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# Importing mosque pedagogy from Turkey: an analysis of contextual factors shaping re-contextualisation processes in the Netherlands

Hülya Kosar Altinyelken  and Semiha Sözeri 

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores how mosque pedagogy was imported from Turkey through imams who were appointed to the Netherlands, and textbooks developed and printed in Turkey. Furthermore, this article examines how a range of contextual factors have reshaped the imported pedagogy in mosque classes. The factors identified in the analysis include language policies, the influence of pedagogical practices in mainstream Dutch schools, concerns about student motivation, and in the backdrop of fears of cultural alienation and assimilation in a Western context, the imperative of nurturing an Islamic and Turkish identity among ethnic minority children. This paper is based on a case study in a Turkish mosque in the Netherlands. The findings demonstrate how a myriad of individual, societal, cultural and institutional factors reshaped imported pedagogy. At the same time, this paper highlights how mosque pedagogy is not only an educational matter but increasingly immersed within competing societal and political agendas of two states.

## KEYWORDS

Mosque education; Qur'anic schooling; pedagogy; Dutch muslims; *Diyabet*; re-contextualisation

## Introduction

Islamic education is intensely debated in Europe due to concerns that it might reinforce isolationist tendencies, and promote values that undermine social cohesion. The academic debate mostly focuses on formal education provided at Islamic primary and secondary schools (Dijkstra and Vermeulen 2008). In comparison, within the European context, there are few studies that examine the non-formal Islamic education provided at mosques, so-called Qur'anic instruction or madrassas (Cherti and Bradley 2011). This omission is particularly striking since most Muslim children receive this type of religious education. For instance, in the Netherlands, 43 Islamic primary schools enrol 10 percent of the total population of Muslim children (Maussen and Vermeulen 2015). Although there are no official statistics, some studies indicate that attending Qur'an courses is the rule

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for Muslim children, with more than 75 percent enrolment rates among the Turkish–Dutch (Phalet, Fleischmann, and Stojicic 2012).

In recent years, mosque education has received unprecedented scrutiny from policymakers and wider public whose perceptions are largely shaped by the media in a decidedly critical way (Sözeri, Altinyelken, and Volman 2017). It is often linked to growing concerns in Europe that Muslim immigrants do not share the core values of liberal democratic societies, and mosques might reproduce conservative dispositions. These concerns are topical in the Netherlands where a shift is observed in the public attitudes from multiculturalism towards assimilation of minorities (Dagevos and Huijnk 2012). Although mosque education is mostly studied in Asia and Africa (Boyle 2006), comparable studies in Europe are rare mainly because of the challenges of negotiating access to mosques (Gent 2011; Scourfield et al. 2013). Researchers tend to be seen as ‘predators’ (Bolognani 2007), and the climate of Islamophobia post-9/11 and the subsequent terrorist attacks in major European capitals had a strong negative impact on levels of trust between mosque officials and researchers. Consequently, there is scant knowledge about Qur’anic schooling. It is largely hidden from view and often insufficiently understood outside of Muslim communities throughout Europe (Cherti and Bradley 2011). As such the pedagogy of mosque education has largely remained a ‘black box’.

The few available studies on the topic pointed out that in the first decades after the migration to Europe (1960s and 1970s), mosque pedagogy has been largely modelled by practices in the countries of origin, namely a pedagogical approach emphasising teacher dominance, authoritarian teaching style, harsh discipline and rote learning (Cherti and Bradley 2011; Pels 2014). Memorisation persisted as an inherent part of mosque pedagogy as learning how to pronounce Qur’anic verses and recite correctly is an important aim (Gent 2011; Rosowsky 2013). Some studies report changes in mosque education and even talk of ‘major transformations’ as pedagogical practices are translated and re-contextualised in European societies over the decades (Che Noh et al. 2014; Pels 2014). Nevertheless, we know little about how these pedagogical practices are adapted, modified and reframed locally, and what constellation of factors influences the re-contextualisation processes.

This article aims to address these knowledge gaps by exploring how mosque pedagogy was imported from Turkey by Turkish mosques in the Netherlands, using one case study mosque to illustrate. Within the comparative education literature, educational transfer refers to supra and transnational agency activity and to common educational agendas across borders. The embedded or re-contextualised policy or practice is to be found in ‘local’ spaces where the travelling policy/practice is mediated and translated in distinctive ways through local actors and contextual factors (Ozga and Jones 2006; Verger, Novelli, and Altinyelken 2012). We apply the notion of educational transfer to mosque pedagogy to illustrate how mosque pedagogy was imported from Turkey through imams who were appointed to the Netherlands, and textbooks developed and printed in Turkey. This article analyses factors in post-migration context that have influenced the translation of mosque pedagogy. The factors we identified in our study included the following: language policies, the effects of mainstream Dutch schools, concerns about student motivation, and in the backdrop of fears of cultural alienation and assimilation in a Western context, the imperative of nurturing an Islamic and Turkish identity among ethnic minority children.

Our focus will be on the Turkish–Dutch Muslims: they are the largest immigrant group in the Netherlands with a total of 397,000 (CBS 2016), and they demonstrate relatively high levels of ethnic retention (maintaining a culture of origin) and social closure (Phalet,

Fleischmann, and Stojicic 2012). Furthermore, due to the isolationist tendencies within the Turkish–Dutch diaspora, they are often seen as living in a ‘parallel society’ (Sunier and Landman 2015), and demonstrate stronger allegiances to Turkey rather than to the Netherlands (Sunier, van der Linden, and van de Bovenkamp 2016). The case study institution is a large mosque which is one of the 146 mosques governed by the Dutch branch of the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs *Diyamet*. The data was gathered between March and May 2017, through classroom observations, and interviews with mosque teachers, parents and students. It is important to note that the fieldwork was conducted at a time when diplomatic relationships between Turkey and the Netherlands were rather tense, and the Turkish government’s links with *Diyamet* were increasingly scrutinised and criticised.

