

Perspectives on Islamic Religious Education in the EU The Austrian experience

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How Islamic religious education is framed in the EU

- ▶ Discussed in the context of „integration“ - expectations and fears
- ▶ Associations in connection to „Quran schools“ - memorizing Arabic texts without further thinking
- ▶ Suspicions about inappropriate teaching methods and indoctrination
- ▶ Mistrust in connection with „importing problems from abroad“
- ▶ Linked mostly to mosques and the very diverse groups who run them
- ▶ Thought as a means to obtain strong bondage towards countries of origin
- ▶ Only a few examples where Islamic Religious Education is part of the school system - due to the diversity within the EU how „Religion“ is dealt with as a school subject and the lack of official acknowledgment of Islamic representation

The Austrian experience of IRE - a success story?

Since the school year 1982/83 Islamic religious education in Austria
- based on the Islam Law of 1912 - going back to Bosnia being part of the Austrian Hungarian Monarchy

Initially only present at a few schools ("collective school system")

Expectations of the parents in the beginning - "feeling home"

Biggest challenge at the start: How to find qualified teachers?

Now: Widely present at schools, professionally organized, high quality standards, teacher education provided for, "part of the school system"

"Bridge building effect" of teachers at schools - interreligious and intercultural competence valued - nevertheless: Impact of shifting perspectives on the value of religion as such in society - questions as to the future

Legal frame of religious education

- ▶ Basis in the Religious Education Act of 1949, §2: "Religious instruction is provided, directed and directly **supervised by the legally recognized church or religious community** concerned."
- ▶ "Res mixta" between churches/religious societies and the state
- ▶ The **school authorities** are entitled to a **supervisory right in organisational and school discipline terms**
- ▶ Religious education is **denominationally bound**. Pupils who belong to a legally recognised church or religious society are not permitted to participate in religious education provided by a church or religious society other than the one corresponding to their own denomination, neither as part of a compulsory subject nor as part of an optional subject.
- ▶ For all pupils who belong to a legally recognised church or religious society, religious education of their denomination at the schools named in § 1 para. 1 RelUG and at schools with their own organisational statutes as defined in § 14 para. 2 PrivSchG is generally a **compulsory subject**. Ethics is a compulsory subject for pupils from general secondary schools as well as from vocational middle and secondary schools from grade 9 who do not participate in religious education.

State objective of the Austrian school

Art 14 (5a) of the Federal Constitution: Democracy, humanity, solidarity, peace and justice as well as openness and tolerance towards people are fundamental values of the school, on the basis of which it ensures the highest possible level of education for the entire population, regardless of origin, social situation and financial background, while constantly ensuring and developing the best possible quality. In partnership with pupils, parents and teachers, children and young people should be given the best possible mental, emotional and physical development so that they can become healthy, self-confident, happy, achievement-orientated, conscientious, artistic and creative people who are able to take responsibility for themselves, their fellow human beings, the environment and future generations **based on social, religious and moral values**. Every young person should be led to independent judgement and social understanding in accordance with his or her development and educational path, be open to the political, religious and ideological thinking of others and be enabled to participate in the cultural and economic life of Austria, Europe and the world and to contribute to the common tasks of humanity with a **love of freedom and peace**. (2005)

What does this mean for Islamic religious education?

- ▶ Anchored in the school system - IRE participates in reaching common goals in education
- ▶ “Right question half of science” - young people ask them!
- ▶ “Striving for happiness now and in the hereafter” - being able to discuss big life questions - “safe space” for personal reflexion
- ▶ Opportunity to go beyond an “Ilmihal” lesson
- ▶ Exploring the difference between tradition and religion - especially in questions of gender images
- ▶ Identity-building: the ability to recognise oneself as both “Muslim” and at home in Austria/Europe
- ▶ Ability to engage in dialogue: German as the language of instruction trains “talking about religion” - empowerment
- ▶ Revitalisation for the internal Muslim discourse
- ▶ Practising the ability to deal with plurality - starting with inner Muslim plurality

Common issues in the curricula - important for all subjects - How does this apply to Islamic Religious Education?

