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### The pedagogy of the mosque

*Portrayal, practice, and role in the integration of Turkish-Dutch children*

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## CHAPTER 2

### **Mapping Discourses on Mosque Education in the Netherlands: A Content Analysis of the Dutch Press, 2010-2016<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Introduction**

This article aims to contribute to the knowledge on media discourses on mosque education in the Netherlands. There are many studies dealing with the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in different Western media (d'Haenens & Bink, 2006; Hussain, 2000; Jackson, 2010; Kabir, 2007; Said, 1997; Schiffer, 2008; Shadid & van Koningsveld, 2002). There is, however, only one study on the media representation of mosque education in the West (Cherti et al., 2011). Media content influences the attitudes and the beliefs of the audiences (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). Hence, a study of the portrayal of mosque education can contribute to our understanding of the polarized context within which Muslim communities are providing religious education. It can help identify the tensions between Muslim parents' rights to educate their children in accordance with their beliefs and the politicized debate on civic integration of the second and third generation Muslim youth. The language used in press portrayals often defines the vocabulary which policymakers and schoolteachers use in their interaction with Muslim students and mosque educators.

Mosque education is defined in the literature by different terms such as Qur'an schools, madrassas or mosque schools. In this study, we adopt an inclusive definition of mosque education. It refers to all forms of non-formal religious education provided by the mosques, including Qur'an schools teaching how to read the Qur'an, *hifz* classes teaching

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Dutch press, 2010–2016. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 40 (3), 358-371. The Version of Record of this manuscript has been first published online on 19 April 2017, and is available in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* by Taylor and Francis. DOI:10.1080/01596306.2017.1316705.

Qur'an memorization and recitation, and more general Islamic religious education classes focusing on knowledge about the life of the prophet, Islamic lifestyle and rules of conduct. Since the educational activities of the mosques in the Netherlands fall beyond the regulatory framework of the state, their choice of curriculum, textbooks and governance regimes are entirely autonomous. Thus, it is important to differentiate them from the state-regulated and state-funded Islamic primary schools.

The central question that guides this article is: What are the major discourses on mosque education in the Dutch press? To that end, using the methodological strategy of content analysis, we examine data from the five most circulated daily newspapers in the Netherlands between 2010 and 2016. The article is structured as follows: First, we provide an overview of the scholarly debates on mosque education in Western societies. The studies about the *practice* of mosque education present a primary source of reference on which we base our analysis of the *portrayal* of mosque education in the Dutch press. By outlining the issues arising from the literature, we aim to set the stage for comparison with the media representations found in our study. Next, we briefly examine the portrayal of Muslims and Islam in the Dutch press so far. Then, we analyze the press discourses on mosque education in the Netherlands, based on their coverage in the five largest Dutch newspapers in the past six years. In the conclusion, we highlight our major findings, discuss their implications and offer some suggestions for further research.

### **Scholarly debates on mosque education**

Despite its high societal relevance and the growing interest by politicians and the general public, the existing research on mosque education in non-Muslim societies is extremely scarce (Berger, 2014; Moore, 2012; Pels, 2014). The few studies regarding the influence of mosque education on children point to two contending lines of thought: Some studies discuss the positive effects of mosque education on self-esteem, school performance, and cultural intelligence, and others suggest that mosque education might undermine reading comprehension skills, civic values education, and social cohesion.

Some of the scholars who claim that mosque education benefits Muslim children have found that it is linked to a greater sense of belonging, confidence and self-worth and that it influences children's learner identity development positively (Ahmed, 2012; Meer, 2009). Östberg (2000), for instance, found that Qur'anic instruction was correlated with higher

cultural competencies and stronger self-reflexivity of the Pakistani children in Oslo. Similarly, Gent (2011) who conducted participant observation and interviews with students of a Qur'an class in a London mosque claims that children reported increased well-being (e.g.: "praying gives you energy", p. 12), and ability to successfully transfer the skills learnt at the mosque to their schools (such as memorization and recitation). Moreover, Maylor et al. (2010) establish positive links between attending mosque classes which provide homework assistance and reinforcement of good attitudes to learning at the mainstream schools.

On the other side of the spectrum, studies conducted by critical scholars have drawn attention to contradictions between mosque education and schools. Rosowsky (2013) who conducted research in three mosques in the UK, observed that students were taught to decode the sacred script ignoring the meaning of the words they read. He suggests that this type of instruction may have serious implications for reading in schools, "to the extent where meaning of the words becomes incidental, and where such nonunderstanding is also not disconcerting to the young reader" (p.76). Considering the role of proficiency in the majority language for the academic achievement of the children from immigrant background, normalizing reading without comprehension may constitute an obstacle to the development of their reading comprehension skills at school.

The pedagogical quality of mosque education has also received various criticisms. Some authors note that volunteers teaching in European mosques usually lack any pedagogical training (Sieckelinck et al., 2012) and warn against cases of maltreatment of the children at the mosque classes, among which the use of corporal punishment (Cherti & Bradley, 2011; Rajabi-Ardeshiri, 2011). Lewis (2002) points out that religious instructors who are educated in their country of origin are unable to relate the content of the lessons to European societies, and to the cultural life-worlds of the Muslim youth. Likewise, Cherti and Bradley (2011) report that 40% of the respondents in their study of British mosque education were taught by foreign imams who were not seen as capable of providing adequate support to children "in understanding their dual British-Muslim identity" (p.6).

Critics also question the compatibility between citizenship education and mosque education. While citizenship education aims at developing critical thinking, respect for opposing views and independence (Schuitema et al., 2008; ten Dam & Volman, 2004), mosque education is said to indoctrinate students with a one-sided approach, promote acceptance of authority and inhibit learner's autonomy (Halder, 2013; Sahin, 2013). Moreover, some studies note that mosque education may be promoting traditional gender

roles and sexist attitudes (Cherti & Bradley, 2011) offering “conflicting perspectives over the issues of educational contents, dress code and segregation” of boys and girls (Bhuiyan, 2010, p.109). Such practices may place the students in the position of constant negotiation between the allegedly contradicting values of schools and mosques, especially if they observe a sharp discrepancy between the two realms. Critics have argued that this may result in a divide between the civic and the religious identity of the children, reinforcing the differences between the two and affecting social cohesion negatively (Cherti & Bradley, 2011; Community Cohesion Independent Review Team, 2001; Ousley, 2001).

The only research focusing on Dutch mosque education is a study by Pels and colleagues (Pels et al., 2006; Pels et al., 2006a; Pels et al., 2006b) conducted in one Turkish and two Moroccan mosques. The researchers note that in all three mosques, the classes present a parallel world to the mainstream schools as the content of the study material makes weak connections with the realities experienced by children in Dutch society. Only in the Turkish mosque Ayasofya, social issues such as the emancipation of women and child abuse were lightly touched upon. Nevertheless, Pels and colleagues claim that they have observed reformed pedagogical practices in which milder child-friendly instruction with a space for “discussion, singing and methods of learning with an element of play” (Pels, 2014, p.69) replaced previous authoritarian teaching styles. This finding is suggestive of reform processes which some mosques might be undergoing.

### **Portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the Dutch press**

The representation of mosque education is situated within a broader media portrayal of Islam and Muslims. Existing studies point out to a general tendency for negative representation of groups usually characterized as the “others” of the mainstream society (Erjavec, 2001; Brooks & Hébert, 2006; KhosraviNik, 2010). Islam and Muslim immigrants, in particular, are structurally portrayed through negative imagery in many Western media outlets (Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Kabir, 2007; Poole, 2006; Shadid & van Koningsveld, 2002). Especially after 9/11, the media discourse on Islam has been dominated by associations with terrorism and essential “otherness” of the Muslims (Morey & Yaqin, 2011). The only study on the portrayal of mosque education in the West is from Britain (Cherti et al., 2011). The British context is peculiar because via the project “Islam and Citizenship Education” the government has introduced a curriculum of citizenship education in more than 300 mosques. The study has found that the storylines in the British press focus on child protection and extremism

prevention through citizenship education in mosques. This suggests that the debates on mosque education are embedded within a discourse on securitization of Islam. Securitization of Islam is not only portraying Islam as a source of threat, but also designing education and immigration policies based on that assumption (Cesari, 2010).

There are a few studies which analyzed the representation of Islam and Muslims in the Dutch press. A pioneering study by ter Wal (2004), for instance, compared the portrayal of Islam before and after 9/11 in the quality newspaper *De Volkskrant*. It showed that before 9/11 the coverage focused more on personal experiences of religiosity by the Muslims, while after 9/11 the focus shifted towards the relation between religious fundamentalism and integration. D'Haenens and Bink (2006), on the other hand, analyzed the Islam-related articles in the popular newspaper *De Algemeene Dagblad*. Their results show that there is a significant increase in negative framing about domestic Islam after the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a radical from Dutch-Moroccan background in 2004.

More recently, van Drunen (2014) who studied the framing of Muslims in eight Dutch newspapers in an ordinary non-election period between September 2010 and March 2011, showed that the four most dominant frames with regard to Muslims are “problematization”, “homogenization”, “otherness”, and “fear and threat”. The “problematization” frame focuses on conflicts and problems caused by Muslims. The “fear and threat” frame contains messages on perceived threats from Muslims. The “homogenization” frame indicates generalizations regardless of the differences among Muslims. Lastly, the “otherness” frame accentuates differences between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is expected that the unfavorable portrayal of Islam and conceptual homogenization of Muslims would be reflected also in the portrayal of mosque education by the Dutch press.

## **Method**

The Netherlands is an interesting case-study for two reasons. Firstly, it hosts one of the highest percentages of Muslim population in Western Europe, estimated at 6% of the total population in 2010 (Berger, 2014). The largest Dutch Muslim communities are from Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese background. There are 475 mosques belonging to the different communities (Berger, 2014) and almost all of them offer educational programs. Some sources claim that nearly half of all Dutch-Turkish and Dutch-Moroccan children attend mosque classes (Driessen & Merry, 2006). Secondly, in the past decade, the country has experienced

a shift from an official policy of multiculturalism towards immigrant assimilation, in a more drastic way than other countries (Entzinger, 2003; Vasta, 2007).

