



IDENTITY, FAITH, AND RESILIENCE:

Islamic Religious Education in Germany

The rise of anti-Islamism in Europe in recent years clearly shows that individuals and communities face deep and complex challenges not only in social life but also in the field of education. This raises the question of how rights guaranteed within the framework of religious freedoms are hindered in practice and what problems they face.

This book is the product of research based on interviews with teachers of Islamic religious education in Germany, imams and the authorities. It not only examines the effects of the rising Islamophobia in Europe on education, but also tries to reflect the processes of identity, belief and struggle of Islamic religious educators.

Mustafa Temel | Hakan Aydın





IDENTITY FAITH, AND RESILIENCE

Islamic Religious Education in Germany

This study was prepared with the support of the TÜBİTAK
2219-Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Program.

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1st Edition, Cologne, April 2025

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Design | Typsetting | Print
PLURAL Publications GmbH | www.pluralverlag.eu

ISBN: 978-3-949982-70-5

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Foreword

The rise of anti-Islamism in Europe in recent years clearly shows that individuals and communities face deep and complex challenges not only in social life but also in the field of education. This raises the question of how rights guaranteed within the framework of religious freedoms are hindered in practice and what problems they face.

This book is the product of research based on interviews with teachers of Islamic religious education in Germany, imams and the authorities. It not only examines the effects of the rising Islamophobia in Europe on education, but also tries to reflect the processes of identity, belief and struggle of Islamic religious educators.

Although religious education is a constitutional right in Germany, for Muslims it is not only a theoretical right, but also a practical reality that can be practiced on equal terms. Many of the people we interviewed in the course of the research said that they faced prejudice, discrimination and sometimes open violence, not only in the process of providing education but also in an environment where their very existence was questioned. This suggests that anti-Islamism has acquired a systematic structure that extends from social prejudices to educational policies.

Similarly, the individuals we interviewed did not hesitate to point out the shortcomings of their own immigrant and Muslim communities. The fact that Muslim individuals and institutions engaged in self-criticism has been an important indication that they do not approach issues unilaterally and address problems in a holistic manner.

The aim of this book is not only to identify existing problems in the context of the growing Islamophobia in Europe, but also to raise awareness about the social, political, economic

and religious dimensions of Islamophobia. Freedom to receive religious education is not only a constitutional right, but also an indicator of a society's commitment to multiculturalism, equality and justice. However, rising barriers to this right severely hamper the ability of Muslim individuals to give and receive education in their own identity.

"Identity, Faith and Resilience: Islamic Religious Education in Germany" is not only an academic study, but also an important question mark on the future of Europe: The test of societies in the face of diversity will shape the moral and ethical stance not only of minorities but also of the majority. In this context, shedding light on the problems faced by Muslims in the field of religious education is important in order to mobilize not only the conscience of one community but also the global conscience.

In this study prepared with these concerns, we would like to extend our endless thanks to TUBITAK 2219-Overseas Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Program for providing the opportunity for research, to the experts/academics who contributed with their ideas, to the owners of valuable works in the literature, and to the teachers, imams and employees of religious institutions who contributed to the formation of this book through our interviews. Additionally, we would like to thank the Proofreading & Editing Office of the Dean for Research at Erciyes University for the copyediting and proofreading service for this manuscript.

We hope that this work will lead to a deeper understanding of the challenges of Islamic religious education and the growing anti-Islamic sentiment in Europe.

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Dr. Hakan Aydın

Introduction: Islam and Islamophobia in Europe

Political-social events between Eastern and Western countries have increased the interaction between different societies. This interaction has also paved the way for the visibility of cultural distinctions/unions or other societal differences. Migration movements, especially outside of war or similar political events, have also been a factor causing political/social/economic interactions.

Migration movements from Eastern countries to Europe have occurred due to economic factors other than political events. As a result of Europe's need for a labor force and its attempt to meet this labor force by recruiting workers from Islamic countries, the Muslim population started to go to Europe after the 1960s. In the 1970s-1980s, there was a significant increase in the number of Muslim immigrants in Europe. Migration movements that continued until the 1990s were especially to countries such as France, England, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, and Austria (Er & Ataman, 2008, pp. 752-753; Türkan, 2015, pp. 9-11). These migration movements were first initiated/realized by the citizens and ethnic groups of the following countries (Canatan, 1995, pp. 15-34):

Countries of Immigration	Migrant Nationals and Ethnic Groups
France	Muslim countries in North Africa: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia. Türkiye and France's countries of exploitation in the Far East: Indochina and China.
England	Migration from Britain's colonies in the West Indies: Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Arabs, and Turks.
Germany	Türkiye, Greece, Spain, Yugoslavia.
Belgium	African and Mediterranean countries (Morocco, Türkiye, Algeria, Tunisia).

Netherlands	Türkiye, Morocco, Suriname, a Dutch colony.
Sweden	Baltic and Scandinavian Countries. Yugoslavia, Greece, Türkiye.
Switzerland	Spain, Yugoslavia, Türkiye, Portugal.
Denmark	Türkiye, Pakistan, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia.
Austria	Yugoslavia, Türkiye.

As a result of the migration movements towards Western Europe for economic purposes, the Muslim minority groups and the citizens in Europe, fed by the perception of Islam/Muslims based on the impressions of Westerners, started to live together, physically meet, and get to know each other closely.

As a result of these migration movements, which were made for compulsory reasons and started with the acceptance of Europe, Europeans caused problems such as the modern-secular West, integration with people bearing the identity of Islam, inability to create a democratic tolerance ground for Muslims, and tried to keep themselves away from them. For Muslims, this forced displacement has also led to a number of problems (Er & Ataman, 2008, p. 754; Cesari & Esposito, 1999, p. 46).. Having a multi-ethnic social structure, Europe witnessed increased xenophobia and violence, especially in the 90s. Racist arson attacks were committed against houses and places of worship, and physical violence¹ reached dangerous levels along with verbal violence. Organized racism started and anti-immigrant discourses increased (Canatan, 1995, pp. 241, 261).

1 In recent years, psychological, sociological and physical attacks against Muslim immigrants have been on the rise. Muslims who are excluded in social life and marginalized with negative views and comments due to their appearance may also be exposed to life-threatening situations. Attacks on their homes, gathering places such as coffee houses and arson attacks on places of worship are the most concrete examples of this situation. The media's biased and framing approach to these incidents and actions, which oversimplifies the events and gives them little space on the agenda, is striking.

Muslims who started to live in Europe resisted these events and the foreign treatment imposed on them, and started to institutionalize to keep their identity alive and secure their religious life against the assimilation of their children through education (AlSayyad, 2004, pp. 14-16). These institutionalizations date back to the workers' dormitories where people who migrated to Europe in the 1960s stayed for shelter. Muslims living in these dormitories demanded to be able to practice their worship and had their demands accepted. Muslims who moved from the dormitories to the residential areas with family reunions (Yiğit, 2005, p. 108) tried to live with their Muslim identity by establishing mosques and educational centers.

The religious education of Muslims, which has come to the forefront, especially with its increasing population, has been a subject of debate in Europe for many years. The problem of Islamic religious education, which emerged with the need of the first generation of migrant workers to realize their own religious practices and to meet the religious education of their children, has made its impact felt even more with the following generations.. As the population increased, Islamic religious education, which started primarily in mosques, was unable to keep up with the demands. Due to the generation shifts, as well as the impact of social and political events, it became necessary to provide Islamic religious education in different institutions and structures.

For this reason, institutions and organizations have been established in many European countries. Through these institutions, they have carried out activities to meet the needs of Muslims such as religious education for children and adults, providing places for religious worship, creating facilities for worship such as pilgrimage and sacrifice, and funeral organizations. In particular, these institutionalization efforts of Muslims in Europe have been instrumental in Islam becoming a lived religion in Europe today.

Islamic activities that have become so visible in social life have triggered xenophobia and anti-Islamism in Europe, and the visibility of Muslims in social life has started to increase anti-Islam/Muslim attitudes and behaviors such as mosque attacks and hate speech against students.

Today, the issue of Islamic life and Islamic education concerns approximately 50 million Muslims living in European countries (de.statista.com). While this figure constitutes 4.9% of the current European population, studies indicate that even without new immigration movements, the proportion of Muslims in the total European population will increase to 7.4% by 2050, and the Muslim segment in the population of Germany in particular could rise to 19.7% (www.statista.com; www.pewresearch.org).

These indicators show that the European public, policymakers, and practitioners are interested in the religiosity, religious education, and religious education practices of Muslims in Europe, which also concerns many academic fields, especially social sciences. For these reasons, there are many academic studies such as articles, books, etc. from different disciplines on Islamic religious education in Europe/Germany² and this issue

2 For the studies, see: Although there are studies written within the framework of Islamic religious education in Germany that include important information about the religious education of Muslims, there are almost no studies that directly deal with the practice of Islamic religious education and the opinions and expectations of the course interlocutors who play an important role in solving the problems related to the course (Yazgan, 2022, p. 110). However, the following works are among those that focus on Islamic religious education in Germany: Nevzat Yaşar Aşıkoğlu, 1990, Federal Almanya’da İslam Din Eğitimi, İslami Araştırmalar; Cemal Tosun, 1992, F. Almanya’da Yaşayan Türklerin Din Eğitimlerinde Caminin Yeri ve Din Görevlilerinin Yeterlilikleri, Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü; İrfan Başkurt, 1995, Federal Almanya’da Din Eğitimi, Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi; Halise Kader Zengin, 2007, Almanya’da İslam Din Öğretimi Modelleri, Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü; Bülent Uçar, 2010, Islamische Religionspädagogik und Islamischer Religionsun-

still attracts the attention of the academic community.

This study aims to approach Islamic religious education/teaching in Europe from the perspective of Islamophobia on the scale of religious instructors. To contribute to efforts to combat the actions of Islamophobia, such as discrimination, exclusion, prejudice, hate speech, and racism, which threaten the search for global social order, it is necessary to examine it in its various forms, with all its elements, and in detail. For this reason, the study will mostly question how Islam/Muslims are positioned in Germany in terms of religious education/religious teaching and religious instructors with the perspective offered by the historical process on the subject, since Germany has a large Muslim population in Europe and Islamic institutions have a long history and experience.

This study aims to examine the psychological/sociological attitudes that religious teachers are exposed to based on Islamic education, the problems they face in the process of religious education, the problems they encounter in the transfer of religious knowledge, and the Islamophobic attitudes they are exposed to in political, social, cultural, and economic life.

Other reasons for addressing the observations and experiences of religious instructors regarding Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors are that religion is seen as a matter of

terricht in Deutschland: Organisatorische Rahmenbedingungen und didaktische Perspektiven, Recht der Jugend und des Bildungswesens; Ali Özgür Özdi, 2011, *Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik in Europa*, Kohlhammer; Mehmet Bahçekapılı, 2011, *Avrupa’da İslam Din Eğitimi Modelleri*, *Din Eğitimi Araştırmaları Dergisi*; Elif Öztürk, 2015, *Almanya’daki Göçmen Türk Gençlerinin Din Eğitimi Problemleri*, *Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü*; Yaşar Sarıkaya ve Adem Aygün, 2016, *Islamische Religionspädagogik*, Waxxman; Zekirija Sejdini, 2016, *Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik in Bewegung Neue Ansätze in Europa*; Şenay Yazgan, 2022, *Almanya’daki Okullarda İslam Din Dersinden Öğretmenlerin Beklentileri: Baden-Württemberg Örneği*, *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*.

integration, they play a key role in the integration of Muslims in Germany, they are seen as a source of information/reference, they are an element of trust that fulfills the multiplier function of keeping together as a community (Ceylan, 2011, p. 37; Halm, Sauer, Schmidt, & Stichs, 2012, pp. 1-2), and they guide the upbringing of children with religious education/training. These reasons will also lead to a discussion of the traces, depth, and extent to which anti-Islam/Muslim sentiments in Europe, in particular in Germany, are internalized.

In this context, the study, which examines religious education/religious teachers on the axis of discrimination, marginalization, xenophobia, and anti-Islam/Muslim sentiment, will be based on interpretive narrative research, one of the qualitative research designs. Interviews were conducted with 33 Islamic religious education teachers/mams/institution officials who were educated in the field of religious education in Germany, actively working in public institutions, working in adult/child education, and having a certain level of experience.

From this perspective, the study first presents a framework of the historical and legal processes of Islamic religious education in Germany and its current situation. In addition, the design of the research was created and interviews were conducted with the determined research field and research group. After data analysis, validity, and reliability assessments were made, the findings were transferred to the study in line with the categories determined.

1. An Overview of Islamic Religious Education in Germany

Religious education in Germany is a right guaranteed by law, as stated in Article 7 and paragraph 3 of the German Constitution (www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de). Considering the rights to education and training essential for the internalization of fundamental rights, the state guarantees religious education by law and tries to provide all kinds of support for the learning and fulfillment of these rights.

As a constitutional requirement, religious education is integrated as part of all types of schooling under state supervision. However, the content regulation is the responsibility of religious communities (Uçar & Sarıkaya, 2009, p. 90). The relationship between the German state and the churches and religious communities responsible for religious education dates back to the 1919 Constitution of the Weimar Republic. According to this constitution, the state has no official religion and that state-religion relations should be kept separate. In this case, the state's cooperation with religious communities and institutions was approved, and this was deemed necessary to meet the demands for religious education. With the 1968 law, religious education was introduced in the country's schools from the first grade onwards. Although the German state does not have the duty to protect and propagate religion, due to the article on religious education in its constitution, the state considers religious education as a public duty and therefore has the same responsibility for religious education as it has for subjects such as mathematics, physics, and history. The state is involved at every level of religious education, from the curriculum to the training of teachers. However, according to the constitution, the education to be provided must be compatible with the principles and ideas of religious communities. This is because there are sectarian differences. To prevent any difficulties in

the implementation of religious education, the state is obliged to appoint people selected by the religious communities to act as interlocutors. At this point, both the state and the churches/communities have their own obligations in religious education. The state is responsible for both hiring the teacher and paying his/her salary. The churches/confessions are obliged to monitor the content of the course for conformity with the state and the constitution and to ensure the competence of the teachers who teach religious education in schools. Therefore, the state leaves the congregations free in religious education in terms of the preparation of curricula and textbooks, the administration of the courses, the selection of programs for classes, and so on. Due to this flexibility, some regions offer religious instruction for various sects and religions in addition to Protestant/Catholic sects. Those who do not belong to any denomination attend ethics or philosophy classes. Regardless of which religion they attend, students are informed about other religions by their teachers. In this way, students have the opportunity to become familiar with the expressions or symbols of their own religion as well as those of other religions. Pupils are also free to enroll or deregister from religious education in Germany. In some schools, religious education is compulsory. The process and method of religious education in Germany, which can be summarized in this way, varies in each state and schools may have independent systems (Anger, 2010, pp. 43, 46-48; Kurnaz, 2019, pp. 12-17; Başkurt, 1995, pp. 116-121; Mete, 2024).

It is possible to express the basic form³ of religious education in Germany in this way. However, regardless of these processes, it was the masjids and mosques that first tried to meet

³ Policies on religious education vary considerably across Germany. In general, the German practice is to provide denominational religious education in schools and to have it provided by religious communities under government supervision. By law, any community with a sufficient number of students can participate in this program (www.euro-islam.info).

the needs of Muslims in Germany to learn and fulfill religious education, religious duties, and responsibilities.

At this point, the origins of Islamic religious education in Germany emerged in the early 1970s, when Muslim labor migrants who did not return home began to organize and establish mosque associations.. As Muslims lacked space for gatherings, solidarity, and congregational prayer on important days, they initially created spaces to meet their needs, and over time they established mosques and non-governmental organizations like associations and foundations. In mosques, people with religious knowledge were assigned to lead worship services, give religious education to children, and teach the Quran (Nielsen & Otterbeck, 2016, pp. 29-30; Uçar & Sarıkaya, 2009, p. 93). Mosques have been the most important place for the religious socialization of Muslims and have played a central role in religious knowledge transfer, cultural activities, pilgrimage preparations, funerals, weddings, festivals, Islamically-slaughtered meat sale, aid deliveries to crisis areas, zakat distribution, and many other religious and social services. Here, Muslims experienced religious requirements/experiences that schools could not provide (Özdil, 2011, p. 52; Tosun, 1992, pp. 199-202).

