DEVELOPING TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT ISLAM IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LESSONS: THE CASES OF TWO SECONDARY GIRLS SCHOOLS IN LONDON

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This presentation will describe an ongoing doctoral research that explores what it takes to develop teaching and learning in Islamic education. Religious education (RE) in both UK and Muslim countries does not often allow Muslim students to deal with various religious phenomena in the classroom (Wilkinson, 2013) and student learning is usually ignored (Sahin, 2013). Thus, the study aims to investigate if and how the theory of Critical Religious Education (CRE) and Variation Theory (VT) contribute to Islamic education in terms of both student learning and teaching development.

Critical Religious Education (Wright, 2007) and the Variation Theory (Marton & Tsui, 2004) will be used as the framework of the study. Critical religious education recognizes religions as controversial and critical about the ultimate order of things and adopts critical judgement as an important method in religious education (Wright, in press). Variation theory, which is a theory of learning, introduces ways to help students learn the object or phenomena in a new way and have a more developed understanding of it (Bowden, 2000). Based on this framework, it is aimed to design a teaching-learning environment in which students are introduced to variation in understanding of Islam and encouraged to critically engage with the varied accounts of religious phenomena in the actual classroom context.

The empirical design of the study takes the form of a qualitative case study and employs the ‘Learning Study’ model (Pang & Marton, 2005) that is an established research tool in the field of education. This study includes two learning studies, the first one has been completed and the second is still in progress. The first learning study was conducted in a secondary Muslim girls school with 28 Year 7 students from two classes and one RE teacher. The second learning study is taking place in another secondary girls school with around 30 Year 8 Muslim students and one RE teacher. The data collection includes pre-test, post-test and research lessons co-planned by the teacher and the researcher. Written task, interviews, and video-recording of research lessons, meetings with the teacher are used as data collection tools. The preliminary findings show that use of CRE and VT had a positive impact on teaching and student learning in RE lessons. Post-test results indicated that there was a substantial change in students’ understanding of the subject. Finally, the study offers educational implications for religious education in both UK and Muslim countries such as Turkey.