To obtain our sample, we have used the Lexis Nexis database. The sample consists of the five largest daily newspapers in the Netherlands: *De Telegraaf*, *De Algemeene Dagblad (AD)*, *De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *Trouw* (NDP Nieuwsmedia data, 2013). Based on previous studies of the Dutch press, we categorize *De Telegraaf* and *AD* as popular (tabloid) newspapers, and *De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *Trouw* as quality press (Schafraad, 2009; Vliegthart, 2007). Popular press is said to cover the news in a more sensational and less nuanced way than quality press, and to share the anti-establishment and anti-immigrant sentiments of the populist right-wing parties (Mazzoleni, 2003). We have restricted the time frame to the last six years. Thus, the articles included in the analysis are published between the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2010 and the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2016. The reason for selecting the year of 2010 as a starting point has to do with the significant rise in anti-Muslim attitudes in the Netherlands as manifested in the electoral success of the extreme right-wing party PVV (Party for Freedom) in the same year.

The articles were retrieved using the search terms *koranschool* OR *madrassa* OR *moskeeschool* (Qur'an school OR madrassa OR mosque school). The initial sample consisted of 163 articles which did not necessarily refer to mosque education in the Netherlands. We experimented with filtering the results by the term *nederlands\** (Dutch) but this resulted in omitting relevant articles and thus we did not apply the filter. One major limitation of using Lexis Nexis is that the search terms may produce symptomatic rather than pertinent results. Therefore, we needed to eliminate manually some of the articles which did not refer to the Dutch context. Consequently, we ended up with a sample of 45 articles. The main focus of the articles was not necessarily religious instruction, but they all contained references to mosque education in the Netherlands.

The methodological strategy employed to analyze the texts was qualitative content analysis which is characterized by reflexive research design allowing new concepts to emerge through constant discovery and constant comparison (Altheide & Schneider, 2013). In this regard, the codes were developed on the basis of the theoretical review of the literature on mosque education, however, new codes were added as they emerge from the texts. This resulted in a list of 22 codes with 85 coding instances in total as some news items contained more than one code. The coding was done via the software ATLAS.ti by two researchers until “convergent validity” of the coding was achieved (see Friese, 2014, p.134). Beside the

codes, the identity of the actors was also taken into account, that is who gets to speak about mosque education.

Mosque education is a rather wide-spread practice among the Muslim immigrants. However, only forty-five out of 163 articles deal with mosque education in the Netherlands as opposed to 118 articles on mosque education abroad. This illustrates the relative invisibility of domestic mosque education in the Dutch press. Since the aim of this paper is to understand the discourses about the mosque education in the Netherlands, articles focusing on mosque classes in Muslim countries, e.g. Senegal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Morocco were not included in the analysis. The portrayals of mosque education in the omitted news items contained mainly references to jihad-recruitment, Islamic terrorism and religious radicalism in the Middle East. This is in line with the results of previous research on Islam in the Dutch press showing that “foreign Islam is more often associated with terrorism than Dutch Islam” (d’Haenens & Bink, 2006, p.147). Such media representations are likely to influence the construction of negative images among Dutch public about the teaching activities of the mosques in the Netherlands as well.

## **Findings**

Most of the discourses emerging from the literature were also reflected in the portrayal of mosque education in the press. The majority of the coding instances contain problematic associations with mosque education, the main issues being allegations of corporal punishment, restrictive gender norms, links with religious extremism and local opposition to mosques. The results also show that quality newspapers provided more balanced coverage than popular dailies by reporting also on positive aspects such as benefits of mosque education for identity formation and cognitive development. Table 3 gives an overview of the codes grouped in discursive categories and distributed by newspaper.



Table 3. Distribution of codes per newspaper.

	<i>Telegraaf</i>	<i>AD</i>	<i>Volkskrant</i>	<i>NRC</i>	<i>Trouw</i>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Pedagogical practices</b>						<b>29</b>
Corporal punishment	0	1	4	1	6	<b>12</b>
Cognitive benefits of Qur'an classes	0	0	1	3	4	<b>8</b>
Changing pedagogical climate	0	1	2	1	0	<b>4</b>
Rote learning	0	0	1	0	1	<b>2</b>
Negative pedagogical climate	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Authoritarian pedagogy	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Inadequate training of imams	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Gender norms</b>						<b>10</b>
Gender norms	1	1	3	1	4	<b>10</b>
<b>Radicalization and extremism</b>						<b>16</b>
Links with religious extremism	3	0	0	1	5	<b>9</b>
Foreign financing	2	0	1	0	1	<b>4</b>
Preaching intolerance	2	0	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Islamization	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Social cohesion and segregation</b>						<b>16</b>
Local opposition	7	0	0	0	0	<b>7</b>
Social cohesion	0	0	1	2	2	<b>5</b>
Segregation	0	0	0	0	4	<b>4</b>
<b>Links with mainstream schools</b>						<b>1</b>
Cooperation with formal schools	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Other codes</b>						<b>13</b>
Islamic identity maintenance	0	0	0	3	0	<b>3</b>
Parental religiosity	0	0	1	1	1	<b>3</b>
Physical conditions	0	0	0	2	1	<b>3</b>
Authoritative parenting	0	0	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
Bad neighborhood reputation	0	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
No to public financing	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Total coding instances</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>85</b>

### *Pedagogical practices*

Corporal punishment is the most dominant theme. It was present in four of the five newspapers referring to cases of child abuse in Moroccan mosques. For example, *Trouw* (6 April 2013) wrote about a legal complaint filed by the mayor of Tilburg against the local Salafi mosque regarding five cases of child abuse which were investigated by the GGD (Municipal Health Service). The voices of the children, parents or the mosque representatives are noticeably absent in this account.

An interview with the Dutch Moroccan writer Mano Bouzamour provides a first-hand account about his own experience in mosque classes in Amsterdam which he attended between the ages four and 13. Here we can trace both the issues of child abuse and the unfavorable physical conditions of the classroom in the mosque:

... a concrete, damp cellar with no windows and no ventilation, lit with fluorescent tubes, where it often was talked about the fire of the hell, seventy times hotter than the fire on the earth. If you had not learned the Qur'anic verses, you were beaten on your palms with a bamboo stick (*NRC Handelsblad*, 23 November 2013).

Samira Bouchibti, a Dutch Moroccan politician and writer, also reflects on corporal punishment: "Children are still sent to Qur'an schools on Sundays. To a not so pleasant environment where sometimes they are beaten" (*De Volkskrant*, 12 May 2012). Considering the scarcity of available official information about the physical conditions and pedagogical practices in the mosques, accounts like these become a main source of reference for the Dutch public. Although the accounts are published in quality newspapers, the balanced nature of the portrayal is arguable as the realities are constructed only by powerful public figures rather than ordinary Muslims.

Other references to the pedagogy of the mosque also portray a negative climate, including a fear-based, authoritarian approach among instructors, emphasis on indoctrination and rote learning, and inadequate pedagogical training of imams and volunteer teachers. These accounts suggest that due to their lack of familiarity with the Dutch culture and language, imams are not able to offer adequate support to the children:

There is radicalization, the imams don't have a good idea what is going on among the youth, they either speak no Dutch or don't speak it well enough, and they are not capable of translating theology to the practicalities of everyday life (*Trouw*, 24 February 2016).

There are, however, also reports pointing towards positive changes in the pedagogical climate of mosques. Critical Muslims such as the Dutch Moroccan writer Abdelkader Benali who attended mosque education in the past comments that “a lot has changed in between” (*De Volkskrant*, 9 April 2011). Likewise, Muslim adolescents in their early twenties are able to observe reformed practices as well:

When I was a child, almost no girls were coming to the mosque. This has changed. Boys and girls sit in the same classroom for a Qur’an class or Arabic lesson (*NRC Handelsblad*, 7 November 2011).

Moreover, as already mentioned, all of the quality newspapers contained also references to the benefits of mosque education. Differently than the articles on corporal punishment, these articles made space for the agency of the students attending mosque classes and the accounts were mostly presented via their voices. The students claimed that the mosque classes had a disciplining effect on them and helped them perform better at school (*NRC Handelsblad*, 21 June 2014). Some claimed that despite memorization and repetition techniques, mosque classes helped them to learn Arabic (*Trouw*, 8 March 2013; *Trouw*, 4 November 2015) and even develop a taste for poetry (*De Volkskrant*, 8 June 2013; *Trouw*, 1 March 2014).

### ***Gender norms***

Reference to gender norms was present in all newspapers and encompassed a diversity of issues related to the rules of conduct for Muslim girls. The dailies portrayed the mosque education mainly as something which enforces inequality between Muslim girls and boys. The references described the compulsory segregation between sexes in the mosques (*De Volkskrant*, 7 March 2012), restrictions on dress code (“you cannot wear short skirt or tights”, *Trouw*, 8 March 2013), and the forbidden handshaking between men and women observed by imams (*AD*, 18 June 2013). Moreover, traditional expectations in terms of gender roles were cited, according to which the girls are not allowed to move away from parents for their studies (*Trouw*, 15 January 2014), and are described as child-bearers and the primary caretakers at home (*NRC Handelsblad*, 7 November 2011). Among all articles containing a code on gender norms, only one presented a critical stance against the “feminist” presumption that a headscarf symbolizes the oppression of the Muslim girls (*Trouw*, 14 February 2015).