### **Mosque pedagogy**

Qur’an courses are independently organised by mosques and remain beyond the regulatory and supervisory framework of the state (Cherti and Bradley 2011; Pels 2014). It may amount to 10 hours per week and is attended mostly by children aged 6–16, in the after-school hours or during the weekends. Students are taught to recite and read the Qur’an (particularly sufficient verses and invocations for use in prayer) and subjects that are viewed important to Islamic nurture (e.g. performance of rituals and introduction to Islamic law, philosophy, norms and values) (van Bruinessen 2003; Scourfield et al. 2013). Groups are organised by gender and/or ability in Islamic knowledge and are taught by same-sex teachers. In several mosques, imams take up educational roles but often mosque education is provided by volunteer teachers who are considered knowledgeable about Qur’an. Moreover, most mosques do not have a unified curriculum or teaching programme, resulting in variations even among mosques affiliated with similar ethnic and national groups (Cherti and Bradley 2011).

### **Teaching and learning in mosques**

The pedagogy of Qur’anic schooling puts emphasis on memorisation and reproduction of Qur’anic texts in Classical Arabic, a language most Muslim children in the West do not comprehend. Similar to religious education practices in other major religions, such traditional pedagogies ‘emphasise verbatim mastery of sacred written texts as a means to develop a child’s intellect, moral character, and religious community membership’ (Moore 2012, 298). Based on an ethnographic research in three mosques in the UK, Rosowsky (2013, 75) reports that ‘the dominant pedagogical approach is systematic phonics’ and ‘an understanding of successful reading in all three settings encompasses reading as fluent and accurate decoding’. However, as students are encouraged to begin reading Qur’an through reciting in a repetitive fashion, students’ comprehension of the meaning of the verses is often ignored (Che Noh et al. 2014).

Nevertheless, Gent (2011, 13) argues for a ‘reconsideration of the status of memorisation as a culturally determined aspect of learning’ and suggests that there is a legitimate role for memorisation as a distinct form of learning. Likewise, acknowledging concerns about comprehension and meaning, Rosowsky (2013, 76) maintains that ‘the activity itself is not therefore meaningless. As a means of participating in an ethno-religious and

ethnolinguistic practice, it engages with important aspects of self and group identities'. Based on their survey of 179 madrassas in the UK, Cherti and Bradley (2011) reported that 97 percent of madrassas taught Qur'an mostly through memorisation techniques with an emphasis on reciting things off by heart. However, they also identified that some teachers highlighted the importance of seizing children's attention and supporting them to understand the meaning behind the sacred texts. In the Dutch context, the work of Pels (2014) points out that mosque education tends to be very teacher centred, emphasising a 'one-way traffic', leaving little room for interactions between teachers and students, and among students.

Over the years, the quality of religious instruction at mosques has been questioned, and imams in the Netherlands were criticised for their lack of pedagogical knowledge, highly authoritarian teaching styles, anti-Western rhetoric, lack of knowledge and familiarity with Dutch culture and language (Witteaman 2009; Cherribi 2010), and for not having a good understanding of the needs of children and youth growing up in European societies. Such critique is similar to calls for reform in other Western countries where mosque education has received considerable criticism both from Muslims and non-Muslims (van Bruinessen 2003; Che Noh et al. 2014). Hence, some studies underline the need for improving pedagogical practices at mosques, in an effort to make learning and teaching more interactive and child-centred (Cherti and Bradley 2011; Pels 2014).

### ***Re-contextualising mosque pedagogy in the West***

Since Islamic knowledge – the Islamic beliefs, values and practices Muslims consider to be correct – is highly contested, it is important to consider how certain forms of Islamic knowledge and pedagogy become authoritative among Muslims in Western Europe. There are a range of would-be Muslim authorities, and state and non-state actors in European societies that 'have a strong interest in favouring or rejecting certain interpretations of Islam' (van Bruinessen 2003, 2). The scant scholarship on mosque education in Europe points out that the pedagogy of the mosque in the country of origin influences largely the mosque practices in European societies. Similar to other countries, in the Netherlands, these influences are exerted through transfer or employment of imams mainly from Turkey and Morocco, and the use of books and other curricular materials developed and printed in these countries (Cherribi 2010; Pels 2014). Moreover, cultural and historical affinity as well as deliberate policies of 'the governments of Turkey and Morocco to keep control over their ex-subjects' (van Bruinessen 2003, 9; Sunier, van der Linden, and van de Bovenkamp 2016) are important ways through which mosque practices in the Netherlands are intimately linked with those of Turkey and Morocco. Consequently, countries of origin are powerful 'reference societies' (Phillips and Ochs 2004) in borrowing educational policies and practices pertaining to mosque pedagogy.

