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#### **Islamic Education within Muslim Minority: A Study of Finnish National Agency For Education (Fnae) Documents**

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#### **Abstrak**

Finlandia, sebagai negara Nordik dengan minoritas Muslim, tampaknya memberikan posisi khusus pada pendidikan Islam dan menjadikannya setara dengan pendidikan agama mayoritas seperti Lutheran dalam *Finnish National Agency for Education* (FNAE). Keberadaan 20 sekolah Finlandia yang secara resmi diakui oleh pemerintah sebagai memiliki komunitas Muslim dan menyediakan pendidikan Islam merupakan bukti bahwa perkembangan pendidikan Islam di sekolah umum berkembang secara signifikan. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan sistem pendidikan Islam di Finlandia dan praktik pengelolaannya berdasarkan dokumen praktik pendidikan Islam yang diterbitkan oleh FNAE. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode *Documentary Research* (DR) untuk mengeksplorasi data primer. Dokumen dari FNAE menjadi dasar bagi semua sekolah di Finlandia. Artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa Prinsip Keadilan mengatur hak atas agama, termasuk kebebasan dalam pendidikan agama, kehadiran Muslim Finlandia di masa lalu membuat komunitas Muslim diakui oleh negara seiring dengan penyediaan pendidikan Islam, dan posisi pendidikan Islam dalam FNES ditentukan oleh negara di mana 'pendidikan agama untuk siswa disesuaikan dengan agama yang mereka anut dan percayai'. Hal inilah yang menjadikan mata pelajaran pendidikan Islam diajarkan selama dua jam per minggu selama setahun, di mana kurikulumnya dirancang untuk tiga konten: pemahaman siswa tentang Islam, pandangan tentang agama-agama dunia, dan menjalani kehidupan yang baik. Artikel ini berpendapat bahwa pendidikan Islam di negara minoritas menempatkan lanskap religiusitas dan kesetaraan antaragama sebagai bentuk penerimaan negara dalam menyelenggarakan pendidikan agama bagi semua komunitas.

**Kata kunci:** *pendidikan Islam, Finlandia, pendidikan nasional, negara dengan minoritas Muslim*

### **Abstract**

Finland, as a Nordic country with a Muslim minority, seems to place a special position on Islamic education and makes it the same portion as the education of the majority religion such as Lutheran in the *Finnish National Agency for Education* (FNAE). The existence of 20 Finnish schools officially recognized by the government as having Muslim communities and providing Islamic education is evidence that the development of Islamic education in public schools is growing significantly. This article aims to showcase the Islamic education system in Finland and its management practices from the Islamic education practice documents issued by the FNAE. This study employed the *Documentary Research* (DR) method to explore primary data. The documents from the FNAE are the basis for all schools in Finland. This article demonstrates that the Principle of Justice regulates the right to religion, including freedom in religious education, the presence of Finnish Muslims in the past made the Muslim community recognized by the state along with the provision of Islamic education, and the position of Islamic education in the FNES is determined by the state where 'religious education for students is by the religion they adhere to and believe in'. This is what makes Islamic education subjects taught two hours per week for a year, where the curriculum is designed for three contents: students' understanding of Islam, views on world religions, and living a good life. This article argues that Islamic education in minority countries places the landscape of religiosity and inter-religious equality as state acceptance in organizing religious education for all communities.

**Keywords:** *Islamic education, Finland, National education, Muslim minority country*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Islamic education in Finland is unique because the Finnish state highly appreciates Islamic education, and even the Finnish system follows the religious education (RE) model (Ubani et al., 2019, pp.17-18). In Finland, establishing an Islamic educational institution must first have the support of the religious community. Islam is one of the religions that has a Muslim community. All students are entitled to religious education. It is enshrined in the Basic Education Act of 1998, Section 13, Amendment 454/2003, which reads: "education follows the religion they (students) profess". However, religious education is not limited to religious practices, only religious principles and values (Sakaranaho, 2013). The reason is that religious education (RE) is a general pedagogical knowledge-based subject and is not based on religious communities.