- ▶ Educational, professional and life orientation
- ▶ Entrepreneurship education
- ▶ Health promotion
- ▶ Informatics education
- ▶ Intercultural education
- ▶ Media education
- ▶ Civic education
- ▶ Reflective gender education and equality
- ▶ Sex education
- ▶ Language education and reading
- ▶ Environmental education for sustainable development
- ▶ Transport and mobility education
- ▶ Economic, financial and consumer education

Responsibility of Religious Authority IGGÖ

Selection of teachers - elaborate hearing process

"Idschaza" gives them the right to teach

Supervision of teaching by 12 superintendents

Participation in the assignment of teachers' services

Formulation of the curriculum

Selection of teaching materials - Schoolbooks - distribution via schools

Providing for teacher's training programmes

Why our teaching needs to appeal to pupils:



Within the first five days after the start of the school year, it is possible to deregister from religious instruction



From the age of 14 (legal attainment of religious maturity) this can be done by the students themselves, before that, it is up to the parents

Increasing attendance

18/19:

608 teachers

76.645 pupils

11.509 lectures per
week

22/23:

667 teachers

99.806 pupils

14.135 lectures per
week

Internal Challenges

Competence-orientation paradigm shift: knowledge reproduction is not enough! Transfer and reflection/problem solving are required

Teachers are increasingly becoming learning facilitators - requires a corresponding teacher personality

Multi-perspectivity and authenticity at the same time - the courage to ask all kinds of questions

Teacher is not a "fatwa machine"

Need for teaching materials and methods of teaching - especially on "sensitive" topics - that are most interesting for young people

IRE in public schools as complimentary to mosque training - how to reach a good cooperation? Where are the differences?

Religious education shows the need for internal Muslim discourse - can these impulses also be taken up and processed?

External Challenges - should also be seen as an opportunity

Self-image of Muslims and external perception diverge - wide field of reflection - need to bridge the gap - external political crisis effects image on Muslims

Increasing secularism of society - Religious education is partially questioned - Religious illiteracy

Organisation of religious education more and more difficult - to find space in the timetable for the many different religious faith groups

School reforms - being part of positive change (Curriculum NEW) - digitalisation

Ethic's lessons in competition - political ambitions to substitute RE

Question of more interreligious cooperation

Declining numbers in Christian RE raise questions of identity

Competence orientation - influence on design of curricula

- ▶ The pupil is in the centre - NOT the teacher
- ▶ Concentration on learning process - not „teaching/preaching“
- ▶ Reproduction of „content“ not enough
- ▶ Pupils should be able to transfer their knowledge to their lives
- ▶ Critical understanding and ability to drive own conclusions is wanted
- ▶ In Muslim thinking this approach is not new at all!
- ▶ Al Ghazali, Farabi or Ibn Rushd provided very similar teaching ideas
- ▶ Wisdom of „*Through self knowledge to knowledge of God*“

Curriculum - some quotations

Islamic religious education makes a fundamental contribution to the religious-ethical-philosophical educational dimension of schools and strengthens social cohesion as a whole. It promotes an understanding of Islam which, based on the IGGÖ's doctrine of faith, sees finding peace with God as a way of finding peace with people and the environment.

Curriculum - some quotations

The dynamic self-image of Islam is conveyed. Depending on the social conditions, questions about religion can change and new answers can be found authentically on the basis of the sources. The understanding of Maqasid ash-Sharia provides a guideline: life, intellect, personal property, family and religious freedom as goods worthy of protection point to basic ethical principles and an understanding of human rights. This strengthens personal responsibility and maturity, as well as creativity and the pursuit of beauty and harmony.

Curriculum - some quotations

Islamic religious education practices forms of communication that prove themselves in dialogue and promote personal knowledge. A culture of questioning goes hand in hand with the willingness to deal with criticism and to scrutinize things critically. Instruments and methods of Islamic thought and religious interpretation are gradually taught to the extent that pupils are enabled to form their own opinions independently when dealing with religious statements. An Islamic path of the “middle way” is promoted, as is an awareness of ambiguity, which often allows for “both this and that as well”.

Basic competences

- the centrepiece of the curriculum

1. SELF-KNOWLEDGE - TRUST IN GOD - DIVERSITY

2. CREATION - RESPONSIBILITY - AMANAH

3. FAITH BASE - AQIDA

4. RELIGIOUS ACTION - IBADA

5. DEALING WITH SOURCE TEXTS - CONTEXTUALIZATION

6. CAPACITY FOR PLURALITY - SOCIAL COHESION

7. INTERPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE - MU'AMALAT

Teaching “As-salamu alaikum” - a practical example

Self-knowledge, trust in God, diversity

I enjoy approaching other people because I feel safe. When I greet with "Salam", I feel that this also has to do with Allah (t). HE is as-Salam.