Yet, our knowledge about how these borrowed mosque practices are modified as they are appropriated in the contexts of reception is scant. One study on the UK context refers to the 'conventional' mosque pedagogy as being 'imported from the subcontinent', and suggests that it has dramatically changed over the decades:

... mainly due to the exposure and teaching techniques, which teachers in this field have learnt and adopted from other sources such as government schools. Government teachers

are provided and given different methods of how children can learn and what methods can be adopted. These same teachers then have the possibility to apply these methods in the mosques, which not only makes the session interesting, but more interactive and productive for the child. (Che Noh et al. 2014, 315)

The field of comparative education seeks to analyse such ‘foreign influences’ – mostly within the framework of mainstream schooling – through the concepts of policy travel or educational transfer. It refers to ‘the movement of ideas, practices and institutions across international borders’ (Beech 2006, 2). The burgeoning literature on educational transfer demonstrates that education policies and practices are adapted and re-contextualised by way of multiple processes, actors and contextual factors (Dale 1999; Phillips and Ochs 2004; Steiner-Khamsi 2014). With reference to the significance of teacher agency, Resh and Benavot (2009) suggest that local schools have increasingly become critical mediators between official policies and the knowledge to which students are exposed in classrooms. One of the important factors that underline this mediation process is the fact that teachers tend to perceive the official policy as a suggestion, and do not regard it as a compulsory frame narrative. Indeed, teachers develop their own narratives that conform to their pedagogical and content approach, and reflect their individual curriculum ideology, orientation or platform.

As a relevant example, various studies on child-centred pedagogy (CCP), which gained global education policy status by the late twentieth century, illustrate how CCP went through a metamorphosis in different regions of the world as teachers attempted to modify it into their classroom realities (Nykiel-Herbert 2004; Carney 2008; Schweisfurth 2013). A constellation of factors gives rise to large differences in how CCP was translated and re-contextualised in distinct national and local contexts, including cultural milieu, resource availability, teacher training and professional identity, classroom size, linguistic competence of students and teachers, and backwash effects of high-stakes examinations that govern access to secondary education (Chisholm and Leyendecker 2008; Schweisfurth 2013). A study comparing the implementation of CCP in schools in two very distinct contexts – Uganda and Turkey – showed that even if CCP enjoyed high levels of receptivity among teachers in both countries, the implementation profiles revealed substantial variances. This was because CCP was framed differently in policy documents; it was understood, interpreted and practised in distinct ways by teachers; and contextual factors (such as resource availability, classroom size and comprehension levels in the language of instruction) gave rise to divergent processes of translation of pedagogical ideas (Altinyelken 2010; 2011).

### **Turkish mosque education in the Netherlands and *Diyanet***

The mosques in the Netherlands are different from those in Turkey not only because of the absence of distinctive architectural features but also because they have assumed larger societal roles. While in Turkey, mosques are purpose-built for worship and prayer, in the Netherlands they operate as community centres typically accommodating teahouse, barber shop, grocery store, bookstore, offices and conference rooms, or even youth rooms equipped with computer game consoles (van Bruinessen 2003; Es 2016).

All Turkish mosques in the Netherlands provide some sort of Islamic education or Qur'an courses. The Dutch–Turkish Muslim community is organised under different Islamic associations following Sunni Islam. The largest of these is the Islamic Association Netherlands (or the Dutch branch of *Diyanet*) owning 146 mosques, the Netherlands Islamic Centre Association (the so-called *Süleymancı* community) having 46 mosques, and the Islamic Community *Milli Görüş* which governs 45 mosques.

*Diyanet* was founded by the Turkish state in order to offset the disunifying influence the other Turkish Islamic groups initiated by the labour migrants, and to strengthen national allegiance among the Turkish diaspora (Yukleyen 2009). Differently than the *Milli Görüş* and the *Süleymancı*, it enjoyed the official support of the Dutch state which signed an agreement in 1983 allowing *Diyanet* to bring and employ their own imams in the Dutch *Diyanet* mosques (Sunier, van der Linden, and van de Bovenkamp 2016). *Diyanet's* vision on Islam was perceived as more attractive and acceptable compared to the others because it was seen as a 'moderate' version of Islam as propagated by the secular state of Turkey (Sunier and Landman 2015). In this regard, it could be argued that the mosque pedagogy imported by *Diyanet* into the Netherlands was perceived as 'the best practice' compared to its alternatives. Moreover, the quality of *Diyanet's* mosque education was perceived higher since *Diyanet* imams are graduates of the Islamic Theology university programmes in Turkey and received pedagogical training, whereas in non-state affiliated mosques in the Netherlands, lower educated or self-taught imams are recurrently employed. Furthermore, 'the *Diyanet* imams are sent and paid by the Turkish government following an annual nationwide exam for Turkish theology graduates and an interview with a committee comprised of officials from the Turkish Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (Sözeri, Altinyelken, and Volman 2018). As such, *Diyanet* imams in the Netherlands are viewed as more knowledgeable and competent in pedagogical skills.

Today the Turkish Presidency for Religious Affairs is still sending and paying for the imams working in the mosques of *Diyanet* in the Netherlands. These imams are employees of the Turkish state and as such, they are under the supervision of the religious attaché and religious consultancy department of the Turkish Embassy. However, contrary to the favourable perceptions in the past, these institutional arrangements are attracting increasing criticism from the authorities in the Netherlands. There are concerns that the practices in the Dutch *Diyanet* mosques encourage consolidating the bond between the Turkish state and the diaspora, and thus, might be counter-productive for the integration of the Dutch-Turks (Sunier, van der Linden, and van de Bovenkamp 2016).