In the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, religious teaching aims to form students who are prepared to be responsible members of religious communities and democratic societies to prepare for global citizenship (NCCBE, 2023). Religious teaching in Finnish schools teaches about their religion and other religions while also supporting interfaith dialogue among students. As explained above, the main parameters of Islamic education in Finland are based on the *Basic Education Act* enacted in 1998: “Basic education providers shall provide religious education (RE) following the religion of most students”. The majority religion in Finland is the Lutheran Church (80%); in practice, Lutherans dominate Finnish schools, while Islam is only a minority (2.2%) below Ethics (6%). However, the Finnish national education system rejects monoculturalism, which is not recognized in Finnish schools (Rissanen & Poulter, 2023a).

In terms of management, Finland follows a fully decentralized system (Moate et al., 2024). Municipalities are obliged to organize religious education for students from the Orthodox Church community if there are three students in the municipality. It also applies to other municipalities in Finland and other religions such as Islam. For members of other religious communities, such as Muslims, the municipality is obliged to organize Islamic education in each school if there are at least three students in the municipality and the students are already members of the Islamic community (Sakaranaho, 2013). In addition to religious education, municipalities are also required to organize ethics education or *elämäntietokasvatusta* for students who are not members of any religious community (Suoranta, 2023). The subjects of Islamic education and Ethics education are taught one hour per week for each level in primary education.

Islamic education in Finland was first introduced and implemented in public schools in the mid-1980s, specifically in the Finnish capital of Helsinki. Prior to this policy, Muslim students were required to attend Lutheran religious education, as the state still applied the old policy that the majority religion was the material for religious subjects for all students with a different religious background from Lutheran. When the overall number of Muslims grew rapidly in the mid-1990s, Islamic education began to be organized, managed and implemented in cities other

than Helsinki (Sakaranaho, 2006, p. 352). However, studies on Islamic education in Finland are minimal and have hardly been touched upon by scholars.

For example, the research conducted by Khalili and Kallioniemi (2022) examines human agency in Islamic education and liberal religious education in the Finnish national curriculum. Khalili and Kallioniemi compare it with Iran, where secular and liberal state ideologies influence the religious context in both countries. This comparison is carried out by analyzing national curriculum documents for education in Iran and Finland using a comparative-deductive methodology. This study focuses on three categories: the agency's basis, requirements, and the consequences of Islamic education from the agency. The results show that human agency is always considered in all curriculum documents but with different concepts and emphases. In Iran, the focus is on the spiritual aspect based on wisdom, whereas in Finland, the focus is on the social aspect based on pure reasoning (Khalili et al., 2022).

Previously, Rissanen studied the diversity of the principal's ideology in Islamic education learning to foster Muslim students in inclusive classes. The most highlighted aspect of this study is equality in education, where Islamic education is promoted after being recognized by the state. Finland and Sweden were chosen as research objects, whereas religious education is rarely discussed as a research focus in state schools. Studying the actualization and influence of various diversity ideologies in Islamic education applied in both countries about various forms of diversity and different contexts is essential. This study examines the diversity ideology of Finnish and Swedish principals in promoting Muslim inclusion, where multicultural ideology applies to linguistic diversity. At the same time, Islamic education is excluded from the multiculturalist discourse (Rissanen, 2021).

Regarding the diversity in Islamic education in Finland, Sakaranaho highlights the role of European educational policies in shaping Islamic education as a form of religious instruction that challenges the social order, with state-justified management varying across countries. In Finland and Ireland, Islamic education is integrated into the public school system, where the state actively controls how Islam is taught (Sakaranaho, 2018a). The phenomenon of Islamic education in Finland is unique. Instead of equalizing social and religious justice in a multicultural landscape,

the Finnish state is open to implementing Islamic education, which discusses Finnish social values and best practices for implementing Islamic teachings for its adherents. Here, Islamic schools reach a point of independence and freedom in managing and practicing their curriculum (Imam & Jabeen, 2018).

In addition to diversity, social cohesion occurs when Islamic education is implemented. Based on classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents, and students, Rissanen and Sai observed that social cohesion is promoted in Islamic Education subject in Muslim schools in Ireland and non-religious schools in Finland. The research findings show that despite differences in the governance of Islamic education as a subject taught in both types of schools (in both countries), Islamic education learning emerges as a space where teachers use power as agents for the internal governance of religion. This means that the substance of Islamic religious material is highly determined by the teacher's capability to understand Islam as teaching and Islam as a value (Rissanen & Sai, 2018).