These pioneering institutions and organizations have played an important role⁴ in the processes of Muslims' worship and religious education and the training of religious teachers. At the same time, these initiatives have enabled the institutionalization of Islamic organizations in Germany and their ability to legally request the German state to provide Islamic religious education in schools.

4 For detailed information on the institutions that train people to become imams and educators in mosques and training centers operating in Germany, see: Bestandserhebung zur Ausbildung religiösen Personals islamischer Gemeinden, Dr. Christian Funke and Dr. Nadine Halle, Nuremberg, 2020.

Islam is the third most populous religion in Germany after the two major Christian denominations, and its education concerns between 5.3 and 5.6 million Muslims living in Germany (Tanis, 2021), according to the German Ministry for Integration and Migration (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge). As the Muslim population began to increase and to have a presence in social life, many Muslims began to demand religious education for their children in public schools with Islamic religious content from the 1970s onwards. In North Rhine-Westphalia, the Islamic World Congress was the first to publicize the Muslim demand for Islamic education in public schools. In 1978, with the support of several Turkish-Islamic organizations, the results of a parental questionnaire were presented to the Ministry of Education in North Rhine-Westphalia outlining the demands for religious education for students of the Muslim faith. Since 1978, the state has made efforts to systematically develop Islamic religious education. As a result of these efforts, Islamic religious education was offered for the first time in North Rhine Westphalia in the late 1970s (Uçar & Sarıkaya, 2009, pp. 88,94).

In 1979, a curriculum for Islamic religious education for grades 1 and 4 was prepared by the State Institute. When this curriculum was prepared without interaction with Islamic communities, the concept of religious education was changed and the curriculum was prepared to integrate it into the main language classes attended by Muslim students. In the mid-1980s, religious education was introduced for children (Mete, 2024), and Islamic religious education was integrated into mainstream language classes. Around this time, Islamic communities and Muslims began to speak out vocally in favor of Islamic religious education (Nielsen & Otterbeck, 2016, pp. 40-41).

With the rights granted by the German Constitution, communities, and associations have come together under one roof

and applied for Islam to be an official subject in schools. In none of the German Länder is there a state-sponsored Islamic religion course according to Article 7 (3) of the Constitution. There are different reasons why Islam cannot be taught. The most important reason is the lack of a single interlocutor in the Islamic community living in Germany for the preparation of the content of the religion course⁵. For this reason, Islamic institutions and communities established a “Roof Organization”, and after this institutionalization, applications for Islamic religion classes were made by Muslim communities in the states of Berlin, Baden-Württemberg, Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, and Bremen. On November 13, 1998, the Islamic Federation of Berlin, which has been fighting for Islamic religious instruction since 1980, was recognized as a religious community by the Federal Administrative Court of Berlin and has been authorized to offer Islamic religious instruction in Berlin schools since 2000. Prior to this date, Muslim students, especially Turkish students, had to take Islamic religion as an elective subject in “mother tongue education” in the states of Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Schleswig-Holstein, Baden-Württemberg, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Bremen, Berlin, Hesse, and North Rhine-Westphalia. Turkish mother tongue

5 For a long time it was unclear what requirements Islamic associations had to fulfill in order to be recognized as religious communities. For this reason, in order to be considered a religious community and to fulfill the right to request religious education, it was deemed obligatory for the association to fulfill conditions such as the establishment of the association for the fulfillment of a common religious purpose, the multifaceted fulfillment of the tasks determined by the common religious purpose, the members must be real persons, the association must have a mission and belief system appropriate to its structure, etc. (Anger, 2010, pp. 48-49). However, although the state in Germany does not interfere in the religious education matters of other communities, there is direct interference in the content of religious education, especially in matters related to Islam. However, the same difficulty is experienced in the acceptance of Islamic communities. While other religious communities are more easily officially recognized, Islamic communities are faced with many problems and difficulties (İnam, 2024).

education was provided in Turkish by teachers from Türkiye through the consulates in Germany, while Muslim students whose mother tongue was not Turkish attended either ethics classes or, depending on the state, Catholic or Protestant religion classes. After these troubles in the past, Muslims began to attach importance to Islamic religious classes in schools, and over time, participation in Islamic religious classes in schools increased (Kurnaz, 2019, pp. 18-20).

Islamic religious education in schools varies by state. Islamic religious education in schools varies by state. In Berlin, Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg, Hesse, Hesse, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein, Schleswig-Holstein, Thuringia, the introduction and functioning of Islamic religious education can be updated according to the sociological/state structure, the need/demand for religious education, testing and implementation of models. For this reason, there is no single and uniform model for Islamic religious education in Germany. However, it can be mentioned that the following models and examples regarding the process of the beginning of Islamic religious education in public schools in Germany and religious education have been applied to the present day (Mete, 2024; Zengin, 2007, pp. 19-21):

First Model: Islamic Religion classes are given outside the school with the approval of the German authorities. Islamic organizations are active in this course. The course is held outside of school hours with the content that does not violate legal regulations.

Second Model: Religious Knowledge classes are given by diplomatic representatives to Muslim students on an Islamic basis within the framework of the Mother Tongue Completion Course. This course is taught by teachers from Türkiye or the

Islamic States with their own programs. In the states of Baden Württemberg, Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg, Saarland, and Schleswig Holstein, classes are organized according to this model.

Third Model: Religious Knowledge course is provided to Turkish students on an Islamic basis within the framework of the Mother Tongue Completion Course by state education authorities. The course is taught in Turkish by Turkish teachers within the framework of the Turkish Language Completion Course. In Bavaria, Hesse, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Rhineland-Palatinate, the lessons are taught under state supervision.

Fourth Model: Regular classes for Muslim pupils include a Religious Culture or Ethics course based on Islamic value concepts. The course is taught in German, with a two-hour program in German, by German or foreign teachers. It is implemented in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Fifth Model: As part of regular classes, Turkish students are taught religious knowledge on an Islamic basis with programs prepared by the Turkish side. The course is taught by Turkish teachers in Turkish for two hours. The cooperation of the Turkish government is required to run this course.

Sixth Model: Religious Knowledge Classes classes are taught to Turkish students on an Islamic basis as part of regular classes with German programs. Turkish or foreign Muslim students are taught two hours in German by Turkish or other Muslim teachers. It is practiced in Bavaria, Hamburg, and Lower Saxony.

Seventh Model: Islamic Religious Education, which is offered to Muslim students as a regular subject in cooperation with Islamic religious communities. The religious instruction is taught in German by German or foreign Muslim teachers. This model is the most constitutionally compliant for sectarian reli-

gious instruction. It is being tested in Bavaria and other states.

The above models, which were implemented in the past, continue today as follows (Aydın, 2017; Suiçmez, 2024):

Berlin: The Islamic Federation offers courses in accordance with the constitution.

Lower Saxony: “Faith-based” religious instruction is provided under the control of an advisory board model in which religious communities are jointly represented.

North Rhine Westphalia: “Faith-based” religious instruction is provided under the supervision of a commission with joint representation of religious communities.

Hamburg and Bremen: A special model in which all religions are taught in mixed classes with students of all faiths is provided. This model, which is called Religionsunterricht für Alle (Rufa), is defined as religious education for all.

Hesse: “Faith-based” religious education is offered under the control of the communities.

Baden Württemberg: “Faith-based” religious education controlled by a state foundation, including the Association of Bosniak and Islamic Cultural Centers is implemented.

Bayern: “Islamic Religious Knowledge” model is offered with materials and teachers determined entirely by the state, with no involvement of Islamic communities.

Rhineland Palatinate: Religious education is provided in coordination with local mosque associations, but with “faith-based” religious instruction determined by the state.

Schleswig-Holstein: The “Islamic Religious Knowledge” model is implemented without any involvement of Islamic communities, with materials and teachers determined entirely by the state.

Saarland: “Islamic Religious Education” model is practiced with materials and teachers determined entirely by the state, without any involvement of Islamic communities.

Models of Islamic religious education in schools are being tested in some regions, while in others they are being piloted and tested. In these states, the teaching of Islam may vary according to social and political situations, and for these reasons, the models can be updated and each state can create a different model of Islamic religious education⁶ (Koç & Küçük, 2021, pp. 25-26). Except for some special applications, the common features of the models⁷ are that the language of instruction is German, the organization and supervision (in mosques and schools) are under the control of the state⁸, instructions and

6 For detailed information on the updated models of Islamic religious education in Germany, see: Ali Özgür Özdi (2011, pp. 47-51), *Islamische Theologie und Religionspädagogik in Europa*, W. Kohlhammer GmbH, Stuttgart).

7 The Bestandserhebung zur Ausbildung religiösen Personals Islamische Gemeinden (Questionnaire on the training of religious personnel in Islamic communities), prepared by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees of the Office of the German Islamic Conference, contains information on the institutions that train people to become imams and educators in mosques and training centers. These institutions provide training indirectly, if not directly (it varies by region and state), as a result of state approval. At this point, it can be seen that the activities related to Islamic education in Germany are carried out under the coordination of Germany, and that it is involved in the training of religious instructors in schools and mosques.

8 The main focus of Islamic seminaries in Germany has been to train Islamic religious teachers, imams, and theologians. Underlining this task, in 2012 the then education minister Annette Schavan did not hesitate to openly state that these seminaries had “the chance to approach the Qur’an with a historical-critical method” and that “religion needs enlightenment”. Expressions such as “Islam must undergo a process of enlightenment”, “Islam must be adapted to the times”, “Islam must be reformed”, “Islam must be integrated”, “Islam must accept European laws and values”, “Islam must not be contrary to democracy” are frequently used in discussions in Europe and Germany (Inam, 2023, pp. 24-26). Therefore, it is possible to talk about a direct intervention of the state or even a shaping process/project called German Islam,

curricula are created/controlled by the state, and teachers are appointed by the state (Uçar & Sarıkaya, 2009, p. 98). In addition to these efforts/initiatives towards Muslim education, different Islamic organizations are also implementing separate models of religious education in their mother tongue (Daun & Arjmand, 2005, p. 415).

Demands for Islamic religious education, which first started in mosques and later became institutionalized in schools with the initiatives of Islamic structures, started to increase (Koç & Küçük, 2021, pp. 28-29) and departments and programs about Islam were opened in some universities in Germany due to the need for teachers. The Center for Religious Studies was first established at the University of Münster in 2001 due to political developments on the need to train teachers of Islamic religious studies at German universities (Uçar & Sarıkaya, 2009, p. 99). Münster was the first German university to develop such a course and allow teachers to gain qualifications for Islamic religious education (www.euro-islam.info). In the following years, centers were established at universities such as Erlangen-Nuremberg, Frankfurt/Gießen, Münster, Osnabrück, Tübingen, and later Berlin and Paderborn (Özdi, 2011, pp. 196-227; Funke & Halle, 2020, p. I).

The profile of religious educators has also changed over time. In the 1960s, Muslim immigrants, especially those who came to Western Europe, did not have an adequate infrastructure for the teaching of their religious beliefs in these countries, while very few of the immigrant Muslims had academic knowledge about Islam and most of them had received “mosque education” and were self-taught in religious matters (Bahçekapılı, 2011, p. 22). Today, however, educators with a pedagogical background not only provide religious education to

European Islam, etc., and a control that is so biased that it does not progress equally with the rights provided to other religions.

children and adults in mosques and schools, but also strive to build Islamic life and Muslim identity through social activities.

Despite the development of religious education that started in mosques and schools with long efforts and the specialization of religious teachers, there are still situations like the lack of demand for Islamic education in German schools, the shortage of teachers (Uçar, 2023), the controversy on the course's existence, which Islam should be given⁹ (Yazgan, 2022, p. 108), who will decide on the course teachers¹⁰, what the criteria will be, the possibility of inadequate/deficient/problematic course materials, the structure, and variability of course content, the language in which Islamic religious education will be taught, the training of teachers or their recruitment from their countries of origin, and the role of mosques. As religious education becomes more widespread, awareness and solutions to these problems are being sought.

In this context, to summarize, the permanent settlement of Muslims in Germany and their growing concern for their children's future and Islamic identity have mobilized them, especially the second generation of Muslim immigrants, in the area of religious education. With the birth of the third generation, for many, the issue of their children's education and upbringing has received significant attention. Therefore, since the 1970s, mosques have been opened, where children and adults have taken Koranic lessons; Islamic religious education has started in some state schools; institutes, academies and private schools recognized or approved by the two states have

9 There are also claims that the reason for the support of the Islam course, especially by some politicians, is that it can make a significant contribution to the establishment of a "German Islam" that is largely separate from Turkish and Arab influences.

10 The German constitution enshrines the separation of church and state and states that the political authority may not interfere with congregations authorized to provide religious education.

been established in Berlin and Munich (Özdil, 2011, p. 46). Considering the approximately 4 to 5 million Muslims living in Germany, about half of whom have German citizenship, the establishment of chairs and faculties in Islamic theology and religious education can be seen as an important and at the same time a historic step regarding the social and structural equality of Muslims in Germany. This step should be taken in view of the desire and need for Muslims to think rationally about their religion and life realities like other religious communities and to address them critically through their own theology and religious education (Takım, 2016, p. 14).

2. Research: Islamophobic Experiences of Islamic Religious Teachers in Europe: The Case of Germany

2.1. Subject, Purpose, and Importance of the Research

Islamophobia, which is characterized by acts such as racism, prejudice, hate speech, discrimination, and exclusion and has become a global problem, is visible in many social, cultural, and political areas. Especially these manifestations of Islamophobia have become commonplace in Western countries.

For this reason, in Western countries, the correct transmission and awareness of Islamic knowledge have a special importance in the integration process. From this point of view, religious education activities in Western countries also contribute to the promotion of Islam, the fulfillment of the basic religious needs of Muslims, and the representation and unifying function of teachers/imams as conveyors of Islamic knowledge. In this context, this study focuses on the function of religious instructors in Europe and focuses on the experiences of Islamic religious instructors concerning religious education/anti-Islam.

Although there are many studies on the Islamophobic attitudes and actions that Muslim immigrants living in Europe are exposed to, it is striking that there are no studies that question issues such as discrimination, exclusion, and hate speech faced by religious instructors within the framework of their rights and freedoms to provide religious education. Therefore, with the perspective offered by the historical process, this study approaches Islamophobia through the issue of religious education.

The study aims to determine the perspective on religious education, the problems experienced by people with Islamic references in the religious education process, the problems encountered in the transfer of religious knowledge, and the Islamophobic attitudes that Muslim immigrants are exposed to in the religious education/training process. For this purpose, the ways of positioning Islamic education and religious instructors, and the Islamophobic attitudes they face in Germany, which has a large Muslim population in Europe and a long experience in providing Islamic education, will be identified and discussed.

Therefore, although receiving religious education in Germany is a fundamental right and freedom, the existence/necessity/status of Islamic education continues to be a matter of discussion. The growing number of issues encountered when receiving and demanding Islamic education, and the increasing amount of information in the German press¹¹ that suggests religious education is a threat to social order/German law that must be kept under control all contribute to the perception of Islamic education as a problem. Given that Islamic religious teaching methods, teachers and students are constantly controlled, scrutinized, and prejudicially criticized, and that Islamic teaching is seen as a threat/obstacle to democracy and integration, it is of particular importance to discuss issues such as religious education in Europe/Germany and the Islamophobic experiences of religious teachers through this research.

11 For some recent examples of media content that discusses Islamic education and uses discriminatory/marginalizing language about people receiving this education, see: "37.3 Prozent aller angehenden islamischen Religionslehrer sehen Juden als ihre Feinde", www.ruhrbarone.de; "Eltern und Lehrer fordern sofortigen Stopp der umstrittenen IRU-Studie in NRW" www.islamiq.de; "Der aufgegeben Kampf um junge Muslime", www.welt.de; "Lehrerverband will Islamunterricht unter staatlicher Aufsicht einführen", www.welt.de; "An Unending Debate in Germany: Islamic Religious Education", <https://gocvakfi.org/>.

