The Islamic Education Curriculum in the Sultanate of Oman: Integrating Diversity

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Abstract

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.

Keywords: Islamic education; curriculum; diversity; integration; Oman

A. Introduction

Human existence is, since its inception, linked to education. Education determines the methodological framework a person moves in, organises and conceptualises his relationship to his environment. Education is a process that takes place in line with teaching systems which emerge from various scientific and pedagogical theories and are then translated into different teaching curricula and teaching methodologies.

In the contemporary context of Islamic education, to realise the educational aim of a virtuous person according to the sound nature (*fitrah*) that Allah s.w.t. has created, demands a sound understanding of the source upon which a person acquires his

understanding of the nature of man, life and universe as well as his place in this life.[1] This will only be realised through an educational methodology which builds on a theoretical foundation, starting from an educational philosophy that stems from the belief system and worldview adapted by society and its understanding of man, life and universe. 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.[2]

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.[3] For the purpose of this paper, we will not delve into the ideological discussions and practical conflicts. We will instead focus on the specimen of the Islamic education textbooks of the Sultanate of Oman in the light of integrating diversity and what benefit may be taken from it for teaching Islamic education in other parts of the world.

The Islamic education curriculum in the Sultanate of Oman is considered to be one of the core curricula to realise the above mentioned educational aims. Islamic education is a compulsory subject from grades 1 to 12 with five weekly lesson units in average. The Islamic education textbooks therefore have a major importance in translating educational concepts and content knowledge into reality. They are supposed to give credit to the different developmental levels of the students and their physical, intellectual, spiritual and societal needs. At the same time, they are supposed to help the students overcome the difficulties in fulfilling these needs. The textbooks include different specialisations of the Islamic sciences; The Holy Qur'an (with a focus on explanation, recitation, memorisation), Prophetic ḥadīth, Islamic belief ('aqīdah), Fiqh, the Prophetic Sīrah, as well as systems and ethics.

As to the teaching methodology, various definitions of the term exist; among them that it is "the sum total of educational experiences that the school presents to its

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[1] 'Alī Aḥmad Madkūr, *Manāhij Al-Tarbiyyah, Ususuhā Wa Taṭbīqātuhā* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1988).

[2] Khāliṣah bint Ṣāliḥ Al-Ḥusniyyah, "Madā Taḍammun Kutub Al-Tarbiyyah Al-Islāmiyyah Fī Al-Ḥalaqah Al-Thāniyyah Min Al-Ta'līm Al-Asāsī Fī Salṭanat 'Umān Al-Mafāhīm Al-Tarbiyyah Al-Ṣiḥḥiyyah Fī Ḍaw'i Al-Taṣawwur Al-Islāmī" (Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, 2014).

[3] Syed Muhammad al-Naquib Al-Attas, *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977); Farid Panjwani, "The Islamic in Islamic Education: Assessing the Discourse," *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 7, no. 1 (2004): 1–11.

students, be it inside or outside of the school, through organised knowledge, target oriented activities under its supervision and orientation, with the aim of realising a holistic and continuous growth of their personalities." [4]

Teaching methodology has also been defined as "the sum of educational, societal, cultural, technical and scientific experiences…which the school plans and prepares for its students, so that they acquire them in- and outside of the school, with the aim of acquiring types of behaviour, or adapting or changing other ways of behaviour to the intended direction, by way of pursuing all the necessary activities needed to acquire these experiences in what assists them in the completion of their growth."[5]

On the other hand, 'Abd Allāh defines it as "the eternal truths taken from the Qur'an and Sunnah and the acquired human expertise which the school organises and supervises with the aim of guiding every student to his ultimate human perfection through asserting his worship to Allah s.w.t, in accordance with teaching and learning means and matching assessment tools." [6]

The preceding definitions show that teaching methodology (and, under it, school curriculum) have specified aims which are translated through the educational content presented to a certain group of learners, executed by specific educational means and methods, and assess the learning outcome by diversified means of assessment. All three definitions point at the role of the school as planning and preparing the curriculum; this point may not generally be applicable to the reality of most educational systems in the MENA region. Here, it is generally the Ministries of Education that take over the role of planning, preparing and composing the curricula for the schools under their tenets, while the role of the school is –generally- to carry them out, assess the learners' performance and make observations on the curriculum development. In addition, while the two first definitions are of a general kind, the third concentrates on the Islamic dimension of the concept of curriculum which combines between revealed knowledge (al-waḥī) and human knowledge arrived at through study and observation.