From the previous research search, no research specifically discusses Islamic education in the context of the Muslim minority community in Finland. Most studies focus on human agency in Islamic and liberal religious education, governance of Islamic education in the religious landscape, equality and social justice in Islamic education, and social cohesion. This article highlights the Islamic education system in Finland and its management practices from the Islamic education practice document issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE). Since Islam is a minority religion (2.2%), and Lutheranism is the majority religion (80%), Islamic education is highly respected by the Finnish government. The first part presents the introduction, methods used, research results, and discussion consisting of discussions: the relationship between the church and the Muslim community in Finland to obtain state recognition in the context of education, the presence of Muslims in organizing Islamic education in Finland today, the position of Islamic education in the Finnish National Education System (FNES), Islamic education management practices, and the curriculum and challenges faced. At the end of the paper, a conclusion is presented to provide a general statement that Islamic education in Finland is expected to produce democratic students, and it is also expected that

students can become part of the Islamic society, which can dialogue globally in terms of understanding religion in the Muslim minority landscape.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was designed with a qualitative approach using the *Documentary Research* (DR) method (Mcculloch, 2004). Documentary sources are increasingly neglected in education and social sciences. The primary data in this study were documents from the FNAE for Basic Education, which are guidelines for all schools in Finland. Because the majority adhere to Lutheranism, the teaching of Islamic education is limited to introducing Islamic teachings to students in heterogeneous classes who are Lutheran, Christian, and Muslim. All documents were coded, reduced, and then analyzed. Coding was done by creating codes, organizing codes, and arranging patterns (Locke et al., 2022). In inductive analysis, although the research findings are influenced by the contextuality of the data as planned by the researcher, the actual findings emerge from the analysis of raw data into final narrative data. During this process, data analysis was carried out back and forth to ensure conformity with the raw data (Kyngäs, 2020).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Relations of Church, State and Muslim Community in Finland**

Finland is one of the Nordic unitary states that promotes justice and equality for all people before the law. This principle of fairness also guides religious rights, including the practice of religion and the free practice of religion (Ministry of Education, 2003; Ministry of Justice, 1999). However, after the wave of immigration to Finland, Finnish society has experienced difficulties in achieving religiosity as socialization has become increasingly uncontrolled. It is characterized by increasing ethnic, religious and cultural diversity; it has been the rapid growth of Muslims since the 1990s (Sakaranaho, 2018b).

As with other European countries, such as France and Belgium, Finland has also struggled to have a ministry or government agency to oversee Muslims in Finland. To address this issue, in 2006, the Ministry of Education and Culture funded the establishment of the Islamic Council of Finland (ICF), known in Finnish as

*Suomen Islamilainen Neuvosto*, abbreviated as SINE (MARTIKAINEN, 2019). It consists of various Islamic communities in Finland, apart from the Tatar Muslims, who represent the largest Muslim community in the country. However, SINE experienced internal problems that resulted in many Islamic communities leaving. The government has also withdrawn its financial support from SINE due to problems with the SINE Board in managing finances (Martikainen, 2019). In addition, a wave of Islamophobia, an increase in extremist threats mainly related to the experience of racism and feelings of alienation of the Finnish Muslim population, forced as many as 80 Muslims to travel from Finland to conflict areas in Syria and Iraq, and about 20 of them have returned to Finland (Pauha & Ritola, 2022). In other words, the tension of racism against Islam in Finland is still ongoing.

### **Muslim Presence and Islamic Education in Finland: The Current Situation**

As in other major European countries, the attitude of Finnish society is very negative. Based on a recent survey report from the Pew Research Centre in 2018, 62% of Finns view Islam as incompatible with European culture and Finnish values, and 35% of Finns know a Muslim personally (Pew Research Centre, 2018, pp. 66; 79). Although it is only a question of raising the issue, it indicates that Islam is still considered strange to Finnish society. This phenomenon reinforces that Islam is not part of the Finnish identity for most of the younger generation. Nevertheless, the presence of Tatar Muslims shaped the Finnish state's identity, the oldest community in Finland. However, geopolitical circumstances and local interests beyond the control of the Tatar Muslims themselves cause Finnish society to regard Islam as an enemy (Elmgren, 2021). It has led to the loss of Muslim identity as Finns. This reality is supported by "Civic Lutheranism", which requires the membership of Lutheran churches to be increased in all cities and towns, indicating a deliberate attempt to force Lutheran religion to be culturally massive throughout Finland (Pauha, 2018).