### ***Radicalization and religious extremism***

Framed in a more negative light than the gender norms are the references to links with radicalization and religious extremism. The references to links between mosque education and religious extremism include accusations of mosques about preaching intolerance or calling on jihad against democracy. Similar to the academic discourse on radicalization, Salafi mosques are highlighted for being associated with controversial imams who “incite children against the society” (*De Telegraaf*, 5 February 2016), or who allegedly have links with “jihadist groups in his homeland Syria” (*Trouw*, 5 April 2013). Although the number of Salafi mosques in the Netherlands is limited, the discourse on religious extremism results in a general securitization of mosque education. This leads to the creation of defensive rhetoric by moderate Muslims. For example, a Dutch-Moroccan community who constructed a new mosque explicitly distances itself from assumptions about foreign donors who are likely to lend not only their financial resources but also their radical religious ideas (*Trouw*, 28 January 2014).

### ***Social cohesion and segregation***

The discourses on segregation and social cohesion are closely related. While the articles on social cohesion accentuate religious diversity either in a neutral or a positive light, all articles on segregation are framed negatively and stress the decreased opportunity for contact between Muslim children attending mosque education and their non-Muslim peers. There are concerns that participation in mosque classes limits children’s exposure to the Dutch language and culture (*Trouw*, 30 November 2011). One of the articles explicitly refers to the report of Lodewijk Asscher, Minister of Social Affairs and Employment (2012-2017), on the isolationist tendencies within the Dutch-Turkish community suggesting that mosque education creates “parallel societies” and is counteractive to successful integration (*Trouw*, 22 November 2014). Mosque education is portrayed as a factor which deepens societal segregation without providing information on possible socio-economic reasons behind it. The exclusionary reactions (or “othering”) of the non-Muslim majority are illustrated by the resistance of the local community to the construction of new mosques with Qur’an schools.

### ***Bridges with schools***

The topic of cooperation between schools and mosques is covered only once. In an opinion piece in *De Telegraaf* (5 February 2016), the Dutch Romanian journalist Nausicaa Marbe is critical against calls from pedagogue Mirte Loeffen for more collaboration between mosques and schools. Loeffen, who organizes trainings for schools on dealing with radicalization among students, has suggested increasing teachers' knowledge about Islam for a better connection with the Muslim students. This proposition seems unacceptable for the journalist of *De Telegraaf*. She questions the role of the mosque in educating Dutch Muslim children and portrays mosques and schools as incompatible "others".

To contrast, *De Volkskrant* (7 March 2012) makes space for the voice and agency of Muslims themselves and presents the example of the recently constructed Dutch-Surinamese mosque Taqwah mosque in Amsterdam. The mosque is an illustration of an attempt by the local Muslim community to bridge the gap with schools by offering homework assistance in mixed-gender lessons in Dutch.

References on extending citizenship education to mosque education are absent from the press discourses. There are, however, some critical opinion pieces which focus on the incompatibility of civic values and mosque education. *NRC Handelsblad* (23 April 2011), for instance, quoted Mike Huckabee, a former Republican presidential candidate in the US, referring to madrassas as something which do not belong to the West and as such, incompatible with liberal citizenship. Similarly, the historian Simon Schama was quoted for stating that the mosques can be tolerated in the Netherlands as long as they do not preach about jihad against democracy (*NRC Handelsblad*, 3 November 2011). Both cases exemplify boundary drawing in defining the values of the nation.

Incidentally, it is pointed out that mosque classes can play a role in Muslim children's identity development. "Almost every Moroccan boy goes through an identity crisis", one of them says, and those who attended mosque classes appreciate the positive recognition of their identity in mosques: "Only in the mosque you are not *that* Moroccan. You feel recognized" (*NRC Handelsblad*, 7 November 2011). This statement suggests lack of recognition in other spheres of social life and problematizes the role of the schools in inclusive identity building.

The only article dealing with the separation of mosque and state advocates that no public funding should be made available for mosque education (*Trouw*, 25 March 2016). This raises the dilemma of whether mosque education should belong to the private or public realm. Situating mosque education inside the public realm would affirm mosques as legitimate

actors in children's educational lives. Situating it outside of the public realm, however, tends to limit mosques' role in designing solutions to educational and social problems of Muslim youth. Furthermore, it undermines state's capacity in ensuring that no isolationist tendencies are cultivated by the "imported imams" of the so-called "parallel communities".

### **Discussion and conclusion**

This article provided an analysis of discourses on mosque education as discussed in the most circulated Dutch newspapers between 2010 and 2016. The leading issues with regard to the *pedagogical practices* in the mosques are illustrated by reports on child abuse and the inadequate pedagogical training of religious instructors. With regard to *gender norms* at the mosque education, the press tends to accentuate differences with the mainstream Dutch society based on the separation of sexes, while differences between religious communities are disregarded. The representations contain associations between mosque education and *radicalization*: mosque classes are said to teach the children intolerance towards democratic values. Also, mosque education is said to decrease children's exposure to Dutch culture and language resulting in isolated communities and stimulating *segregation* rather than *social cohesion*. Lastly, *cooperation* with mainstream schools is only once touched upon, and is represented as undesirable due to the essential 'otherness' of the two types of education.

The main issues discussed in the Dutch press resonate with the portrayals of mosque education in British media (Cherti et al., 2011). Mosque education in the Netherlands, just like in Britain, is frequently mentioned in relation to child protection and religious extremism. Differently than the British press, there is no coverage on mosques' role in the civic values education of Muslim children in the Netherlands. Rather, mosque education is placed in a position to prove that the Islamic values they teach are compatible with democratic citizenship. This may be related to the absence of Dutch initiatives similar to the British projects for citizenship education in the mosques which have attracted attention in the British press.

As pointed out earlier, the press discourses on mosque education are embedded within a more general media portrayal of Islam and Muslims. Considering the predominantly negative coverage on Islam and Muslims in the West, it could be expected that the representation of mosque education is overall negative as well. This phenomenon can be partially explained by the discourse on securitization of Islam after terrorist attacks claimed by Muslim groups. Moreover, some scholars have drawn attention to the fact that even before

9/11, the “othering” of Muslims based on the idea of the superiority of the West has been a prominent line in the Orientalist knowledge production of the European and the U.S. media for a long time (Said, 1997; Richardson, 2004). Others like Ottosen (1995) suggest that “the enemy image of Islam has roots centuries back and must be analyzed in the context of Christian-Muslim rivalry” (p. 98). As such, the media portrayal of mosque education is part of a long trend of a dual representation of the world, of an Occidental identity construction in which “they” (the Arabs, the Muslims) have been viewed as “different” and “threatening” to “us” (the Westerners, the Christians).

In this case, portraying mosque education as threatening, problematic and essentially different reinforces a homogenized image of mosque education. This raises some concerns because media representations may have real implications for policymaking and practice. Increased dialogue and partnership between schools and mosques are important steps in bridging the gap between the two realms. The prevalence of unfavorable portrayal disguising the differences between and within religious communities, however, might make partnerships between mosques and schools unlikely. The polarized debate may also affect negatively the decisions of municipalities to cooperate with mosques.

As portrayal and actual practice of mosque education are likely to be different, we need rigorous and unbiased research on the pedagogy, content and structure of mosque education in various religious communities. The analysis also shows that the space for the voices of Muslim students and parents is very limited in the press. Both policymakers and educators can gain from better understanding the role of mosques in the educational lives of young Dutch Muslims. This requires more empirical knowledge about the experiences of Muslim students, parents and mosque teachers as well.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Turkish Mosque Education in the Netherlands: Organization, Objectives, Curriculum, Content and Language Policies<sup>2</sup>**

#### **Introduction**

This paper seeks to explore a very scarcely studied academic area: mosque education followed by students with Muslim immigrant background in non-Muslim majority countries. Mosque education, also known in the literature as madrasa education, mosque schooling and Qur'an schooling, is the Islamic education provided by imams and mosque teachers to school-age children outside of their school time. The international literature on Islamic education mostly focuses either on challenges about mainstream Islamic education in Muslim-majority countries (e.g. Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2016; Aşlamacı & Kaymakcan, 2017; Bano, 2017; Boyle, 2006), or on the debates around the relatively recent arrangements for Islamic primary and secondary schools within the public education systems of Western countries (e.g. Abdallah et al., 2018; Bourget, 2019; García, 2018; Merry & Driessen, 2005; Zine, 2008). The first line of research falls outside the scope of this study as it deals with the experiences of Muslims in their native context. The second line of research also falls outside of the scope of the present study as it deals with the issues of accommodation of the Islamic schools within the formal mainstream schooling. Usually Islamic primary and secondary schools in non-Muslim countries follow the national curriculum with limited inclusion of Islamic subjects, and in cases of irregularities, the authorities in the respective country are known to withdraw subsidies and school permits (Daun & Arjmand, 2005). As such, they constitute a better-known case of Islamic education in non-Muslim contexts.

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter is a pre-print version of: Sözeri, S. & Altinyelken, H. K. (2019). What are children being taught in the mosque? Turkish mosque education in the Netherlands. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction* 22, 1-13. The Version of Record of this manuscript has been first published online on 28 June 2019, and is available in *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction* by Elsevier. DOI:10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.100326.



