THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

# *5ᵗʰ Warwick Islamic Education Summer School*



## Educational Empowerment &

## Cultural, Religious Diversity of 21st Century Learners:

*Unpacking Learning Experiences of Muslim Children and Young People in European Education Systems*

*Convened by*

Dr Abdullah Sahin

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Radcliffe House

Department of Education Studies

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Warwick

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INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY

# Warwick Islamic Education Summer Schools (WIESS)

The Warwick Islamic Education Summer School brings together a distinctive learning community of researchers and practitioners, coming from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, with a shared interest in exploring issues framing the 'education and Islam/Muslims' intersection within the context of contemporary Muslim societies, majority and minority. Inspired by the Islamic educational principle of *taaruf*, openness to know and learn from one another, WIESS facilitates a transformative educational space fostering collaborative research activities and the sharing of knowledge, skills and best practice. WIESS promotes values of an inclusive, transformative, and compassionate education that is vital for facilitating holistic human flourishing, forming a shared culture of living well with one another and advancing a cosmopolitan model of citizenship nurturing a sense of belonging to more than one world.

Education is a critical catalyst for facilitating community development, effective civic engagement, socio-economic prosperity, and personal wellbeing. WIESS aims to contribute to the generation of a new transformative Muslim culture of learning, teaching, and reflective inquiry through rethinking Islamic Education within the context of a secular and culturally and religiously plural Europe and the wider Muslim-majority world. By reorienting Islamic Education Studies as an interdisciplinary field of research, critical scholarship, and professional development, WIESS aspires to advance education and Islamic pedagogic practice in  diaspora and global Muslim communities. WIESS aims to contribute to public understanding of Islam and encourage collaboration between Muslim educators, RE and general education practitioners in producing critical Islam literacy and facilitate intercultural/interfaith understanding within the secular schooling system in Europe.

WIESS delegates will have the opportunity to engage with a critical dialogue between Islamic and Western traditions of education. WIESS is part of the Warwick Islamic Education Initiative, a model collaboration between British Muslim communities and the university that is based on a shared transformative vision of education and values of social inclusion. During the gathering participants will learn more about Warwick Islamic Education taught, research and community outreach activities and the wider research expertise and pioneering courses offered at the Department of Education Studies.

## Previous Sessions
Each annual meeting explores in-depth a specific theme related to the theoretical and practical aspects of facilitating contextual teaching/learning of Islam within diverse contemporary Muslim and secular educational settings. During the first gathering in 2016, the interdisciplinary nature of Islamic Education Studies and the main challenges facing the field were explored. The discussions have led to the charting of a broad research agenda over which the members could engage with future collaborations. The second Summer School explored the educational character of the Qur'an and its diverse pedagogic appropriations/interpretations within the context of historical Muslim societies and the modern world. The third gathering engaged with the gender disparity in education within Muslim minority and majority societies. Issues related to the formation of Muslim female faith and educational leadership were explored. The theme of the fourth Summer Schools was Pedagogies in Dialogue which analysed traditions of human formation in educational cultures of Islam and the West.

## The Warwick International Islamic Education Research Network
The Summer School has led to the establishment of the Warwick Islamic Education Research Network that has over two hundred members and encourages cross disciplinary exploration of the Islam/Education intersection within diverse Muslim minority/majority contexts. The network facilitates collaborative research activities among Muslim educators and the wider community of researchers, practitioners and policymakers in Education, Social Sciences, and the Humanities.

## The 5ᵗʰ Warwick Islamic Education Summer School

### The Historical and Socio-Political Background

Diversity is increasingly becoming the defining feature of contemporary societies across the globe. An unprecedented level of population mobility triggered by the economic needs of post WWII Europe, mostly from the Southern colonised world to the affluent coloniser, the North, has contributed to the emergence of an ethnically, religiously, and culturally plural modern Europe. Political and economic uncertainty, and a perpetual cycle of conflicts engulfing post-colonial states, including Muslim-majority nation states, have increased this migration pattern, pushing a considerable percentage of their populations to flee in search of better lives in the North.

The arbitrarily drawn physical boundaries of the states by the colonial powers have rendered a large heterogeneous group of people who lived with one another for a millennium suddenly divided along ethnic and religious lines. The enforced European idea of a nation state was framed around the privileging of a single race or family dynasty often with a secular elite and an authoritarian political structure, legitimised and maintained by the military power, at the expense of excluding other ethnic and religious identities. This modernisation/westernisation process has created permanent fault lines within the cultural fabric of these societies, severely hindering their competence and willingness to come to terms with the diversity shaping their historical legacies and present social reality. As a result, many 21ˢᵗ century Muslim-majority countries continue to exist in a permanent state of underdevelopment, struggling to manage the change affecting their societies. Regrettably, there is not a single Muslim society that has brought about a successful civic self-transformation articulating a new civilizational expression of Islam and its human dignity-focussed core values of justice and compassion in the modern world.