This reality also impacts the educational environment, which is often in the spotlight of the Finnish public. In various public discussions, the younger generation in Finland often gets information and knowledge that the young Muslim generation is the cause of social problems and raises the seeds of radicalism in their learning process, even though there is only one incident in Finland that has an Islamic terrorism motive (BBC News, 2017). It is no wonder that the discourse on the

securitization of Islam has intensified in public discussions on Islamic education in Finland and has raised questions about the attitudes and actions of Muslims and the Finnish government in response to the infusion of radicalism through education (Niemi et al., 2019).

This phenomenon is not surprising when reflecting on the number of Muslims in Finland, which is only 2.7% of the Finnish population. The *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* notes that there were around 110,000-120,000 Muslims in Finland in 2020, and they are registered in 46 Muslim communities and 87 Muslim associations. This community has the same rights as the Lutheran community, the largest religious community in Finland (Račius et al., 2021).

Finland's Muslim community has been around for a century, precisely at the end of the 19th century when Tatar Muslims from Russia began to settle in Finland (in 1909-1917). In Finland, they settled in a resident area or grand duchy under Finnish rule. When Finland gained independence in 1917, the Tatar Muslims were granted full citizenship rights by the Finnish government and established the first registered religious community in the country before Lutherans (Sakaranaho, 2006). The waves of Muslims coming to Finland grew, and by 1987, they had migrated to Finland in a third phase. By the 1990s, the number of Muslims was growing and spreading across Finland. In terms of religious beliefs, Finnish Muslims are *Sunni* (90%) with African (Somali) backgrounds, and the rest are Shia (10%) of the total Muslim population. During the arrival of this third migration, it is estimated that around 5000-6000 Finnish citizens converted to Islam.

This condition has led Finland to adopt a unique and remarkable religious education (RE) model compared to other European countries. Registered religious communities, such as the Muslim and the Lutheran communities, have equal rights to "education by their respective religions". It is stipulated in the Basic Education Act of 1998, Article 13, Amendment 454. There is something very interesting here: despite this right, all students and teachers are prohibited from practicing religion in the school environment, in the sense that they only teach or are taught about the teachings, principles, and values of Islam but are not allowed to practice it in school. According to the Act, RE is "a subject" that is only "knowledge" based on pedagogical purposes, not for the practice of religious practices nor the propagation

of religion. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education states that “teaching religion is only to support the growth of students into human beings who will one day join their religious community and a democratic and globalized society” (NCCBE, 2023). In other words, the teaching of Islam in schools is enacted to prepare students to become future citizens so that they have the skills to dialogue with adherents of other religions so that they have a broad view of their religion as democratic and globalized human beings.

### **The Position of Islamic Education in the Finnish National Education System (FNES)**

In the last decade, Finland has had 20 Finnish schools officially recognized by the government in which there are Muslim communities and the implementation of Islamic education (Kallioniemi & Ubani, 2016). To explain how Islamic education is positioned in the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE), starting from primary education, the Finnish government applies the basic education system in ‘one school choice’ to be equal for every child. The central government applies a principle of fairness to all schools in cities other than Helsinki. In Finland, primary education is compulsory for children aged 6-7 years, while preschool education takes place for one year before age 6 (FNAE, 2018). Interestingly, all these schools are public, while very few private schools are established by foundations. In Finland, permission to establish a private school or a school under a Foundation or NGO (Non-Government Organization) is not easily granted by the Finnish National Ministry of Education and Culture, or it is estimated that more than 95% of children are educated in primary and secondary schools in public schools or government schools. This phenomenon contrasts with Indonesia, where private schools established by foundations outnumber public schools, and licenses are fairly easy to obtain.

What happens in Finland is based on the principles of the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, and Norway), which place a strong emphasis on the provision of universal educational welfare for the public and a vital concern for social equality, so that privatization of education by private schools is limited as much as possible to avoid profit-making and abuse in education (Dovemark et al., 2018). In the last decade, efforts to establish Muslim primary schools have increased.

However, some problems are difficult to solve equally, namely related to the competence of Islamic teachers, premises and infrastructure, and financing models. The government has implemented the Freedom of Religion Law 453/2003 for curriculum issues. The Islamic education curriculum is designed with the involvement of the Muslim community. This provision has practical consequences for Finnish schools in the Helsinki metropolitan area, where language and religion, including Islam, are taught as part of the public-school curriculum.