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[4] Ṣubḥat Ḥamdān Abū Jalālah, *Al-Manāhij Al-Muyassarah Li-Marḥalat Al-Ta'līm Al-Asāsī*, 1st ed. (al-Kuwait: Maktabat al-Falāh, 2001), 16.

[5] Tawfīq Mar'ā and Muḥammad Al-Haylah, *Al-Manāhij Al-Tarbawiyyah Al-Ḥadīthah, Mafāhīmuhā Wa 'Anāṣiruhā Wa Ususuhā Wa 'Amaliyyatuhā*, 3rd ed. (Amman: Dār al-Masīrah, 2002), 37.

[6] 'Abd Allāh 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ṣālih, *Al-Minhāj Al-Dirāsī Ru'yah Islāmiyyah*, 2nd print (Amman: Dār al-Bashīr li-l-tawzī', 2001), 31.

Teaching methodology in general as well as Islamic education teaching methodology in particular are built on a number of foundations, among them the nature of knowledge and its sources. The first and foremost sources are undoubtedly the Qur'an and Sunnah, and Islamic heritage, while knowledge arrived at through human expertise and endeavours is incorporated where there is no contradiction.

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.[7] 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.[8]

Teaching methodology consists of four main constituents: (1) Educational aims, in their three fields: cognitive, emotional, skills – which it aims to realise; (2) the teaching content that translates these aims; (3) learning activities that help the learner to understand the contents, and nurture his expertise and knowledge, and (4) assessment tools that assess to which extent the learner has realised these aims.

Learning outcomes are of major importance for the teaching methodology. As for Islamic education, it aims at realising a number of general aims throughout the different levels of education, such as:

1. 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.

2. 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.

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[7] Madkūr, *Manāhij Al-Tarbiyyah, Ususuhā Wa Taṭbīqātuhā*.
[8] 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ṣālih, *Al-Minhāj Al-Dirāsī Ru'yah Islāmiyyah*.

3. Growth of the belief in the human entity and the complementariness of humankind; to realise 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 characterised by a growing communication between people due to the scientific and technological developments in the time of globalisation.[9]

B. Research Method

This study focuses on diversity and the extent of its consideration in the Islamic education textbooks of the Sultanate of Oman, grades 5 to 7. This stage has been chosen initially as it is crucial in the development of the target group. The researchers extended the scope of the research so as to incorporate grade 8 to 12 of the curriculum.

The researchers have not carried out a study on the teaching body, as the research focuses solely on the textbooks. This is not to diminish or omit the role of teachers in integrating diversity, but rather to practically limit the scope of this study.

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.

The 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. The recurrence of diversity with regard to the specifics featured in the score card are measured in percentage.

Topics and features sensitive to diversity and its integration (through the textbooks) of teaching Islamic education in the Sultanate of Oman include several topics that are researchable. The researchers have focused on the following points of analysis through their score card assessment of the textbooks of Islamic education, grade 5-7.

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'

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[9] Mājid 'Irsān Al-Kaylānī, *Ahdāf Al-Tarbiyyah Al-Islāmiyyah* (Madīnah al-Munawwarah: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 1988).

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? In how far do these topics consider **physical, psychological, social and / or economic needs** of the target community? Are diverse dimensions in terms of individual, family, society, state, Ummah and the world at large considered?

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?).

Addressing students with **different learning abilities** was not a particular rubric of the score card, but random observations are summarized below.