Creation - Responsibility - Amanah

As humans, we bear responsibility for the world around us. Carrying love for creation in my heart makes me realize that I should respect the people and nature around me. I show this with my greeting. The peace greeting reminds me that peace with and in God can only be found by living in peace with the world around me.

Basis of faith - Aqidah

In greeting, I welcome whatever may develop in my relationship with people. I thereby acknowledge divine providence and seek to recognize the good and make it fruitful for myself.

Religious practice - Ibadah

I follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who always used the greeting of peace, and I know and internalize the intention behind it. I recognize that the greeting of peace at the end of the ritual prayer plays an important role and know the deeper meaning of it.

Dealing with source texts - contextualization

I read in the Qur'an and hadith about greeting: "*O you who internalize faith! Do not enter houses except until you have permission and have greeted their inhabitants! ...*" (Sûra 24:27). I read: "*...So when you enter houses, greet one another with a blessed, good greeting from Allâh! ...*" (Sûra 24:61). And I read: "*And when a greeting is offered to, then greet with one more beautiful than it or return it!*" (Sûra 4:86). In the hadith: "*You cannot enter Paradise until you believe, and you do not believe until you love one another. Shall I show you something, if you did that, you would love one another? Unbid the greeting of peace among yourselves!*" (Reported by Muslim.) I draw conclusions from this for my behaviour and also consider the situation in which I find myself, especially the aspect of living in a multi-religious society.

Capacity for plurality - social cohesion

I can support social cohesion through a culture of consciously greeting and use a variety of greetings and courtesies.

Interpersonal perspective - Mu'amalat

I strengthen my social relationships through a reflective culture of greeting.

Areas of competence - performing NOT reproducing

- ▶ A - Perceiving and describing (perception)
- ▶ B - Understanding and interpreting (cognition)
- ▶ C - Creating and acting (performance)
- ▶ D - Communicating and making judgements (interaction)
- ▶ E - Taking part and taking decisions (participation)

Perceiving and describing (perception)

I see that people greet each other very differently. Every language has its own words. There are also different movements and facial expressions. Waving, shaking hands, bowing, smiling... My mum greets my baba differently than when she says "Grüß Gott" to the shop assistant when shopping. And when shopping for meat, she says "Salam alaikum!". I like the way my big brother greets me. But I don't like it when strange people want to hit me on my back as if joking. When my cousin comes from Germany, she laughs that we sometimes say "Servus". She doesn't know that expression.

Pupils can recognize different forms of greeting and describe them in a differentiated way.

Understanding and interpreting (cognition)

When you meet someone, you greet him/her. This helps you to understand each other better. You can show that you enjoy dealing with someone. It's part of politeness. Sometimes people have different ideas about how to greet each other. "Grüß Gott" is typical in Austria. In Germany it's more like "Guten Tag!". "As-salamu alaikum" is the Islamic greeting and Arabic. It means wishing each other peace. All Muslims know this greeting, no matter where they live in the world.

Pupils recognize the Islamic greeting for peace in the variety of greeting forms. At the same time, they understand that greeting in itself serves good communication and the positive shaping of relationships.

Shaping and acting (performance)

I say "Grüß Gott" to the teacher and "As-salamu alaikum" to the Hodja in the mosque. I always think about which greeting is appropriate for whom. A smile always works. Sometimes I hurry to greet someone straight away and sometimes I take my time and wait a bit for the other person to start. When greeting someone, it's not just the words that are important, but also how I feel when I say them. I also know the answer to "As-salamu alaikum!". That is "wa alaikum as-salam".

Pupils can greet consciously. They use the Islamic greeting of peace in situations where it is appropriate and can return it. They can also use other common forms of greeting.

Communicating and taking judgements (interaction)

I can show many things when greeting someone - whether I am happy to see someone or how I respect the other person. Because I think about which greeting is "right", I adapt to the person I am dealing with. But I also notice a lot about how I am greeted.

Pupils are able to justify their decisions to greet in one way and then in another and to talk about it with others. Beyond the verbal level, they recognize the importance of body language and facial expressions and use them.

Taking part and taking decisions (participation)

I want to greet the other person in such a way that things go well afterwards. That's why I want to know how to greet people well. I have my own opinion on this. I can also explain this when someone asks me why I sometimes greet one way and then differently.

Pupils can take conscious decisions in different social settings about which greeting they want to use when interacting with other people. They can reflect on the chosen way of greeting and explain this to others if they want.



Might Islamic Religious Education as established in secular public schools be an inspiration towards further developing Islamic education in general?