Finland follows a rather unusual model of a religious education system. All registered religious communities have the right to:

*“Religious education follows the religion they profess and believe in.”*

It is enshrined in the Basic Education Act 1998, Section 13, Amendment 454/2003. However, this religious education does not include religious practices taught at school, such as praying within the school premises (Ziebertz & Riegel, 2009, p. 63). The aim is to prevent disrespect for religious values and practices within schools, leading to social disparities and discrimination that teach students negative things (Keränen-Pantsu & Rissanen, 2018, p. 19). In Finland, Islamic education is a knowledge-based subject for public school teaching. It is not intended for private schools or schools that prioritize the interests of religious communities.

The goal of religious education is achieved through learning about their respective religions in school without engaging in religious practices in the school environment. Students and teachers are free to dialogue about their religion and study their religious rituals textually. Meanwhile, religious practices are carried out outside the school environment, at home or in places of worship. The parameters of this Islamic education implementation goal are outlined in the Basic Education Act, which says that:

*“Providers of basic education shall provide religious education (Lutheran, Orthodox, and Islamic) by the religion professed by the students with the criterion of adherence to the majority religion”* (Finlex Data Bank, 1998).

As two-thirds of Finland’s population is Lutheran, Lutheran students dominate Finnish schools in practice. The distribution of religious subjects followed by students varies according to their religion.

## Islamic Education Management Practices in Finland

As mentioned above, RE is based on the *Basic Education Act* of 2008, and the government decree states that: “the provision of religious education in primary education shall be by the majority of students”. In this case, the majority of the entire school is Lutheran. This means that if there are 20 students in a class, of which 18 are Lutheran and the rest are Muslim, then RE teaching is Lutheran religious material. In addition, the local government, in this case the municipality, requires RE to be organized for Orthodox church students if there are three students. Many students and their parents are not registered as any religion in Finland. For Muslim students, the municipality also requires RE if there are three Muslim students in the municipality. In other words, there are justice and equality in the policy taken by the Finnish government in implementing religious education (RE).

In addition to RE, the municipality must organize ethics education (EE), which is *elämänkatsomustieto*. EE is for students who do not belong to any religion or are not registered as members of any religious community. As in Islam and Orthodox Christianity, the number of students for those without a religion must be at least three, so ethics education (EE) is mandatory (Sakaranaho, 2013). This EE subject is followed by about 6% and Muslims by about 2.2%. Since, in practice, there are schools that have mixed classes of Muslim and non-believer students, more EE is taught, and Muslim students are required to take the subject (see Table 1). RE and EE are taught one hour per week at the primary level. This is exempted from primary education, where the local municipality chooses the grade level, so RE and EE must be taught two hours a week for a year.

Table 1. Students' Choice of Religious Subjects in Primary Education in 2018

Religion	Subject choices in grades 1-6	Subject choices in grades 7-9
Lutheran	86.1%	89.1%
Orthodox Christian	1.6%	1.5%
Islam	2.5%	2.2%
Ethics*	8.5%	6.0%
Other religions	0.5%	0.5%
Quit religion	0.8%	0.6%
Total	100%	100%

Notes: \*Designated for students who have no religion (atheists).

Source: Vipunen (2019).

Religious studies were first introduced in the mid-1980s, focusing only on the Finnish capital, Helsinki. In the past, Muslim students were required to take Lutheran religious subjects. However, when the number of Muslims grew rapidly, the government introduced Islamic education in cities other than Helsinki in the mid-1990s (Sakaranaho, 2006, p. 352). It can be said, therefore, that the introduction of Islamic education learning started in cities other than Helsinki, and as the Muslim community was more dominant in these cities, Islamic education became an urgent issue to be negotiated at the center.

### **Islamic Education Curriculum in Finland**

Islamic education was not implemented in Helsinki because the people of the capital city considered that to start organizing religious education (RE), a clear national curriculum must first be officially issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE). Meanwhile, the implementation of Islamic education in cities other than Helsinki was because religious communities already had terms of reference for Islamic education materials managed by each religious community, and they were more qualified in designing materials than the central government. Developing the national curriculum for Islamic education went through a very long process and involved inviting representatives of FNAE, municipalities, district education offices, schools, and different religious communities. In practice, the most recent Religious Education Curriculum in 2014 and 2019 were developed in cooperation with these parties and involved religious teachers from all religions, including Islam (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2019). There are currently several unified curricula for religious education within Christianity, e.g. Lutheranism, Orthodox Christianity, and Catholicism. However, unlike Christianity, the Islamic education curriculum is only one (Sakaranaho, 2013). Even though there is both Sunni Islam and Shia Islam in Finland, the Islamic education curriculum is taught as general Islamic teaching-based learning materials, not as a school of Islam (NCCBE, 2023; Onnisekka, 2011, pp. 131-134; Sakaranaho, 2019b).