Every textbook scrutinized for this research is divided into two learning units (waḥdah), every learning unit comprises of approximately 14 – 15 lessons (dars). Every book features an introduction by the Minister of Education, Dr. Madīḥa Bint Aḥmad al-Shaybāniyyah, an introduction by the authors (who remain unnamed), the excerpt of the Holy Qur'an that is required for memorization during the study year, with a mention of intended learning outcomes; both learning units are introduced by one or two pages of learning outcomes. While the learning outcomes do not mention the topic of diversity explicitly, the authors' introduction thematises, in a message to the teacher, the students' different academic levels and how these are addressed through exercises of different levels of difficulty.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Islamic education in the Sultanate of Oman

The Sultanate of Oman has approximately 4 million inhabitants as of 2014, with an expatriate percentage of approximately 44%.[10] 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,

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[10] "National Centre for Statistics and Information, Sultanate of Oman," accessed June 4, 2017, http://www.data.gov.om/en/DataAnalysis/.

Persian, Urdu, and Sindhi. Most Omanis adhere to Islam, with different schools or madhāhib being followed (the Ibadi, Sunni and Shi'ah schools).

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.[11] Female empowerment through education is considered a national priority.

Textbook development in the Sultanate of Oman falls under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (more particularly the Curriculum Development Directorate (CDD). Support and Exchange of expertise between the Ministry and the College of Education, SQU, existed through the decades. The College of Education is, however, not assigned with the production of textbooks. The joint report on Education in Oman, published by the World Bank and the Ministry of Education in 2012, states:

> "The CDD actively promotes respect for peace and diversity. There is justifiable concern that curriculum and textbook materials in some countries do little to encourage peace and social cohesion (Greaney 2006). The CDD asserts that peace, respect, diversity, democracy and multiculturalism have been incorporated in new school frameworks and learning resources and that teachers' guides for all subjects reflect these goals or aspirations. Four committees (writing, revision, steering and education policy) that oversee curriculum design and implementation are expected to confirm the new materials are consistent with these goals and that stereotypes or incorrect versions of history are omitted."[12]

The Islamic education curriculum 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.

2. Academic research on Islamic education curricula

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 places in most parts of the Islamic world today, where scientific

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[11] College of Education, *Diversity Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020* (Oman: Sultan Qaboos University, 2015).

[12] V. Greaney, "Textbooks, Respect for Diversity, and Social Cohesion." In Promoting Social Cohesion through Education," in *Promoting Social Cohesion through Education* (Washington, D.C: World Bank, 2006), 93.

curricula are often imported or taught in a foreign language.[13] 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 philosophy of Islamic education in the Sultanate of Oman strives to realise the above mentioned aims and translate them into its curriculum and textbooks. There is no doubt that this is only possible with scientific and pedagogical foundations. The Ministry of Education is continuously striving to develop the curriculum for Islamic education. In this vein, a number of academic studies have been carried out on the Islamic education curriculum in Oman.

Academic research on the Islamic education curriculum in the Sultanate of Oman is abundant within its borders, numerous M.A. and PhD theses have focused on various aspects of the curriculum, the target and teacher community, and possibilities to develop it, some random international academic studies are available as well. However, integrating diversity through the textbooks has, to our knowledge, not been researched so far. Only some of the studies concerned will be described in the following paragraphs.

Al-Ghāfirī[14] devoted a PhD thesis (submitted to Cairo University) to the Islamic education curriculum in Oman in the light of holistic education. The study does, however, not specifically talk about diversity topics in the target community.

The study of Al Busa'īdī[15] calls for an incorporation of contemporary issues into the secondary school curriculum for Islamic education. The researcher has distributed 253 questionnaires among male and female teachers of Islamic education, containing 38 contemporary issues. The teachers have been asked to choose those issues which should, in their opinion, be incorporated into the secondary school textbooks. The study concludes that the discussion of contemporary issues in the secondary Islamic education textbooks is not satisfactory; it advises to link the textbook contents more to the reality of Omani society and the needs and problems of the students.

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[13] Abdul Kabir Asmau Imam, "The Needs and Direction for Changes in Curriculum Standards for Islamic Education," *Islamiyyat* 38, no. 1 (2016): 35–44.