In the fight against Islamophobia, Islamic education and experts have an important role in explaining Islam and raising awareness about Islamophobia. From this perspective, the experiences, problems, and observations of religious educators will also shed an important light on the fight against Islamophobia.

2.2. Method of Research: Narrative Research

The study mainly focuses on the Islamophobic experiences of Islamic religious instructors in Germany. In this context, it aims to determine how Islamic religious instructors are defined and positioned, the Islamophobic attitudes and actions they are exposed to, and how they comprehend and interpret this situation. To this end, the study will adopt a qualitative research methodology that focuses on how individuals interpret their experiences, how they approach developments, and how they attribute meaning to them/events. Qualitative research evaluates the concepts/meanings used by individuals and tries to determine what these expressions mean for them. For this reason, qualitative research focuses more on a phenomenon and its meaning.

In this study, narrative research will be used as a qualitative research approach to focus directly on the views, experiences, and perceptions of the sample group. Elements such as narrative and story are a matter of how we understand, perceive, define, and interpret events and phenomena. It is also a process of understanding and making sense. Stories/narratives, which are very important for qualitative research, are based on first-person experiences. First-person experiences form the basis of this approach. Stories, also called “narratives”, are a popular source of data in qualitative research. In this type of research, biography, life history, oral history, and autobiography can be obtained through materials such as interviews, diaries, letters, etc., and can be

analyzed by sequentially organizing them according to the meaning intended by the researcher (Büyükoztürk et al., 2020, pp. 24, 283-284; Merriam, 2009, p. 32). These narratives also contribute to the researcher and the participant gaining a rich perspective on the events. In narrative research designs, researchers describe individuals' lives, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences (Creswell, 2012, pp. 501-502). According to Elliott (2005), in narrative research, the researcher focuses on the stories that will emerge, recognizing that all people have stories to tell. Another instructive aspect of considering the individual in narrative research is to consider whether first-order or second-order narratives are the focus of the research. First-order narratives are those in which individuals tell their own experiences and stories directly from their perspectives. In such narratives, the storytellers directly express their experiences, thoughts, and feelings. For example, telling one's life story or personal experiences is considered a first-order narrative. Second-order narratives are narratives in which a researcher or another person analyzes, interprets, and reconstructs first-order narratives. In these narratives, the researcher uses the information from the first-order narratives to analyze and interpret them in a broader context. For example, when a researcher analyzes life stories collected from participants and writes an article explaining the themes, patterns, and social contexts derived from these stories, this is considered a second-order narrative. In this way, narrative research creates a new narrative/story as a result of a collaboration between the author and the participants/interviewees.

Narrative research (Creswell, 2007, p. 54), which focuses on collecting data by collecting people's stories, reporting individual experiences, and sorting out the meaning of these experiences, is prepared based on the following stages/procedures (Creswell, 2007, pp. 55-56):

- Determine whether the research topic and question are appropriate for narrative research. In particular, the research topic/questions should be of a nature that they provide a detailed description of the lives of a small number of people or their perspectives on a certain subject.
- Individuals are interviewed, time is spent and their narratives are noted and recorded.
- The context between the narratives and the research topic is established.
- Participants' stories are analyzed and then put into a logical framework. Retelling is the process of reorganizing stories into a general type of framework. This framework may consist of collecting the stories, analyzing them with the key elements of the story, and then rewriting the stories to place them in a sequence.

Thus, in narrative research, the stories/experiences of one or more individuals are identified, then data is collected, and reported after re-storying. The implementation of narrative research in this study was prepared according to the stages and examples in Creswell's "Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches", as mentioned in the process above.

In this context, due to the subject matter of the study, narrative research, one of the qualitative research methods, has been preferred in order to examine how religious instructors are defined by their perception due to their profession/status; how they establish a religious, cultural, and social life in Germany; how they describe this process; what kind of prejudice/discrimination and exclusion problems they are exposed to in the process of making sense of themselves and their beliefs, and their experiences regarding Islamophobic attitudes and actions in general, through their own narratives.

2.3. Scope and Limitations of the Study

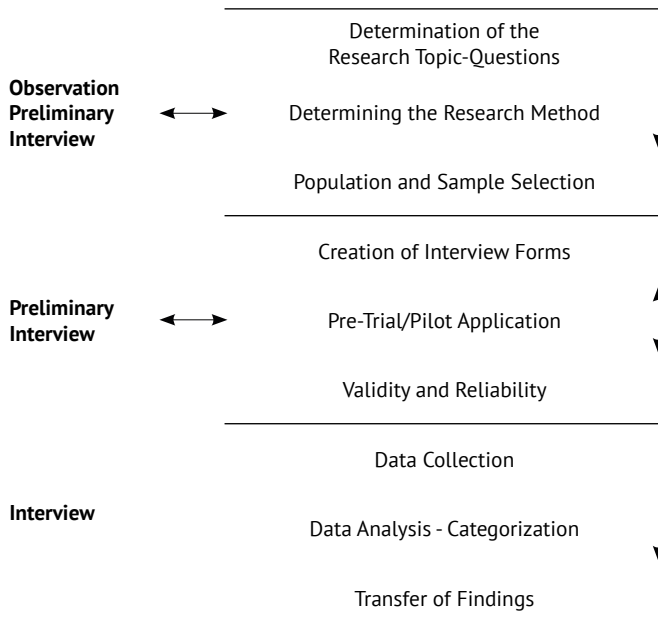
In order to measure the observations and experiences of Islamic religious educators in Europe regarding anti-Islamism, it is necessary to focus on the sociological/political/economic consequences/reflections of the migration movements from Muslim countries to Europe and the current state of anti-Islamism. In addition, it is also important to mention the stages, legal processes, and the current situation of the need for religious education that emerged as a result of the migration movement to reflect the background of the study.

The research was conducted in Germany since the Muslim population is quite large, Muslims have a long history, and Islamic educational institutions have a certain experience. In this direction, first of all, the problems that emerged as a result of the migration movements towards Europe were mentioned. Along with these problems, the historical process related to the issue of religious education, which has become a need, and the historical/legal processes related to religious education in Germany are also included.

In this study, it is deemed sufficient to approach anti-Islamism based on religious education from the perspective of religious instructors who provide Islamic education in schools/mosques/institutions. In this context, the deep historical background of Islamophobia and the media/political issues that lead to the visibility of Islamophobia are not included in this study.

2.4. Research Design

The research was prepared in line with the following stages/work packages:



With the determination of the subject of the study, research problems that could reveal the focal points of the research were identified. After determining the method that could answer the research questions, the selection of the population and sample was completed. The draft interview form was piloted and the final version of the interview form was prepared. After the validity-reliability test, data collection was carried out and the analyzed data were thematized/categorized.

The data obtained from the literature review on religious education in Germany, preliminary interviews with expert academics, observations in institutions providing religious education (schools and mosques), focus interviews with religious educators and administrators of the institutions where religious education is provided have all had a supportive effect in clarifying the subject, creating the theoretical framework of the subject, determining the method and sample group, preparing the interview questions, collecting, and analyzing the data.

2.4.1. Research Questions

In order to examine the relationship between religious education and Islamophobia, the Islamophobic experiences of religious educators will be analyzed in the case of Germany. In this context, the main questions of the research are as follows:

Q.1: What is the perspective on Islamic religious education in Germany, where Islamophobia is on the rise in political, social, and economic life?

Q.2: Do Islamic religious educators in Germany encounter Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors?

The detailed sub-questions created in order to find answers to the research questions are as follows:

- What is the attitude towards Islam and Muslims in Germany?
- How and to what extent does the realization of events associated with Islam/Muslims in different countries affect the perspective on Muslims in Germany?
- In which expressions/meanings are Islamic words and concepts defined/framed and what is the general level of knowledge about the concepts?

- How is Islamic education received politically/socially and theologically in Germany?
- What are the main problems encountered in the transmission of Islamic knowledge?
- Do religious educators encounter any discriminatory, marginalizing, exclusionary attitudes and behaviors in social, political, economic, and religious terms?
- What kind of attitudes do religious instructors have towards negative situations and events associated with Islam and Muslims?

Research questions form the road map of scientific studies. However, especially in qualitative research, the questions are revised and new, sub-research questions are prepared with the interviews conducted in the research field and the feedback obtained. The main and sub-research questions of the study were finalized according to the interviews with the people who told their experiences/stories.

2.4.2. Data Collection Technique

The data collection process refers to the process of activities aimed at collecting information/experiences, seeking answers to the questions/problems prepared for the research topic. In particular, data collection process includes observation, interviews, document analysis, and audiovisual material examinations. While it is possible to use one of these tools in qualitative research, some studies can also utilize more than one technique (such as participant and non-participant observation or both interview and observation in observation technique). In this study, observation and interview techniques were used together.

Observation refers to the researcher's description of objects and events to a certain systematic extent. In communi-

cation research, data can be collected through observation on issues such as people's interactions and their testimonies about events. In this context, field examinations were made in schools, mosques, and other institutions where religious education is practiced, religious lesson trainings and workshops/ in-service trainings for religious teachers were attended, and the outlines of the research and interview processes were clarified. The observation process continued throughout¹² the field research of the study.

The interview technique is based on the interaction of asking questions and receiving answers with the sample group selected in line with the research topic. It is frequently used in qualitative research. During the interview, the researcher is the interviewer as the person who asks the question, while the person who is asked a question and whose knowledge/ story is consulted is characterized as the participant. The main purpose is to determine the experiences and stories of individuals and how they perceive/understand the issues conveyed. The interview/interview technique, which is based on asking questions, receiving answers, and recording, can be conducted face-to-face or through technical communication tools (Creswell, 2007, pp. 132-136).

In this direction, the interview technique was used in the study to measure the thoughts and interpretations of individuals about the subject. Face-to-face and online interview techniques were used together to determine the stories/approaches of religious instructors on the subject.

12 In order to observe the activities of Islamic religious instructors in Germany, training events and activities were attended. In order to experience the repercussions of the recent political and social events (October 7, 2023 Palestine-Israel, etc.) and to observe the impact of these events and how they affect the behavior of religious educators, we visited religious teaching institutions and interviewed educators and political actors.

In this study, an individual interview was conducted for research purposes. The interview was conducted with a semi-structured interview technique with pioneer/experienced experts in religious education.

In semi-structured interviews, interview forms are prepared with questions that can guide the researcher. Along with this interview form, the interview topics can be expanded by asking additional questions to collect information. A semi-structured interview was preferred because it allows the research questions to be examined in depth and the participants to be involved in the process (Merriam, 2009, pp. 89-90; Büyüköztürk et al., 2020, p. 159).

In the study, questions aimed at revealing the participants' personal experiences/narratives expressing their observations/experiences, thoughts, and attitudes on the subject were prioritized. The questionnaire included a brief introduction to the research, a briefing text on ethical issues, followed by demographic questions and basic research questions.

While preparing the interview form, basic questions and then sub-research questions were included to experience the personal observations and experiences of the interviewees. The interview form was revised in line with the opinions of experts and pilot applications were conducted. As a result of the preliminary applications, care was taken to ensure that the questions were appropriate and comprehensible to the research topic and did not contain repetition. Since the interviewees live in Germany and to ensure that the questions consist of common/familiar concepts, the interview forms were prepared in Turkish, English, and German, and the questions were directed in the language of the interviewee's choice. Foreign language answers were translated into Turkish and transferred to the study.

In addition, care was taken to ensure that the research questions were impartial and enlightening. In addition to open-ended questions, additional, clarifying detail/ drilling questions asked during the interview provided detailed information about the experiences/stories of the interviewees on the subject.

2.4.3. Research Area and Research Group

In the context of research, the population refers to the area that contains all the facts, objects, and individuals within the scope of the study, the generalizable structure, and the large group needed to answer the questions for collecting the required data . It can also be defined as the group providing the research data that will be analyzed and interpreted to obtain results. However, in qualitative research, due to the nature of social phenomena, it is not always possible to determine a sample that can represent the universe, so it is difficult to generalize the findings of qualitative research (Büyükoztürk et al., 2020, pp. 82, 263-264). Therefore, the research field of this study consists of Islamic religious instructors working as teachers in schools, imams in mosques, and experts in institutions engaged in religious education activities in Germany.

As the research does not aim to generalize the results statistically, the subject is more important than the representativeness, and qualitative research allows the researcher to determine the sample, the non-probability and purposive sampling methods were preferred in the study. Purposive sampling means that the researcher selects individuals and places according to certain criteria in parallel to the objectives of the study. In addition, purposive sampling is used when the researcher wants to identify case types for in-depth analysis. For this reason, it is obvious that generalizations cannot be made (Neuman, 2006, pp. 320-324). However, purposive sample selection is also based on certain strategies. In this study, typical case and snowball

sampling types were preferred in the sample selection process. Typical case sampling refers to determining a typical representative case from a large number of cases in the population in relation to the research problem and collecting information through this sample. The snowball method is a system in which the sample is expanded by taking the suggestions/connections/information of the people in this selected typical situation and reaching the appropriate person or persons (Büyüköztürk et al., 2020, p. 94; Neuman, 2006, pp. 324-325).

Since the research focuses on the religious education experiences of Islamic religious instructors in Germany, basic criteria such as having a degree in religious education¹³, being active in official institutions, being involved in adult/child education, and having a certain amount of experience (at least two years or more) were decisive. Although there are many teachers/imams who can fulfill these basic criteria, voluntary participation in the interview was also requested because Islamic religious education in Germany has recently been discussed in the media and political arena.

In addition to the basic criteria, the research group also included teachers and imams who were born and raised in Germany, who received undergraduate and/or graduate education in the field of Islamic education in Germany, who lived in Germany but received Islamic education in another country and came back to work in Germany, who came to Germany on assignment from Türkiye, or who had the opportunity to observe from outside. We also included people from institutions that are active in the field of religious education (such as imam/teacher training and train-the-trainer programs) and people

¹³ It is stated that the level of education and training of religious officials working in Germany is quite high, and that these people improve themselves with special religious trainings as well as university education (Halm, Sauer, Schmidt, & Sticks, 2012, pp. 3-5).

who prepare course materials for Islamic religious education, create curricula, or serve as representatives/member in the official institutions of the states related to Islamic education. It was also ensured that the interviewees included officials who were familiar with the history of Islamic religious education in Germany, the legal processes, and the difficulties encountered in these processes, and who were in constant contact with the authorities. In addition, it was thought that determining the perspectives of people who later converted to Islam and worked as religious officials in Germany on Islamic education in Germany would enrich the study.

In the research, attention was paid to having people with representative characteristics and thanks to the snow-ball strategy, different people were reached in line with the suggestions of these typical people.. Although the research group's ability to address the research questions, identify and represent general/specific issues, and draw comparisons was also noted, it should be remembered that the issue of Islamic religious education in Germany varies by state and that the sociological and political structures of the states are not uniform, so the results should be interpreted in this light.

As mentioned, determining the research group in line with the subject and purpose of the research will allow us to explore the main problem of the research. For this reason, special care was taken in sample selection.

In this context, 33 participants¹⁴ were interviewed between

14 Creswell, citing various sources, stated that there are many studies conducted with one or two individuals in narrative research, the number of participants in phenomenological studies can vary from 1 to 325, some sources recommend working with 3 to 10 people, but a larger pool of participants can be used to develop a collective approach (Creswell, 2007, pp. 126-128). There are also studies in which narrative research is conducted with one or more participants to construct a shared meaning (Creswell, 2007, pp. 55, 119-122). In this direction, 33

May 1 and June 2024. The real names and surnames of the interviewees were not included in the research findings, and pseudonyms were used. As stated in the section titled General Characteristics of Religious Teachers, attention was paid to the fact that the sample group consisted of people with different levels of education and experience in many fields of religious education. The data obtained from the questionnaires were framed and interpreted in the form of a main title, five main themes, and 12 sub-categories in which the characteristics of the interviewees were evaluated and the Findings section was prepared.

2.4.4. Data Analysis of the Study

To collect the research data, the characteristics of the sample group were determined through observations and preliminary interviews. An interview program was prepared in line with the study schedule for the identified sample group. Within the framework of this program, the subject, importance, and purpose of the research were explained to the interviewees, brief information was given about the main lines of the study, and an explanation was given about how the interview data would be used for scientific purposes. Preliminary information was also given that the interviews could last between 30-60 minutes on average.