In many Western countries, however, there is a lot of anxiety and speculations with regard to the teaching practices within the mosques. This field of non-formal or supplementary Islamic education differs from formal Islamic primary and secondary schools as it remains outside of the mechanisms for state supervision. Some of the concerns are related to claims about Muslim youth radicalization and the contested role of foreign imams in the integration of immigrant children (Cherti & Bradley, 2011). Despite the interest by policy-makers and the wider public, mosque education followed by Muslim children is an understudied area both in education research and in migration studies (Berger, 2014; Moore, 2012). The scarcity of scholarly attention to the subject is partially due to difficulty in obtaining access to the field as researchers are often met with suspicion and distrust with regard to their intentions (Bolognani, 2007; Gent, 2011; Scourfield et al., 2013). These feelings of distrust and the defensive attitudes of the Islamic communities are caused to some extent by the negative portrayal of Muslims and mosque education in the media (Cherti, Glennie, & Bradley, 2011; Sözeri et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the field of supplementary Islamic education in non-Muslim contexts is emerging. Some noticeable contributions include a research by Cherti and Bradley (2011) reporting on the organization of British madrassas and their influence on social cohesion and radicalization; an ethnographic account by Gent (2011) who provides insights on student experiences based on interviews and observations at a boys' hifz class in London mosque; a study by Berglund (2018) who, based on student interviews in London and Stockholm, analyzes the different construction of the notions “reading”, “understanding and “meaning” by secular mainstream and supplementary mosque education; a research paper by Alkouatli and Vadeboncoeur (2018) who, based on classroom observations and interviews with the educators in a mosque in Canada, present mosque educators' views on learning and child development; and a study by Isik (2018) who explores whether mosques and mainstream educational institutions in Germany can learn from each other's experience with Islamic education. A common denominator for all these studies is the attempt for unveiling the links between the student experiences at school and in the mosque by recognizing that the mosque constitutes a significant part of Muslim children's learning environment.

In this regard, this exploratory study has the aim to contribute to the expansion of the research on mosque education in the Netherlands and beyond. To do so, it uses the Dutch country case and based on a diverse body of data, it provides a comparative overview of the

mosque education offered by the three largest Turkish Islamic communities in the Netherlands; *Diyanet*, *Milli Görüş*, and *Süleymanlıs*. In the following sections, this article starts with an overview of the Turkish Islamic communities in the Netherlands which are also the main providers of mosque education. It continues by mapping the theoretical underpinnings – the main concepts – which it employs for examining mosque education. This is followed by a comparative analysis of the way mosque education is organized by the Turkish Islamic communities in the Netherlands. The main analytical lenses are organization, curriculum, including learning objectives and content of the teaching materials, and language policies. The last section presents a discussion of the findings and their implications, and ends by offering potential directions for further research on Islamic education in non-Muslim majority countries.

### **Turkish-Dutch youth and the Turkish Islamic organizations in the Netherlands**

A recent report by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research estimates that Muslims constitute 6% of the Dutch population, and point to increasing levels of religiosity among both older and younger generations conveyed via higher frequency of praying and mosque attendance (Huijnk, 2018). In the case of our study, it is interesting to focus on the Turkish-Dutch for a number of reasons. First, they are the most numerous Islamic group in the Netherlands (Berger, 2014). Most group members are second and third generation descendants of the guest-workers who came in the 60's and 70's. Second, research has shown that the Turkish-Dutch have stronger intra-ethnic ties and isolationist tendencies than other immigrant groups in the country (CBS, 2012; Huijnk & Dagevos, 2012). Moreover, Turkish-Dutch youth has repeatedly been found to exhibit high levels of Islamic identification and practices indicating successful transfer of parental religious values across generations (Phalet et al., 2008; Maliepaard et al., 2010; Fleischmann & Phalet, 2012). Recent study by Fleischmann and Phalet (2018) comparing Muslim youth in Belgium, England, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, has found that stronger commitment to religion is associated with lower sense of identification with the host nation. Hence, studying the way Islam is being taught to the Turkish-Dutch youth by the mosques might also provide insights for understanding the dynamics between religiosity, Turkish and Dutch national identification.

The four largest Turkish Islamic associations outside of Turkey, namely *Diyanet*, *Milli Görüş*, *Süleymanlıs*, and the *Gülen* community (also known as *Hizmet*), play an important

role in sustaining the religious identity and practices of the young generations by providing opportunity for Islamic education outside of the school. All of them adhere to Sunni Islam, and each one has a transnational structure originating from Turkey and spread across Europe (Sunier & Landman, 2015). Differences between them stem from their relationship with the Turkish state, and their religious and political ideologies. Since the educational initiatives of the *Gülen* movement are different in character, they are left out of the scope of this article. The reason for that is mainly related to the fact that the *Gülen* movement does not have any mosques, and therefore it does not provide mosque education comparable to the other Turkish Islamic communities.

*Diyanet*, or the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Türkiye Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), is an organ of the Turkish state responsible for the regulation of all public religious affairs, and as such, a representative of the “official Turkish Islam” both at home and abroad. One of its main organs in the Netherlands is the Islamic Association Netherlands (*Islamitische Stichting Nederland*, established in 1982) which, with its 147 mosques, is the largest mosque association in the country. Imams at *Diyanet* mosques abroad are appointed for up to five years on a rotation principle by the Turkish state, and so are the chairs of *Diyanet* associations who are usually religious attachés at the respective Turkish embassy (Sunier & Landman, 2014). Recent studies point out to the increasingly contested role of *Diyanet* in the life of Turkish diaspora communities: it has been argued that under the AKP governments, *Diyanet* has become an influential actor in the foreign policy of the Turkish state which has been instrumentalizing *Diyanet* structures as part of its attempt to maintain influence over the Turks abroad (Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018; Maritato, 2018).

In contrast to *Diyanet*, the associations of *Süleymanlıs* and *Milli Görüş* were established by the guest-workers in the European countries independently from the Turkish state. In the 80’s, the operation of both of these movements was banned in Turkey due to representing competing understandings to the state-controlled Islam (Sunier & Landman, 2014). *Süleymanlıs* played a pioneering role in founding mosques and organizing religious activities for the Turkish Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands (Sunier & Landman, 2014). Currently there are 48 mosques affiliated with *Süleymanlıs’* Association Islamic Center Netherlands (*Stichting Islamitisch Centrum Nederland*, established in 1972). The members are followers of the Turkish spiritual leader Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan, who was a Sufi *şeyh* and a late Ottoman scholar of Islam. Tunahan is a central figure in the establishment of Qur’an courses

in Turkey since upon the abolishment of the Ottoman madrasa education and the adoption of the Latin script instead of Arabic by the newly founded Turkish Republic, he “launched a mission to teach the young and adults how to recite the Qur’an in Arabic” (Yükleyen & Yurdakul, 2011, p.78). In addition to thousands of Qur’an schools, the *Süleymanlı* movement is also well-known for establishing an extensive network of student dormitories providing religious classes both in Turkey and abroad (Sunier & Landman, 2015).

The Islamic community *Milli Görüş*, on the other hand, was founded by the followers of the Turkish politician Necmettin Erbakan and his *Milli Selamet Partisi* (National Salvation Part) in 1970’s in Germany, and later “strengthened as a diasporic network of Turkish Muslims in Europe” (Yükleyen & Yurdakul, 2011, p.72). In the Netherlands, there are 45 mosques affiliated with *Milli Görüş*, and the first ones were set up by the South Holland branch of the movement called Dutch Islamic Federation (*Nederlandse Islamitische Federatie, NIF*, established in 1981). Initially, *Milli Görüş* positioned itself “as an anti-imperialist and anti-secularist alternative to both leftist Turkish associations who were very active in those years and to the state-controlled Islam, represented by *Diyanet*” (Sunier & Landman, 2015, p.74). Yet, there is an indication of an ideological change within the movement after 2007, with key representatives voicing more liberal pro-European orientation and attempting to bridge the gap between *Milli Görüş* and the host society (see Lindo, 2008, and Schiffauer, 2010, cited in Sunier & Landman, 2014 ).

### **Studies on mosque education in the Netherlands**

All diaspora mosques offer religious education, but to date there are only three studies on mosque education in the Netherlands. The first one was commissioned by the municipality of Rotterdam to Pels and colleagues who investigated the pedagogical practices at one Turkish mosque affiliated with *Milli Görüş* and two Moroccan mosques through classroom observations and interviews with stakeholders (Pels et al., 2006; Pels et al., 2006a; Pels et al., 2006b). The findings of Pels and colleagues point out to a number of educational challenges. First, they identify that the Arabic and Turkish teaching materials make poor connections to the Dutch context in which the Muslim youth is growing up. Second, they suggest that the traditional initiate-response-evaluate didactical approach (in which usually questions targeting factual knowledge with only one possible correct answer are initiated by the teacher and answered by the students), is still dominant in the mosque classrooms. This finding

implies that the *hocas* rely less on approaches encouraging critical and analytical thinking. Furthermore, it hints at an existing misalignment in didactical approaches between the mosque and school classrooms. Nevertheless, they also suggest that the pedagogical approaches at the mosques have become more child-friendly compared to the past.

The second study authored by Stella van de Wetering and Arslan Karagül (2013) investigates the need for Islamic education at the mosques and at the schools in a neighborhood in Amsterdam. Based on their own observations and seven interviews with imams, chairs and representatives of mosque associations, the authors have found out that the mosque associations are struggling with a shortage of space to meet the high demand for mosque classes, and with lack of mosque teachers trained in pedagogy and didactics. The authors conclude that despite these shortcomings, Muslim children have no other choice but to be content with mosque classes in their present form due to very limited opportunities for Islamic classes at school. Additionally, they note that the Islamic education given at the primary and secondary schools in the Netherlands is often seen as deficient by the Muslim parents who have preference for teachers who are practicing Muslims.

The third study is a recent research by Altinyelken and Sözeri (2019). Based on a case-study of a Turkish *Diyanet* mosque and 36 interviews with imams, mosque teachers, parents and children, we have analyzed the contextual factors that alter the pedagogical practices imported by *Diyanet* through imams and teaching materials from Turkey to their mosque classrooms in the Netherlands. The findings of our case-study suggest that Turkish *Diyanet* mosques in the Netherlands are experiencing tentative pedagogical change as they show a tendency to introduce more Dutch in their teaching materials and the mosque classrooms, to incorporate more inquisitive teaching methods, and to emulate the classroom management, reward and punishment strategies of the Dutch schools. Importantly, the results of our case-study also indicate that the curriculum of *Diyanet* also places a strong focus on the transmission of Turkish culture and national values along with religious knowledge.