Today, the rapid advancement in communication technology, marking the dawn of the 4ᵗʰ Industrial revolution, has brought people of diverse cultures to live within a closer proximity of one another. This has added an 'intimacy' dimension to the cross-cultural encounters created by the process of globalization, a phenomenon that originally emerged as an inevitable outcome of the expansionist logic of capitalist market economy. Paradoxically, this increasing diversity, facilitated by the globalising forces of western modernisation, has unmasked plurality-resisting Eurocentric essentialism of Western modernity that is formed around the ideologies of secularism, scientism, and the market. Recently, the inclusive character of secular liberal democracy that promised a positive response to diversity, represented by minority ethnic and religious communities, has come under attack from within. A coalition of extreme movements (neo-conservatism, far right/white supremacist ideology and religious nationalism) with their plurality-denying, anti-liberal and authoritarian shared political agendas have started to explicitly call for imposing the hierarchies of power created by the Western/European colonialism on the multitude of 'alien others' who now reside within their midst. The result has been further marginalisation of 'racialised' minority people, often singling out 'the Muslim other' for systemic discrimination. Minority communities are trapped within a perpetuating liminality experiencing social exclusion, poverty, institutional discrimination, and cultural assimilation.

### The Educational Context

Education is the main engine of social mobility in modern societies, opening pathways of economic prosperity and gaining necessary competence and confidence for effective participation within the wider civic society. Educational exclusion creates a long-term negative impact on minority communities. Barriers to educational access and not recognising diversity of learners, including pluralities of ethnic, religious, and cultural identities, within all levels of education have emerged as central challenges to be urgently addressed. The effective building of educational capital and resilience among minority children and young people remain key to achieving social justice, community cohesion and a shared culture of living well with one another in modern European societies.

Addressing the diversity that informs the world of 21st century learners means not only acknowledging individual differences but responding to the inequalities created by religious, ethnic, class and gender differences. The frequently invoked 'social inclusion and diversity' agenda is mostly subject to the phenomenon of 'elite capture' and seems to be serving political correctness and maintaining existing power structures. The postmodern obsession with the idea of 'difference' seems limited to recognizing its role in engineering a playful signification economy that produces endless reconfigurations of fictitious self-perceptions. It is unable to address the visceral, embodied experience of oppression and suffering in the lives of minority communities generated by the hegemonic socio-economic, political, and educational structures of the society. Therefore, a cross-disciplinary critical educational analysis framework is needed to understand how minority learning communities are perceived and addressed within the educational discourse of mainstream schooling systems across Europe. The educational challenges facing these vulnerable group of minority learning communities include the following complex dynamics:

- Poverty and cultural barriers hindering access to education and higher learning
- Whilst in education experiencing imparity in attainment (degree awarding gap) and stereotyping/marginalisation (race/religion-based bullying, Islamophobia)
- Epistemic injustice, including exclusion of minority historical, religious, and educational heritages and ways of being/knowing within the curriculum and educational community.
- Discrimination following graduation e.g., unequal opportunities of accessing jobs
- Ontological insecurity caused by policies of surveillance/securitisation that push many to resort to self-censorship by suppressing their religious and cultural identities or being pushed to 'perform white,' indicating further alienation from their own identity heritage.

## The Islamic Education Focus

Within the above historical, socio-political, and educational context, the WIESS' fifth gathering will explore the case of Muslim children and young people within a complex intersecting set of dynamics (ethnicity, religiosity, gender, class etc.,) shaping their learning experiences within mainstream schooling and formal/informal Muslim education settings in Europe. The learning experiences of European Muslim children and young people are informed by both the religiously embedded cultures of their parental heritage as well as the wider secular and multicultural ethos of European societies. WIESS sessions will examine how young learners construct their learning identities and position their overall personal agencies within such a multi-layered matrix of educational cultures and pedagogical practices that often have conflicting expectations. The discussion will be framed within the Muslim minority context of Europe, examining the experiences of Muslim learners within diverse settings such as religious nurture, community-based education, mainstream schooling, and Islamic and secular higher education. There will be opportunities to examine challenges of being a 21st century Muslim learner and the complex issues facing effective learning about Islam within the Muslim minority and majority contexts of the Global South, Africa, and North America. The session will adopt an interdisciplinary analysis framework, critically comparing how the issues raised are experienced within the particularity of plural contemporary Muslim learning contexts shaped by distinctive geographies, histories, linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage.

## Interrelated Themes and Delivery

The programme will be delivered through interactive workshops, lectures, and presentations. Participants are invited to share recently completed or ongoing research related to following themes/questions and should indicate in 500 words the topic and delivery of their presentations upon application:

- Who are the 21st century European Muslim learners? Muslim children, youth & adults: demographics, intergenerational change and diversity within European Muslim diaspora.

