

Warwick-Berlin International Forum on

Philosophy of Islamic (Religious) Education

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and University of Warwick

Convened by Prof. Dr. Tuba Işık & Dr. Abdullah Sahin

5th December 2025

Education Studies/RE Context:

There is a growing debate about the relevance and desirability of publicly funded religious education in a fragmenting, secular world in the grip of an anti-globalisation, nationalist/populist politics, increasingly turning authoritarian. The degree to which RE can facilitate critical religious literacy, interfaith dialogue, as well as cultivate meaning and inspire ethical self-awareness and moral conduct have been questioned. The European RE models are shaped by each country's distinctive historical, cultural, educational and, critically, Church-state settlements. These national RE systems range from various types of confessional/denominational approaches to secular educational framings such as multi-faith RE and more recently the ethics/philosophy-focused 'worldviews' paradigm.

RE has been criticised by minoritized faith communities for misrepresenting their religious traditions and the secular, liberal educational establishment that advocates children's rights, agency and well-being (Clayton, 2025). Parents retain the right to withdraw their children from public RE. For example, in Germany, Jewish communities commonly withdraw their children from RE in favour an exclusive Jewish instruction offered at home and faith-based educational institutions. Similarly, a significant percentage of British Muslim families choose to home school their children or send them to Islamic ethos schools. However, over time distinctive, philosophical and theological foundations (educational philosophies) informing RE in the Western European mainstream schooling have emerged. In England, J.M Hull's work provided a critical philosophical and theological justification of a non-confessional, inclusive RE while Karl E. Nipkow, from a Protestant perspective, offered a new theoretical framing of confessional RE in Germany. Similarly, there have been Catholic approaches to RE as well as explicitly non-religious philosophical framings of RE.

Islamic (Religious) Education Focus

Post 2nd World War mass migration to Western Europe has resulted in the permanent settlement of growing Muslim communities in Europe, a phenomenon that has contributed to the continuing social, educational and political significance of religion in modern secular Europe. This has paved the way to the establishment of Islamic educational institutions (set up by Sunni/ Shia Muslim communities) to transmit Islamic traditions across generations within an ethnically/culturally plural post-colonial European/Western Muslim *ummah*. With the increasing politicization of the Muslim presence in Western Europe (i.e. concerns over 'integration, assimilation and isolation' of Muslim minority communities in liberal secular European societies) education, in general, and religious education, in particular, have emerged as significant areas of policy development. The policies of containment and securitisation have led to formation of a state-sponsored Islamic Religious Education within secular schooling in many countries. Islamic Religious Pedagogy Departments as well as Islamic Theology Faculties (alongside the well-established Catholic and Protestant equivalents) have been set up to train Muslim teachers and faith leaders with the long-term goal of engineering an indigenous, European/Western Islam.

However, the theoretical (philosophical and theological) foundations of modern Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Europe, as a subject within mainstream secular curriculum, have yet to be worked out. IRE in the modernised/westernised educational systems of Muslim majority countries, reflect similar shortcoming: its primary focus is to achieve citizenship goals of a nationalist educational philosophy rather than facilitate critical religious literacy and faith development. It needs to be stressed that Islamic Education cannot be confined to a curriculum subject. It signifies a broad, faith-embedded, educational philosophy with a distinctive set of ontological, epistemological and axiological principles which, as Sahin proposed (2018), delineate a cross disciplinary field of 'Islamic Education Studies'.

Despite the rich, critical educational heritage of Islam, amply described by a plethora of historical studies, surveying educational views of classical Muslim philosophers and theologians, there hasn't been much innovative theoretical thinking capable of addressing contemporary contexts i.e., guiding curriculum design, pedagogical practice, assessment and teacher training in modern Islamic (Religious) Education. Responding to this gap, Işık (2021) proposes a paradigmatic shift in Islamic Religious Education, by grounding the subject on a firmer theological-anthropological foundation.

Following the First World Conference on Muslim Education in 1977 in Makka, Al-Attas proposed a theoretical approach to Islamic Education (the infamous 'Islamisation of knowledge' project) that has been highly influential. The anti-Western and anti-secular rhetoric of the model has ensured its persisting appeal. However, the weak theological grounding of Al-Attas' conception of education in Islam (its linguistic essentialism, philosophical perennialism, and disciplinarian pedagogy of moral formation reproducing the stagnant educational culture of *taqlid*) has been criticised by Sahin (2014, 2018, 2024). The need for innovative perspectives in Islamic Educational theory has been widely voiced by researchers, practitioners and policy makers in the field, including the related subfields of Muslim Chaplaincy and Counselling. The controversies over the study/teaching of Islam in secular higher education (Islamic Studies) persists: Islamically committed academics often interpret it as a form of (confessional) theological study while secular academics frame it within the pedagogical culture of (neo)orientalism and coloniality informing much of modern Western Social Sciences and Humanities.

We invite you to join us to explore the theoretical foundations of Islamic Religious Education and Islamic Education in the modern world. Although the discussion will be mainly focused on mainstream schooling, philosophical approaches to modern Islamic Higher Education will also be covered.

Below are some of the questions that will be raised to facilitate the conversation:

- *What are the weaknesses/strengths of the literature (current research) examining theoretical issues in Islamic (Religious) Education?*
- *What are the disciplinary contours of educational philosophy in Muslim intellectual heritage?*
- *What are the languages of 'educational imagination' in the 'Islamicate' Muslim civilisation?*
- *What was the impact of ancient Greek, Indian and Persian science and wisdom traditions on the formation of classical Muslim educational culture and thought?*
- *What is the role of 'educational theorising' in managing conflict & post-conflict reconstruction and peace building in Muslim majority societies & minority communities?*
- *How do Sunni and Shia approaches to philosophy & Islamic educational philosophy converge & diverge?*
- *How are 'education, educational good and spirituality of education' imagined in Islam?*
- *Are there distinctive civic aims of education (and pedagogy) in Islam?*
- *What role does theological anthropology play in shaping a contemporary philosophy of IRE?*
- *What are the main theoretical issues facing Islamic theological Education in Europe?*
- *How do Islamic (neo) traditional revivalism and modernist reformism define education?*
- *Are there recognizable philosophies of teaching/learning Islam in the modern world?*
- *What is the role of 'hermeneutics' in developing a contextual, learner-led and plural philosophy of Islamic (Religious) Education?*
- *What is the scope of a dialogue between Western secular and Islamic approaches to education?*
- *How to position theoretical discussions in Islamic Education in the face of persisting coloniality in contemporary Eurocentric educational philosophy?*
- *Can Western conceptual analysis frameworks such as 'intersectionality, critical theory, feminism, phenomenology' be adapted/adopted in Islamic educational theorising?*
- *What are the challenges/opportunities of AI in theory building in IRE?*

A detailed programme of the event will be circulated near the time. Following the inaugural **online** meeting, future in-person meetings of the Forum at Warwick and Berlin are planned. Papers presented in the Forum will be considered for publication in a special issue of a related international academic Journal. If you are interested in joining the **Online Forum**, please prepare a max 300-word abstract outlining the key questions and issues related to the theoretical foundations of Islamic (Religious) Education you want to examine.

Please send your abstract to sekrelpa@hu-berlin.de by **31st October 2025**. For further information contact:

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