In addition to these, there are also non-empirical studies dealing with mosque education in the Netherlands such as the article “Islamic Education of Muslim Children at Home and in the Mosque” by Stella El Bouayadi-van de Wetering (2012), and the article “Islamic Education in the Netherlands” by Ina ter Avest and Cok Bakker (2017). The first one provides an overview of the educational practices at the mosques in the Netherlands

mainly based on the scant literature and personal observations of the author as “a mother in a Muslim Moroccan-Dutch family” (El Bouayadi-van de Wetering, 2012, p. 75). She summarizes the learning goals of mosque education as: “1) learning to read and recite the Qur’an; 2) learning to pronounce Arabic; 3) learning how to perform the main religious rituals concerning the five pillars; 4) gaining information on Islam as a faith and a way of life; 5) learning about Islamic etiquette and ethics” (El Bouayadi-van de Wetering, 2012, p.82-83). The author remarks that mosque education has gained an additional objective in the immigration context: namely, providing guidance with regard to relations with non-Muslim members of the Dutch society. She observes that this is one of the most important pedagogical challenges that mosque education has to deal with since “the problem here is how to teach children to be respectful toward those of other religions, worldviews or culture while at the same time being taught that the faith and behavior of others is reprehensible or haram” (El Bouayadi-van de Wetering, 2012, p. 83).

Ina ter Avest and Cok Bakker (2017), on the other hand, provide a brief overview of the organization and learning goals of mosque education as a part of their chapter on Islamic education in the Netherlands. The authors differentiate between the mosque education provided within the Moroccan, Turkish and Surinamese communities, paying attention to the differences in language policies and content. For example, they state that while learning fluent Arabic is an important goal in Moroccan mosques (since it is not only the language of the Qur’an but also the national language of Morocco), Turkish mosques use Turkish as the language of instruction and only teach basic Arabic literacy sufficient to read the Qur’an and say the prayers. Surinamese mosques, in contrast, provide mosque education in Dutch as this is also their national language. Moreover, the authors claim that classes at the Turkish and Surinamese mosques use more similar content compared to the Moroccan mosques. The latter are said to prioritize the recitation of the Qur’an by heart, while the learning goals at the other two communities are based on educating the children in the pillars, requirements and practice of Islam. Ter Avest and Bakker also draw attention to the increasing awareness among imams about the importance of providing messages of respect and tolerance countering possible radicalization tendencies among the youth in the mosque classes. However, many of the points raised by the authors are based on older studies (e.g. Andree et al., 1990; Nijsten, 1998; Pels, 1999, cited in ter Avest & Bakker, 2017), and thus, might not be offering an up-to-date picture of the current state of mosque education.

## Theoretical underpinnings

### *Curriculum content, purposes and organization*

This study employs theoretical concepts derived from Walker's (2003) fundamentals of curriculum as a heuristic device guiding the analysis of the data. Walker (2003, p. 4) argues that "curriculum is a particular way of ordering content and purposes for teaching and learning in schools". In other words, he identifies three basic principles of curriculum: content, purposes and organization. Content refers to the subjects, themes, concepts and tasks included in the teaching and learning activities. Purposes correspond to the objective behind providing certain type of education and the learning goals (or outcomes) aimed to be achieved with it. Organization is the way in which the content and the purposes are coordinated and arranged within the course by the educators.

The use of these theoretical concepts, however, is safe-guarded by two assumptions: 1) that some of the theoretical concepts which are developed for the regular school context might not be fully applicable to the realities of non-formal religious classes in a mosque, and 2) that mosque education might be primarily guided by an Islamic understanding of education which does not necessarily fit into curriculum models developed by Western educationalists. In this regard, when exploring the educational practices of the mosques, this study attempts to include in its explanatory framework conceptualizations from Islamic philosophy of education. Halstead (2004), for example, argues that one of the main purposes of Islamic schooling in the West has been the preservation of the Muslim identity of the children. He claims that:

at the heart of the Muslim concept of education is the aim of producing good Muslims with an understanding of Islamic rules of behavior and a strong knowledge of and a commitment to the faith. [...] Independence of thought and personal autonomy do not enter into the Muslim thinking about education, which is more concerned with the progressive initiation of pupils into the received truths of the faith. (Halstead, 2004, p. 519).

Alternatively, Hussain (2004) defines the purposes of Islamic education with the Qur'anic concepts characterizing the meaning of education, namely *tarbiyah* and *ta'lim*. *Tarbiyah* refers to nurture and care for the spiritual development of the child, and *ta'lim*, to

the transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the student. Differing from Halstead, Hussain states that “the question of identity is secondary” to the objective of providing Islamic education (Hussain, 2004, p. 322). Instead, he argues, that the rationale behind Islamic education initiatives in non-Muslim countries (in his example, Britain) has to do with acquainting the Muslim youth with Islam as “a way of life”. He conceptualizes the role of Muslim schools as facilitators of understanding of the re-contextualization of the religion in the new non-Muslim environment.

In line with Hussain (2004), Sahin (2013), bases his analysis of Islamic educational philosophy on the style and structure of the Qur’an itself. He claims that repetition of the thematic material is part of the Qur’anic “pedagogy of storytelling” which follows the “educational rationale of teaching through discourses that are easy to recite, reflect, comprehend, apply and teach” (Sahin, 2013, p.176). He is critical of those defining Islamic education as an esoteric teaching based on coercive moral practices and training, and situating it in antithetical juxtaposition with Western secular education understood as materialistic teaching based on humanism. In response to that, he puts forward his “cloud-grass theory of education in Islam”. His theory capitalizes on the Islamic educational concept of *tarbiyah*, which sees education as a means to look after and guide in order to facilitate the growth of a faithful Islamic personality. According to his theory, the transfer of knowledge is secondary to the process of caring for the upbringing and the development of student’s potential.

Based on these conceptualizations, one can expect that the objective of mosque education would be not only to transfer Islamic knowledge, but also to cater for the context-specific needs of the students in their classes, possibly with a strong emphasis on Islamic identity maintenance. Besides, previous studies in multiple contexts and subjects have shown that curriculum can be a tool for national identity building (Ahonen, 2001; Murray, 2008; Duranni & Dunne, 2010). Hence, this observation can help interpret and understand better the role of curriculum content and objectives of Turkish mosque education in the Dutch minority context.

### ***Language policies: the importance of medium of instruction***

The choice of medium of instruction and the fluency of both teachers and students in it are important determinants of the extent to which the provided education achieves its goals. In



this regard, research shows that education in students' mother tongue or in the local language is more conducive to educational success than education in a second language (Baker, 2001; Benson, 2004). Also, some studies have identified a link between the maintenance of heritage language in the classroom and higher self-esteem, feelings of acceptance and general cognitive benefits (Cummins, 2000, & Byalstok, 2001, cited in Baker 2003). However, in the case of mosque students, while Turkish is their mother tongue, Dutch is the local language to which they are exposed at school and in the wider society since early childhood. The choice of one as a medium of instruction over the other might have different implications for their Turkish language maintenance, or further expansion of their Dutch language vocabulary with the addition of Islamic terminology.

That being said, proficiency in the medium of instruction might be a goal in itself. Some scholars claim, for instance, that language policies in education often reflect a political and social agenda (Tsui & Tollefson, 2004), and that the choice of a language of instruction is an "implicit part of the 'hidden curriculum' of a school" (McGroarty, 2002, p.17). Since language, just like religion, is considered to be one of the main markers of a national or ethnic identity (Brubaker, 2013), the choice of a language as a medium of instruction might serve an indirect learning objective related to the construction of that identity and to the strengthening of children's feelings of belonging to the respective community (Brock-Utne, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Therefore, to understand the dynamics between objective of the provided education, the medium of instruction and national identity, we also look at the use of language in the classroom by the imams, *hocas* and the students. In our study we adopt the Turkish term denoting a mosque teacher: *hoca* (pronounced: hodja) for two reasons. First, it is an untranslatable Turkish word ascribed to people teaching at a mosque (similar to the untranslatable word "imam" which cannot be replaced with a "priest"). Second, the term "teacher" is not appropriate since it conveys a degree of professionalization and vocational training which is lacking in the case of *hocas* who are often volunteers.

## Data and methods

The study is based on nine classroom observations, 43 semi-structured interviews (four of which were group interviews) with a total of 48 participants, and field-work notes. The field-notes come from two roundtables with *hocas* respectively from *Milli Görüş* and *Süleymanlıs*, and field-notes from one expert meeting on mosque education with participation of representatives from all major Islamic communities in the Netherlands, including from *Diyanet*, *Milli Görüş* and *Süleymanlıs*. The classroom observations were conducted respectively during three months of fieldwork in one of the largest *Diyanet* mosques between March and May 2017, and two months of fieldwork in one of the largest *Milli Görüş* mosques between October and December 2017. In the observed mosques, informed active consent was obtained by the parents of the students. The parents were informed about research goals, issues of confidentiality and anonymity, and their right to withdraw at any point via bilingual letters in Turkish and Dutch, and signed bilingual active consent letters about their children's participation in the research. Prior to the observations, the children themselves were also informed about the research, and were allowed to ask questions to the first author before and after the classroom observations. Many parents expressed to the first author that they trust the discretion of the imam and the mosque chair when it comes to agreeing to participate in the research. The classroom observation framework reflected the analytical lenses of the study, including but not restricted to content of the classes, teaching materials, learning goals, and language use by the students and by the *hocas*. Below Table 4 describes the composition of the classrooms during the observations.

Table 4. Composition of the observed classrooms.

