

***THE ISLAMIC EDUCATION  
CURRICULUM IN THE SULTANATE OF  
OMAN:  
INTEGRATING DIVERSITY***

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## بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

- *Islamic Education is one of the required core courses in governmental and private schools in the Sultanate of Oman. This research paper gives an overview over the governmental curriculum for Islamic education, grades 5 to 7, and in how far it considers diversity in its different features. It looks into the ways and methodology used, as well as the design and topics of learning units, with a focus on the means used to integrate diversity on different levels.*



# ISLAMIC EDUCATION

- Education determines the methodological framework a person moves in, organizes and conceptualises his relationship to his environment, man, life and universe. (Madkur, 1998)
- School curriculum has a particular importance, as it makes up the overall framework for the educational enterprise. It is the curriculum that provides the educational tool to realize its goals and enables the student to discover and develop his abilities, potential and gifts and implement and develop these in real life (Al-Ḥusniyah, 2014).



- Academic research on (Islamic) education mirrors a number of controversies, particularly upon comparison between traditional concepts of Islamic education and the contemporary state of affairs (see Al-Attas, S.M.N. 1977, Panjwani, 2004).
- Our research focuses on the specimen of the Islamic education textbooks of the Sultanate of Oman, grade 5-7, in the light of integrating diversity: What benefit may be taken from it for teaching Islamic education in other parts of the world?



# ISLAMIC EDUCATION: LEARNING OUTCOMES

- To educate the Muslim individual or the sincere person, i.e. an active practicing individual who does good deeds and performs any work properly (*itqān*). What is meant by “good deeds” here is the translation into practice of the Islamic worldview on the relationship towards his Creator, life and universe, as well as to his fellow human beings.
- Realisation of the Islamic Ummah, which is bound by the belief in Allah s.w.t. without any distinction in terms of colour, gender, ethnic, linguistic or cultural background, as all believers are one Ummah, comparable to one body.
- *Growth of the belief in the human entity and the complementariness of humankind; to realize this aim as well as co-existence between human beings is one of the original aims of Islamic education, particularly in the contemporary age which is characterized by a growing communication between people due to the scientific and technological developments in the time of globalization (Al-Kaylānī, 1988).*



## LEARNING OUTCOMES, CONTD.

- Human nature is definitely one of the foundations to be considered. Man is a servant of Allah, a dignified creature with a will and freedom of choice, and the purpose of his creation is to serve his Lord and cultivate the earth according to His method.
- Man is created to naturally accept Islam and has the innate ability to distinguish between good and bad, truth and falsehood (Madkūr, 1998).
- On the same line, Islamic education builds on the foundation of the human inclination to live in society with others rather than in seclusion; with a clearly defined make up of society.
- The methodology of teaching Islamic education therefore strives to provide the foundational elements of society, the role of every individual in this society, and to equip the growing generation with the means to overcome challenges to society (‘Abd Allāh, 2001).



# THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

- The Sultanate of Oman has approximately 4 million inhabitants as of 2014, with an expatriate percentage of approximately 44%. (National Centre for Statistics and Information, 2017)
- Due to its history and geographical situation, Oman traditionally is a culturally and ethnically diverse country. In addition to Arabic, many Omanis have acquired languages such as English, Swahili, Baluchi, Persian, Urdu, and Sindhi. Most Omanis adhere to Islam, with Ibadi, Sunni and Shi'ah schools being followed.
- According to the 2010 Census, the number of Omanis with special needs reached 62,506 individuals. The Royal Decree (63/2008) was issued to regulate the rights of special needs citizens. In the education sector, there were 11,626 students with learning difficulties as of 2014. 182 schools apply inclusion of 1,390 visually and mentally challenged students (College of Education, 2015). Female empowerment through education is considered a national priority.



# ISLAMIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM, OMAN

- The development of Islamic education curricula in the Islamic and non-Islamic world has become a field of interest for academic scrutiny, particularly with the duality of instruction that takes place in most parts of the Islamic world today, where scientific curricula are often imported or taught in a foreign language (Abdul Kabir, 2016). An intelligent design of Islamic education curricula so as to meet the demands of the time while remaining true to the exigencies of Islamic education is indeed a difficult task.
- The Islamic education curriculum, one of the core courses, is binding for governmental schools with an average amount of 5 teaching hours per week; the same curriculum is being implemented in bilingual private schools in the country.