The influence of mosque pedagogy is considered high in terms of religious nurture in Islam, and developing a sense of belonging and identity (Scourfield et al. 2013) particularly in contexts where Muslim children grow up in historically Christian, secularised societies. A study focussing on the Turkish–Dutch Muslims illustrated that 'Turkish Muslim participants whose parents regularly went to the mosque and who were sent to Koran lessons as a child were not only more strongly attached to their Muslim identity as young adults, but they were also more actively involved in the religious life of their community' (Phalet, Fleischmann, and Stojcic 2012, 359). Hence, the study pointed to the key role of mosques in the transmission of Islam and the Islamic identity to the next generation of European-born Muslims.

## Methodology

The data was collected between March 2017 and May 2017, through classroom observations in four different classrooms, 31 individual and two group interviews with *Diyamet* imams, mosque teachers, students from the observed lessons and their parents (Table 1). The years of experience of the imams, religious officials and mosque educators working at *Diyamet* ranged from six months to 19 years. All imams in our sample had also teaching duties. They differed from the volunteering mosque educators by their official status of being appointed by *Diyamet* as a Turkish state official stationed abroad (the demographic characteristics of our participants are presented). The mosque was chosen in consultation with the management of the Dutch *Diyamet* who took into consideration factors such as the large capacity of the mosque (attended by approximately 300 students) and its well-organised physical structure accommodating regular classrooms. The mosque is a typical example of a *Diyamet* mosque in terms of its structure, administration of religious education, curriculum, learning content and goals. However, it is larger in terms of a number of students and classrooms than the average *Diyamet* mosques in the Netherlands. Using Dutch as the language of instruction in few classes is not a typical practice in Turkish mosques and sets this mosque apart from most.

The interview questions focussed on the content of the lessons, on motivation and discipline strategies used in the mosque classroom, on links with the formal schools, and on the role of mosque education in the social integration and identity development of the children. Each participant was offered the choice to conduct the interview in Turkish or Dutch. The average duration of the interviews with the imams and the mosque teachers was 45 minutes, while the interviews with the parents lasted on average for 30 minutes and those with the students for 26 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded except for the interviews with one student, three parents and three religious officials who did

**Table 1.** Sample background information.

	Gender	Age	Educational level	Nationality	Length of stay in the NL	Profession
Students (N = 14)	Female: 5 Male: 9	Age range 10–12: 10 Age range 13–16: 4	Primary: 10 Secondary: 4	NL & TR: 11 TR: 1 Afghan: 1 Afghan & NL: 1	All born in NL and lived only in NL	N/A
Parents (N = 12)	Female: 10 Male: 2	Age range: 39–52	Primary: 5 Secondary: 5 Higher education: 2	NL & TR: 7 TR: 5	14–45 years	Cleaner: 3 Teacher: 2 House wife: 2 Clerk: 2 Factory worker: 1 Manager: 1 Accountant: 1
Imams/religious officials (N = 7)	Female: 0 Male: 7	Age range: 27–58	Secondary: 1 Higher education: 6	NL & TR: 3 TR: 4	<5 years: 3 5–10 years: 1 >10 years: 3	Imam: 5 Religious official: 1 Chair of a mosque: 1
Mosque educators (N = 3)	Female: 2 Male: 1	Age range: 33–45	Secondary: 1 Higher education: 2	NL & TR: 2 TR: 1	<5 years: 1 >10 years: 2	Educational assistant: 1 Religious teacher: 1 Preacher: 1



not want their voice to be recorded. In these cases, the researchers took detailed notes of the interviews.

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed for all participants and active parental consent was sought for the students participating in the study. Students were informed about the study by their mosque teachers and the participating students were selected based on their expressed interest and willingness to take part. The classroom observations were based on an observation framework focussing on the formal and informal curriculum, the classroom climate, the interactions between the teacher and the students, the learning activities in which the students participated, and the physical conditions of the classroom. The class size was about 15, and the groups were separated by gender each taught by a same-sex teacher. Two female and two male classes were chosen for observation by the imam and the chair of the mosque. The language of instruction in one of the observed classes was Dutch, and in the other three it was Turkish with Dutch used as a complementary language.

To analyse the data, the researchers conducted thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. The classroom observation reports, the transcribed interviews and the interview notes were entered into Atlas.ti version 8.043 and coded following a coding list developed based on existing literature and emerging themes from the interviews. Some of the main codes included in the analysis were curriculum content, language, pedagogical approach, parental involvement, links with mainstream schools, identity and social integration. To ensure greater reliability of the analysis, the researchers made summaries of the quotations per code and came together to discuss possible differences in their understanding and interpretation.

### **Re-contextualisation of teaching and learning in mosque classes**

The organisation of the mosque education by *Diyanet* in the Netherlands is different in some ways from the Qur'an courses in Turkey: the mosques in Turkey usually do not have specific classrooms for that purpose; the Qur'an courses are usually organised in summer holidays but there are courses throughout the year in the evening hours or in the weekend as well; and the learning objectives focus mainly on reading and reciting the Qur'an, and religious knowledge (Diyanet 2017). In the Netherlands, there are school-like classrooms where religious education takes place throughout the year (except for summer holidays), various socialising activities are organised (such as sports activities), and the content is wider covering basic religious knowledge, and the Turkish history and culture.

Our case study mosque provided both weekend classes and *Sohbet* evenings (conversations on religious themes) for older youth organised on Friday evenings, which are attended by 20–40 people. Students attended three lessons every weekend-day, each lasting 45 minutes with 15 minutes of break in between. The lessons were structured to teach children how to read, memorise and recite Qur'an, and inform about Islamic knowledge, Islamic values and norms, and general codes of conduct. Frequent references were made to the life of prophet and to some incidents in the history of Islam to illustrate these values. For this purpose, teachers employed storytelling techniques which were largely appreciated by the students we spoke to.