Islamic organization	Observation number	Age range	Gender	Number of present students	Level
<i>Diyanet</i>	First	8-12	Girls	13	Intermediate
	Second	10-16	Boys	11	Advanced
	Third	8-14	Boys	13	Intermediate
	Fourth	8-14	Girls	15	Intermediate
<i>Milli Görüş</i>	First	7-10	Girls	9	Foundations of religious knowledge 1
	Second	7-10	Girls	9	Foundations of religious knowledge 1
	Third	6-8	Mixed	7	Preparatory class
	Fourth	10-14	Boys	13	Foundations of religious knowledge 3
	Fifth	11-14	Boys	9	<i>Hifz</i> class

Access to the case-study mosques was granted by the management of the Dutch branch of *Diyanet*, and by the executive board and imam at the *Milli Görüş* mosque. Since the mosques were not chosen randomly by the researchers, it is likely that they portray best practice examples which the management of the mosque communities prefers to share with the wider public. Nevertheless, in both cases, the mosques present typical examples of the curriculum content, learning goals and language policies implemented in the *Diyanet* and *Milli Görüş* mosques. For a more complete overview of the teaching practices in the Turkish mosques, *Süleymanlıs* were also approached with a request to include a case-study mosque with classroom observations. The community preferred to participate only with interviews and a roundtable discussion.

The interviews were conducted between July 2016 and January 2017 with imams, *hocas*, key stakeholders such as chairs and representatives of Islamic umbrella organizations and Turkish migrant associations, leaders of the Turkish Islamic associations, and academics with expertise on Islam and Muslims in the Netherlands. We used purposive sampling to reach imams, *hocas* and key stakeholders from all Turkish-Islamic communities in the Netherlands. All interviews except four were audio-recorded and verbatim-transcribed. Four of the participants did not want their voice to be recorded, so we took detailed notes of these interviews. Confidential processing of the data was guaranteed to all participants. The interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the participant (usually their office or at the mosque), in Turkish, Dutch or English depending on the preference of the participant. Wherever necessary, quotations used in the text were translated into English by the first author. We conducted thematic content analysis to analyze the data (Friese et al., 2018). This entailed coding the transcribed interviews, classroom observations, and fieldwork notes using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti (version 8.043). The coding was guided by the theoretical conceptualizations in the study. Below Table 5 provides a compact overview of the data collection methods and Table 6 describes the demographic characteristics of the interviewees.

Table 5. Overview of data collection methods.

Methods	N	Recorded as	Average duration	Profile of the participants
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	43	Audio files; verbatim transcribed	50 minutes	Imams, <i>hocas</i> , Islam experts and key stakeholders
<b>Classroom observations</b>	9	Filled in a classroom observation framework	75 minutes	<i>Hocas</i> and students attending the mosque classes
<b>Roundtables on the pedagogy, didactics &amp; social relevance of mosque education</b>	2	Fieldwork notes	2 hours	Imams and <i>hocas</i> affiliated with <i>Milli Görüş</i> and <i>Süleymanlıs</i>
<b>Expert meeting on mosque education organized by CMO</b>	1	Fieldwork notes	3 hours	Imams, education coordinators, representatives and chairs of the major Islamic organizations affiliated with CMO (including <i>Diyanet</i> , <i>Milli Görüş</i> and <i>Süleymanlıs</i> ).

Abbreviation: CMO (Contactorgaan Moslims en de Overheid) [Contact Organ for Muslims and the Government].

Table 6. Demographic characteristics of the interviewees per occupation.

	Imam (N=10)	<i>Hoca</i> (N=9)	Chair or board member (N=15)	Academic (N=4)	Journalist (N=2)	Policymaker & advisor (N=5)	Educator (N=2)
<b>Age range</b>	27-53	19 - 49	25-63	43-62	30-34	32-62	30-44
<b>Gender</b>	10 men	7 women, 2 men	4 women, 11 men	1 woman, 3 men	2 men	1 woman, 4 men	2 women
<b>Education level</b>	10 university	3 university, 1 HBO, 2 MBO, 3 Imam-hatip	9 university, 1 HBO, 5 secondary school	4 university	2 university	3 university, 2 HBO	2 university
<b>Nationality</b>	7 NL&TR, 3 TR	7 NL&TR, 2 TR	10 NL&TR, 1 NL&MR, 3 TR, 1 NL	4 NL	2 NL	3 NL&TR, 1 NL&MR, 1 NL	2 NL
<b>Years of residence (range)</b>	2-42	2-27	2-43	43-62	30-34	32-55	30-44

Abbreviations: NL: Dutch; TR: Turkish; MR: Moroccan; HBO: University of applied sciences; MBO: Vocational secondary school; Imam-hatip: Islamic professional secondary school.

Before we proceed with the findings of the study, the reflexivity and the positioning of the first author who collected the data should be addressed. Scholars differentiate two types of reflexivity: prospective and retrospective (Edge, 2011). The first one deals with the effect of the characteristics of the researcher on the research and findings, and the latter: with the effect of the research experience on the researcher post-fieldwork (Attia & Edge, 2017). Our concern here is with the prospective reflexivity, or in other words, to what extent are the findings of the study shaped by the eye of the beholder? There seems to be a consensus among academics that one of the most appropriate ways to deal with prospective reflexivity is to acknowledge it is an inevitable and important part of doing qualitative research (Berger, 2015; Pillow, 2003). It entails “the recognition that as researchers, we are part of the social world that we study” (Palaganas et al., 2017, p.427), and that our research practice is affected by our personal experiences and attitudes. One way to account for reflexivity is continuously engaging in critical self-evaluation on our own positioning in the field. In the case of this study, the researcher collecting the data was considered an outsider of the studied population, as she was not a member of any of the communities and did not have personal links to any of the mosques included in the study. This fact made the process of gaining access very challenging as negotiations to gain the trust of formal gatekeepers were long and effortful. However, the researcher also qualified as an insider of the studied population: by means of being a native Turkish speaker who has attended mosque classes while growing up as a minority youth in (another) non-Muslim majority country. Some authors say that the position of an insider is more favorable for “identifying disguised and subtle expressions of themes” (Berger, 2015, p.228), which might have been conducive to the analyses in this study.

## **Findings**

### ***Organization of mosque education***

Our observations and interviews reveal that there are a number of similarities and differences between the mosque education provided by the different communities, mainly pertaining to organizational effectiveness, size and composition of the groups of students, physical conditions of the classrooms, and financing. The largest community, *Diyanet*, also has the most sizeable student body, estimated at 15 thousand students in November 2016 (as reported by a Key Figure 1 at *Diyanet*). Table 7 provides an overview of the different educational activities offered by *Diyanet* mosques.

Table 7. Overview of the educational activities offered by *Diyanet* (source: <https://diyanet.nl/hizmetlerimiz/dini-egitim-ve-din-hizmetleri/>).

<i>Mosque playgroup</i>	<i>Primary mosque classes</i>	<i>Secondary mosque classes</i>	<i>Imam-hatip</i>	<i>Summer courses</i>	<i>Fall courses</i>	<i>Winter courses</i>	<i>Spring courses</i>	<i>Hifz class</i>	<i>Islam in Dutch</i>	<i>Islam for the disabled</i>	<i>Homework and CITO exam</i>	<i>Turkish language</i>	<i>Arts</i>
Continuous education				Holiday courses				Special education			Homework assistance	Culture and arts courses	
Educational activities of <i>Diyanet</i>													

At *Diyanet*, students are grouped in same-sex classes of 10 to 20 students depending of the number of registered students and the physical capacities of the mosque. For example, the case-study mosque was attended by approximately 320 students divided into 16 classes, with an average of 20 students per class, 11 attending the morning shift and five, the afternoon shift. The total number of students at *Milli Görüş* mosques, on the other hand, has been estimated at approximately 5 thousand students in November 2016 (as reported by Imam 1, Imam 2 and Key Figure 2). The case-study mosque of *Milli Görüş* was similar in size to the *Diyanet* mosque in our study: the registered students were around 300 grouped in classes of 15 to 20 students, all attending a morning shift. Some *Diyanet* and *Milli Görüş* mosques also have a *hifz* class for their most excellent students who are taught to recite the Qur'an by heart. Usually, the *hifz* classes are smaller (seven or eight students), follow a more intensive schedule with more instruction hours per week. Due to organizational reasons (e.g. difficulty of scheduling two different *hocas*), some mosques keep the *hifz* class mixed-gender. Besides, some *Milli Görüş* and *Diyanet* mosques also have kindergarten groups for the youngest children. For instance, the case-study mosque at *Milli Görüş* had three kindergarten groups which were also mixed-gender. In general, there was an agreement between the respondents that mixed-gender classes are more often seen at *Milli Görüş* mosques than at the other communities. For example, it was reported by Imam 1 that some *Milli Görüş* mosques also have a mixed-gender class conducted in Dutch for Muslim students from other ethnic groups (e.g. Afghans, Palestinians and Somalis). Another *Milli Görüş*

mosque decided to have only mixed-gender classes in order to provide a classroom environment which feels close to the regular school:

Imam: Before they used to separate the classes by gender, but I was not a supporter of dividing the girls from the boys. Therefore, it continued just like at school.

Interviewer: And the parents did not object to that?

Imam: No, they did not at all. The education was conducted with a very clear discipline. The bell would ring, and they would enter the classrooms. The bell would ring, and they would go out for a break. In other words, it was just like at the other schools. (Imam 2)

A comparison between Table 8 and Table 9 presenting the grouping of students by age at *Diyanet*, and at *Milli Görüş* shows that both communities follow similar grouping strategies.

Table 8. Grouping of students per age at the different classes at *Diyanet*.

Level	Ages
<b>Kindergarten/ play group (not in every mosque)</b>	3-6
<b>Arabic alphabet - <i>Elif cüz</i></b>	6-9
<b>Beginners class</b>	7-9
<b>Intermediate class</b>	9-12
<b>Advanced class</b>	12-15
<b><i>Hifz</i> class (Qur'anic memorization and recitation, not in every mosque)</b>	10-15
<b><i>Imam-hatip</i> program (informal imam training, not in every mosque)</b>	16 and above

Table 9. Grouping of students per age at the different classes at *Milli Görüş*.