# DIVERSITY – MEANING, STRATEGIES, PITFALLS

- As Smith (2006, 29) formulates it; “diversity represents a challenge and an opportunity for education”.
- For our research, we adopted the definition of diversity by the diversity committee, College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University:
- *‘Diversity is the natural and acquired differences among members of the education community resulting from individual differences in gender, age, nationality, language, disability, socio-economic status, and geographical region in Oman.’ (College of Education, 2015)*
- We may add to the features mentioned in the definition the factor of madhhab affiliation; as adherents to the Ibadi, Sunni and Shi’ah schools are represented in the population and learning community.



# IMPORTANCE OF THE TEXTBOOK

- The school textbook may be described as the embodiment of educational philosophies, cultural, academic and sometimes ideological demands turned reality. The textbook is the students' guidance, their Imam or *dalīl*, to guide them through the subject. It communicates content knowledge as well as concepts on life, man and universe that are – intended or unintended – by-products.
- As Greaney put it, “The sheer amount of time students devote to textbooks underscores their importance” (2006, p.47). Textbooks can be catalysts for change and development, positive as well negative; they can influence by ways of bias, omission, imbalance, historical inaccuracies, persuasive techniques.



# DIVERSITY IN TEXTBOOKS

- The incorporation of diversity in textbooks may be beneficial if it works on the lines of stressing the commonalities rather than differences in the target group. Talking about difference may act out as deepening existent or even creating non-existent prejudice. A fertile methodology may be to create general sensitivity without raising actual or imagined differences, as these may end up in negative stereotyping



# OUR RESEARCH

- This study focuses on the diversity and the extent of its consideration in the Islamic education textbooks of the Sultanate of Oman, grades 5 to 7.
- The researchers have not carried out a study on the teaching body, as the research focuses solely on the textbooks.
- The researchers have made use of an analytic score card to assess in how far the chosen features of diversity are to be found in the textbooks. The unit of analysis is represented by the topics of learning units presented in the books.



# METHODOLOGY OF OUR STUDY

- Research methodology is descriptive and analytical, describing and analyzing the given reality of the books with regard to our research question, to which extent diversity is recurrent in the Islamic education textbooks.
- Recurrence of diversity with regard to the specifics featured in the score card is measured in percentage.



# FEATURES OF DIVERSITY

- Several topics that are researchable;
- The researchers have focused on the following:
- **How diverse is the distribution of topics** (related to ‘aqīdah (belief), to ‘ibādāt (worship), mu‘āmalāt (transactions), values and systems, sīrah (the Prophetic biography) through the textbook contents (as distributed by Qur’an, ḥadīth, ‘aqīdah, fiqh, sīrah, systems)?
- How diversified are the textbooks in addressing the students’ **physical, psychological, societal and economic needs**, how are **different levels of caring for the individual, family, society, Islamic Ummah, humankind** at large met? And how are these topics addressed as per the diversity of sources, the Qur’an, ḥadīth, sīrah, fiqh, etc? Are diverse dimensions in terms of individual, family, society, state, Ummah and the world at large considered?



## FEATURES OF DIVERSITY CONTD.

- Is **ethnic, linguistic, cultural diversity** in the target group addressed, either directly or indirectly? **Diversity of opinion** (Are views particular to a certain school presented as standard? How is difference of opinion dealt with? Which references for content knowledge are used in the textbooks?);
- **Gender** (Are both male and female students addressed through the textbooks, in the presentation of topics and dialogues, role models, specific topics, pictures?).



# COMPREHENSIVENESS

- One important feature of the Islamic education textbooks of the Sultanate of Oman is the holistic presentation of the different branches of Islamic sciences; there is no separation between Tafsīr, tilāwah, ḥadīth, fiqh, ‘aqīdah (tawḥīd) and sīrah, as exists, for instance, in the Saudi curriculum.
- GR6/2 presents the following learning units:
  - (part 1) 1: Sūrat al-Mu’minūn (1), recitation and understanding;
  - 2: the rules of nūn sākinah and tanwīn: al-iqlāb;
  - 3: Messengers in the Holy Qur’an;
  - 4: Sūrat al-Mu’minūn (2): recitation and understanding;
  - 5: Women’s dress (ḥadīth sharīf);
  - 6: propagating the Islamic message to the tribes (sīrah);
  - 7: Sūrat al-Ḥāqqah (1) recitation and understanding;
  - 8: the Messengers’ miracles;
  - 9: Sūrat al-Ḥāqqah (2): recitation and understanding;
  - 10: the importance of time;