The first hour often focussed on reading and reciting Qur'an in Arabic. One teacher started reading the Qur'an himself to demonstrate how the Arabic words should be pronounced. He paused occasionally to briefly explain the meaning of the passages in Turkish. Another teacher asked students to volunteer for reading Qur'an. A student started reading aloud while others followed in their books. Then other students took turns, the teacher occasionally stopping them to correct the pronunciation. The second and third lessons were devoted to Islamic Knowledge during which teachers explained the meanings of *surahs*, or discussed themes such as 5 requirements of being Muslim, 32 rules of Islam, ablution, Ramadan and so on. These thematic focuses are parallel to *Diyanet* mosques in Turkey (Diyanet 2010, 2017).

Our discussions with mosque educators, students and parents highlighted the imperative of modifying the mosque pedagogy into Dutch context. Teaching and learning practices we observed in classes, as well as the discussions with participants pointed to the ways in which mosque pedagogy has been appropriated. These were discernible particularly with regard to language policies, classroom management and discipline strategies, hands-on learning and homework, attitudes towards student participation, strategies to improve student motivation, and redefining the outcomes of mosque education beyond religious education with an equally significant focus on nurturing a Muslim and Turkish identity among new generations. The contextual factors which informed such modification processes included linguistic environment, the impact of the mainstream education system, the background and training of mosque educators, and the broader societal and political contexts of the Netherlands.

It is also important to note that the material used in the classes and the curriculum are determined by *Diyanet* largely based on their regulation for Qur'an classes in Turkey. The imams and the mosque teachers are free to adjust their teaching methods to a certain extent (depending on their personal capabilities and initiative they could incorporate, e.g. using Dutch as an assisting language, using storytelling, songs or crafts in the classroom). However, *Diyanet* attempts to give more standardised form to mosque education by developing textbooks specific for the Dutch context. Furthermore, imams appointed from Turkey are themselves an example of a travelling policy in that they should (but don't always) embody Turkish mosque pedagogy. Some argue that imams are the embodiment of the Turkish state as they represent the Turkish state abroad and are used by the Turkish government to supervise and exercise control over the diaspora (Öztürk and Sözeri 2018).

### **Language policies**

The language of instruction in Qur'an courses in Turkey is primarily Turkish, while Arabic is used for reading and reciting verses from Qur'an. Likewise, in our case study mosque, Turkish was the primary language teachers used to convey Islamic knowledge, explain the meaning of verses or describe the religious practises. The choice of Turkish was to a certain extent dictated by the fact that imams or religious teachers appointed from Turkey did not speak Dutch. The few books or educational materials used by teachers were also in Turkish. More importantly, Turkish was seen central to the cultural and religious nurturance of the new generations of Turks in the Netherlands: 'Our language is very important. I am not in favour of mixing languages. Children must learn Turkish

language, and ideally classes should be in Turkish. It is a fact that our children are forgetting Turkish' (Parent 9).

It is important to note that Turkish was offered as a course in mainstream primary schools in the Netherlands between 1974 and 2004 and funded by the government. Later, the policy and the funding were terminated due to concerns that provision in immigrant languages was in contradiction with the objectives of policies on immigrant integration (Extra and Yagmur 2006). Some participants argued that the demand for mosque education increased following the termination of Turkish classes in mainstream schools, since parents started to regard mosques as institutions where children could learn Turkish. Some mosques also profiled themselves as such and few of them even initiated separate Turkish lessons to address the demand.

Some mosque teachers and parents in our study stated that children who attended mosque education spoke much better Turkish compared to their peers. Nevertheless, several mosque educators and parents remained concerned about children's language proficiency, suggesting that most children did not fully comprehend Turkish. Indeed, we were told and also observed that children spoke primarily in Dutch among themselves during breaks. Moreover, all Turkish–Dutch students involved in this study either spoke in Dutch or used a combination of Turkish and Dutch during interviews. The majority of them also admitted that their Dutch was better than their Turkish. Hence, they did not express a clear preference for the language in which the classes were conducted and were less conflicted about Turkish language loss. A student remarked: 'For me it does not matter. Turkish is fun, Dutch is fun too. Last year it [the class] was in Dutch, this year it is in Turkish' (Student 2). Another student had a preference for Dutch: 'Sometimes I do not understand Turkish. Hence, it is much better when things are translated in Dutch' (Student 5).

Nonetheless, mosque educators remained concerned about language and noted that 'Language is the biggest problem. Their Turkish is not sufficient. They do not understand everything' (Teacher 1). Another teacher appointed from Turkey shared that she had difficulties with bonding with these children and understanding them due to language barriers. From children's reactions, she could observe that they did not fully comprehend her talks. Lack of proficiency in Turkish also meant that even if there was a book in Turkish, children could not really use it. There was a general agreement among mosque educators that the native language of these children was Dutch, not Turkish. Moreover, they reported that most children needed language support in Dutch as well. In light of these, several mosque educators argued for bilingual education in Turkish and Dutch. To realise this objective, they suggested that instead of appointing from Turkey, more educators should be selected and trained among new generations of Turkish–Dutch in the Netherlands. Moreover, *Diyanet* developed a set of new books which incorporated texts in Dutch. Having bilingual books was also important so that children can study the books at home on their own. Furthermore, in one classroom, there were few students from non-Turkish backgrounds. To diversify the classrooms and open the mosques to other national and ethnic groups, more emphasis on Dutch was imperative. Some parents argued that bilingual education would help children when they need to explain some concepts or practices to their non-Muslim peers at school. Even if several parents were concerned about how their children were 'forgetting

Turkish', they could also see the value of incorporating Dutch in order to improve children's learning outcomes.