Level	Ages
<b>Kindergarten (not in every mosque)</b>	3-6
<b>Preparatory class including Arabic alphabet (<i>hazırlık</i>)</b>	6-8
<b>Foundations of religious knowledge 1 (<i>Temel bilgiler 1</i>)</b>	8-10
<b>Foundations of religious knowledge 2 (<i>Temel bilgiler 2</i>)</b>	10-12
<b>Foundations of religious knowledge 3 (<i>Temel bilgiler 3</i>)</b>	12-14
<b><i>Hifz</i> class (Qur'anic memorization and recitation, not in every mosque)</b>	10-15
<b><i>Nizamiye</i> (informal Islamic high school, not in every mosque)</b>	14-18

In contrast to *Diyanet* and *Milli Görüş*, *Süleymanlıs* reported that they do not keep a record of the total number of students in their mosques, but in any case they have an idea that

they have “thousands of students” as expressed by Imam 4 who is also a key figure from the community. In contrast to the other associations, they do not have a standardized curriculum and textbooks, and therefore, there exists no standardized grouping. Nevertheless, the students are grouped by level of knowledge, age and gender, keeping the group boundaries flexible. Imam 4 remarked that before the age of seven “there are playgroups. And after that, starting from the age of seven they [the children] are channeled towards education through play”. He also indicated that group sizes range between 12 and 17 students, and each class has two *hocas*, one regular *hoca* and one trainee who works individually with each student.

In all three communities, the classes were financed via contributions by the parents ranging between 100 and 175 euro per year, and via membership donations to the mosques, meant to cover the costs of teaching materials and a modest reimbursement for the volunteer *hocas*. Classroom observations and data collected via the roundtable meetings showed that in the great majority of cases, the classes are being held in regular classrooms equipped with a whiteboard, school desks and bookshelves. A lecturer at Islamic University of Europe and a former imam at *Milli Görüş* drew attention to the fact that nowadays they try to mimic the educational environment of the school as closely as possible so that the children do not get a negative image of mosque education:

[...] the children are going to school, they see desks, chairs and a white board at school, but the education at the mosque used to be on wooden lap desks. This has an impact on the students. This is the reason [we changed it], so that it is integrated and parallel [to the education at school], and to avoid the creation of an image at the minds of the students that mosque education is inferior.

### ***Objective of providing mosque education and learning goals***

Respondents from all three communities reported that mosque education has evolved as one of the main services of the mosque as an answer to the demand coming from the parents. Eight of our participants underlined that parents feel the need to give an Islamic upbringing to their children, and due to lack of expertise in the teachings of the Qur’an and/or a lack of time, they prefer to delegate this role to the imam and the *hocas*. Another important objective voiced by respondents across all communities, is religious socialization with Islamic peers within the mosque. Beside these, in time another important objective has evolved in the diaspora context: a shift from the transfer of Islamic knowledge and values-education towards



Islamic and Turkish identity building. This was expressed repeatedly by respondents with different affiliations. For instance, a chair of an Islamic umbrella organization remarked that “especially at *Milli Görüş* the used methods and the educational activities evolved from transfer of knowledge into identity building” (Key Figure 14). This was confirmed by a *Hoca* 5 at *Milli Görüş* who said their mosque was providing Islamic education “so that the children don’t lose their Turkishness, so that they don’t lose their identity and essence”. Likewise, imams at *Milli Görüş* also re-affirmed the centrality of identity building in providing mosque classes. One said, “we give these classes so that they can live as conscious Muslims” (Imam 3), and another one stated the following:

Today the youth in the Western societies and in Europe is captivated through games, entertainment, music and social media devices. The battle we are fighting aims at giving them a Muslim identity so that the children don’t get lost among all these. [...] Our education is focused on raising our children based on our national and moral values. [...] To build a national identity and to prevent the creation of generations who have lost their own identity within the European culture away from national feelings and passion. (Imam 10)

The identity-building purpose of mosque education was shared by imams and *hocas* at the other communities as well. To illustrate, *Hoca* 8 from *Diyanet* claimed that “The objective is to teach the children who they are and to teach them their religion. Of course, they can have other identities as well, but they built upon this basis”. Similarly, Key Figure 3 from *Süleymanlıs* stated that “the ultimate goal is to help them to be good Muslims”.

The classroom observations and the responses by *hocas* and imams indicated that the learning goals of the mosque classes are to a great extent in line with the stated objective of providing the education. It was often reiterated that the main learning goals are teaching the children to read the Qur’an in Arabic, help them memorize the prayers and educate them about the main pillars and principles of Islam. Another important learning goal is achieving greater proficiency in the Turkish language; therefore, all communities use Turkish as their main language of instruction. Imam 4 from *Süleymanlıs* remarked that in addition to reading the Qur’an, an important learning goal is teaching the children “what does being a Muslim mean and how does someone become a Muslim”. *Hoca* 6 from *Milli Görüş*, a woman who was born and educated in the Netherlands, said that she prioritizes teaching the children to

question in order to understand why they perform the Islamic rituals, teaching them why they believe in Islam, and how it is similar to and different from Christianity so that her students can give answers to questions coming from non-Muslims. This was, in contrast to what a female *hoca* at *Diyanet*, born and educated as an Islamic theologian in Turkey, commented about the learning goals at their mosque:

Children here have to learn about Allah, the importance of Allah, why they need to be afraid from Allah and why they are Muslims.[...]. They need to know about *haram* and *halal*, and the afterworld. In other words, they need to learn the importance of resurrection after death because in this society children are growing up without believing in the afterworld. (*Hoca* 9)

It is noteworthy that both during individual interviews with imams from *Milli Görüş* and during a roundtable discussion with *hocas* at *Milli Görüş* the importance of giving children a purpose related to the mosque was underlined. *Hocas* and imams at *Milli Görüş* shared the idea that once the children have a purpose related to the mosque, they also develop a long-lasting connection with it.

### ***Curriculum content and teaching materials***

When it comes to curriculum and teaching materials, we found out that at the time of the study only *Milli Görüş* had standardized textbooks and curriculum developed for the different age groups by their own regional educational committees in the Netherlands and in Germany. While at *Diyanet* there was no standardized curriculum yet, it was reported that since 2014 there is an attempt to create standardized textbooks adapted for the Dutch context with the aim to introduce some of the main Islamic terms both in Turkish and Dutch (the books contain a glossary as an appendix). At all three communities, the mosque classes were given under two subjects, Qur'an literacy and Islamic knowledge. Accordingly, the curriculum content for each is different. Qur'an literacy classes focus on learning the Arabic alphabet, reading the Qur'an, memorization of the daily prayers and learning to perform the *namaz*, and for the more advanced students, reciting (passages of) the Qur'an by heart (usually done in a separate *hifz* class). The content of the Islamic knowledge classes, on the other hand, focuses on teaching religious knowledge such as: the 32 binding duties of Islam called *fards* among which the five pillars of Islam (obligatory acts every Muslim has to perform, such as praying five times per day and fasting) and the six principles of the belief called *iman* (such as belief

in the existence of angels and in the existence of a day of judgement), Islamic catechism or *ilmihal*, life of the prophet Mohammed (*seerah*), the interpretation of stories from the Qur'an with contextual examples of their application (*tafsir*), and simple form of Islamic jurisprudence *fiqh*, usually enough to give the children guidance for Islamic rules of conduct and Islamic lifestyle.

Correspondingly, the teaching materials for the Qur'an literacy class at each community are Arabic alphabet books and the Qur'an itself. For the Islamic knowledge classes, *Milli Görüş* would use their own textbooks, but *hocas* reported to have freedom in complementing the material with games and videos as they deemed appropriate:

Every class has their own textbook. You can add extra material yourself if you want to, or you can just follow the book. I don't like just following the book. Why? Because if you explain something to small children just with words, they would understand perhaps only 10 or 20 percent of it. I don't think they would understand more. But if you play games, show them videos according to their level...usually for the first few lessons I don't bring anything and only talk with them in order to determine what is their level, to check what they will understand and what not, and afterwards I prepare games based on that. (*Hoca* 6)

Although *Milli Görüş* textbooks are prepared and printed in Germany, some *Milli Görüş* imams were critical towards the suitability of the textbooks to the European context in general and the Dutch context in particular:

But it is a disadvantage that it [the material] has been prepared according to the children living in Turkey. For example, there they have 23 April, which does not have a counterpart here. 19 May does not have a counterpart here. Therefore, perhaps the curriculum prepared here has to take into account that the children live in a Christian society and that this Christian society has its own holidays. Like Christmas days versus the Muslim holidays. There is a need for a bit more comparative language while in Turkey there is no need for that since it is a Muslim country. (Imam 2)

At *Diyanet*, the *hocas* would use a compilation of teaching materials, prepared and printed in Turkey, similarly with the Turkish context in mind. This was perceived by some

key figures at *Diyanet* as a drawback which the association is aware of and attempts to remedy:

We cannot use the curriculum from Turkey in the mosques here. Right now, we are developing textbooks for the Netherlands on three levels: “My Beautiful Religion Islam 1, 2 and 3”. We used both Turkish and Dutch in these books. [...]. Besides these, we are using the *elif-ba* [the Arabic alphabet book] of *Diyanet*. But we are considering to include Dutch also in it. (Key Figure 1)

That being said, it is remarkable that the bilingual Islamic knowledge textbook developed by *Diyanet* for the Dutch context starts with the Turkish national anthem and contains a chapter on Turkish culture which discusses concepts such as responsibilities towards the Turkish nation and love for Turkey as the fatherland (Malkoç & Arslan Baran, 2015)<sup>3</sup>. In the light of this, it is not surprising that a key figure from an independent Islamic umbrella organization commented that:

According to me, [the textbooks of *Diyanet*] could have been more oriented towards Europe. I am also critical towards *Milli Görüş*, but they were the first community to realize this. They renew their textbooks continuously, and I observe that their way of working is more compatible with Europe. Just like in the example of the textbooks Basic Religious Knowledge 1,2 3, for instance. These are their first textbooks and it is very much obvious that they have been written with a perspective imported from Turkey. But right now, they started publishing the textbooks in German and Dutch<sup>4</sup>. You can see that these are clearly written with these countries in mind. (Key Figure 15)

Nevertheless, an educational coordinator of *Milli Görüş* has explained that while they are “printing textbooks in Dutch and all communities had to start long ago with offering

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<sup>3</sup> After the end of the field work and data collection in this study, *Diyanet* has printed two new textbooks containing a Dutch glossary for every chapter: “Camiye Gidiyorum 1 ve 2” [“I’m Going to the Mosque 1 and 2”] which are intended to replace the existing monolingual Turkish textbooks.