[14] Hāshil b. Saʿīd Al-Ghāfirī, "Taṭwīr Manāhij Al-Tarbiyyah Al-Islāmiyyah Bi l-Marḥlah Al-Thānawiyyah Fī Salṭanat ʿUmān Fī Ḍawʾi Madkhal Al-Takāmul" (Cairo University, 2002).

[15] Qays b. Mirdās Al-Būsaʾīdī, "Ilā Taqwīm Kutub Al-Tarbiyyah Al-Islāmiyyah Fī Al-Marḥalah Al-Thānawiyyah Fī Ḍawʾi Al-Qaḍāyā Al-Muʾāṣirah" (Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, 2003).

The study of Al-Rāshidī[16] aims at assessing the Islamic education textbooks for grades nine and ten in the light of psychological and societal foundations. The researcher followed a descriptive analytical methodology in her study. The contents of the respective textbooks were analysed with the aid of a score card featuring psychological and societal foundations that are expected to be available in the books. The research findings are that the mentioned foundations recur 773 times in the books, with a focus on the psychological rather than the societal foundations, in particular in relation to the demands of spiritual growth. The study recommends the necessity to include those foundations that are missing from the two textbooks, and to consider the balance between both psychological and societal foundations.

Al-Ghadhānī[17] researched possibilities to develop the curriculum in his PhD thesis (submitted to Cairo University) in the light of the Higher Objectives of the Sharī'ah (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah), while the study of Al-Ḥusniyah[18] investigates in how far the Islamic education textbooks of the second cycle in the Sultanate of Oman incorporate concepts of health education according to the Islamic conceptualization. In the wake of this study, the researcher has distributed 209 questionnaires among Islamic education teachers containing 42 concepts of Islamic health education. The teachers were asked to identify those concepts that should be incorporated in the textbooks subject to the study. The study, based on an analytical descriptive methodology, also provides a score card analysis of the respective textbooks. The study concludes that the Islamic education textbooks of the second cycle feature Islamic health education concepts 606 times, of which 325 are in the field of mental health, with a percentage of 53%, and 12 are in the field of environmental health, with a percentage of 1.98%. The study recommends to find a balance in the distribution of Islamic health education concepts in the contents of the Islamic education textbooks of the second cycle of fundamental education.

A conference initiated by Eleanor Abdella Doumato in 2003 entitled "Constructs of Inclusion and Exclusion: Religion and Identity-Formation in Middle Eastern School Curricula", convened at The Watson Institute for International Studies

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[16] Thurayyā bint Nāṣir Al-Rāshidī, "Taqwīm Kitābay Al-Tarbiyyah Al-Islāmiyyah Li-l-Ṣaffayn Al-Tāsi' Wa Al-'Āshir Min Al-Ta'Līm Al-Asāsī Fī Ḍaw'i Al-Usus Al-Nafsiyyah Wa Al-Ijtimā'iyyah" (Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, 2010).

[17] Nāṣir Al-Ghadhānī, "Taṭawwur Manāhij Al-Tarbiyyah Al-Islāmiyyah Fī Al-Ḥalaqah Al-Thāniyyah Min Al-Ta'līm Al-Asāsī Fī Salṭanat 'Umān Fī Ḍaw'i Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah Al-Islāmiyyah" (Cairo University, 2013).

[18]

at Brown University, US, examined the content of religious curricula found in textbooks in various countries of the MENA region, among them Oman. M.E. Limbert's research focused on Oman as an example of "Cultivating good citizens and religious virtue". In contrary to the Western-led discussion at the beginning of this millennium on the alleged promotion of violence through the Islamic contents of school textbooks, the editors of the conference volume, "Doumato and Starret, and the authors of the essays more generally, reject this view as ultimately untenable."[19]

3. Diversity – Meaning, Strategies, Pitfalls

As Smith formulates it; "diversity represents a challenge and an opportunity for education". [20] But what exactly does diversity include, and what are the strategies to integrate/ accommodate diversity through curricula, teachers and textbooks?