- 11: the ethics of sneezing (ḥadīth sharīf);
- 12: the prayer of solar and lunar eclipse;
- 13: the two bay'ahs of al-aqabah (part 2);
- 14: “Actions are judged by intention” (ḥadīth sharīf);
- 15: the rules of nūn sākinah and tanwīn: al-izhār;
- 16: from the manifestations of Allah’s might in plants;
- 17: from the ethics of the Messenger (pbuh): confidence in Allah;
- 18: Sūrat al-Isrā’ (1) recitation and understanding;
- 19: ‘Id al-fitr and id al-adḥā;
- 20: Sūrat al-Isrā’ (2): recitation and understanding;



- 21: Funeral Prayer;
- 22: Sūrat Nūḥ (1): recitation and understanding;  
23: Two eyes are not touched by fire (ḥadīth sharīf);
- 24: Sūrat Nūḥ (2): recitation and understanding;  
25: Sports in Islam,
- 26: al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥussayn, may Allah be pleased with them;
- 27: Sūrat Nūḥ (2) recitation and understanding.



Contents Field	Qur'an	Ḥadīth	'Aqīdah	Fiqh	Sīrah	Syste ms	Total	Percentag e
<b>First: Under consideration of topics</b>								
Belief	111	4	21	---	3	--	139	53.7 %
Worship	7	6		24			37	% 14.28
Transacti ons	1	3		1			5	% 1.9
Values and ethics	23	9				5	37	% 14.28
Prophetic biography					24		24	%7 9.2



Contents Field	Qur'an	Ḥadīth	'Aqīdah	Fiqh	Sīrah	Systems	Total	Percentage
<b>Second: With regard to the students' needs</b>								
physical						1	1	0.37%
psychological	1	2				2	5	%1.9
societal								
economic	1						1	%0.37



Contents Field	Qur'an	Ḥadīth	‘Aqīdah	Fiqh	Sīrah	Systems	Total	Percentage
<b>Third: Diversity in terms of dimensions</b>								
Individual		1	1		1	1		%1.5
Family		1				1		%0.8
Society	1						1	%0.8
State								
Ummah								%0.37
World	1						1	%0.37
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>146</b>	



# DIVERSITY IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF TOPICS

- With regard to the diversity in the distribution of topics (related to ‘aqīdah (belief), to ‘ibādāt (worship), mu‘āmalāt (transactions), values and systems, sīrah (the Prophetic biography) through the textbook contents (as distributed by Qur’an, ḥadīth, ‘aqīdah, fiqh, sīrah, systems), the analysis yielded the following results: Diversity in the distribution of topics through the contents of textbooks grade 5-7 exists, even though in varying percentage.
- The field of ‘aqīdah reached the highest distribution with 53.7%. This concentration may be due to the fact that the age of the target group is in need of concentrated lessons on these topics so as to conform to their intellectual abilities and spiritual needs; as questions of belief are the first core on which human life builds up.



- Both worship and values and systems occupy rank two with 14.28 % each. Questions of worship, as includes the teaching of the rules of purity, prayer, fasting, are of vital importance at this age, as well as good ethical behaviour and values which are vital for Muslim society.
- The analysis has also shown a concentration on the Qur'an as compared to the other features; a natural result in view of the Qur'an being the first source of Islamic education. The textbook authors therefore naturally use Qur'anic references and teachings as a starting point.



## ANALYSIS CONTD.

- As far as the second field, the physical, psychological societal and economic needs of the target community; and the third field, diversity in dimensions (individual, family, society, state, Ummah, world) are concerned, the diversity takes a lower scale with a rather sparse recurrence of these topics. This may be due to the age group, as these features may be more appealing to older students.
- Most psychological needs are already addressed through the topics of the first field, particularly those in the belief section, values and sīrah, even though no particular headlines have been specified for them.