According to Creswell (2007, p. 256), when analyzing data in narrative research, firstly, the data obtained are archived with a file layout. Then the texts are checked and the first codes are created. After coding, a chronology of the stories is prepared and the meanings and emotions determined as a result of the interview are defined/described. With the interview data supported by contextual narration and texts, the general

participants were deemed sufficient to ensure that a common narrative could be questioned in order to determine the Islamophobic experiences of religious instructors in Germany.

meaning of the stories is revealed.

In the study, the data obtained through the interview form were processed on the computer. The data uploaded to the computer were placed according to the research questions and coding was created. The texts were divided into meaningful sections to emphasize the upper and lower topics in the texts, and these coded texts were classified under certain headings, considering the research questions. To ensure the confidentiality of the information of the participants, the general meaning of the data was tried to be discovered by associating the thoughts of the participants with contextual information and meanings according to a certain chronological order, without including the names of the participants, institutions/representatives. Participant opinions that were not answered or emphasized contexts far from the purpose and subject of the study were not included.

2.4.5. Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are concepts that express the quality and accuracy of scientific research and are used to assess whether the research results are reliable and whether the findings reflect reality. The validity and reliability standards of qualitative research are different from those of quantitative research. Especially in qualitative research, it can be stated that reality is multifaceted and there is no quantitative measurement. For this reason, making a comparison between the data obtained and reality is not an issue that will ensure validity. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is also evident in terms of reliability. In qualitative research, the researcher aims to explore, define, and explain the experiences, questions, and issues together with the participants. For this reason, it does not seem possible to ensure reliability with quantitative measurements with differentiated data.

However, there are different aspects of ensuring validity and reliability criteria in qualitative research. In qualitative research, reliability is met when researchers try to record and convey their observations in a consistent and stable manner. Again, the researcher's attempt to present the focused issue in a fair, honest, and balanced way from the perspective of someone who constantly experiences it in social life also expresses validity (Neuman, 2006, p. 286). Other issues such as revising the interview questions, making additions, conveying the views of the participants with direct quotations, and including the results in the qualitative research process also increase the validity of the research.

In this study, some methodological and ethical attitudes were observed to ensure validity and reliability. For this reason, to get good answers to the research questions, the sample group was selected with special care. Many criteria in determining the selected participants were also essential to ensure the validity of the answers to the research questions. Validity and reliability were attempted to be guaranteed by ensuring that the research questions were understandable, clear, would allow for general perception and measurement, and were supported by pre-test interviews with the necessary expert contributions, considering their suitability for the subject and purpose of the research.

Furthermore, by conducting interviews with specialists in the fields of religious studies, educational sciences, sociology, politics, and communication, the entire research process was thoroughly explained, the research questions were established, the sample group was chosen, and the research was written. This allowed the study to be constructed critically and inquisitively, thereby exposing every facet of the research topic.

In addition to the transparency of the interviews with the participants, special care was taken not to be directive during the interviews and in the writing of the findings.

3. Findings

The findings of the research are presented in line with the themes created during the preparation of the questions. In this direction, the findings will be presented under categories such as general characteristics of religious instructors; general level of knowledge about Islam/Islamic words, concepts, and Muslims in Germany; political/social and theological perspective on Islamic education; problems encountered in the transfer of Islamic knowledge; Islamophobic attitudes that religious instructors are exposed to; and ways of combating anti-Islamism/Islamophobia.

3.1. General Characteristics of Religious Teachers

Information about the religious instructors who participated in the research is given in the table below:

Table 1: Main Characteristics of the Sample

Participant:								
Nu.	Name	Gender	Age	Education Status	Life expectancy in Germany	Profession	Work Experience related to Islamic Education	Place(s) of Employment
1	Zeynep	Female	49	Master's Degree	42 Years	Teacher Lecturer	21 Years	School
2	Hasan	Male	51	License	51 Years	Teacher Administrator	22 Years	School NGO
3	Ayşe	Female	37	High School	35 Years	Religious Officer	10 Years	Mosque
4	Zehra	Female	29	Master's Degree	29 Years	Religious Officer	4 Years	Mosque
5	Kemal	Male	51	Master's Degree	27 Years	Teacher	27 Years	School - Mosque
6	Fatma	Female	29	Master's Degree	29 Years	Teacher	10 Years	School
7	Mehmet	Male	48	PhD	48 Years	Lecturer Expert	2 Years	Religious Institution

8	Ahmet	Male	53	Master's Degree	53 Years	Teacher	21 Years	School - Mosque
9	Bünyamin	Male	31	Master's Degree	31 Years	Imam	5 Years	Mosque
10	Mustafa	Male	33	Master's Degree	33 Years	Imam	7 Years	Mosque
11	Süleyman	Male	58	PhD	12 Years	Imam	30 Years	Mosque
12	Yusuf	Male	50	Master's Degree	26 Years	Teacher	21 Years	School - Mosque
13	Serhat	Male	55	License	20 Years	Teacher	15 Years	School - Mosque
14	Sinan	Male	47	License	5 Years	Imam	5 Years	Mosque
15	Metin	Male	55	License	48 Years	Teacher	18 Years	School
16	Hüseyin	Male	56	License	7 Years	Imam	26 Years	Mosque
17	Tarık	Male	47	License	11 Years	Teacher Administrator	23 Years	School- Mosque Dormitory
18	Seher	Female	52	License	40 Years	Teacher Administrator	27 Years	School Dormitory
19	Burcu	Female	38	License	38 Years	Teacher Administrator	3 Years	School
20	Faruk	Male	61	License	52 Years	Teacher Administrator	35 Years	School - Mosque Religious Institution
21	Hülya	Female	56	Master's Degree	36 Years	Teacher Administrator	29 Years	Mosque - Religious Institution
22	Kerem	Male	35	License	8 Years	Administrator	7 Years	Religious Institution
23	Matthias	Male	34	License	34 Years	Expert	2 Years	Religious Institution
24	Ömer	Male	62	License	35 Years	Teacher	34 Years	School Religious Institution
25	Onur	Male	25	License	25 Years	Teacher	10 Years	School - Mosque
26	Kerim	Male	24	Master's Degree	24 Years	Teacher	1 Years	School
27	Merve	Female	28	Master's Degree	28 Years	Teacher	4 Years	School - Mosque
28	Kübra	Female	25	Master's Degree	25 Years	Religious Officer	2 Years	Mosque
29	Yasemin	Female	26	Licence	26 Years	Teacher	1 Year	School
30	Şeyda	Female	30	Master's Degree	30 Years	Teacher	7 Years	School
31	Amine	Female	32	Master's Degree	30 Years	Expert	2 Years	Religious Institution
32	Hamza	Male	50	High School	40 Years	Teacher	8 Years	School
33	Nilüfer	Female	29	High School	29 Years	Teacher Administrator	6 Years	School Dormitory

A total of 33 people participated in the research. Of these, 13 were women and 20 were men. The average age of the participants is 42.

Among the participants, 3 were high school graduates, 14 were bachelor's graduates, 14 were master's graduates, and 2 were doctoral graduates. This indicates that the educational level of the interviewees is quite high.

It is seen that the participants have been living in Germany for an average of 30 years. It can be assumed that they may have a general observation/experience regarding the representation of Islam and the positioning of Muslims in political, social, and media spaces in Germany.

In addition, 13 of the participants work as teachers in schools, 7 as teachers/administrators in schools/religious education institutions, 5 as imams in mosques, 2 as teachers/lecturers in schools/universities, 3 as chaplains in mosques, 2 as experts in religious institutions, and 1 as an administrator in religious institutions. Therefore, it can be stated that our interviewees are working in many fields of religious education such as schools, mosques, dormitories, and religious institutions, and they have a diversity that will enrich the subject of the research with their activities and experiences in different institutions, organizations, and places.

It is seen that our interviewees who participated in the research have many years of experience (4-5 years on average) in Islamic education. At this point, it can be considered that their observations, awareness, and experiences regarding the problems and issues they face in the Islamic education process are quite sufficient.

3.2. The View of Islam/Islamic Words/Concepts and Muslims

In academic studies on Europe and Islam/Muslims, it has

become commonplace to radicalize the concepts related/ associated with Islam and to make them known with a hate speech framework. At this point, in addition to the existing literature, to observe the perspective of Islamic education in the social sphere, this section tries to measure the general level of knowledge and approach towards Islam/Islamic words/ concepts and Muslims in Germany through the observations/ experiences of religious instructors.

3.2.1. Islam and Muslims in the Grip of Integration and Harmony

*Muslims are seen as terrorists.
I can state that.*
(Ayşe, 37, Religious Officer)

The awareness of Islam and relations with Muslims in Europe/Germany have become more prominent/influential as a result of the legacy of the historical process as well as the migration movements, especially to Germany. This influence eventually paved the way for Germans to encounter and interact more closely with Muslims. However, when we look at the Islamophobic manifestations of this interaction, especially in the political, social, and economic spheres in recent history, it is observed that this interaction has not led to a positive trajectory, racist attitudes have increased and ultimately, readings of Islam/Muslims have turned negative. The views and experiences of the participants regarding the definitions/readings of Islam/Muslims in Germany are as follows:

In general, I can say that there is no good approach to Islam and Muslims. (Zeynep, 49, Teacher/Lecturer)

Especially after the events of September 11, 2001, I can say that the negative view of Islam/Muslims has increased and there is more opposition. Today, the closest example is the events between Palestine and Israel on October 7, 2023. After these events,

Islam and Muslims are marginalized and imprisoned in negative meanings and expressions. (Hasan, 51, Teacher/Administrator)

Germans are prejudiced against Islam and Muslims and feel fear. (Fatma, 29, Teacher)

As long as I can remember, as long as I have been living here, there has been a negative perspective towards Islam in Europe. This attitude and perspective has not changed. (Ömer, 62, Teacher)

There is a lot of racism in Germany. There is Islamophobia. We can feel it very strongly. They define Islam as terrorism. There is a constant prejudice. I have been living in Germany for 52 years and I feel it all the time. (Faruk, 61, Teacher/Administrator)

With the rise of right-wing tendencies and thinking across Europe, the perception of Islam is becoming increasingly negative. Despite the fact that Islam is now a well-known religion in Germany, a positive perception has not been formed; on the contrary, Islam is seen as a religion that is marginalized and associated with terrorism and extremism. (Şeyda, 30, Teacher)

Although I don't want to generalize, German society is prejudiced against Islam/Muslims. I think this is especially due to the stereotypical portrayal of Islam in the media. When they have the opportunity to get to know Muslims one-on-one, they usually realize that their prejudices are not true. (Kübra, 25, Religious Officer)

It is important to note that the participants stated that there is a negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims and that Muslims are defined as terrorists. However, it is also stated that prejudice and lack of knowledge about Islam/Muslims are behind these attitudes and approaches.

In addition, some participants state that Islam and Muslims in Germany are defined/interpreted within the framework

of the integration and harmonization process:

Islam has become a reality in Germany. That is why there is a fear in social and political life. That is why they are trying to integrate Islam and Muslims into European life. (Bünyamin, 31, Imam)

In Germany, the fact that Turkish teachers from Türkiye give Turkish lessons in mosques and spread Anatolian culture is an obstacle to assimilation. There is no physical intervention in the mosques, but high-level state authorities frequently mention this. (Hüseyin, 56, Imam)

I can classify the perspective of German society into two categories. 1st and 2nd generation, 3rd and 4th generation. The first two generations are those who came to Germany to work and their children who grew up in Germany. The 3rd and 4th generation refers to people born in Germany and their children. The way people born in Türkiye who come to Germany live in Germany is different from the way people born in Türkiye who start a family life in Germany live in Germany. From this point of view, while there is a positive attitude towards people who have adopted German culture, they think that people from Türkiye cannot integrate, that their Islamic lifestyle is an obstacle to this and that especially the last generations should be assimilated, and raised with German culture. (Kemal, 51, Teacher)

According to the information provided by the interviewees, it can be stated that people who adopt traditional Turkish and Islamic culture and have Islamic clothing/appearance and habits are not accepted in social life, but individuals with a European lifestyle are defined with a positive perspective.

However, some participants also emphasize that the view of Islam and Muslims is too individual and diverse to be generalized:

It would not be right to generalize. I have recently met Christians who show sincere behavior towards Islam/Muslims, but I have also seen the opposite behavior. Some establish relations with Turks and Muslims, and some approach them with prejudice. There are also people who do not want to establish relations at all. It is also true that Germans instinctively have a great inexperience in how to interact with foreigners. For this reason, there may also be prejudice. (Mustafa, 33, Imam)

There were not many Turks where I used to live. When I started teaching, I was the only foreign teacher, but I did not encounter any discrimination or bad attitudes. (Metin, 55, Teacher)

It varies individually. Some have a positive view of Islam and Muslims, while others are worried. (Seher, 52, Teacher/Administrator)

In Germany, I have observed that society's view of Islam and Muslims is quite diverse, with some accepting Islam and Muslims, while others are critical or concerned. (Zehra, 29, Religious Officer).

I have encountered very well-meaning teachers, especially at school. Of course, I cannot say that there is no Islamophobia. There are some who are very uneasy, even openly hostile. I think that some young people in Berlin are less prejudiced because they go to school with Muslims, work with them, etc. But I can say that in Germany in general, as seen in the recent European elections, Muslims are not looked upon favorably; some think that Islam is a reactionary, quarrelsome, and belligerent religion. (Merve, 28, Teacher)

There are positive and negative points of view. It would not be correct to say that "German society" is a single-minded group. There are also Germans who are very open-minded, curious, and love and respect differences. There are also Germans who are prejudiced and uncomfortable and unhappy with the presence of Muslims. (Yasemin, 26, Teacher)

As can be seen, it is emphasized that there are positive/negative perspectives due to reasons such as the lack of recognition of Islam and Muslims and prejudice. Along with this situation, there are those who state that the awareness of Islam and Muslims is shaped by media content:

In Germany, you can find people from all cultures around the world. For this reason, there are good points of view, but there are also bad points of view. Unfortunately, the German media always tries to denigrate Muslims. Some people blindly believe this negative media content about Islam/Muslims. (Kerim, 24, Teacher)

German society is actually curious about Islam. However, unfortunately, due to the media and other factors, Islam is constantly associated with danger, so some of the society is prejudiced against the religion. (Onur, 25, Teacher)

We came to Germany not so long ago. We are still in the process of integration. I try to build relationships and increase our dialog within the society. (Kerem, 35, Administrator)

The perception of Islam/Muslims in the political environment is different from the perception of Islam/Muslims in the social sphere. Therefore, we are in a period of increased interaction in the social sphere. In this era, most Germans have Muslim contacts/friends. (Matthias, 34, Expert)

In a situation where the awareness of Islam and Muslims is low and prejudice prevails for this reason, negative representations in media content also take precedence over reality, and Islam and Muslims have become depicted through media narratives.