For the purpose of this paper and given the proximity to our topic, we may adopt 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.*[21]

The Committee strives to alert both faculty and students to diversity and its implications for teaching and learning through programs and workshops. In the wake of the international accreditation process, the College of Education has developed its own conceptual framework, where *diversity* takes its firm place (Bouzenita, 2016). There is, to our knowledge, no particular definition of diversity or a diversity strategy paper published by the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. With regard to our research conducted on the Islamic studies textbooks, grade 5-7, we may add to the features mentioned in the definition the factor of madhhab affiliation; as followers of Sunni and Shi'ah schools are to be found in the target group of learners next to those of the Ibadi school.

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[19] Sean W. Anthony, "Doumato, Eleanor Abdella and Gregory Starret. Editors. Teaching Islam: Textbooks and Religion in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2008): 55–58.

[20] Alan Smith, "Education for Diversity: Investing in Systemic Change Though Curriculum, Textbooks, and Teachers," in *Promoting Social Cohesion Through Education*, ed. Eluned Roberts-Schweitzer et.al (Washington DC: World Bank Publications, 2006), 29.

[21] College of Education, *Diversity Strategic Plan 2015 – 2020*.

Different strategies exist with regard to accommodating or integrating diversity; Smith[22] divides them into three categories in the overall education systems and their institutions; the assimilationist approach, where institutions operate according to the values of the dominant tradition and minority needs are neglected; the Separatist approach, where separate institutions in a country serve different relatively homogenous parts of the population, and the integrationist approach, where the diversity present in the population is represented in the institutions.[23] While diversity can strengthen a society, it can also become the locus of conflict.[24] Diversity-sensitive training needs to be carefully planned, as it can also reinforce differences between individuals rather than fostering commonalities.[25]

4. Academic research on diversity in Islamic education

Hardly any research on diversity in Islamic education particularly seems to be available. Mustafa and Abd. Wahid have researched the student diversity experience in teaching Islamic education in the Malaysian context; their main focus is on the lack of interest many students have vis-à-vis the subject. The non-representative study (only six form four students have been interviewed) comes to the conclusion that different kinds of instructional methods should be used to assist students' learning.[26] The authors name the variety of the grade four syllabus which includes Tilawah al-Qur'an, 'Ibadah, Sirah, Adab and Tamaddun Islam (Islamic Culture) as something that caught interest from the students.[27] The textbook itself has however not been subject to research, the focus is on diversity in students' learning behaviour influenced "by sociocultural factors such as ethnicity, culture, educational background, gender, geographical location, and socioeconomic status."[28]

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[22] Smith, "Education for Diversity: Investing in Systemic Change Though Curriculum, Textbooks, and Teachers."

[23] Smith.

[24] Smith.

[25] Hans Bader, "Diversity Training Backfires | Competitive Enterprise Institute," accessed July 25, 2020, https://cei.org/blog/diversity-training-backfires.

[26] Najihah Mustafa, Zaiton, and Abd. Wahid, "Student Diversity in Learning: A Need for Effective Teaching of Islamic Education," in *Proceedings of the ICIC2015 – International Conference on Empowering Islamic Civilisation in the 21th Century*, 2015, 235.

[27] Mustafa, Zaiton, and Abd. Wahid, 234.

[28] Mustafa, Zaiton, and Abd. Wahid, 233.

5. The importance of textbooks

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".[29] 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. "The presence of even a small amount of biased reading material can be a problem since reading material can contribute to the development of stereotypical negative attitudes, especially when it confirms unjustified perceptions held by others."[30]

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.

6. Results

This study found that there are some differences in recurrence and percentage of fields of diversity in the Islamic education textbooks, Sultanate of Oman as shown in the table 1 below:

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[29] Greaney, "Textbooks, Respect for Diversity, and Social Cohesion." In Promoting Social Cohesion through Education," 47.

[30] Greaney, 47.

Table 1: Recurrence and percentage of fields of diversity in the Islamic education textbooks, Sultanate of Oman, grade 5-7.

