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Research Article

Islamic Education in Christian Basic Schools in Iraqi Kurdistan Region

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Abstract. This essay highlights the distinctive educational environment in which different religious affiliations coexist by examining Islamic teaching within Christian schools in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan

Region. Examine policies and practices that permit the teaching of both Islam and Christianity in Christian schools, fostering an environment of tolerance and respect for students of many faiths. The Paper employs qualitative techniques, such as in-depth interviews with stakeholders, to reveal the obstacles and achievements of this instructional paradigm. The findings show that Islamic education and the cohabitation of Christian and Muslim pupils promote moral growth and social cohesiveness, which in turn promotes a tranquil and harmonious community. The paper highlights how Christian schools can adapt as models for interfaith discourse and Islam in particular against Quran coming out of erroneous interpretation without proper knowledge or qualification.

Keywords : Islamic Education, Christian Education, Christian Schools, Basic Schools, KRI.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity is becoming a more prominent feature of the modern educational scene, especially in religious institutions. Since Christian schools accept students from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds, they play a significant role as hubs for interfaith engagement. This essay examines the dynamic environment of Christian schools in Iraqi Kurdistan Region, which promote an environment of peace and respect for all students by offering Islamic education to Muslim students.

As seen by the different approaches used in Greece and England, religious connections have a considerable impact on the content and organization of educational programs across the world. Greece keeps its religious system monotheistic, whereas England has been pluralistic since 1689, and as a result, its curriculum is inclusive and covers a variety of religions. There is a rising awareness of the value of teaching tolerance and understanding among students from many origins, as seen by the trend toward incorporating diverse religious teachings within educational settings. Interfaith dialogue should be covered in the curriculum, according to academics like Kao and Thompson (2003), who contend that this kind of education is essential for fostering harmonious relationships in society.

Those schools are becoming more and more important venues for fostering interfaith cooperation and societal harmony. In the end, this article will show how Christian schools support a more accepting and tolerant society by examining the procedures and difficulties they encounter when providing both Christian and Islamic instruction.

METHOD

The Paper methodology outlines the systematic approach to understanding basic Islamic education policy in Christian minority schools in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviewing, are employed to gather insights from various stakeholders, including students, and officials from the Ministry of Education (Sarokhani, 2007; Eisner, 2017; Lukosius, 2014).

The article focuses on Christian minority primary schools in Erbil, which represent the largest minority community in the region. The study community includes 10 Christian basic schools, composed of 8 public and 2 private schools, providing valuable data on educational policies affecting these communities (McDowall, 1996; Jambaz, 2013; Hanna & Barber, 2017).

Any Paper must have limitations to be handled by confining the data and research methodology (BRYMAN, 1988). The sampling technique also allows a researcher to pick a small but representative sample that includes all of the study's fundamental qualities while also reflecting the population's variability. Due to logistical constraints, a representative sample of students, and officials from the Ministry of Education will be recruited. This approach acknowledges the limitations inherent in the Paper and allows for a more focused analysis of the specific issues faced by these schools (Creswell, J. W. 2009; Giddens, A. 2009).

Data collection Procedures involves a method: semi-structured interviews. Interview is the most popular and beneficial technique of data collection for qualitative research, the Paper will use in-depth interviews to acquire thorough information from specialists (Wertz et al., 2011). Interviews provided qualitative insights into the experiences of educational stakeholders (Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E, 2005). Interviews were conducted in Kurdish and Arabic to facilitate comfort and rapport with participants. Before each interview, participants received an outline of the study and consent forms, ensuring transparency about the Paper process. In addition, the researcher utilized the interview approach to take notes or record the interviews during the session. Finally, with the interviewers' agreement, the replies were recorded (Strauss, & Corbin, 1998).

The analysis involved coding and categorizing data from interviews to identify themes related to Islamic education policies. Both manual and digital methods are employed to enhance the rigour of the analysis, aiming to generate comprehensive insights into the educational experiences of minority students (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Jackson II et al., 2007).

Religious Pluralism

Below are the results based on papers and studies conducted around the world. The literature shows different outcomes which are discussed later.

Christian schools have diverse Religious groups from various sects and cultural backgrounds, who coexist peacefully and embrace one another. Religious affiliations influence a country's religious education program. Greece is mono-religious, while England has a pluralistic Christian tradition since 1689 and a significant multi-religious presence since 1689. England's religious education now teaches six major world religions (Hull, J. M. 2024). This section explores a shift in the educational landscape towards Christian schools that embrace students from different religions, such as Islamic students. It is fascinating to learn about Christian

schools that provide Christian instruction to their Christian students and also offer Islamic education to their Muslim pupils. For example, how to interact with people of other faiths should be a required topic in every school curriculum (Kao & Thompson, 2003). Awi & Foluke (2021) also mention that this is in terms of giving equal rights to all followers of different religions and teaching students tolerance towards each other, they believe that tolerance is the cornerstone of peaceful relations in society.