3.2.2. Level of Knowledge of Islamic Words and Concepts

There is a general sense of unfamiliarity with Islam. While there are people who show interest and engagement, the prevailing tone tends to be prejudiced and critically inquisitive.
(Hamza, 50, Teacher)

Although awareness of Islam and relations with Muslims have increased in recent years, the level of knowledge and sensitivity regarding Islamic words and concepts is still a matter of debate. In particular, it is a common opinion of the interviewees that people with prejudiced knowledge of Islamic words and concepts are quite high:

I observed that their perspectives on Islamic words and concepts are prejudiced and their level of knowledge is lacking. (Ayşe, 37, Religious Officer)

In general, the level of knowledge of Islamic words and concepts varies across society. Some have a deep understanding, while others have limited knowledge or misunderstandings. (Zahra, 29, Religious Officer)

As far as I observe, a certain part of the society knows about Islam and Muslims, but they deliberately treat them badly. Some of them attack Islam/Muslims even though they do not know Islam/Muslims. Another group is completely indifferent to words related to Islam and Muslims. (Sinan, 47, Imam)

Interaction undoubtedly plays an important role in learning and transferring religious knowledge in social life. At this point, contact between people of different religions brings about mutual tolerance and religious awareness. However, despite the long history of contact with the religion of Islam and encounters with Muslims in social life in Germany, the negative framing of religious concepts that are far from reality and incomprehensible shows an important problem. The

interviewees state that it is difficult to find a response to the efforts made to explain this problem and to establish contact:

They know Islamic words and concepts. But they are uncomfortable with some manifestations of Islam (such as the call to prayer, and the mosque). They do not want to understand its spirit. They find it repulsive. When we want to explain, they keep their distance. (Süleyman, 58, Imam)

I have observed that Germans have a very low level of knowledge about Islamic words and concepts, they only learn some words during Islamic religious holidays and events organized by non-governmental organizations because it is a closed society. For this reason and because of some prejudices, they feel anxiety and fear towards Islam and approach it with distance. (Hüseyin, 56, Imam)

I can state that there is a prejudice against Islam. There is not even any doubt about it. Although there are still many Muslims living in Europe, we feel excluded. We experience this opposition even in their perspectives and approaches. (Serhat, 55, Teacher)

There is a prejudice in small cities, in places where there is no contact with Muslims. There are situations where I feel the need to explain and observe negative approaches. But I can say that people with a higher level of education are tolerant. (Burcu, 38, Teacher/Administrator)

They know a little bit about Islam. As the number of foreigners increases, they become more familiar with the concepts related to Islam and Muslims. (Metin, 55, Teacher)

One of the most important obstacles to establishing contact with different cultures and creating a language of communication is prejudice. At this point, the media, which has become an important source of information, rebuilds/reinforces social prejudice, weaves concepts about Islam and Muslims with its ideological network, and creates new realities/myths:

The level of knowledge in society in general is very limited. There are many negatively defined words in the news or on the internet. Without research, they are accepted as they are portrayed. Examples such as "Dschihad, Kalifat, Scharia" can be given. Other than that, concepts such as "Allahu akbar" or "Mashallah" are not received very positively. As reflected in the news, they are perceived as words that contain violence and express strict rules and fanaticism. (Yasemin, 26, Teacher)

They learn about concepts such as Sharia, halal and haram, jihad, and headscarf through tools such as the media. Therefore, they have a perception of Islamic knowledge presented by the media. This causes them to be prejudiced against Islamic words and concepts. (Hülya, 56, Teacher/Administrator)

They know about prayers such as hajj, fasting, prayer, and headscarf. They learn especially from the media. For this reason, there is a negative perception. (Merve, 28, Teacher)

The experience of living together and the conscious, cumulative set of meanings that emerge despite individuals' efforts to explain/explain their religious lives are reinforced by media narratives and cause Islamic words and concepts to become known through selected narratives/generated myths. This leads to Islam/Muslims being defined only by certain words and concepts and the meanings attributed to these concepts:

They try to understand and interpret Islamic concepts according to the religious principles they believe in. As a result of the effort to explain/understand Islamic words and concepts according to German culture, problematic/prejudiced perspectives towards these concepts may increase. (Faruk, 61, Teacher/Administrator)

They know the concepts of jihad, Sharia, the Koran, and the headscarf. But they characterize these concepts and these Islamic

issues as a negative situation for German society. They have learned them by associating them with wrong information, far from their real meaning. (Hasan, 51, Teacher/Administrator)

They know concepts such as jihad, halal and haram, and headscarf. However, they show a questioning approach towards these concepts. The questions they ask are mostly to criticize and convey their own thoughts rather than learning. Very few of them ask to learn neutrally. For example, they generalize and interpret the veil, turban, etc. (Kemal, 51, Teacher)

Especially in Europe, there are a few words that are very misunderstood. There is prejudice behind it. Especially the word jihad. They misunderstand it. (Tarık, 47, Teacher/Administrator)

They mostly use the term Islamist. They also make a distinction between good and bad Muslims, marginalize people who adhere to their values, and use people who are defined as modern as examples. (Bünyamin, 31, Imam)

Words like Sharia and jihad can be a problem. They mostly define it negatively. People who do not know about Islam continue to adopt their wrong knowledge instead of learning. (Kerim, 24, Teacher)

They know terms like Sharia, hijab, and jihad. However, this information is mostly biased and far from its real meaning. (Kübra, 25, Religious Officer)

Islamic concepts, for example, words like "Allahu Akbar" in the call to prayer, have a negative/negative connotation in German society. Unfortunately, they make comments without knowing the meaning and content of these religious concepts. (Şeyda, 30, Teacher)

They have a negative approach towards Islamic concepts. (Amine, 32, Expert)

As can be seen, the level of knowledge about Islamic knowledge and concepts in general is low, whereas the existing knowledge is shrouded in prejudices and Islam/Muslims are known/bringing to be known for concepts that are consciously loaded with certain Islamophobic meanings and expressions.

3.2.3. Radicalized/Framed Meanings

Terms like Sharia, hijab, jihad in Germany society has negative connotations. Terrorism is associated with oppression and violence.
(Kübra, 25 Religious Officer)

Negative content about Islam and Muslims, which is usually shaped by information and prejudices learned from the media, stories based on fiction, and false/incomplete/incomplete/malicious information framed/fixed by certain stereotypes, produce new discourses. People who do not know about Islam may have thoughts such as categorizing Islam and marginalizing it with the meanings they attribute to it. This is especially true even in the basic beliefs/concepts of Islam:

They use words like Sharia, Islamist, etc., and associate them with terrorism. (Matthias, 34, Expert)

Words and concepts such as Jihad and Sharia are associated with terrorist incidents. The word "Islam" itself, including the simplest words, is often used in this sense. (Fatma, 29, Teacher)

They approach Islamic words from their own point of view. They interpret jihad as a terrorist activity. They see some acts of worship, such as prayer, as an element of coercion. When we fast, although we explain it to them, they criticize us by saying 'Why don't you eat and drink' and try to impose their interpretations on us. (Ömer, 62, Teacher)

There is an antagonism towards Islamic words and concepts. In particular, they have learned the concept of jihad by associating it with terrorism. Germans know that the concepts of halal and haram have a religious dimension, but they interpret them as a reactionary point of view. They define it as radical. Their approach to some concepts is cynical-insulting... They also define the headscarf negatively together with the hijab and burqa. (Zeynep, 49, Teacher/Lecturer)

They associate some words and concepts such as jihad and Sharia with the Middle East and interpret them as terrorist activities. They also interpret Islamic issues that are visible in social life, such as halal-haram, as reactionary. (Kemal, 51, Teacher)

There is fear when it comes to jihad. It is defined as holy jihad. It means war. Words and concepts are framed in a frightening way. Jihad is defined as war, the headscarf is interpreted as an element of oppression. (Bünyamin, 31, Teacher)

There are people who do not want to understand some of our acts of worship that are visible in daily life and social life, such as fasting, and criticize them. (Ayşe, 37, Religious Officer)

There are many examples. There have been discussions in schools about children's fasting. They presented warning letters to their families not to fast. Since they do not understand fasting, they see it as a kind of persecution, as if children are being tortured. (Mustafa, 33, Imam)

For example, people who pray, fast, etc. are seen as fundamentalists. People who dress in Islamic clothing are again seen as bigots. They see those who pay attention to halal and haram behaviors as seers. They make sense of concepts such as jihad and Sharia by associating them with war and the Middle East. (Yusuf, 50, Teacher)

The Germans I have talked to and interviewed do not know Islam in general. In my opinion, this is the reason for fear. Islam and Muslims are associated with violence and terrorism. (Sinan, 47, Imam)

Especially in Europe there are a few words that are very misunderstood. There is prejudice behind it. Especially the word jihad. They misunderstand it. But there is such a perception in Europe in general. They only understand killing, terror, etc. The word Sharia, Sharia is also seen as reactionary and outdated - beheading, hand cutting. Again, they define Sharia, etc. as a horrible system that threatens the social order. (Hussein, 56, Imam)

There can be misunderstandings about some concepts like Sharia. Sharia and Islamist terrorism are often used interchangeably. (Matthias, 34, Expert)

Words like Sharia and jihad can be a problem. They are mostly defined negatively. (Kerim, 24, Teacher).

Terms like Sharia, hijab, and jihad have negative connotations in German society. They are associated with terrorism, oppression, and violence. The real theological meaning of the words is unknown to many Germans. (Kübra, 25 Religious Officer)

Islamic concepts, such as the words in the call to prayer (Allahu Akbar, etc.), unfortunately, have a negative/negative connotation in German society. (Şeyda, 30, Teacher)

Based on the statements made by the participants, the concepts of jihad and Sharia are seen as concepts associated with terrorism, violence, and oppression. These concepts, which are detached from their meanings, are interpreted as threatening the social order, reactionary, outdated, and associated with the continuous and unjustified killing of people.

However, acts of worship such as fasting and prayer, and behaviors that require special attention, such as halal and

haram, are confined to a discourse that excludes and marginalizes them because of their visibility in social life.

At school, because I wore a headscarf, they defined me as a reactionary, etc. and kept me at a distance. (Nilüfer, 29, Teacher)

Muslims wearing Islamic clothing (headscarves, beards, etc.) are characterized as radicals, Salafists, etc. In some cases, people who do their prayers are put in the position of 'dangerous people.' (Serhat, 55, Teacher)

Muslim women have prejudices about their ability to take part in social life. This is because they misunderstand the necessity of the headscarf. It is thought to be an element of pressure on women. There is a sense that women are not very intellectual and have a low level of knowledge, that they remain ignorant because they are veiled. They associate jihad with the concept of killing. It is interpreted out of its meaning. They are seen as a threat to society. Issues that are visible in social life, such as fasting, etc., are thought to be strange matters. (Seher, 52, Teacher/Administrator)

They make comments without knowing the meaning of Islamic words and concepts. They have a marginalizing approach to concepts. For example, they interpret the headscarf as oppression against women. We frequently encounter these discourses about headscarved girls in schools. (Hasan, 51, Teacher/Administrator)

The issue of veiling, like the concepts of jihad and Sharia, is framed in similar terms and marginalized in a discriminatory language. Women who wear Islamic clothing are interpreted as reactionary, bigoted, unmodern, oppressed, and unable to fulfill their individual rights and demands.

Media content undoubtedly has a significant impact on radicalizing the meanings attributed to these concepts and

framing them with negative words and concepts. As the participants also stated:

Islamic concepts, especially in the media and in some political debates, are associated with negative concepts such as Islamic terrorism, extremism, backwardness, or violation of women's rights. I have observed that such negative framing can negatively affect people's perception of Islam. (Zehra, 29, Religious Officer)

For example, the words jihad and Sharia are often seen in a negative light. There is a connection between war and fear management. This is of course embedded in people's minds through the media and other elements. (Onur, 25, Teacher)

The thoughts and observations of our interviewees on how Islamic words and concepts are framed with their meanings show how the multicultural (!), democratic (!) life in the West is moving in a dangerous/threatening direction. Especially the way they selectively summarized their experiences on the subject reflects how widespread anti-Islamism has become and how normalized Islamophobic thoughts/perceptions/attitudes have become. The fact that the interviewees are teachers, imams, and others who provide Islamic education sheds light on the problems they face in the process of Islamic education in the social structure they live in.

3.3. Political/Social and Theological Perspective on Islamic Education

As mentioned in the section entitled "An Overview of Islamic Religious Education in Germany", the history of Islamic education in Germany is quite recent. However, Islamic education was first offered in masjids and mosques, and in the following years in pilot schools in some states and cities. Today, the issue of Islamic education is widespread throughout Germany, but in places with a Muslim population, there are individual and institutional demands, but it has not been put

into practice, and there are formal differences (such as religious classes or only ethics classes). While Islamic education continues in mosques established through private efforts and initiatives, Islamic education in schools has a structure that varies and differentiates according to states and cities.

Along with this current situation, Islamic education is still being debated throughout Germany, and the existence of Islamic education, the way it is provided, the content of the courses, the course resources, and the selection of instructors are constantly being discussed through political and media channels. The opinions of the trainers/experts who participated in the research on the subject and who are active in the field of Islamic education about the controversial/problematic (!) Islamic education in Germany also express this confusion/problem.

3.3.1. A Debate on Freedom: Islamic Education

I cannot say that there is much tolerance for Islamic education.

The process of introducing Islamic education in schools has been long and difficult.

Despite this, there are still political and social problems.

We continue to deal with problems.

(Serhat, 55, Teacher)

Religious education in Germany is a constitutionally guaranteed right. Therefore, people who request Islamic education can also benefit from this right. However, despite this constitutional guarantee, the availability of Islamic education can still be a matter of debate:

Religious education in Germany is like an area of freedom as it is constitutionally guaranteed. I don't know the situation in schools, but as someone who works in a mosque, I have not encountered any restrictions/obstacles. (Ayşe, 37, Religious Officer)

There are those who are against Islamic education and those who are open to Islamic education. (Kübra, 25, Religious Officer)

When non-Muslims visit mosques, they are tolerant towards us. (Bunyamin, 31, Imam)

In Germany, there are those who advocate 'non-radicalizing' Islamic education in mosques or 'controlled' Islamic education against radicalizing tendencies. However, in general, a German may think that there is no need for Islamic education. Non-Muslim parents may also find Islamic education in schools unnecessary. (Yusuf, 50, Teacher)

In the past years, I served as the vice president of the mosque. As the number of students increased, we continued to institutionalize. We contributed to the legal requirements for Islamic education in schools as well as in mosques. We made efforts to overcome many problems we faced. (Metin, 55, Teacher)

The issue of Islamic education in Germany is highly controversial. While some argue that Muslim students should be given the right to learn and live their religion, others say that Islamic religious education should be separated from schools. In some states in Germany, Islamic religious education is either compulsory or optional. However, it can be stated that Islamic religious courses are not treated equally with other religious courses in the German education system and the problem of instructors continues to increase. On the other hand, some Muslim communities are turning to alternative education options such as weekend schools/ mosques or private education centers to teach their children about their religion and culture. The issue of Islamic education is still a matter of debate in Germany and there are different opinions among various stakeholders. (Zehra, 29, Religious Officer)

In recent years, some schools have been offering Islamic education. There were and still are some who oppose it. The necessity

of Islamic religious education continues to be debated. There are also those who interpret the teaching of Islam as the 'Islamization of Germany'. For this reason, there are those who see the introduction of Islamic religious classes as contrary to integration and therefore want to control the introduction of religion classes. (Fatma, 29, Teacher)

I cannot say that there is much tolerance for Islamic education. The process of introducing Islamic education in schools has been very long and difficult. Despite this, we are still dealing with political and social problems. (Serhat, 55, Teacher)

Islamic education is one of the most talked about/debated issues. They accept our curriculum but they cannot define professions and they do not accept our students' diplomas. We are politically struggling with such problems related to Islamic education. (Seher, 52, Teacher/Administrator)

I can say that Islamic education in Germany started with Qur'an courses. It started with fights and interventions. The German state cannot intervene in the demand for Islamic education because it has to provide religious education, but it tries to control and shape the process/form of Islamic education. Normally, religious communities prepare the request for religious education in cooperation and after the qualifications are met, the education is given. However, religious communities demanding Islamic education are constantly challenged with problems. At this point, we are equal on paper with the authorities of other religious institutions (Christian, Jewish, etc.), but in practice, there is a situation of allowing and interfering with Islamic education. (Faruk, 61, Teacher/Administrator)

There is a lack of materials for Islamic education in Germany. We demand, but this process is very slow and there are cases where our demands are not met. (Kerem, 35, Administrator)

The situation of Islamic education can vary even according to schools. I know that in some schools it is approved, while in others the school principal or the administration prevents it. The administration does not want the students to choose that course, and if the course is chosen, the class is not given or the class hours can be very late. (Merve, 28, Teacher)

As our interviewees pointed out, the process of providing Islamic education in Germany is quite challenging. Despite this, debates and problems regarding the existence of Islamic education continue (Uçar, 2023). Moreover, the idea that Islamic education should be provided with the expectation of providing immunity against radical movements (Stein & Zimmer, 2022, p. 36) finds a discourse space. This suggests that the freedom of Islamic education has not been fully internalized and that it needs to be controlled.