## ETHNIC, LINGUISTIC, CULTURAL BACKGROUND

- No particular mention of either nationality, ethnicity, linguistic or socio-economic background is made.
- The textbook addresses the entire target group equally. It does not open Pandora's box of stereotyping. It may rather be observed that, through the focus on Islamic rules, values and ethics, differences are superseded.
- As to different language backgrounds, (different Arabic colloquial dialects, Arabic as second language), no special needs are addressed through the textbooks; it is therefore upon the specialized teacher to address these issues upon necessity.
- The focus on the correct recitation of the Qur'an through teaching the rules of *tilāwah*, intrinsically addresses linguistic variety. Some of the textbook introductions (such as GR5/1 and GR6/1) formulate as a learning aim to “treat recitation difficulties that some students experience”.



## EXAMPLES IN THE TEXTBOOKS

- Examples, pictures and photos depict the local Omani background (in its own diversity); to give an example, students are asked to discuss the change of some sweet water wells to saline water wells in the Sultanate (under the topic of different kinds of water, GR7/2: 78), or collect pictures of mosques in Oman (GR7/2).
- **Plant diversity** is mentioned as one of the manifestations of Allah's might. GR6/2:77 asks students to find out about the benefits of plants for the industry in Oman; students are also asked to devise a plan how to preserve trees in their region (GR6/2:78). This is in line with creating an awareness of responsibility for the immediate surroundings.



# GENDER

- Topics introduced in the form of dialogues centre either on dialogues **between a male teacher (or Imam masjid) and boys** (GR5/1:45f; GR5/2:52, 89; GR6/1: 119f; GR7/1:34f, 81f, 85f; GR7/1:81f, 85f); **between son and father** (GR5/1: p.21,70f; GR5/2:85; GR6/1:55); **between female teacher and girl(s)** (GR7/2:52f, 102f); **mother and son** (GR6/1:89f); **parents and children, both male and female** (GR7/2:32f); **parents and son** (GR7/1:27ff; GR7/1:127ff); **grandfather and grandchildren (male and female)**: (GR6/1:77ff).
- While the percentage of only male settings is prevalent with 65%, the only female settings amount to 10 %, mixed settings to 25 %. **The gender of dialogue partners does however not stand in relation to the topics introduced, the topics are never gender-specific.**
- Photos depict male teachers and male students (GR 5/1: 22, 70, 94) or female students (GR 5/1:60); GR6/1:61 features a photo of each a male and a female pupil performing *sajdah*, GR7/1:91 shows photos of a boy performing *tayammum*; boys and girls reading (GR7/1: 95).



## GENDER CONTD.

- Textbook authors have obviously made attempts to address both the female and male learning group through these measures, although the higher percentage goes to dominantly male settings.
- There are no particularly ‘male’ or ‘female’ topics in the books, with the exemption of a learning unit on female dress requirements (GR6/2:34), the special role of a Muslim wife is emphasized in GR 7/1: 132, where the personality of Asmā’ Bint Abī Bakr is depicted.
- After an introduction of the Sahabiyyah Nusaybah Bint Ka’b, one of the few women involved in giving the pledge of allegiance to the Prophet (pbuh), students are required to search for female Muslim personalities (GR6/2:62).



# REFERENCES / SOURCES FOR CONTENT

## KNOWLEDGE

- Typically Ibadī sources, such as the Musnad al-Rabī' (or al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ) as a ḥadīth reference, occupy a minor place; reference to al-kutub al-sittah, or even al-kutub al-tis'ah, of the ḥadīth collections is made in abundance. These comprise the Ṣaḥīḥān, the compilations of Abū Dawūd, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Mājah, the Muwaṭṭa', Sunan al-Bayhaqī.
- While the reference in GR5/1 to the most authentic ḥadīth compilation for the Ibadī school, Musnad al-Rabī', is two out of 11 or 18 %, references to standard (Sunni) ḥadīth compilations is 9 or 82%.
- The same distribution is obvious in GR5/2 with 2 or 6.7% and 28 or 93.3 %, respectively.
- GR6/1 mentions the Musnad twice (7%), as compared to 27 (!) references to other hadith compilations (93%).
- GR6/2 has an even more obvious distribution with only one reference to the Musnad al- Rabī'(4%) and 26 or 96% references to standard hadith compilations.
- The distribution changes in the textbooks for grade 7, as GR7/1 has 10 references to both the Musnad and al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ (34%) and 19 or 66% references to other compilations.
- GR7/2, finally, shows a weightage of 42 % (8 references) to the Musnad, and 11 (58 %) to other compilations.