The current practices at mosque classrooms already demonstrated some elements of bilingual education. When Turkish words were not understood, some children translated them into Dutch for their peers. Or, teachers who were proficient in both languages resorted to Dutch when they discussed complex and sensitive issues, and conversed in Turkish while talking about more simple subjects. A teacher who did not speak Dutch asked help from 15- to 17-year-old students who were good in their religious studies. These students assisted the teacher as interns, and translated stories about the life of prophet or other talks into Dutch.

### ***Classroom management and discipline strategies***

Disciplining children was viewed as a challenge by several teachers. Children came to mosque voluntarily unlike mainstream schools. They were not concerned either about grade promotion and graduation. Teachers argued that children's attitudes towards mosque educators were different as well: they were more wary of school teachers, while some even did not see mosque educators as teachers. Hence problems with setting boundaries between students and educators emerged, which made classroom management difficult. Furthermore, some imams and parents commented that the attitude towards authority was different among third-generation Turks compared to children in Turkey. Hence some teachers concluded that discipline strategies that were used in Turkey were not applicable in the Netherlands.

Mosque educators commented that they followed the discipline strategies used in schools, since children were already socialised into these measures. As one teacher remarked: 'They have the kids in their hands five days a week' (Teacher 1) and suggested that it was very difficult for them to adopt different classroom management strategies other than what children were already accustomed to. Some teachers drew parallels with mainstream schools, and argued to parents and children that mosque was a school too, they had classes just like in schools. Hence, they should take mosque education equally seriously. A teacher who was trained to be a teaching assistant in the mainstream education system, believed the Dutch education system was very successful in classroom management as teachers knew how to structure lessons and put healthy boundaries with students. She shared that she was using those techniques in her classes. An imam from another mosque also remarked that they adopted discipline measures from mainstream schools. For instance, when children misbehaved, they were seated at a separate desk. In Turkey, such a measure would not have had any influence, and might be even taken as a reward. Yet, since in Dutch schools children were used to this measure as a punishment, they felt excluded and isolated. The imam added: 'We use exactly the same [discipline strategies]' (Imam 4). In addition to punishment strategies, mosque educators were emulating some reward strategies as well, such as giving colourful stickers to students who did well.

Using corporal punishment as a discipline measure is one of the most notorious ways mosques appeared in the Dutch media in the past decade (Sözeri, Altinyelken, and Volman 2017). Several educators as well as parents mentioned how as children they had either experienced or witnessed corporal punishment in mosques in Turkey or in the

Netherlands. One or two decades ago, the parents used to simply instruct their children that they should listen to whatever the imam told them. During our interviews, none of the children brought this as a concern or reported an experience, and all parents and mosque educators acknowledged that corporal punishment was not a solution: it used to alienate children from the mosque and even from their religion. In our case study, all educators had discussed this issue collectively and decided unanimously that corporal punishment was unacceptable in their mosque. Some parents also denounced corporal punishment and suggested that fear-based disciplining should be completely eliminated from mosques.

This zero tolerance policy towards corporal punishment was informed by the negative ramifications of such practices, but also by some other concerns. One educator noted that 'Because this is the Netherlands. Its religion, language, everything is different. They are expecting that we would do such things' (Chair of a mosque). He commented that such news would quickly make headlines and reinforce the already negative images and stereotypes about mosques. Moreover, corporal punishment is punishable by law in the Netherlands. Another mosque educator added that 'Particularly here, it [corporal punishment] would not happen. Because if children are offended, they are after all free children. They live in a free country. They would never come back to mosque' (Imam 1).

### ***Teaching practices emulated from mainstream schools***

Some teachers argued that children learnt at mainstream schools through play and fun activities. Hence, they also allowed for more freedom and flexibility in the third hour and some self-study time. Children were asked to bring colourful papers and pencils, and similar learning materials, and teachers organised some activities. For instance, children cut and pasted colourful papers to make a flower with five petals. Then, on each petal they were asked to write down the five requirements of Islam. Attitudes toward homework was another example. Children did not get much homework except for reading sections from Qur'an in order to improve their recitation skills. Teachers hesitated to assign homework because they did not want to put additional pressure on their time and demands, but the impact of practices in mainstream schools was also present. A teacher explained that 'You cannot give homework here, not in the Dutch education system. Even if you do, it is very small ... whatever children learn, they learn at the mosque' (Teacher 3). Moreover, some imams and mosque teachers argued for use of information and communication technology (ICT) in classrooms, such as touchscreens which are widely used in mainstream schools. One imam suggested that increased incorporation of ICT would make mosques resemble mainstream schools ever more. The receptivity of mosque pedagogy to mainstream schooling can be seen as surprising in the absence of formal co-operation programmes or efforts in that direction between schools and mosques. Nonetheless, learning and borrowing from formal schools took place as students socialised into specific pedagogical practices at schools, the second generation teachers were graduates of Dutch education system, and some of the teachers and imams who were appointed from Turkey also enrolled their children in mainstream schools.