However, it is an important point that tolerance for Islamic education in schools, in general, is weak, Islamic education is seen as unnecessary, student/instructor problems related to Islamic education continue to increase, and it is tried to be directed in line with Germany's social/political control. Therefore, these issues shed light on the increasingly negative attitudes towards Islamic education, as well as the extent to which Islamophobic attitudes such as discrimination and exclusion have been internalized, making Islamic education unsuitable to be viewed as an area of freedom (İlgaz, 2023, p.152,156).

In this context, the regulations on Islamic education in Germany should try to consider the desire and need for Muslims, like other religious communities, to think rationally about their religion and the realities of life and to address them critically in their theology and religious education (Takım, 2016, p. 14).

3.3.2. Islamic Education on Trial / Marginalized

*Those who receive Islamic education are terrorists,
and places that provide Islamic education are
terrorist training centers. As a result of this prejudice,
there are attempts to control and prevent Islamic education.*
(Sinan, 47, Imam)

Another issue related to Islamic education is the growing prejudice against Islamic education. This prejudice also leads to the politicization of the view of Islamic education and the rise of Islamophobic approaches.

The teaching of Islam is needed and tolerated in Germany. For example, when I was doing my internship at university, a Christian religion class teacher told me that it was important to teach Islam in schools. Of course, some people have a prejudiced stance against Islam classes. (Onur, 25, Teacher)

I can say that there is prejudice against Islamic education in schools. While a small number of people respond positively, the majority are prejudiced. This is because they do not know the content of the education. They are afraid that behind closed doors there are things they cannot control. This is also the narrative at the school where I am currently working. Four years ago, when Islamic religion classes were introduced in the school, many teachers reacted. But today they are very positive about it. Their prejudices have been broken. Until we get to this point, Islamic religious education teachers have a lot of work to do. They need to prove themselves and draw a positive profile. (Yasemin, 26, Teacher)

Although Onur (25, Teacher) and Yasemin (26, Teacher), two of the religious instructors who participated in the interview, state that there are no problems with Islamic education in schools, they emphasize that prejudice is dominant in general.

However, the interviewees state that there is not only prejudice but also marginalizing approaches as follows:

Islamic education is seen as radical. Especially those who receive Islamic education are seen as students being trained for radical groups. For these reasons, there is great control over Islamic education. (Zeynep, 49, Teacher/Lecturer)

There is prejudice and opposition, especially in small cities. One of the reasons for this is perception and the general attitude of the media. (Burcu, 38, Teacher/Administrator)

Those who receive Islamic education are seen as terrorists, and places that provide Islamic education are seen as terrorist training centers. As a result of this prejudice, there are attempts to control and prevent Islamic education. (Sinan, 47, Imam)

They do not look at Islamic education well at all. The visibility of those who receive Islamic education in social life disturbs them. (Süleyman, 58, Imam)

There is great prejudice against Islamic religious education in Germany. Those who receive Islamic education are seen as people who pose a danger. For this reason, those who receive Islamic education and the places that provide such education are seen as places that need to be controlled. (Tarık, 47, Teacher/Administrator)

Religious education is a constitutional right, but they see Islamic education as reactionary and outdated. The fact that children in schools have religious sensitivities and perform religious practices is seen as a problem. Since they cannot fully comprehend Islamic education, they see it as a threat to Western social life. (Hülya, 56, Teacher/Administrator)

The perspective on Islamic education varies according to states/regions in Germany. But generally, it is perceived as radical education and they are afraid of this situation. (Kerim, 24, Teacher)

Religious classes in mosques are viewed negatively. It is always a matter of curiosity which lessons are given and by whom. Although the mosques are well-equipped and the teachers are qualified, the impression is that they are reactionary. The view of Islamic religious education at school is also not entirely positive. There is still a skeptical approach. (Şeyda, 30, Teacher)

It is perceived as extremist, and dangerous. The necessity of Islamic education is questioned. It is interpreted as a political movement. (Hamza, 50, Teacher)

We can state that what exactly Islamic education means and what the aims of providing this education are not generally known in Germany. This ignorance brings with it fear, prejudice, and negative characterizations. It is obvious what kind of an Islamophobic approach people who are interpreted as radicals or even seen as terrorists just because they have received Islamic education face.

These narratives also reflect the judgmental/marginalizing anti-Islamic language, which is constantly used against Muslims in the West and frequently expressed in the literature (Temel & Koçak, 2020, p. 182; SETA, 2018 and 2019), including hate language such as terrorist, dangerous, radical reactionary, Sharia, Islamist, which carries a mediatic and populist language (Temel & Koçak, 2020, p. 182; SETA, 2018 and 2019), is also used against people with Islamic education, and people with Islamic education are shown as potential targets.

At the same time, the fact that places such as mosques and school classrooms that provide Islamic education are seen as hotbeds of terror and violence increases the language of hate in society. As a result of this language of violence and this approach, attacks on mosques are on the rise.

3.3.3. Controlled and Intervened Islamic Education

Islamic education is controlled. Even though mosques and other institutions are free, Islamic education is under pressure and control compared to the education of other religions.
(Nilüfer, 29, Teacher/Administrator)

The struggle to provide Islamic education has brought with it control and repression. Despite constitutional guarantees, the demands to receive and impart Islamic education have constantly encountered political obstacles. These obstacles have made themselves felt in all areas such as the delivery of the course, the content of the course, and the selection of the instructor. The statements of our interviewees regarding this situation are as follows:

They feel a fear of Islamic education. In general, they allow religious freedom. But when it comes to Islamic education, we feel control, pressure, and interference. (Hasan, 51, Teacher/Administrator)

Most of Germany is unaware of Islamic education. In Germany, communities are not allowed to interfere in matters of religious education. But when it comes to Islam, even the content is interfered with. It is difficult for religious communities to be recognized. While it is easy for other official religious communities to be recognized, it is difficult for Islamic religious communities to be recognized and to provide education. They shape the courses, try to determine the people who teach the courses, and coordinate them. I can say that Islamic education is approached positively, provided that the Islamic faith has content and characteristics approved by Germany. (Mehmet, 48, Lecturer/Expert)

Islamic education is like a stepchild in Germany. According to the constitution, Islamic education is allowed in some places,

even if only for show. But there is interference. I served on the religious education and teachers' curriculum commission. The religious community checks whether the lessons and content are appropriate. But here, Islamic communities are not recognized and accepted, and they are constantly being subjected to problems. (Ahmet, 53, Teacher)

Although there is a constitutional right to receive Islamic education in Germany, political and social obstacles are encountered when it comes to implementation. A German minister has said that our problem is not with Muslims, but with the constitutional rights that Muslims have won and the court rights they have won. Because Germany has given the freedom to receive religious education in the public sphere and because there is a growing number of people who believe in Islam, they are trying to roll back, prevent, and control many of the issues that arise from this constitutional right. We face an obstacle such as accepting religious communities. This shows that they are trying to make it particularly difficult to give and receive Islamic education. (Mustafa, 33, Imam)

I realized that Germans are uncomfortable with the fact that Turkish teachers from Türkiye in Germany give Turkish lessons in mosques and spread Anatolian culture, as this is an obstacle to assimilation. There is no physical intervention in mosques, but high-level state authorities frequently express this. Therefore, gradually people who are trained and educated in Germany, not from Türkiye, are allowed to serve as imams/teachers. (Hüseyin, 56, Imam)

They give freedom within the framework of the law. But they do not give this right willingly. They control and monitor the places that acquire the right to provide religious education. They intervene when there is something out of control. We feel constant pressure. (Ömer, 62, Teacher)

It is controlled. Even though they are free, mosques, etc. are under more pressure and control than other religious institutions. (Nilüfer, 29, Teacher/Administrator)

Governments are trying not to include it in the curriculum. In some states it is allowed, in others, it is an elective subject. There is also an approach that tries to shape Islamic education. While there is no interference in other religious education mechanisms, there is intense pressure on Islamic education centers. They cannot do this to other religious institutions, they do not interfere with them. But since those who receive Islamic education and those who provide it are seen as a danger, there is control and surveillance. (Tarık, 47, Teacher/Administrator)

The freedom to receive Islamic education is enshrined in the German constitution, but as our interviewees reported, Muslims who receive this freedom under difficult conditions (!) also face problems such as control and pressure. While there is no problem in the education centers and classes of other religions, there is direct interference and intervention in Islamic education centers, course contents, and educators. In addition, there is not only control and pressure, but also other forms of obstruction such as surveillance, surveillance, and labeling.

At the same time, the fact that those who give and receive Islamic education convey the words, concepts, and lifestyles of Turkish and/or Islamic culture in Islamic education classes is perceived as a threat to integration and all stages of Islamic education are wanted to be shaped.

One of the concrete examples is that in the coming years, religious instructors will no longer come to Germany from Türkiye in the old ways and forms. Germany wants to meet the need for instructors in the education centers in the country from the people it has trained in its own schools. In this way, the issue of interfering with the religious instructor is not

seen in the education centers of other religions. This attitude also shows that there is a negative approach and pre-control against Islamic education.

3.4. Problems in the Transmission of Islamic Knowledge

According to the categories that emerged as a result of the interviews, it can be stated that the level of knowledge about Islamic words and concepts is low and that there are political, social, and theological distance/political approaches to Islamic education. This is an important problem area that may cause problems in the process of transferring knowledge in Islamic religious education in Germany. Behind these problems, there are reasons such as prejudice against Islam; orientalism, media cumulative generalization/discrimination; fear of the unknown; and language and cultural differences.

3.4.1. Fighting Prejudice

*There are conscious questions based on prejudice.
You have to be careful when conveying Islamic
knowledge because there is a tendency to categorize Muslims.
(Faruk, 61, Teacher/Administrator)*

Combating existing prejudices and explaining misconceptions before imparting Islamic knowledge is a point emphasized by almost all of the religious educators interviewed:

*We have difficulty in explaining basic Islamic requirements.
We encounter a lot of prejudice and intolerance when explaining
issues such as headscarves, halal and haram behaviors. (Zeynep,
49, Teacher/Lecturer)*

*In Germany, we waste a lot of time, especially with confusion.
We have a lot of difficulty in explaining a concept. Because there
are many negative representations in explaining Islam, there*

can be situations such as not trusting our knowledge. (Hasan, 51, Teacher/Administrator)

Germans have many prejudices. That is why we are trying to break down prejudices. (Ayşe, 37, Religious Officer)

We call it combating prejudice in the transmission of Islamic knowledge. Non-Muslims may have inaccurate or overgeneralized prejudiced information about Islam and Muslims. These prejudices can make it difficult to convey accurate information. (Zehra, 29, Religious Officer)

There are always conscious questions based on prejudice. And you have to be careful when you convey Islamic knowledge because they have a tendency to categorize Muslims. (Faruk, 61, Teacher/Administrator)

Sometimes there are misunderstandings. We fall into repetition. We cannot break prejudice. (Fatma, 29, Teacher)

There are no requests for information on specific topics. They do not talk about the important aspects of Islam, but more about daily, superficial issues. We express our opinions but there is always the obstacle of prejudice in front of us. (Bünyamin, 31, Imam)

There is prejudice. And first, you need to be able to remove prejudice to explain yourself. (Mustafa, 33, Imam)

They have a marginalizing approach. Even though I am an expert lecturer in the field of Islamic education, our opinions may not be valuable to them. They are asked interesting, different, judgmental questions. And their opinions usually do not change. (Süleyman, 58, Imam)

In mosques, there are open-door days. On these days, non-Muslims can come to visit. They can ask questions. But they usually ask anxiously and try to get the answer in their minds.

Rarely, they may care about your opinions and want to know the answer. (Serhat, 55, Teacher)

In some cases, they ask questions with purely ulterior motives, aimed at pressurizing. They ask about Islamic issues by associating them with media and orientalist approaches that seem interesting. They focus on superficial issues and do not take the meanings seriously. (Sinan, 47, Imam)

I can give an example. We organized an event in a city. Some people listened and even converted to Islam. We organized the same event in another place, and we had to deal with a lot of judgment and accusations. They tried to explain Islamic worship and daily life with negative examples. Although it varies according to the social structure, we feel negative language and prejudice while conveying Islamic information. (Seher, 52, Teacher/Administrator)

There is prejudice when you first meet, but if you can break this prejudice later on, it can become easier to transfer information and interact. We feel prejudice more on issues such as the role of women in Islam, headscarves, etc. (Burcu, 38, Teacher/Administrator)

They usually don't ask to find out. They ask to judge and accuse. The questions they ask are usually based on what they know and aim to measure your attitude and approach. (Hülya, 56, Teacher/Administrator)

There are serious generalizations and prejudices about certain concepts. This is very evident when it comes to the relationship between men and women, jihad, etc. The content of the media is also effective in this prejudice. (Ömer, 62, Teacher)

The most common observation/experience of the religious instructors regarding the transfer of Islamic knowledge

is the accumulated/generalized and widespread prejudice against Islam and Muslims. For this reason, they stated that they had problems in explaining concepts and correcting missing information. In addition, they frequently encounter superficial and malicious questions, and although they are in a position to be considered experts on Islamic issues, they have problems with trust as a source of information.

3.4.2. Orientalist and Mediatic Cumulative Meanings/Representations

When events related to Islam and Muslims in different countries happens, even the visibility of religion in social life is threatened. Interference in religious worship and activities in schools is becoming an issue.

(Mehmet, 48, Lecturer/Expert)

Orientalist studies and political developments in West-East relations have a significant impact on the impressions and knowledge about the East, Islam, and Muslims in Western countries. For this reason, the stereotypes that find meaning through orientalist studies, that are framed and disseminated through generalized representations, have been internalized in Western societies and have replaced the truth.

At this point, Islamic religion teachers/imams in Germany state that they encounter these common prejudices/narratives when certain events (political events in Afghanistan, developments in the Middle East, Charlie Hebdo publications, etc.) associated with Islam/Muslims occur in Islamic countries or European countries. Their responses to the question, "Do you feel the need to explain/explain/prove yourself as an Islamic religious education teacher/imam, especially in these countries or in other political/political developments in Western countries?" show that these events affect both the

perspective on Islam and Muslims and that there are problems in the process of providing Islamic education. In fact, these events are developments that pave the way for the issue of Islamic education to be constantly on the agenda, the use of this right and freedom to be discussed, and Islamophobic attitudes and attitudes to remain alive. In this respect, the interviewees' responses to this question are of particular importance:

When this happens, the German view of Islam and Muslims can change very quickly. They force us to explain ourselves. They make us feel obliged to choose sides. The most recent example is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We faced a lot of interrogations asking which side we support. (Zeynep, 49, Teacher/Lecturer)

There is an obligation to testify. They judge you. They see me as belonging to one side and criticize that side. During the October 7 events, I saw this. I was openly questioned by the authorities about which side I supported in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In many cases like this example, I have seen that German politics can also directly affect the perception of Islam and Muslims in society. (Hasan, 51, Teacher/Administrator)

When such incidents occur, I try to explain Islam and Muslims. I explain that the incidents have a political and political appearance and do not reflect Islam and that Muslims cannot be generalized. (Ayşe, 37, Religious Officer)

They see us as representatives, and when such incidents happen, they want us to make a prejudiced statement. (Hamza, 50, Teacher)

Yes, when certain events related to Islam/Muslims occur, I feel the need to explain, explain, or prove. These events are often based on misconceptions and prejudices, so I try to dispel misconceptions by sharing accurate information. Political and social events around the world can affect the perception of Islam

and Muslims. In particular, terrorist attacks, migrant crises, social conflicts, or political events are associated with Islam and Muslims, which can affect the general perception of society. Such incidents increase Islamophobia and reinforce existing prejudices. I try to share accurate information about such incidents, correct misconceptions, and encourage social dialogue. (Zehra, 29, Religious Officer)

They can generalize the events in Islamic countries and judge us. They make us feel guilty. (Kemal, 51, Teacher)

Of course, they make us feel it all the time. Even when we go out on the street, we try to explain ourselves. They make us feel obliged to express ourselves. Even our private lives can be intervened when these incidents happen, even the students who take Islamic religious classes in schools can be controlled. (Fatma, 29, Teacher)