- How do European education systems frame Islam, Muslim children, and young people? Examining educational policies of multiculturalism, assimilation, and securitisation.
- What are the main methodological approaches in investigating empirically the learning experiences of Muslim children and young people?
- What are the strengths/weaknesses of using ethnicity-focussed secular theories e.g., 'Critical Race Theory' in understanding inequalities experienced by Muslim children and young people in mainstream educational institutions including higher education?
- Does the secular Anti-Racism educational discourse accommodate faith-based needs and identities of the 'Muslim other'?
- How do Muslim children perform within mainstream schooling systems in Europe? Educational under-achievement and exclusion within Muslim communities in Europe.
- How to engage with religion-based bullying, stereotyping and marginalisation in schools?
- How to decolonise the education of Muslim children and young people in Europe?
- How to facilitate critical Islam literacy within secular curriculum? Examining pedagogical models and addressing (mis)representations of Islam/Muslims within teaching/learning resources in European schooling systems.
- What do we know about the history of Islamic Education in modern Europe (the West)?
- What is learning? Engaging with the philosophical, psychological, theological, social and cultural framings of learning process.
- How has the meaning of being a 'learned person/ scholar' changed with the introduction of Western secular education in the Muslim world?
- How is the 'Muslim learner' perceived/defined in Islamic Education models in Europe? Examining traditional forms of Islamic education and Islam-ethos schooling in Europe.
- How is the 'ideal learner/learned person' imagined in classical Muslim educational thought? Exploring the depictions of 'learning, learners, and the content, methods, purpose, ethics, aesthetics and spirituality of learning' in Islamic scholarly traditions of theology, philosophy, law, science, and spirituality.
- What is meant by learning by heart in Islamic pedagogy? Does learning through repetition, memorisation inhibit young people's imagination?
- Can Islamic Education accommodate the concept of a critical/questioning learner?
- Are learner-led teaching models compatible with the philosophical, theological, and pedagogical principles of Islamic Education?
- What do Muslim children and young people find most difficult whilst studying Islam? Does the medium of instruction make a difference in terms of their attitude to learning?
- How to develop research-based teaching resources involving the life experiences of Muslim learners in Islamic Education?
- Can Islam be taught through controversial issues: Islam and politics; secular citizenship; the place of ambiguity, scepticism in Islam; Sharia in the modern world; women rights; sex education and LGBTQ rights; Islam, science, and evolution?
- How do young Muslim children and young people react to learning about diversity within Islam and other religions and worldviews? (Experiences of Muslim children in RE).
- To what extent do the curriculum, teaching, and assessment methods within traditional Islamic education institutions (Madrassah/Maktab, Dar al-Uluum/Seminaries and hybrid models of Islamic further Education) accommodate/respond to the individual differences of learners including the gendered learning identities? (Case studies assessing challenges of facilitating effective learning of classical Islamic sciences & faith development of learners).
- Are there safeguarding, wellbeing concerns in Muslim education institutions?
- How do Islamic learning practices contribute to the personal, spiritual and faith development of Muslim children empowering them to engage with their religious heritage and the cultural diversity informing their life-worlds?

- What is the impact of intergenerational change on the religious learning needs within diaspora Muslim communities in Europe?
- How do Muslim children and young people negotiate traditional and modern sources of knowledge authority (family, teachers, mosque, Madrassah, and the charismatic Muslim preachers of the cyber space) when learning Islam and forming their core values?
- Is there a gap in the learning experiences of Muslim children ?
- How to reinforce the concept of 'teachers as learners' within Islamic Education? Exploring the teacher education and continuous professional development opportunities of Muslim educational/faith leaders in Europe.
- How do the learning experiences of the Muslim children who receive home schooling impact on the formation of their religious identities & attitudes towards diversity?
- How did Covid-19 create inequalities in the learning experiences of Muslim communities?
- Who are the most vulnerable groups of learners within European Muslim communities? Exploring the Islamic learning experiences of children with special needs, black Muslim children, Muslim converts and radicalised Muslim male/female youth.
- How to assess/respond to the Islamic learning needs of Muslim prisoners?
- How can state, universities and community-based stake holders cooperate to widen access to higher education among young European Muslim learners? British Muslim philanthropy /Muslim family trusts in supporting Muslim young people to engage with higher learning.
- What are the effective strategies for facilitating the formation of a new transformative Islamic learning culture inspiring 21$^{st}$ century Muslim learners?

## Who Should Participate?

The Summer School is open to all researchers and educators who are interested in developing their understanding of educational heritage of Islam, educational challenges facing Muslim communities and Muslims in mainstream schooling. Early career researchers and doctoral students are particularly encouraged to attend as the event provides opportunities to engage in scholarly dialogue with more senior researchers and experts. The issues raised will be explored within a cross cultural comparative perspective. Practitioners and researchers based in the Global South, Africa and the Middle East are welcome to apply. Participants will be supported in formulating, discussing their research interests and will receive peer support.

Papers presented at WIESS will be considered for inclusion in an edited volume planned for publication during 2023. Please note the number of places is strictly limited to 25 bookings allocated on a first come first served basis. Those who wish to share an aspect of their completed or ongoing research need to submit a 500 word abstract by 15 September 2022. Please e-mail your abstract to a.sahin@warwick.ac.uk and claire.alkouatli@alumni.ubc.ca.

**Venue**: Radcliffe House, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK.

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