexts and settings that employ a critical theoretical lens toward insightful readings of the field. Antum Panjwani's paper, entitled "Perspectives on Inclusive Education: Need for Muslim Children's Literature", suggests a 'Muslim Children's Literature' curriculum to respond to calls for inclusive curricula in Ontario, Canada's public schools. Such a curriculum, she argues, would initiate critical conversations related to the diverse and complex identities of Canadian Muslim students and also actualize the Canadian policies' claims of genuine multiculturalism.

Fella Lahmar's paper entitled: "Islamic Education: An Islamic 'Wisdom-Based Cultural Environment' in a Western Context" provides a mapping of the distinct approaches to Islamic education and schooling in the United Kingdom. Acknowledging the varying aims and aspirations of diverse Islamic schools, she contends that there are common elements to an 'Islamic school culture' that can be drawn from a combination of classical and contemporary Islamic thought in dialogue with British educational trends and logics.

Mohamad Abdalla, Dylan Chown, and Nadeem Memon's paper entitled: "Islamic Studies in Australian Islamic Schools: Learner Voice" found that Muslim learners are largely dissatisfied with the curriculum and pedagogy of Islamic Studies in Australian Islamic schools. They argue for the need to take learner voice more seriously in the re-design and re-development of Islamic Studies curricula and the renewal of Islamic schooling as a whole.

Mehmet Tuna's paper, "Islamic Religious Education in Contemporary Austrian Society: Muslim Teachers Dealing with Controversial Contemporary Topics" provides insights on the experience of teachers teaching Islamic education in Austrian secular public schools. The findings reveal that further professional development and curriculum resources are required to support educators in addressing sensitive issues such as homosexuality or evolution and to navigate the diverse perspectives within the Muslim community on such topics.

Mariam Alhashmi, Naved Bakali, and Rama Baround's article entitled: "Tolerance in UAE Islamic Education Textbooks" employs a qualitative content analysis of the notion of tolerance. The study found that the notion of tolerance is discussed in Islamic Education textbooks in a multitude of ways that include themes such as civic engagement or justice and equity. What remains wanting is the need to teach through a pedagogy of tolerance. The co-authors argue that curricular themes related to tolerance cannot be disassociated from the preparation and enactment of it. This paper is interesting against the background of the ongoing reform of teaching Islam and rethinking Islamic education in the Middle East, especially in the UAE, which appears to be spearheading education for tolerance in the region.

Mohammed Adly's article entitled: "Teaching Islam in an International School: A Bourdieusian Analysis" takes us to Qatar for an analysis of how local and global educational priorities play out in the teaching of Islamic Studies. Through a qualitative study of one international school in Qatar, Adly's findings point to a distinction between social capital and cultural capital—where Islamic Studies teachers fail to nurture the latter.

Naved Bakali and Shujaat Wasty's paper: "Identity, Social Mobility, and Trauma: Post-Conflict Educational Realities for Survivors of the Rohingya Genocide" provides insights from aid-workers about educational programming in refugee camps. As much as Islamic education is being viewed as a fundamental source of education for Rohingya youth, there remain significant challenges with underqualified teachers, inaccessibility of learning centers and cultural barriers for girls and women. Set against the traumatic experiences of Rohingya in Myanmar and the refugee camps outside the country, this paper speaks to the viability and centrality of faith and religious education to the identity and hope of refugees and immigrants across many regions of the world.

Together, these seven studies provide important empirical insights from around the globe on Islamic education and Muslim youths' experiences in both public/state/secular schools and private/independent faith-based ones. We are particularly excited to see studies that draw on the voices of a range of stakeholders that include students and teachers as well as contexts that require ongoing research and support. This issue highlights the need for more critical studies in the field of Islamic education and Muslim youths' education experiences in various contexts.

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