When there are incidents involving Islam and Muslims in different countries, even the visibility of religion in social life is threatened. There is interference in religious worship and activities in schools. In such cases, they force us to choose a side. (Mehmet, 48, Lecturer/Expert)

Let me give a recent example. While explaining a recent attack on Muslims, a reporter asked him the following question: "Does your faith now invite you to take revenge?" However, we were trying to calm people down. As part of our obligation to represent our religion, we have to make explanations when such incidents happen. They make us feel guilty. (Mustafa, 33, Imam)

When these events happen, they associate them with you. In fact, if you have Islamic visibility, such as wearing a headscarf, etc., you can also be a potential criminal when these events happen. (Süleyman, 58, Imam)

When there are incidents such as Charlie Hebdo-ISIS etc., we are left between distinctions such as how do you think, what is your approach, and we are exposed to a generalized language. (Yusuf, 50, Teacher)

We are used to them making us feel guilty when such incidents happen. They try to categorize you by making you fall into the distinction between good and bad Muslims. (Serhat, 55, Teacher)

I know that some of my friends experience this more. I have friends who are asked to explain, who are accused. They also approach you with suspicion. (Sinan, 47, Imam)

It definitely happens. Even more, when such incidents happen, our social media accounts are monitored. After the October 7 events, we experienced this a lot. It is seen as obligatory to take sides, to side with the Germans if possible. In some cases, there may even be a danger of losing your job. Islamic elements that are visible in social life begin to be interpreted more negatively, and you are exposed to discriminatory and marginalizing attitudes. (Tarık, 47, Teacher/Administrator)

When the events of September 11, 2001, happened, we faced constant pressure and control. We were left in difficult situations. (Seher, 52, Teacher/Administrator)

Most recently, we experienced this during the events of October 7, 2023. They directly accuse you without even an explanation, without even allowing you to make a choice. (Burcu, 38, Teacher/Administrator)

I feel an accusatory approach. The majority of Muslims are targeted. (Hülya, 56, Teacher/Administrator)

When such incidents happen, even the students in the school can be blamed and hesitate to express their opinions on these issues. (Kerem, 35, Administrator)

When these events occur, especially the German media tries to keep them on the agenda and to include generalizing content about Islam and Muslims. During the events of October 7, 2023, I had German neighbors who questioned my opinion. (Matthias, 34, Expert)

Sometimes when such incidents happen, they include all of us in the category of bad Muslims, without even making a distinction (!) between good Muslims and bad Muslims. The impression is given that all Muslims are like this. There are even cases where we are not allowed to express our side and make explanations about these situations. (Ömer, 62, Teacher)

Political and social events do not affect everyone negatively. If some of them confirm their prejudices, some of them can support Muslims. Of course, sometimes some political decisions can cause difficulties for Muslims and unfair decisions can be made, for example, the ban on headscarves, etc. (Onur, 25, Teacher)

These events affect the way people view Islam and Muslims. It even causes arguments among children. As a teacher of Islamic religion classes, we are specifically asked for our opinion, and if they don't like our ideas, they use accusatory language. (Kerim, 24, Teacher)

There are generalized, malicious approaches that marginalize Islam and Muslims. (Merve, 28, Teacher)

Yes, political and social events around the world affect the way Islam and Muslims are viewed. Muslims are being forced to account for what is being done in the name of Islam around the world. If I had been asked the question about the need to explain a few years ago, I would have answered yes. Now I don't think it makes sense to explain/explain/prove. It is a vicious circle, it will repeat itself and it robs the energies of Muslims. (Kübra, 25, Teacher)

It certainly does. It's not an explanation, but it's an effort to prove that Islam is very different from how it is portrayed. But I don't see it as tiring or negative. As people who represent our religion, we already have this responsibility. It is also necessary to explain and explain when appropriate. As such incidents occur, one inevitably has to be more careful. (Yasemin, 26, Teacher)

Whenever there are incidents associated with Islam and Muslims, there is a generalization and judgment, as can be seen in the media content. Therefore, teachers/imams who teach Islam in Germany have clear observations and opinions about this situation.

Teachers of Islamic religion classes, who are constantly confronted with such incidents as camera surveillance and surveillance, have also observed that in some cases even students can be blamed and are not allowed to express their opinions. The most recent experience of such incidents is the events of October 7, 2023, and its aftermath. After these events, our interviewees stated that they encountered more severe control, pressure, attitudes, and behaviors.

It is also debatable to what extent the freedom of religious life and education can be exerted by the people who are constantly experiencing feelings and behaviors such as choosing sides, feeling the need to explain themselves, being refused to do so, being seen as potential criminals, and even being on high alert due to the frequent recurrence of these events. This is because political/religious events and approaches about Islam and Muslims, which have become generalized in politics and the media, pave the way for Islamophobic attitudes and actions such as the negative marginalization and exclusion of Islamic elements that are visible in social life such as headscarves, prayer and fasting. In particular, political/social discourses and media contents

that interpret the provision of Islamic education as raising terrorists, and see people who receive Islamic education as potential criminals increase especially in such periods. Since political and social events around the world can affect the perspective towards Islam and Muslims, teachers/imams can be seen as potential criminals or the cause of such events, and their right to explain/explain can be interfered with, even though they feel the need to explain/explain with a responsibility.

3.4.3. Fear and Pressure from the Unknown

*In particular, because they feel fear and prejudice,
we have difficulty explaining Islam.*

(Kemal, 51, Teacher)

Prejudice, negative perceptions, and impressions against Islam constitute a major obstacle, a wall in the process of knowledge transfer. This fear or pressure is reinforced by the fact that Islam is not known or conveyed in a real way by foreigners.

I can tell from the way people around me talk, especially when they use words and concepts related to Islam, that they focus intently on what they are going to say (!). But this attention is often judgmental. I have experienced that people don't really know about Islam. They hear it for the first time, even though there has been a culture of living together for so many years. One of the other reasons for this ignorance is political and media Islamophobia. (Tarık, 47, Teacher/Administrator)

Another problem we face is discriminatory attitudes towards Islam and Islamophobic approaches. Some people may have anti-Islamic views and are therefore reluctant to learn about Islam in an objective way. (Zehra, 29, Religious Officer)

We have difficulty explaining Islam, especially because they feel fear and prejudice. (Kemal, 51, Teacher)

We may not be able to convey information to non-Muslims in a school environment, etc. It can be misunderstood. (Ahmet, 53, Teacher)

It is not possible to say anything general. There is a lack of interest and knowledge. It is not the situation they live in. These topics are like talking about a field they are not interested in. (Yusuf, 50, Teacher)

We feel so pressured that we cannot express our views on social/political events on some issues that are not associated with Islam (such as LGBT freedom, etc.). (Hamza, 50, Teacher)

We have difficulty explaining gender issues and behaviors such as halal and haram. We face pressure and prejudice. (Nilüfer, 29, Teacher/Administrator)

As emphasized by the religious educators, although they are experts on Islamic issues and people to be taken as interlocutors, it can be stated that people in general do not have an interest in obtaining accurate information and that there is no questioning such as learning the truth about Islam or correcting wrong issues, despite the culture of coexistence with Muslims and the accumulated prejudices and misunderstandings/narratives about Islam/Muslims. The high level of general ignorance about Islam and Muslims can also lead to social/legal problems in Islamic education processes.

3.4.4. Language and Cultural Differences

The difficulty in transferring Islamic knowledge is the difference in language and culture. Islamic terms and concepts can sometimes be difficult to understand in a different language or culture.

(Zehra, 19, Religious Officer)

Although the experience of Muslims living in Germany goes back a long way, the impact of language and cultural differences has been dominant in every aspect of social life because the first generation of migrants arrived in Germany for employments and had plans to return

In the following years, the second and third generations did not leave Germany, received education, got married and made a living here, which allowed the language and cultural differences to diminish (!) even more. However, despite the culture of coexistence, it can be quite difficult to transfer Islamic words and concepts to different religions/languages. As Zehra (29, Religious Officer) puts it, "The difficulty in transferring Islamic knowledge is the language and cultural differences. Islamic terms and concepts can sometimes be difficult to understand in a different language or culture. This can cause some barriers in communication."

Furthermore, as Faruk (61, Teacher/Administrator) emphasized, "From a sociological point of view, we have problems primarily because we are foreigners. We do not speak the same language and we have cultural differences. Apart from that, prejudice is dominant. There are always conscious questions based on prejudice. And you have to be careful when you convey Islamic information because they also tend to categorize Muslims."

3.5. The Islamophobic Attitudes Encountered by Religious Educators

It can be seen that the perspective on Islamic education in Germany continues to be discussed in different dimensions. In addition, Islamic religious education teachers, who may experience problems in the transfer of Islamic knowledge and face problems in their professional lives despite their official duties, may also be exposed to Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors.

These Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors can be in the form of pressure on teachers and students, control and surveillance, and profiling. In addition, acts of violence and attacks against mosques, dormitories, etc., where Islamic religious education is taught, continue to increase day by day.

3.5.1. Pressure, Control, and Tracking

*We are being controlled. I know clearly.
There are long waiting times and discriminatory behaviors in official institutions and interviews. There are hundreds of examples.
As a person responsible for religious education,
I can also be subjected to interrogations and explanations.
(Tarik, 47, Teacher/Administrator)*

The answers given by our interviewees to the question, “Have you encountered any Islamophobic approaches, attitudes, and behaviors as a result of being an instructor of Islamic religion classes?” show how much anti-Islamism/Islamophobia has been internalized and continues to increase.

We have always felt interventions and controls because we teach Islam in schools. Recently, they made us go through the same process during the events of October 7, 2023. (Seher, 52, Teacher/Administrator)

We experienced this in the most recent example, the events of October 7, 2023. They directly accuse you without even making an explanation, without even allowing you to make a choice. We can receive threatening messages. (Burcu, 38, Teacher/Administrator)

There is a general perception that Muslim women are reactionary etc. For this reason, they may be surprised when we express ourselves. I can say that some Germans observe Muslims as police officers or informers. In fact, when I made lesson programs with my friends who came to my house, my German neighbor said: ‘Different people come to your house, I am scared’.

We may encounter these situations more when there are events related to Islam and Muslims in different countries. (Hülya, 56, Teacher/Administrator)

I have not encountered exclusionary attitudes and behaviors so far. But I know that I have brothers and sisters who have many problems with the processes of Islamic education. (Kerim, 24, Teacher)

Yes. Unfortunately. Although I was a teacher at the school, I was exposed to accusations about the school, I witnessed intolerant behaviors by some of my fellow teachers. (Merve, 28, Teacher)

In the school where I work, when negative things are said about Islam, I feel the need to explain, and when I do, they see me as intrusive and anti-freedom. Also, unfortunately, Islamic religious classes and teachers have not reached the status (such as respect and value) of educators in other religions. Islamic religious education teachers are still marginalized and seen as a problem. (Şeyda, 30, Teacher)

I am an instructor who provides religious education at school. For example, I have had administrators who found it unnecessary to provide Islamic education and therefore caused problems in the school and my teaching process. (Zeynep, 49, Teacher/Lecturer)

There were and are attacks and interventions. Although there is a shortage of employed Islamic religion teachers in schools, they do not include them in the staff. (Mustafa, 33, Imam)

They know that I am an Imam and I believe that's why they always cause my kids to struggle at school. (Sinan, 47, Imam)

I did not have any problems with my teaching process at school. I had a good relationship with my colleagues at school. (Metin, 55, Teacher)

I can't say anything concrete, but I know for sure that we are being monitored, we are being followed. We are being controlled. There are long waiting times and discriminatory behaviors in official institutions and interviews. There are hundreds of examples. Since I am a person responsible for religious education, I can also be subjected to questions and explanations. (Tarık, 47, Teacher/Administrator)

I have not been subjected to open exclusion or accusations from students or fellow teachers. But there are of course people who are uncomfortable with Islamic education in schools. (Yusuf, 50, Teacher)

I have no first-hand experience. But we feel what the perspective is. It is not tolerant. There are prejudiced approaches. They are skeptical. They can interfere in Islamic religious education, they can try to control our schools and close them down. We even experienced that indictments were prepared against students who took Islamic religious education, interfered with their hijab, and that they were forced by their families to take these classes. When a family sent their child for religious education, we encountered legal cases and processes such as the family having radical tendencies and needing to be controlled. (Serhat, 55, Teacher)

In Germany and around the world, whenever there is an incident related to Islam and Muslims, we experience pressure like the February 28th process in Türkiye. All the time. We often experience surveillance, surveillance with cameras, tagging, etc. (Faruk, 61, Teacher/Administrator)

We cannot express ourselves comfortably. They do not accept interlocutors in cases such as explanations and questions. (Hasan, 51, Teacher/Administrator)

At school, the administrator constantly interferes with my lessons. For example, when male and female students want to sit separately with their friends, there is a prejudice that they

sit separately because of me. When children are fasting in the class, they think they are fasting because of my pressure. I have experienced examples like this. (Kemal, 51, Teacher)

They give people the chair if they insult religious values. But if your thoughts criticize Western values, your freedom of expression is restricted. (Mehmet, 48, Lecturer/Expert)

Principals are extremely powerful in schools. They try to reduce our class hours. During Ramadan, they create problems when we fast, etc. It is like walking in a minefield. On religious days, there can be problems in getting permission, etc. (Ahmet, 53, Teacher)

According to the statements of the educators who participated in the interviews, it is seen that teachers and students are subjected to Islamophobic behaviors such as psychological violence, pressure, siege, harassment, distress, and harassment due to their identities/activities related to Islamic religion lessons and that these mobbing behaviors have become so widespread that they have become normalized.

In the international literature, people who provide Islamic education are shown to suffer from Islamophobia, which refers to the prejudice and discrimination faced by Muslim communities in their daily lives, unfounded hostility towards Islam, as well as the practical consequences of hostility towards unjust discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities and the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social issues, framed by discrimination, exclusion, violence and prejudice (The Runnymede Trust, 1997, pp. 1-2,4).

Given that the ignorance of Islam and Muslims is the largest barrier to Islamophobia, the interference with the rights and freedoms of Islamic religious education teachers/imams, who have a great duty, to explain, explain, teach, shows the current state of Islamophobia in Germany.

3.5.2. Attack on Places of Islamic Education

Two months after I became an imam, while I was working, there was a stone attack on the mosque. Four people attacked.
(Bünyamin, 31, Imam)

In addition to Islamophobic acts against individuals, acts of violence are also committed against places such as masjids and mosques¹⁵ where Islamic education is provided:

I have observed that mosques and other places of Islamic education are allowed to open in places that are not in the center of social life. It is also known that pigs' heads and pork meat are thrown in front of the doors of mosques, and arson incidents have taken place. They look at Islamic education as raising terrorists.
(Sinan, 47, Imam)

Two months after I started working as an imam, the mosque where I was working was attacked with stones. Four people attacked.
(Bünyamin, 31, Imam)

I haven't experienced much in social life, but there have been 900 attacks in different regions. Especially imams or mosques are subjected to attacks. In trams and public transportation vehicles, people wearing headscarves are attacked and spit in their faces.
(Faruk, 61, Teacher/Administrator)

Mosque attacks are an important problem that continues to increase in Germany¹⁶. In particular, the statements

¹⁵ Cases such as arson of mosques and threatening messages sent to mosques continue to increase in Germany. For this reason, this issue should be seen as a special field of study and should be discussed in detail in academic and political fields with a joint approach with different disciplines.

¹⁶ For examples of mosque attacks, see:
<https://perspektif.eu/category/islamofobi-gozlemevi/cami-saldirilari/>
<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/almanyada-2022de-35-camiye-tehdit-ya-da-saldiri-yapildi/2904868> <https://gocvakfi.org/wp-content/>

emphasized by our interviewees about mosque attacks coincide with the statements and statistical data in the reports (Ceylan, 2021, p.2-5) prepared on cases such as attacks on mosques, threatening messages, etc.

These acts, which are seen as hate crimes in international law and interpreted as contrary to freedom of religion, have become a constant issue in the regions where Muslims live. The lack of warning/reminder/agenda-setting content¹⁷ in the German media and German government reports, especially regarding these criminal acts, is another problem area.

These acts, which can be defined as harming the exercise of religious freedom and intolerant behavior against different religions, are also hate crimes that threaten the security of life and property of Muslims and cause them to feel in constant danger and experience psychological problems.