According to a study done by Duke (2016) in Christian elementary schools, some individuals are worried that the Islamic religious education curriculum in Nigeria could be detrimental to Christian religious education and its adherents. The Muslim belief that Jesus is not the Son of God and did not die influences Christian ideas that have disturbed parents about their children because of hybridity and the multicultural nature of religion in society. Transactions have long been considered the foundational principles of Christianity. As a result, pupils in Christian schools feel certain that believers' hearts securely contain the essence of Jesus Christ (Green, 2020).

"Integrated" schools have made it their mission to work as closely as possible with all ecclesiastical and religious organizations while adamantly defending their autonomy from all forms of religious authority. These latter schools typically centre their religious instruction on the idea that kids from all backgrounds should spend as much time as possible together. While some traditional church hierarchies have expressed objection to the "Integrated" schools, many others see them as a crucial sign of how to establish a more stable political climate in Northern Ireland (Richardson, N. 2024).

Similar findings were made by Pike (2005), Watson (2010) and Hoon (2014), who discovered that in some Christian schools, interactions between Muslims and Christians can spark debates between them due to their divergent worldviews or methods of approaching problems. For example, Schools in Indonesia assert that all pupils receive an equal education. Muslim pupils are being included in Christian events by Christian schools. There hasn't been much racism at their school. Christian schools must strike a balance between upholding their religious identity and fostering ideals of tolerance, pluralism, and respect.

According to Sidarous's (2011) study in Egypt, Catholic Christian schools invited Muslim teachers to teach. Although it is not yet common in Egypt for Muslim teachers to teach in Christian schools, it has since been allowed under Vatican guidelines and documents allowing ordinary people and other religious followers to teach in Christian schools. Currently, some Muslims hold some Christian school management positions.

The Liberal Studies textbooks fail to effectively discuss Islam and Muslims, resulting in mixed, balanced, neutral, or positive representations. Negative discussions, such as terrorism and gender oppression, often lead students to view

Muslims as sexist, patriarchal, and hostile to cultural diversity. This does not help students learn about differences or Muslims in Hong Kong or worldwide, who face prejudice and discrimination when their religion is misunderstood (Jackson, L. 2015). According to the literature found in Christian basic schools, some Muslim pupils do not teach Islamic education. The sole endeavour is to terminate bias and foster an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance at Christian institutions, where a small number of Muslim kids are enrolled.

Social Coexistence

Christian schools in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region embrace diversity by bringing together students from different religious groups, contributing to their harmony and peaceful life. The harmonious interaction between Christian and Muslim students attending Christian schools, where they are taught from separate Christian and Islamic textbooks.

Apart from a few Christian families living peacefully in Muslim areas, Christians have their areas. For example, in Erbil province, Ankawa district next to Erbil city is home to Christians. The same is true of Diyana district and Hermota village. Muslims and followers of other religions often surround Christian areas. In addition to geographical factors, many social and administrative factors have caused non-Christian students to attend Christian schools. Aymanwil who is an official in the Ministry of Education offered an additional explanation:

“Non-Christian students attend Christian schools for a variety of reasons, including the ideal coexistence of peers who do not experience prejudice or discrimination. They choose because they are convinced that studying in Christian schools is sometimes better. They will also have religious education available and teachers and students will be treated kindly. As a result, eight out of ten public and two private basic schools currently have non-Christian students.”

Regarding the stages of Christian students going to Christian basic schools, an official named Manuel in the Ministry of Education classified the process into three stages, he added:

“Since the late 1970s, when the government's offices were first opened in Ankawa, government employees, mostly Muslims, have settled in the area. The children of these families went to Christian schools. During religious education, Christian students took Christian education, but Muslim students went to the school grounds and took breaks. Since the 1991 uprising, Muslim families have moved more to Christian areas, especially Ankawa.

Islamic Education

Due to the geographical and social proximity between followers of different religions in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, the number of non-Christian students in Christian basic schools has increased. From now on, according to the law, if the

number of followers of any religion in a class reaches 10 students, the government will provide teachers and religious programs to study separately from their religion. In the third phase, after 2014, when ISIS invaded the region, millions of refugees from central Iraq and war zones fled to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Like other parts of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Ankawa was a peaceful and non-fighting area, with many refugees settled there, so Christian schools became more religiously and ethnically diverse.”

A student participant in the study talks about religious educational lessons in Christian schools. Naeim, an 18-year-old student from Hermot, describes how Christian students studied Christian education and Muslim students studied Islamic education at the same time in their school:

“We were Christian and Muslim students together in a Christian school. We were in the same class together in all subjects, but during religion classes, Christians went to one classroom to learn Christian education and Muslims went to another classroom to learn Islamic education. So we have no religious problems.”

Similarly, Ashwr, a 16-year-old student from Ankawa, describes the same method of teaching Christian and Islamic education in his school. During religious education, Christian students went to one classroom and taught Christian education, while Muslim students went to another classroom and taught Islamic education.

“In Basic school, we had Christian and Muslim students. During religion classes, all the Christian students went to one class and studied Christian education, while the Muslim students went to another class and studied Islamic education.”