Contents / Field	Qur'an	Ḥadīth	'Aqīdah	Fiqh	Sīrah	Systems	Total	Percentage
First: Under consideration of topics								
Belief	111	4	21	---	3	--	139	53.7 %
Worship	7	6		24			37	14.28 %
Transactions	1	3		1			5	1.9 %
Values and ethics	23	9				5	37	14.28 %
Prophetic biography					24		24	9.27 %
Second: With regard to the students' needs								
physical						1	1	0.37%
psychological	1		2			2	5	1.9 %
societal								
economic	1						1	0.37 %
Third: Diversity in terms of dimensions								
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
Total	146	24	24	25	24	24	146	

7. Discussion

a. Comprehensiveness of the curriculum

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, ʿaqīdah (tawḥīd) and sīrah, as exists for instance in the Saudi curriculum. A typical grade syllabus will address lessons from any of these areas or present a topic under a combination of them. To give a random example; textbook 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-iẓhār; 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: ʿId 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.

With regard to the **diversity of the distribution of topics** (related to ʿaqīdah (belief), to ʿibādāt (worship), mu'āmalāt (transactions), values and systems, sīrah (the Prophetic biography) through the textbook contents (as distributed by Qur'an, ḥadīth, ʿaqīdah, fiqh, sīrah, systems), the analysis yielded the following results, **as shown in Table 1**: Diversity in the distribution of topics through the contents of textbooks grade 5-7 exists, even though in varying percentage. The field of ʿaqīdah reached the highest distribution with 139 counts or 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.

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. It needs also be mentioned that 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.

To give a practical example how diversity is taken up in the student activities; Students are implicitly exposed to topics related to diversity through, for example, presenting the topic of "qudrat Allah", through the following setting: Students of grade 7 organise a workshop on the topic, inviting teachers of different specializations (science, social studies, …) to give their view on the topic. The student is thereby alerted to the manifold dimensions of the topic, fostering a holistic understanding.

b. References /Sources for content knowledge

What may be seen as an indicator for **diversity of opinion** is the list of references for content knowledge that are made use of in the textbooks. While the typically Ibadi 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. The following percentage may illustrate this. While the reference in GR5/1 to the most authentic ḥadīth compilation for the Ibadi 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.

With regard to references to other specialized books, the same tendency can be observed. 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.

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 often 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-iḥrām, are not discussed.

The representation of personalities of the early Islamic era, the time of Ṣaḥābah and Tābi'ūn, is exemplary; to quote from the selection of textbooks grade 5-7, 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-Khaṭṭāb, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥussayn; GR 7/1: Imam Jābir b. Zayd, Zayd b. Ḥārithah, 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 prohibition to transgress against any Muslim (GR5/2:21).

c. Diversity in terms of ethnic, linguistic, cultural background

No particular mention of either nationality, ethnicity, linguistic or socio-economic background is made. By not particularizing these differences in the target community, the textbook addresses the entire target group equally and 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, where pupils speak different Arabic colloquial dialects or may have 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*, however, 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".

What may be observed is that 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: The Islamic education textbooks are used for the entire target student population regardless of gender, teaching is, however, separated between male and female students starting from grade 7.

An examination of the textbooks, grade 5 – 7, reveals that 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).

The 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 women involved in giving the pledge of allegiance to the Prophet (pbuh), students are required to search for female Muslim personalities (GR6/2:62).

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.

D. Conclusion

The preceding analysis of the Islamic education textbooks for grades 5 to 7 of the Sultanate of Oman has revealed that, although no explicit statement is being made in the books (apart from the existence of different academic levels in the learning

group) diversity seems to have been actively considered in several aspects, with regard to school affiliation (through the references used for content knowledge), gender and learning types. Especially the variety of references made as well as the interaction with them give credit to the madhhab diversity or diversity of thought in the region as well as the Islamic Ummah. 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.

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.

The textbooks analysed for this limited research seem not to be in need of revision with regard to the integration of diversity. However, if a recommendation has to be made, it would be to introduce units that particularly talk about the diversity (*tanawwu'*) in Allah's creation, with regard to ethnicity and language, and different shapes and abilities human beings have been created in. These units can be linked to Qur'anic verses and Prophetic ḥadīth; the Islamic textual sources are abundant in this context.

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