### ***Making learning more inquisitive***

Teachers discussed how mosque pedagogy evolved over the years, and how they now emphasised giving space to children to ask questions and interact with teachers. One teacher argued that even if the second generation Turks attended mosque education, they did not learn much because the mosque pedagogy had been alienating. Students then encountered such responses to their inquiries: ‘Shut up! Allah would turn you into a stone. You cannot possibly ask such a question! Have you become a *Kafir* [infidel]?’ (Teacher 3). She added that even if children came to the mosque they came because of parental pressure and did not learn much eventually. Moreover, such pedagogical approaches did not explain why they should adhere to certain religious practices. Her account signalled a change in mosque pedagogy, in terms of being more inquisitive, participatory and open. She said, in her own classes, she welcomed questions and told students that they could ask anything they wanted: ‘There is no shame, no sin in asking questions’ (Teacher 3).

We have observed that students could pose questions throughout the lessons on Islamic knowledge, and some teachers particularly allocated time at the end of the third session for questions and answers. One imam from another mosque believed that compared to students in Turkey, these children were not curious enough and did not really have many queries. He believed that children’s main pre-occupation was their phones. ‘As long as you do not take away their phones, the rest does not really matter’ (Imam 3). Yet, most teachers in our case study believed that children were inquisitive and asked many questions, mostly to understand the reasoning behind specific rules and obligations, or exceptions to such rules. They were also more used to inquiring into things, which can be partly attributed to their schooling experiences as well as the debate culture in Dutch society.

Some mothers emphasised the need for more interactions and discussions in order to explain the *surahs* and the reasoning behind religious practices. They believed that only through such interactions their children can be conscious Muslims. Improved awareness about Islamic knowledge was also crucial so that children can respond adequately to inquisitive questions from their non-Muslim students and teachers in schools. Moreover, some parents were concerned that their children might be negatively influenced by the views, remarks and arguments of their atheist peers. Increased awareness about one’s religion would strengthen their confidence and make them less vulnerable to such ‘negative’ influences. Consequently, some teachers as well emphasised the imperative of transition from a fear-based pedagogy towards a love-based pedagogy which highlights and incorporates God’s qualities, such as compassion, graciousness and forgiveness. According to some teachers, such a transition was essential not to lose the new generation of Muslim children in Europe. These corroborate the assertion of Pels, Lahri, and El Madkouri (2006) that the new generation of Muslim parents and children have increasingly rebelled against authoritarian and rigid teaching styles that characterised many mosques.

### ***Strategies to improve student motivation***

Several discussions with regard to mosque education pointed to concerns about student motivation and attendance in some explicit or implicit ways. As children got older, their

motivation appeared to wane. Several teachers suggested that in the Netherlands, if children did not want to attend the classes, parents would not put pressure on them. One teacher argued that parents were afraid that it would reinforce children's mosque alienation and they would stop altogether. Some teachers were also explicitly told by parents not to put too much pressure on children. These concerns appeared to influence mosque pedagogy as well. Teachers noted that they developed strategies in order to overcome mosque alienation, or likely perceptions of mosque as a prohibitive, and 'not fun' environment. Our case study mosque, and some other mosques we included in our study regularly organised social activities, such as bicycle club, football matches, Turkish and music lessons, evening *Sohbet*, and joint barbecue or picnic in order to help students bond with mosques more strongly. Several mosques also organised annual trips to Germany or to amusement parks in the Netherlands with negligible cost to families. These efforts aimed at making mosques inviting places, and to stimulate students to attend mosque education.

### ***The imperative of nurturing an islamic and turkish identity***

The mosque education was not only geared towards religious education but also towards citizenship education. Teachers underscored that these children were different from those in Turkey, because they were born and raised in the Netherlands, and their needs were different. Therefore, in addition to religious education, they needed education on Turkish national identity and culture so that they would be conscious about who they were. Not only among teachers but also among parents, there was a strong conviction that being a Muslim and Turk should be the core identities of these children. Only then they could build on some other identities.

Since parents often felt inadequate in teaching Qur'an and Islam to their children or had no time for it, the mosque was perceived as an important institution for religious nurture. Strengthening religious identity was important particularly in the Dutch context, as it is 'the land of unbelievers' (Cherribi 2010). Some parents talked about children having a lot of pressure from the society with regard to their Muslim identity. Several students also mentioned that they were asked questions about their religion at school. Consequently, several teachers and parents believed that the more children knew about their religion and religious identity, the more they could express themselves to their non-Muslim peers and teachers, and explain what their religion entailed. A solid religious identity and strong faith were also important to counter 'adverse influences' of atheist peers who might argue that 'There is no God, there is no Book' or some elements of school curriculum (such as the Evolution theory challenging the Creation theory). Such influences, it was feared, might undermine the religious convictions of children, 'turn them away from Allah', or convert into non-believers.

The mosque was seen as a key institution to counteract the forces of assimilation within Dutch society, and to prevent children forget 'who they are'. Therefore, the content and objectives of mosque education were modified in the Dutch context with an emphasis on motherland (Turkey), Turkish history, culture, norms and values. For this purpose, Turkish historical events and Turkish national holidays were celebrated together with the children, with special activities such as theatrical plays on the stage of the mosque or large social events including parents. The students were encouraged to participate in

competitions for singing the Turkish national anthem organised on a national level for all *Diyanet* mosque students in the Netherlands. One teacher remarked that he often started lessons with the Turkish national anthem and proudly announced that every student in his class knew it by heart. While describing the *Sohbet* evenings, another teacher said that 'We talk about our motherland [Turkey], our flag, religious duties, our own culture, religion, sensitivities, family structure. They are very enjoyable' (Imam 1).