<sup>4</sup> During our fieldwork, none of the *hocas* at *Milli Görüş* have seen those textbooks and all Islamic knowledge books were still in Turkish.

religious education in the local languages, the Dutch textbooks are intended for the foreigners [non-Turkish Muslims]” (Key Figure 2).

A key figure and an imam from *Süleymanlıs* responded that their mosques also use “their own textbooks”, however, he clarified that these are the “traditional books on these subjects” which have been printed and developed in Turkey. It was noteworthy that in the educational vision of their community, Qur’anic education was also seen as linguistic education in which oral teaching methods played an important role:

Of course, they learn the Qur’an also orally, after all it is not possible to teach it only through books, it is a language education and it requires listening. Furthermore, for those interested in the meaning of the Qur’an we have basic books for Arabic. We also use those, as teaching material. (Imam 4)

### ***Language***

Our data shows that learning Turkish is part of the curriculum at all Turkish mosques independent of their affiliation. *Hocas* and imams from *Diyanet* and *Milli Görüş* expressed that they notice and acknowledge that their students have difficulty in understanding and expressing themselves in Turkish. Nevertheless, they underline the importance of conducting the lessons in Turkish because they believe that this way the Turkish language skills of the children will improve, and in return, this will boost children’s self-confidence. Depending on the availability of Turkish language teachers in their congregations, mosques from all affiliations would try to offer a weekly Turkish language class beside the Islamic education classes. It was reported that the weak Turkish language skills of the students presented unexpected challenges for some *hocas*. For instance, a female first generation *hoca* at one of the observed classes at the *Diyanet* mosque said that the children react better to discipline warnings when the warnings are given in Dutch instead of Turkish (*Hoca* 9). Since she was not proficient in Dutch herself, she would use young second generation trainees (training to be a *hoca*) who are fluent in Dutch and who would translate some of the Turkish material in her classes into Dutch for the children who have understanding problems. She was critical towards her own lack of proficiency in Dutch:

The children learn whatever you can teach them at the mosque. And for this you need very good Dutch because the children here are different than the children in Turkey.

The native language of the generation which is 12-13 years old, and even of the generation younger than 20-24 years of age has already become Dutch. [...]. Since their Turkish hasn't developed enough, I don't think *hocas* like me who don't speak Dutch are linguistically apt to teach religious education to those 12-13 years old children. [...]. As I said, I feel inadequate in this regard. And honestly, since I don't understand their language, I'm not able to understand their world either. (*Hoca* 9)

The same practice of relying on a trainee was observed at the classes in *Milli Görüş* mosques as well: whenever necessary, second generation *hocas* or trainees would translate the Turkish terms into Dutch to improve children's understanding. Again, similar to the experience reported at *Diyanet* mosques, an educational coordinator at *Milli Görüş* observed that many first generation *hocas* find it challenging to connect to the students in their classes due to language issues:

There is the language problem. The children don't get the jokes told by them. They have to tell the children also where to laugh. In other words, if you fail to establish emotional and linguistic connection, there isn't much you can offer to these children. (Key Figure 2)

In the cases in which the *hocas* was competent in Dutch, Dutch was used as a second or complementary assisting language in all of the observed classes. For example, sometimes the *hoca* would ask the question in Turkish and the children would respond in Dutch, or alternatively, the children would ask a question in Dutch and the *hoca* would respond in Turkish. Often, classmates would also be involved in translating unclear Turkish concept into Dutch for the rest. Furthermore, code-mixing, or using words from both Turkish and Dutch within the same sentence, occurred in all observed classes. To illustrate, sometimes during our classroom observations the students would ask: “*Welke harf is dat?*” (“Which letter is that?”, where *harf* is the only Turkish word), or they would say: “*Ama o beni prik yapıyor*” (“But he is bothering me”, where *prik* is the only Dutch word). There were very rare occasions in which the class was exclusively conducted in Turkish. This was the case at a *Milli Görüş* class which was taught by an elderly first generation male *hoca*, and at a *Diyanet* class taught by the imam who has been just recently appointed to the Netherlands. Also, there were very rare occasions in which the class was (almost) exclusively conducted in Dutch. For instance, this was the case at a class at the *Milli Görüş* mosque which was taught by young

second generation female *hoca* who showed preference for Dutch as the main medium of instruction since both she and her pupils were more proficient in it. This was also the case at an ethnically mixed classroom at the *Diyanet* mosque, in which some of the students came from non-Turkish Muslim backgrounds. Although their *hoca* was a long-term resident of the Netherlands, she was aware that her Dutch language skills still needed improvement:

I'm trying to manage somehow [teaching in Dutch] but of course, I cannot express myself very fluently, sometimes I'm stuck. And I know what's the reason behind my inadequacy, I don't have people to practice with. [...]. Naturally, language is one of the biggest issues we face. Their Turkish is not good enough, so they don't understand everything. And my class is mixed. I have the only mixed class. There are foreign Muslims in it. Now there are Africans, but previously there were also students from Surinam. (*Hoca 7*)

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Our findings indicate that mosque education provided by the Turkish Islamic communities in the Netherlands shows significant similarity in terms of its organization, learning goals, curriculum content and language policies. Members of all three communities point to the importance of teaching the children the five pillars of Islam, the life and teachings of the prophet Mohammad, and Islamic rules of behavioral conduct so that they learn “how to be a good Muslim”. Instilling a Muslim and Turkish identity in the students appears to be an overarching objective of providing mosque education that is prioritized over the transfer of knowledge. The fact that the curriculum of all three communities includes some knowledge of Turkish cultural traditions and history is also suggestive of the goal of building emotional ties between the otherwise distant Turkish nation-building rituals and the life-worlds of the second and third generation Dutch-Turkish children. In this regard, our findings resonate only to some extent with the learning goals of mosque education as depicted by El Bouayadi-van de Wetering (2012), and ter Avest and Bakker (2017). On the other hand, our findings seem to refute the conceptualization of Hussain (2004) according to which the question of identity is seen as secondary to the objective of mosque education.

Furthermore, it seems that the imams and the *hocas* implicitly try to implement the Islamic educational approaches of *tarbiyah* and *ta'lim* discussed by Hussain (2004) and Sahin (2013). This is seen in their concern about their own inability to connect with the life-worlds

of their students, and hence, to offer the nurturing context-specific guidance implied by these concepts. There seems to be an intrinsic link between the ability to teach in accordance with *tarbiyah* and *ta'lim* and the weak Dutch language skills of some *hocas*, as Dutch is the dominant language of the students. Nevertheless, the language policies of all three communities show a conscious preference for Turkish as the main medium of instruction as students' proficiency in Turkish language appears to be an important learning goal for the mosque communities. This seems to be comparable to language policies of the Moroccan and Surinamese Islamic communities in the Netherlands who also choose their national languages as the medium of instruction in the mosque classrooms (ter Avest & Bakker, 2017).

Last but not least, the findings suggest that imams and *hocas* from each community recognize a number of challenges of teaching Islam to children growing up in a non-Muslim country with materials targeting their peers in Turkey. Despite sharing this awareness, the educational practices of the three communities differ in their extent of harmonization of their teaching practices and materials with the Dutch context. For example, the classes of *Milli Görüş* seem to be more influenced than the education of the *Süleymanlıs* and *Diyanet* by borrowing from the Dutch educational system (e.g. stronger emulation of the educational environment and grouping strategies of the schools). It is remarkable that the practices of emulation happen in a context in which collaboration between mosques and schools is virtually non-existent. Rather, these processes are facilitated by the recruitment of second-generation *hocas* who are themselves familiar with the Dutch system, and possibly, by the educational vision the community imparts to its *hocas*. This finding provides a comparative perspective to our case-study on the re-contextualization of mosque pedagogy imported from Turkey to *Diyanet* mosques in the Netherlands (Altinyelken & Sözeri, 2019). Moreover, as illustrated by the presence of a curriculum content on teaching allegiance to Turkey (e.g. teaching the Turkish national anthem, and textbooks chapters identifying Turkey as a fatherland), the national identity building function of the curriculum appears to be most prominent in *Diyanet's* mosque education. It seems to aim at identity construction of the pupils not only as Muslims, but also as Turkish citizens. Linking back to the recent research on the politically contested role of *Diyanet* abroad (Maritato, 2018; Öztürk & Sözeri, 2018), mosque education appears to provide additional ground for expanding the authority of the institution over the lives of the diaspora youth. These findings might have implications for the development of sense of belonging and identity negotiation processes of the Turkish-



Dutch youth attending mosque classes at *Diyanet* mosques. *Hocas*, parents and students alike might be aware of these implications, as our previous study on *Diyanet's* mosque pedagogy indicated that there is a strong demand by these three groups for adapting the educational practices more to the Dutch context (Altinyelken & Sözeri, 2019).

A further empirical research on the educational practices in the mosques might provide insights on whether and to what extent mosque education plays a role in the social integration and feelings of belonging of Muslim children from immigrant background. To echo Hussain (2004), future empirical research might help us understand whether the mosque classes act as a facilitator helping Muslim children to bridge the gap between the traditional Islamic way of life of their (grand)parents and the non-Muslim society they are part of. In this regard, potential directions for future research include studies comparing the teaching practices of the different ethnic and sectarian Islamic communities, and studies investigating the cooperation between the mosques and the schools attended by the same students.