In Christian basic schools, Muslim students receive Islamic education just as Christian students do. Participating students talked about how teaching different religious subjects was normal practice during their time as students, believing that all groups including Christians and Muslims have the right to learn about their religion in school. In addition, Muslim students in Christian basic schools agree that they are maintaining their religion by studying Islamic education without any problems. Students of both religions learn and practice their religion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since the 1970s, Muslims have settled in Christian areas for employment and administrative reasons, in addition to the increasing proximity of Christian areas due to urban growth. The displacement of residents from other parts of Iraq to the region has also led to an increase in the number of Muslim students in Christian schools. Therefore, they are taught Islamic education by Muslim teachers in another class. As a result of the interviews, students and educational officials in the Ministry of Education of the Kurdistan Regional Government/Iraq emphasized that this type of teaching is conducted in a very appropriate manner and without any problems.

Christian primary schools in Erbil province, Iraqi Kurdistan Region, include many different religious and ethnic groups. The main ones are Christian and Muslim

students, both of whom share the same subjects, except for religious education. Followers of both religions have the right to study their religion. In a way, at the same time and in the same school, but in different classes, Christian students are taught Christian education by Christian teachers. This ensures the process of transmitting religion to future generations. This is, contrary to the Paper conducted by Pike (2005), Watson (2010) and Hoon (2014), the presence of Christian and Muslim students in the same school has led to more debate and interaction. According to Sidarous (2011), dozens, it is not yet common for Muslim teachers to teach in Christian schools in Egypt, but in Erbil province, Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Muslim teachers have always taught in Christian schools. These Muslim teachers cannot only teach Christian education; otherwise they are free to teach other subjects according to their characteristics. Therefore, in Christian schools, there is an ideal coexistence between students and teachers.

Education serves as a means of socialization and transmission of cultural norms and values. Christian and Islamic teaching availability in Christian basic schools in Erbil province, Iraqi Kurdistan Region, these schools play an important role in preparing students to navigate a multicultural society, reinforcing social norms of tolerance and respect. Promoting shared values such as tolerance and respect in these schools contributes to the moral development of students, which, according to functionalist theorists, is a major function of education to change demographics and social needs. This adaptation is necessary for the stability and continuity of the educational system within a diverse society (Ritzer, G. 2011).

The literature emphasizes the importance of integrating students of different faiths into educational settings. Christian schools are especially popular in places like Iraq and Nigeria for accommodating Muslim students and offering Islamic education alongside Christian teachings. This approach aims to foster tolerance and understanding among students from different backgrounds.

Acceptance Of Others

The researcher observed that this type of system is not observed in other Christian schools in the region and the world. As in past Paper discussed Muslim students in Christian schools are given the right to leave the classroom and take breaks during Christian education lessons. Without respecting their rights and providing them with Islamic education, this type of education policy in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region has also prevented a sense of alienation among Christian and Muslim students. They are also taught to accept each other peacefully in practice. This has inspired the establishment of peaceful coexistence.

This experience of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region is the exact opposite of the experience of Greece, which is a monotheistic education, but closer to the experience of England. In the British experience, Muslims are concerned about the lack of state neutrality in the lesson. Similarly, Hong Kong has favoured the subject,

but in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region experience there were no concerns about Islamic and Christian education subjects by Muslims and Christians. Instead, there are equal rights for followers of both religions (Hull, 2024; Kao & Thompson, 2003; Awi & Foluke, 2021; Jackson, 2015). Because of the equal right to education in Christian schools, Christian students receive Christian education and Muslim students receive Islamic education.

Structural functionalism emphasizes the importance of social cohesion. In this context, Christian schools that incorporate Islamic education contribute to social stability by fostering understanding and tolerance among diverse religious groups. This is in line with Durkheim's (1912) concept of collective consciousness, where shared values and beliefs contribute to social cohesion. From this perspective, structural functionalism suggests that different social institutions work together to maintain equilibrium. Christian schools providing Islamic education can reduce potential conflicts between religious groups by promoting dialogue and mutual respect, thereby reducing social tensions (Giddens, A. 2009).

Christian elementary schools play a significant role in shaping the religious and social development of their students. By communicating values from both Christianity and Islam, these institutions contribute to a broader understanding of coexistence and acceptance in multicultural societies. The collaborative educational environment not only enhances the learning experience but also prepares students to navigate a diverse world effectively.

CONCLUSION

One effective example of interfaith cooperation in a diversified educational setting is the integration of Islamic instruction into Christian schools in Erbil. This study emphasizes the value of encouraging tolerance and understanding between kids from various religious backgrounds. These schools foster tolerance and social cohesion in addition to supporting students' religious identities by letting Muslim students study Islamic education alongside their Christian counterparts.

The results show that the cooperative learning environment fosters a feeling of belonging and common values, which are critical for preserving social order in a heterogeneous society. Additionally, the presence of instructors who identify as Christian and Muslim fosters a respectful and balanced discourse that enhances the educational experience for all students and equips them to navigate a varied world with empathy.

Ultimately, this study underscores the potential for educational institutions to act as catalysts for peace and harmony, demonstrating that diverse religious education can coexist harmoniously within a single framework. As such, the model observed in Erbil could serve as a blueprint for other regions facing similar demographic and cultural challenges, reinforcing the idea that education can bridge divides and foster a more inclusive society.

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