Several mosque educators and parents discussed the perils of identity crises among youth. They believed this was mainly because of receiving contradictory messages in the different environments they navigate (home, school and mosque) about who they were and how they should be living their lives. Search for belonging and experiences of discrimination at school were other factors identified as contributing to the identity crisis. Within this context, mosque education was seen as a panacea. Most mosque educators and parents we spoke to referred to their own identity and the identity of children as primarily Turkish. There was a limited reference to a hybrid Dutch–Turkish identity. Those who partly incorporated Dutchness into their identity, did it only on the basis of legal citizenship bond. Moreover, cultural distance between the Turks and the Dutch was a recurrent theme during interviews: 'We live in Europe, in a very different culture. We want our children to learn at least our culture, our own customs and traditions, and our faith in the best way' (Parent 7). In contrast, the findings indicate that compared to their parents and mosque teachers, the children had less difficulty in combining their Turkish and Dutch identities. Half of the students in our sample identified themselves as Dutch–Turkish. Often they took being born in the Netherlands, living in the Netherlands or speaking Dutch as the basis of their Dutch identity. Some showed a clear preference for Turkish identity and pointed out the role of exclusionary or discriminatory experiences in feeling more Turkish. Others expressed that they would feel betrayal towards their family if they claimed that they were Dutch.

## Conclusion

Mosque education in Europe is a transnational endeavour which brings powerful influences from the countries of origin and supports immigrant communities in Europe with the continuity of their religious, cultural and national identities. In this article, we analysed the pedagogy of one *Diyanet* mosque in the Netherlands to illustrate how a best practice pedagogy is transferred from Turkey and re-contextualised during implementation processes. Mosques in general and this mosque, in particular, appear as agencies invested in tradition and continuity, and primarily interested in reproducing specific religious, cultural and ethnic norms, values, and attitudes, informed largely by the countries of origin. Nevertheless, this case study illustrates receptivity to a host of influences in the host society.

Not only have mosques increasingly engaged in socialisation activities that are hard to categorise as religious (Es 2016), in the case of this mosque, pedagogical practices have also modified in ways that likened classrooms ever more to mainstream schools. Main aspects we identified in our study included: (i) bilingual education practices which gradually incorporated Dutch in teaching and learning activities and curriculum materials alongside Turkish and Arabic, (ii) emulating classroom management, reward and punishment strategies as well as hands-on learning practices from mainstream schools, (iii) organising



extra-curricular cultural and sports activities to improve student motivation and bonding with the mosque and (iv) making teaching and learning gradually more inquisitive and allowing for meaning seeking and questioning. Moreover, our study points to the mosque's policy of making citizenship education (with a focus on Turkey and Turkishness) an integral part of mosque curriculum in an effort to promote Muslim and Turkish identities as the core identities of the new generations of Dutch-Turks. Overall, the five aspects discussed throughout the article illustrate how particular contextual and individual actors in the Netherlands influence mosque pedagogy in this context. As such, our findings align with the broader literature on pedagogical change which has demonstrated that large discrepancies persisted between the imported pedagogy and the actual practices in classroom settings (Schweisfurth 2011; Altinyelken 2012) as notions of best practice pedagogy were understood, interpreted and practised differently in local contexts.

What we uncovered in our case study mosque cannot be generalised to all *Diyanet* mosques or all Turkish mosques in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, these practices signal efforts to make mosque pedagogy more relevant to the needs of new generations of Dutch-Turks whose life-worlds in Western Europe give rise to new questions, new values and practices (see also Cherribi 2010). In that sense, what drives change in this mosque pedagogy is not a top-down policy, but rather a bottom-up process informed by the background, capacities, needs and interests of students and their parents. As noted by Elliott (2014, 35) 'Changes in everyday practices do not occur solely because of changes at the level of culture or society but, in part, because of the experiences and personal characteristics of new generations'.

Furthermore, our study confirms the critical role of the mosque in generational transmission of Islamic values and norms, particularly in a secular country which is perceived as unfriendly towards Islam. At the same time, it demonstrates that mosque education in this case not only focuses on religious education and strengthening of religious identity, but there is a considerable concern and focus on Turkish identity and transmission of Turkish language and culture. As such, the mosque appears to promote a competing citizenship agenda to that of the Dutch state. Nevertheless, hardly any study on citizenship education in the Netherlands considers the influence of mosques, their citizenship discourses, and promotion of alternative identities and loyalties. This omission largely derives from the fact that little is known about mosques' educational activities.

Based on her work with Moroccan mosques in the Netherlands, Pels (2014) reports that parents consider it highly important that their children know their Moroccan roots; only then they can find their way in the Dutch society. In this respect, mosque education is considered very important to teach children about their roots, culture and history. A survey among 483 parents in 20 *Diyanet* mosques in the Netherlands also pointed out that Turkish–Dutch parents were concerned about raising their children in a historically Christian and increasingly atheist society. More than half of the respondents (51.8%) believed that the Dutch lifestyle might be harmful and inappropriate for the religious and moral development of their children (Sevinc 2012). Our study confirms similar concerns and commitments among the Turkish–Dutch community associated with this mosque, and a parallel tendency to attribute important roles and responsibilities to mosques in this regard. By doing so, mosque education appears to cultivate 'a moral Turkish Islamic subjectivity' (Es 2016), and promote a sense of belonging to Turkish community in the Netherlands as well as to Muslims in and outside of the Netherlands.

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