Developing the Islamic education curriculum is outlined in the latest regulations in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (NCCBE) for primary and junior high schools by the FNAE, considering that the curriculum is based on Finnish cultural heritage as a form of national identity. In other words, it

refutes the common perception of the younger generation of Finns that Islam is a nuisance and not a forerunner to the founding of the Finnish state. With this policy, a cultural dialogue focuses on the original Finnish identity, and Islam plays a central role. In line with this principle, the overall aim of all religions education (RE) is to provide a comprehensive education about different religions and the worldview of those religions (Kavonius & Kallioniemi, 2016). Such a rationale is to educate young people who are pluralistic, free from exclusive and radical thinking, and able to interact with a globalized society (Niemi et al., 2018).

Therefore, the content of Islamic education in Finland aims to prepare students to understand global citizenship and promote them into responsible citizens in a democratic society, of course, with the principles and values taught by Islam regarding the concept of citizenship. The Islamic education curriculum has three contents: students' understanding of their religion (Islam), a view of the world's religions, and living a good life (NCCBE, 2023).

Meanwhile, the Qur'an and Islamic traditions are the main foundation of students' understanding of Islam. At this stage, providing Islamic stories and teachings in consensus (no Sunni or Shia) appropriate to the student's age is important. At 6-9 years old, students should be introduced to Islam from a family perspective, meaning that providing Islamic material related to everyday family life is important, including filial piety to parents, praying with parents, daily prayers at home and in the neighborhood, and various things about family life. Then, gradually, they are taught to recognize Islam in Europe, Islam in the Middle Eastern world, and Islam in Asia. Eventually, they get to know the images of Islam around the world. The influence of Islam on culture, art, and science is also discussed, as Islam has contributed significantly to the civilization of the times. In the last grade of the comprehensive school (around 10-12 years old), learning materials on Islamic history and interpretation of the Qur'an (*tafseer*) and Islamic culture are taught to students at this age. In the next grade (grades 7-9), around the age of 13-15, they are taught about the diversity of Islam, which consists of various sects within Islam (such as Sunni and Shia), political Islam, and also Islam in Society (NCCBE, 2023).

The second content area is about the "worldview of religions". The content of Islamic education materials examines religion and how the world views Islam. It

is important that students know the religions and their teachings to make sure to express their differences, and they must tolerate religious differences (Rissanen & Poulter, 2023b). In the third content area, “living a good life”, Islamic education materials are devoted to human values (including human rights), the universal value of Islam called *rahmat lil 'alamin*, and treating other creatures (plants and animals) and taking care of them. The Islamic education materials also convey the importance of responsibility for actions toward other humans and creatures. As in the Christian curriculum, the Islamic education curriculum in this third content area is adapted to the United Nations (UN) Convention by emphasizing that living a better life has been taught by Islam and justified in the world conference (UN) (Sakaranaho, 2019a).

Meanwhile, in senior high school, the National Core Curriculum includes six religious education (RE) subjects with different topics. In the RE curriculum, the first compulsory subject focuses on the general religions, i.e. the Abrahamic religions, which means it covers all religions related to Abraham. In the second compulsory subject, the topics are related to Islam around the world but from a broader perspective (not the same as in the previous primary education), where the history of Islam in different parts of the world, the implementation of different Islamic sharia in different parts of the world, and the religious culture of Islam around the world. This second compulsory course aims to help students understand Islam as it is perceived in different countries worldwide, including minority Islamic societies in the Western countries. In Finland, in particular, the material is related to the role of Islam in science and technology, art, and popular culture, which developed with the help of the media and the influence of Islamic civilization in Europe (NCCGUSS, 2019).