3.6. Combating Anti-Islamism/Islamophobia

*In terms of expressing yourself,
even the existence of religious institutions and religious education
is an important step to struggle against Islamophobia.*

(Mustafa, 33, Imam)

Religious instructors and imams who are involved in Islamic education in schools, mosques, and institutions in Germany are probably one of the most important interlocutors in

uploads/2021/06/Sayi-16-Almanyada-Irk%CC%A7ilig%CC%86in-Dis%CC%A7a-Vurumu-Camilere-Yo%CC%88nelik-Saldirilar.pdf

17 It can be stated that while policy makers in Germany should bring solutions to these problems, on the contrary, they have an approach that tries to ignore the problems and not bring them to the agenda. Recently, a report prepared by an independent commission on the initiative of the Ministry of the Interior analyzing anti-Muslim hostility in the country was removed from the website and the report in question was withdrawn (www.dw.com.tr).

the fight against Islamophobia. Since they can be a source of information and have professional experience in Islamic education, they, like other social and political actors, play a key role in combating Islamophobia, which causes prejudice, hate speech, discrimination, and marginalization.

In this context, our interviewees, who are active in the field of Islamic religious education, individually or through institutional organizations, state that they undertake the mission of understanding and explaining Islam and Muslims and combating Islamophobia as follows:

I make a special effort to explain Islam and raise children consciously. However, I participate in activities such as explaining and promoting Islam during Ramadan and other special religious days. (Zeynep, 49, Teacher/Lecturer)

I follow the literature on Islamophobia. I participate in activities related to this issue. I transfer my experiences to my social life and my students. (Fatma, 29, Teacher)

I give religious education, I try to introduce Islam, I try to give information about Islam to non-Muslims. I try to be careful in representing Islam. By getting involved in the issues of society, we express our sensitivity and try to represent it in an exemplary way. (Bünyamin, 31, Imam)

I try to establish a good dialog with my students. In my school, I try to help the teachers and explain Islamic issues and matters. (Yusuf, 50, Teacher)

We try to fight against Islamophobic attitudes. We try to emphasize the importance of the idea of coexistence, knowing that “people with different worldviews live in the same boat.” (Hüseyin, 56, Imam)

Along with personal efforts, traditional and professional organizations also try to combat Islamophobia. Inviting people

to the mosque with open-mosque days, publishing books on Islam in German-Turkish, compiling statistical data on Islamophobia, and preparing reports that open up for discussion are some visible elements of this struggle.

At the point of expressing yourself, even the existence of religious institutions and religious education is an important area of struggle against Islamophobia. (Mustafa, 33, Imam)

We organize mosque visits. We explain tolerance. I try to give religious information they are curious about. I also try to use German words and concepts to explain better. (Süleyman, 58, Imam)

We organize open-door days. We organize Ramadan tents. We invite our German or other foreign neighbors in our area. Through this interaction, some foreigners get to know Islam and Muslims better. (Serhat, 55, Teacher)

We organize open-mosque days. We also accept students, especially from schools. We try to give information about Islam and Muslims by introducing the mosque. We try to answer their questions. (Sinan, 47, Imam)

I try to establish good communication with my students. Non-Muslim students may have prejudices. At this point, I try to inform them transparently and sincerely. We also organize bazaars and iftar programs. (Metin, 55, Teacher)

We organize open-mosque days. We also organize different activities for students in schools. (Tarık, 47, Teacher/Administrator)

We organize events in mosques, on the streets, and sometimes throughout the cities. These events are important. Sometimes there are even Germans who convert to Islam. Because they have the opportunity to get to know us. (Seher, 52, Teacher/Administrator)

I was working as a school principal. At that time, I was doing projects with my students. Apart from that, we organize open-door day activities in mosques. (Burcu, 38, Teacher/Administrator)

We organize open-mosque days. We try to publish books on Islam. (Hülya, 56, Teacher/Administrator)

We organize open-mosque days. We also have different activities organized to get to know Islam. We organize courses for everyone who wants to learn about Islam. (Ömer, 62, Teacher)

We do publishing activities such as books, etc. We also have a research/follow-up center on Islamophobia. Through these activities, we try to explain and promote Islam and Muslims individually and institutionally. (Faruk, 61, Teacher/Administrator)

We publish reports. Especially against Islamophobic events and situations such as mosque attacks, etc. We also collect data on the Islamophobic attitudes of the media and share it with relevant institutions. (Amine, 32, Expert)

Individual and institutional efforts to understand and explain Islam will also reduce prejudices against Islam and Muslims and increase the level of knowledge about Islam. At the same time, one of the most important outcomes of this effort is that it allows non-Muslims in particular to turn to imams/teachers as a source of religious information and to interact with foreigners.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As a result of the migration movements from Eastern countries to Germany, the Muslim population started to increase in Germany, and immigrants with guest worker status started to have problems with daily life needs such as education/prayer facilities or leisure time activities. The first masjids were opened to enable Muslims to come together to address these problems, and over time, mosques were established with private initiatives, worship was carried out in congregation, and religious education began to be provided in mosques. Recognizing that religious education in mosques should be supplemented by religious education in schools, the first legal attempts were made to teach Islam in schools in Germany. As a result of these efforts, in the late 1970s and 1980s, the first Islamic religion classes began to be offered in schools in Muslim-majority areas. The introduction of Islamic education in schools paved the way for requests from different schools, regions, and states in Germany. However, due to the different political and social structures of the states, many difficulties have been encountered in the process of providing Islamic education in other states. Still, in some states, Islamic education cannot be provided freely in schools and there is interference in the Islamic religious education process. Therefore, the processes of Islamic education in schools in different states of Germany vary according to differences in political and social structures.

Although Islamic education in schools and mosques in Germany started in the 1970s and 1980s, many problems regarding Islamic education are still being discussed today. The existence of Islamic education, the insufficient number of teachers who can provide Islamic education, the lack of educational materials, interference in the curriculum, the language in which the education will be given, and how the instructors will be selected are some of the issues discussed.

In this context, this study discusses the state of Islamic education in Germany. This discussion includes the increasing anti-Islamic and Islamophobic acts in Europe and focuses on the relationship between religious education and Islamophobia. With this perspective, the study discusses the issues such as discrimination, exclusion, and hate speech faced by religious instructors in Germany and the issue of religious education/anti-Islam in line with the views and opinions of Islamic religious instructors working in Germany.

This study aimed to determine the perspective of religious education in the case of Germany, to identify the problems experienced by people with Islamic references in the religious education process, to identify the problems encountered in the transfer of religious knowledge, and to identify the Islamophobic attitudes that Muslim immigrants are exposed to in the religious education/training process. For this purpose, the positioning of Islamic education and religious instructors in Germany, which has a large Muslim population and a long experience in providing Islamic education, and the Islamophobic attitudes they face were determined.

A qualitative research method was used to measure these attitudes. Among qualitative research methods, narrative research was preferred. It was deemed appropriate to use narrative research to collect the views, thoughts, and stories of people who are active in Islamic education in schools, mosques, and institutions in Germany. In this direction, interviews were conducted using the interview/semi-structured interview technique, which is one of the data collection techniques, and these interviews helped reveal the perspective on Islamic religious education in Germany and the Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors that Islamic religious instructors in Germany faced

In this context, a total of 33 people working in various fields such as schools, mosques, and non-governmental organizations were interviewed, including 13 people working as teachers in schools, 7 people working as teachers/administrators, 5 people working as imams in mosques, 2 people working as teachers and lecturers, 3 people working as religious officials in mosques, 2 people working as experts in religious institutions, and finally 1 person working as an administrator in religious institutions.

Among the participants executing religious education activities, 3 people were high school graduates, 14 people were university graduates, 14 people were master's graduates, and 2 people were doctoral graduates. This shows that the educational level of the people in charge of religious education is high.

The interviewees with an experience of living in Germany for about 30 years or more have been providing Islamic education in Germany for an average of 4-5 years. At the same time, 13 of the participants work as teachers in schools, 7 as teachers/administrators in institutions such as schools, 5 as imams in mosques, 2 as teachers/lecturers in schools/universities, 3 as chaplains in mosques, 2 as experts in religious institutions, and 1 as an administrator in religious institutions. The fact that religious instructors have sufficient experience and work in various institutions shows the competence and experience of the interviewees on the subject.

These characteristics of the Islamic religion course instructors also contributed to the construction of the research topic, and categories were created in line with the stories they told. In this context, it is possible to summarize the data obtained from the interviews according to the categories as follows:

a-The view of Islam/Islamic words/concepts and Muslims:
To evaluate the perspective on Islamic education in Germany, the level of the general perspective on Islam/Muslims should be observed. The results of the interviews yielded the following conclusions in this context;

- there is prejudice and a general fear of Islam,
- Islamic concepts are framed in an unrealistic and incomprehensibly negative way,
- Islamic words and concepts are categorized and defined as good and bad,
- Some concepts such as Sharia and jihad are associated with violence/terror and framed as a horrible system that threatens the social order,
- Issues such as prayer, fasting, and headscarves are interpreted as forced acts of worship,
- The religious dimension of the concepts of halal and haram is ignored and they are associated with backwardness/radicalism,
- Issues related to Islamic dress and appearance (headscarf, beard, etc.) are characterized as bigoted and primitive,
- Disinformation and misinformation about Islamic words and concepts continue to increase and the media has a decisive influence in this regard,
- There are low levels of tolerance towards some manifestations of Islam (such as the call to prayer, mosques),

It has been concluded that there are problems in the integration and harmonization process and Muslims are not liked

for this reason; these perceptions are stronger, especially in areas where Muslims live less; there are fewer problems in areas where Muslims are concentrated; and especially far-right parties use this situation for political purposes and provoke German people.

b-Political/social and theological perspective on Islamic education: The research on how Islamic education is positioned and interpreted in Germany yielded the following inferences:

- Islamic education in Germany was first provided through mosques, and in the following years, in some states and regions, upon the demands of Muslim communities and institutions, it was provided in schools under various courses, and in time, education was provided under the Islam course independently,

Institutions that provide Islamic education such as mosques, associations, etc. have professionalized over time and course materials have been produced, the need for teachers has been met, and in-service training practices have been carried out to train qualified teachers; however, it has been late in producing educational materials that support pluralistic life and consider the living conditions in Germany, and there are processes of misinformation transfer among educators,

- Social, political, and economic problems related to the provision of Islamic education in Germany are tried to be overcome through independent initiatives, whereas it is difficult for Muslims to benefit from the facilities and freedoms enjoyed by institutions and representatives of other religions,
- Despite the completion of legal processes and requests, in some states of Germany, Islamic education

courses cannot be offered, especially in schools, or the processes of providing Islamic education are made difficult,

- There is a weak tolerance for Islamic education in schools across Germany, Islamic education may be seen as unnecessary, and student/instructor problems related to Islamic education continue to increase,
- The view of Islamic education is also negative due to prejudice and fear of Islamic words and concepts and Muslims,
- Islamic education is interpreted as a radical activity,
- Islamic education is seen as raising terrorists and those who receive Islamic education are thought to tend towards violence and terrorism,
- Individuals with an Islamic education would not be able to integrate into Germany,
- Although there is freedom of religious education in Germany's constitutional system, there is no interference in other religious education processes, but there is direct interference in Islamic education centers, course content and educators,
- There is control, pressure, surveillance, and plugging of people and institutions providing Islamic education,
- Islamic education processes and methods are being provided in line with European/German ideology, far from Türkiye and/or Islamic culture, and there are political pressures and interventions at this point,

Islamic religion classes in schools are viewed as preventing radicalization and protecting students against so-called

“Islamist” movements,

- It has been determined that Islamic education is tried to be directed in line with the social/political control of Germany and that the fact that the Islamic religion course has a grade value at school is an indicator of acceptance in the German society in which they live.

c-Problems encountered in the transfer of Islamic knowledge: People who have experience in Islamic education and who have been involved in religious education in mosques, schools, and religious institutions in Germany for many years are usually involved in the transfer of Islamic knowledge. Some of the problems they experience during giving Islamic education are listed as follows:

- Accumulated, generalized, and widespread prejudice against Islam and Muslims,
- Questions asked superficially and with ulterior motives,
- Not being seen as a source of information and trust problems,
- Feeling the need to explain/explain/justify themselves in events in different countries or other political/political developments that are/can be related to Islam and Muslims,
- A generalized, judgmental, and blaming approach to negative events,
- Being forced to choose sides, the need to explain themselves,
- Feeling that they are perceived as potential criminals.

In addition, in political tensions between Muslim immigrants' home country and Germany, teachers are put in a difficult situation because it is claimed that Germany should be the party to show "loyalty".

In addition, it has been found that foreigners do not know Islam, or Islam is not transmitted in a real way, and people who believe in different religions do not question whether they should learn the truth or correct wrong issues. In addition, it has been observed that religious educators have problems in the process of transferring Islamic words and concepts to different religions/languages.

d-Islamophobic attitudes that religious educators are faced: Islamophobia is not only a problem that individuals face in social spheres but also a situation that they are frequently exposed to in the process of securing their constitutional rights and freedoms. In particular, our interviewees who are engaged in religious education state that they are exposed to Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors despite having the freedom to receive religious education and engage in religious education activities. At this point, the following findings are illustrative of such attitudes:

- Pressure, control, monitoring, and surveillance practices against teachers,
- Psychological violence, siege, harassment, distress, harassment, etc. against teachers and students because of their identity/activities related to Islamic religious education,
- Discriminatory and marginalizing behaviors that students are exposed to in the classroom due to their religious beliefs and behaviors,
- Marginalizing and exclusionary attitudes towards those who provide and receive Islamic education in

social, political, and economic life,

- Actions that also threaten the security of life and property of Muslims,
- Islamophobic incidents such as burnings and attacks on mosques, dormitories, etc. where Islamic religion classes are taught. In addition, teachers in schools are questioned about their ties to religious communities and are forced to hide themselves.

e-Combating anti-Islamism/Islamophobia: Although anti-Islamism is an international problem that has been on the rise in recent years, Muslim individuals, especially those living in European countries continue to struggle to explain and promote Islam as well as to explain themselves. Some strategies they follow to combat Islamophobia can be presented as follows:

- Being sensitive to the issue of Islamic education, as they are in a position to impart religious knowledge and provide education on Islamic issues,
- Trying to make contact and interact with individuals of different religions,
- Organizing 'open-mosque days' to promote mosques and Islam,
- Publishing books about Islam in German,
- Publishing reports with statistical data on anti-Islamism,
- Setting up tents and organizing iftar programs on special religious days such as Ramadan and inviting their foreign neighbors,
- Participating in intercultural and interfaith gatherings/events in schools and invitations from places of

worship of other religions and civil society organizations,

- Interacting with students of different religions and trying to eliminate prejudices about Islam in general.

As the research data displays, Islamic religious education is still a subject of debate and religious education is still being provided with many problems/deficiencies. Along with the problems in Islamic religious education, institutional (media and political) Islamophobic discrimination in religious education, increasing hate speech against Islamic words and concepts, marginalizing/discriminatory approaches against the visibility of Muslims in political/social and economic life, and Islamophobic attitudes that religious educators are exposed to reflect the perspective on Islam and Muslims in Germany. Religious educators play a crucial role in helping people learn about and comprehend Islam, especially those who reside in European nations. In the current world, where anti-Islamism is on the rise, the free implementation of religious education programs without political pressure, control, and media barriers will support cultural integration and coexistence. At the same time, this contribution will serve to reduce Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors. Religious education institutions also have important duties in terms of forming public opinion on Islamic education and realizing political demands, and carrying out activities to train religious teachers in a qualified manner following the requirements of the age.

Additionally, increasing attention is given to research exploring Islamic education receiving students' experiences, addressing religious instructors' professional problems, and discussing Islamic education-related problems (curricula, materials, etc.) in Europe. This interest, together with scientific requirements, will contribute to raising awareness about

the issues such as xenophobia, hate speech, discrimination, marginalization, etc., especially against Islam and Muslims in today's world where the far right is on the rise, and the practices that violate basic human rights related to receiving restricted / controlled religious education .

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