- The representation of personalities of the early Islamic era, the time of Ṣaḥābah and Tābi'ūn, is exemplary.
- The following personalities are presented: GR 5/1: **Ibn 'Abbās** (The Omani Imam Jābir b. Zayd is mentioned as his student); **'Ammār b. Yāsir**; GR 5/2: **Sa'd b. a. Waqqāṣ**, **'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd**, **Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'**; GR 6/1: **Anas b. Mālik**, **Abū 'Ubaydah b. al-Jarrāḥ**; GR6/2: **Asmā' bint Abī Bakr**; **'Umar b. al-Khattāb**, **al-Ḥasan** and **al-Ḥussayn**; GR 7/1: **Imam Jābir b. Zayd**, **Zayd b. Hārithah**, **Asmā' bint Abī Bakr**; GR7/2: **Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī**.
- No judgment is passed or prevalence is given, early political incidents that divided the Muslim Ummah are not mentioned. At the same time, the unity of Muslims is implicitly stressed through introducing concepts like the (GR5/2:21). **prohibition to transgress against any Muslim**



## REFERENCES CONTD.

- References to specifically Ibadi books , such as the Mashāriq al-Anwār of al-Sālimī (GR 6/2: 28), or the Nuthar al-Jawhar of al-Bahlawī (GR6/1: 69), are rather an exception.
- Particularly the textbooks for grade 7 refer vastly to the available old and contemporary canon of books in Tafsir, Sirah, History, among them Tabarī's Tārīkh (GR7/2: 106), Ibn Hishām's Sīrah (GR7/2: 25, 47 (twice), 84), Ibn Qayyim's Zād al-Mi'ād (GR6/1: 104 and 105); to the Fiqh al-Sīrah of al-Būṭī (GR7/2:46) and even to Faḍl Allāh's Tafsīr min waḥī al-Qur'ān (GR7/2:72), to name but a few.



# STUDENTS' ACTIVITIES

- Interestingly, students are (GR5/1:87) called to compare between two different ḥadīths, one narrated by Bukhārī, the other by al-Rabī', with regard to reading the Fātiḥah in prayer. **The expected result of discussion is that there is no substantial difference.**
- Students' activities may focus more on research in typically Ibadi sources for some aspects, like a research in the Musnad (GR7/2: 32), or to collect Fatwās of the Sultanate's Mufti, Shaykh al-Khalīlī, on Zakāt (GR7/2:63).
- Quotations from various scholars, such as Imam al-Shāfi'ī (GR6/2:78), show how well balanced (i.e. transgressing borders of school affiliation) or diversified the references are.



- Integration of diversity takes place through focusing on commonalities rather than raising or discussing controversial issues.
- The Islamic education schoolbooks provide a general Islamic education, in ‘aqīdah as well as fiqh, without delving in differences. Existence and reasons for the existence of different legal schools or opinions are not discussed.
- While the textbooks for grades 5 and 6, for example, devote a large amount of lessons to the rules of prayer, questions with diverging opinion, such as raising or not raising the hands for takbirat al-ihrām, are not discussed.



# SOME REMARKS ON DIFFERENT LEARNING TYPES

- Different learning types are addressed through a **variety of activities** spanning from simple assessments based on repetition, fill in the gaps, match the right answer, to more demanding tasks such as to comment, discuss, research in electronic data bases or books.
- The **use of technology** is frequently demanded in activities (eg: register your *tilāwah* and listen to it, retrieve info from databases).
- Activities by default include **individual and group activities** per learning unit.



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Although no explicit statement is made in the textbooks, diversity seems to have been actively considered in several aspects: with regard to **gender, school affiliation (through the references used for content knowledge) and learning types.**
- The analysis of the distribution/ recurrence of topics has shown an amount of diversity, even though a clear focus on ‘aqīdah questions has been revealed



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## CONTD.

- Due to the basic teachings of Islam that transgress boundaries of gender, ethnicity and language, teaching Islamic education may be the most suitable of specializations to contribute to an integration of diversity on any level of society.
- Interestingly and as need be expected in today's age, the diversity discourse in the educational sector is guided by international (Western) expertise and paradigms rather than the innate Islamic ones.
- It would be worthwhile to develop an original Islamic diversity discourse and its consideration in education. **Diversity and its integration are profoundly Islamic themes which should be answered on the basis of the Islamic textual sources and heritage. *Islamic education textbooks can act as a torchlight in this area.***



والحمد لله ربّ العالمين

Thank you for listening