### **Current Challenges of Islamic Education in Finland**

Religious education (RE) in Finland has repeatedly generated intense public debate, and the current model is often outdated. However, this was not the case when discussions in the parliament and the government were very accommodating to the interests of the Muslim community to promote Islamic education. In several Finnish cities, schools have organized pilots in which different forms of religious education are integrated, including the integration of Lutheran religious education with Orthodox Christianity, which has a different viewpoint (Åhs et al., 2019). The

current model of Islamic education provision is most prominently defended by representatives of minority religions such as Islam and their teachers is the minority religion model of learning, which often revolves around minority rights. Based on the data, Islamic education policy in Finland is based on the principles of inclusiveness, freedom of religion, and human rights. Therefore, the policy of implementing religious education in Finland refers to students' religious beliefs. In this context, Muslim students can get Islamic religious education materials.

Although the general objectives in the national core curriculum are the same for all religions, minority communities often provide a religious education function that is also a minority, and often, the religious education in the classroom is given to students belonging to the majority religion and minority students have to receive material that is different from their religion. This is in contrast to majority (Lutheran) religious education, where religious education aims to develop comprehensive knowledge, including religious rituals, and a worldview in response to the Lutheran religion (Rissanen, 2019). This makes the face of religious education in Finland seem “unbalanced” between Lutheran religious education and other religions such as Islamic education. For example, understanding national identity for students of the majority religion will be very different for minority students in understanding the complex diversity that forms the Finnish national identity.

In addition, challenges also come from demographic differences in different regions of Finland, which must also be considered in discussions about Islamic education. For example, Islamic education is shifting to an interfaith religious education model, which will result in an “ambiguous” understanding of Islam itself and religious education (RE) in general. In addition, the effect on minority students will be conspicuous with majority students when viewed from the students' religious identity. Therefore, it is easy to see why religious minority student groups feel that they are the ones who will be disadvantaged under these circumstances. However, in the case of religious education (RE), the issues aforementioned also affect the quality of religious learning in classrooms, resulting in varying levels of learning. For example, materials related to teaching “general Islam”, when taught by teachers with a strong understanding of Islam, may cause further confusion due to the existing

curriculum guidelines. This has led to a disconnection between religious teacher training and their capabilities.

Nowadays, more and more non-Muslim teachers with Bachelor's or Master's degrees are becoming Islamic education teachers in comprehensive or specialized classes. It makes the disparity wider, and teachers who have a deep understanding of Islam will lose out to teachers who have a Master's degree, even if they are non-Muslims, for example. Although RE can be considered a very sensitive subject, which requires many pedagogical skills by Islamic education teachers, discussions about general religious education (RE) and Islamic education often focus on learning approaches or methods, not the substance of religious subject matter. In other words, the future development of Islamic education in Finland depends heavily on the development of general religious education (RE). It makes the disparity between RE and Islamic education even more unclear in smaller towns in Finland.

## CONCLUSION

As a Nordic country, Finland is unique in managing Islamic education. Although a minority religion, the Finnish government highly appreciates Islamic education, and even the Finnish state system follows the religious education (RE) model. It cannot be separated from the existence of Tatar Muslims who inhabited Finland before the country finally became independent in 1917. For this historical reason, the Finnish government considers Islamic education one of the elements of national education that must be accommodated. Finally, Islamic education has a place in the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE) even though there are public discussions that stigmatize Islam as a religion that has no historical roots in Finnish culture in various places.

This article discusses the implementation of Islamic education in the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE) and how Islamic education is managed in public schools in Finland. It centers on a study of the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education. This document is the basis for all schools in Finland, including in the capital, Helsinki. The study found it interesting that the Finnish government gives an equal share of the education system and management to the education of majority religions such as the Lutheran religion. Twenty (20)

Finnish schools, including Muslim communities, were officially recognized by the government and provided Islamic education. The primary, junior, and senior high school divisions on the material presented vary according to age and characteristics. In addition, the national curriculum for Islamic education has three different contents, i.e. students' understanding of Islam, views of world religions, and living a good life, making the Islamic education material area focused on contextual issues. It indicates that students' understanding of Islam is broader to produce democratic students. Students are also expected to be able to become part of the Islamic community and be able to dialogue globally in terms of understanding religion. Along with the development of Muslim mobility.

The researcher recommends that future research investigates Islamic education in Muslim minority countries, such as Australia, Canada, and Hong Kong. In response to this, it examines how the Islamic education system helps Muslim students maintain their religious identity amidst the dominance of the majority culture.

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