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## Islamophobia in European Schools: A Multinational Phenomenological Research

Ali Baltacı \* Murat Kayacan \*\*

### Abstract

This study, which aims to investigate the existence of Islamophobia in European schools, an important part of the social structure, is designed as a phenomenological study. Data were collected through interviews with 36 teachers working in seven different European countries. As a result of the study, Islamophobia has been identified as an unignorable and a major problem in European schools. Moreover, it reveals that the teachers do not have enough knowledge about Islam, but the majority of participants have open or hidden Islamophobic tendencies. In addition, the teachers think that Islamic lifestyles and Muslims are not part of European cultures and that Muslim students should be subjected to intense cultural training. Again, the majority of the participants argue that the fight against Islamophobia can be achieved through prejudice and communication training for teachers. This study is important in that it is a pioneering work in the literature that investigates the entity of Islamophobia among teachers in Europe.

### Keywords

Religious Education, Islamophobia, Europe, School, Teacher

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## Avrupa Okullarında İslamofobi: Çok Uluslu Fenomenolojik Bir Araştırma

### Öz

Avrupa okullarında, sosyal yapının önemli bir parçası olan İslamofobinin varlığını araştırmayı amaçlayan bu çalışma, fenomenolojik bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Veriler, yedi farklı Avrupa ülkesinde çalışan 36 öğretmenle yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda toplanmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda İslamofobi, Avrupa okullarında göz ardı edilemez ve büyük bir sorun olarak tanımlanmıştır. Ayrıca, araştırma öğretmenlerin İslam hakkında yeterli bilgiye sahip olmadıklarını, ancak katılımcıların çoğunluğunun açık veya gizli İslamofobik eğilimlere sahip olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Buna ek olarak, öğretmenler İslami yaşam tarzlarının ve Müslümanların Avrupa kültürlerinin bir parçası olmadığını ve Müslüman öğrencilerin yoğun kültürel eğitime tabi tutulması gerektiğini düşünmektedir. Yine, katılımcıların çoğunluğu İslamofobiye karşı mücadelenin öğretmenler için bir önyargı ve iletişim eğitimi yoluyla sağlanabileceğini savunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, literatürde İslamofobinin varlığını Avrupa'daki öğretmenler arasında araştıran öncü bir çalışma olması bakımından önemlidir.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Din Eğitimi, İslamofobi, Avrupa, Okul, Öğretmen

### INTRODUCTION

Europe, which historically has internalized its religious tendencies after an intense struggle, has been well adapted to the diversified cultural life after the industrial revolution. In Europe, which has recently received immense migration from Asia and Africa, the social structure has begun to change and social mobilization has increased. It is inevitable that the education system and schools will be influenced by such a change. Every debate and change in the society, due to social mobility, somehow affects the school system. For example, migrants moved to Europe in recent years have become visible primarily in social areas; because of this increase, unemployment rates escalated and employment areas narrowed. Due to the increasing number of migrants, health and education services offered to the society in Europe have been disrupted. This situation led to criticisms, which were not perceived as xenophobia at first, and then growing xenophobia has become visible in the social areas.<sup>1</sup> This negative attitude towards foreigners in society has spread to schools. Especially in England and in the Baltic countries, negative attitudes towards migrants have increased. In these countries, bullying, violence, and barbarism against foreign and especially Muslim children were reflected in the press.<sup>2</sup> It is important to examine schools in order to reduce such

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<sup>1</sup> Ulrich Beck, *The reinvention of politics: Rethinking modernity in the global social order* (John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Alina Rzepnikowska, “Racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in the UK before and after Brexit vote”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45/1 (2019): 61-77; Peter Morey, “Introduction: Muslims, Trust and Multiculturalism”, *Muslims, Trust and Multiculturalism* (Springer, 2018), 1-23; Abdeslam Marfouk, “I’m neither racist nor xenophobic, but: dissecting European attitudes towards a ban on Muslims’ immigration”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2018, 1-19.

negativities in society. From this point of view, it is unthinkable to separate schools and school staff from contemporary debates.

In Europe, Islam has been a known phenomenon for centuries. However, rhetoric against Islam has begun to be developed, especially the recent terror attacks and other negative developments. It was actually developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s by political activists to draw attention to harmful rhetoric and actions canalized towards Islam and Muslims in Western countries. In recent years, Islamophobia has been flourished as a chiefly political concept. Since Islamophobia is debated and widespread in society, it is seen that schools are also affected by this phenomenon. Especially in recent years, there have been studies aimed at increasing attitudes and behavior towards Muslim students such as physical and psychological violence, i.e. bullying and discrimination. For example, Zine<sup>3</sup> addressed the problems of Muslim girls living in Canada and Poynting & Mason<sup>4</sup> discussed the anti-Islamic attitude in the UK and Australia. As part of the anti-Muslim rhetoric, restrictions have been placed on the use of religious symbols in public spheres in many European countries. The necessity of examining such a controversial subject in detail is the main motivation for us. This study focuses on the phenomenon of Islamophobia observed in European schools and aims to examine the opinions of teachers especially about Islam, Islamophobia and Muslim students.

### **1. THE CONCEPT AND FORMATION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA**

Islamophobia is the fear and alienation of, or prejudice against, the Islam or Muslims commonly, notably when it was seen as a geopolitical force or the origin of terrorism. The term was first used during the beginning of the 20th century and it developed as a neologism in the 1970s, then it shifted frequently prominent during the 1980s and 1990s, and it influenced public policy influence with the report by the Runnymede Trust's Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia (CBMI) entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (1997). The introduction of the term was explained by the report's assessment that "anti-Muslim prejudice has grown so considerably and so quickly in recent years that a new item in the vocabulary is needed".<sup>5</sup> Although the etymology of the Islamophobia, which implies fear of Islam and its followers<sup>6</sup>, developed as a concept in the late 1990s<sup>7</sup>, it is possible that the motivation that Western Christians resort to the Crusades, which Western Christians have organized against Muslims in the East and organized with economic factors in large scale, may be called "Islamophobia". The causes, conditions, and characteristics of Islamophobia are still discussed. Some scholars have asserted an increase in Islamophobia resulting from the September 11 attacks, the rise of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, some from various terror attacks in Europe and the United States, while others have linked it with the expanded appearance of Muslims in

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<sup>3</sup> Marrie Jasmin Zine, "Unveiled sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and experiences of veiling among Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school", *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39/3 (2006): 239-252.

<sup>4</sup> Scott Poynting - Victoria Mason, "The resistible rise of Islamophobia: Anti-Muslim racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001", *Journal of sociology* 43/1 (2007): 61-86.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Miles - Micheal Brown, *Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 197.

<sup>6</sup> Zafar Iqbal, "Islamophobia or Islamophobias: Towards developing a process model", *Islamic Studies*, (2010), 91.

<sup>7</sup> Erik Bleich, "Defining and researching Islamophobia", *Review of Middle East Studies* 46/2 (2012): 180.

the United States and in the European Union. Some scholars likewise investigate the legality of the term.<sup>8</sup> Sayyid and Vakil declare that Islamophobia is a reaction to the emergence of a separated Muslim public status globally; the appearance of Muslims is in itself not a notice of the level of Islamophobia in society. Besides, they advance that there are societies where practically no Muslims live but many standardized forms of Islamophobia still exist in them.<sup>9</sup>

According to Imhoff and Hocker, two particular criticisms are regularly raised about Islamophobia: "One claims that Islamophobia is an expendable neologism that merely describes a rather well-known phenomenon of prejudice and discrimination against immigrants (particularly from Muslim countries). The other, more intransigent objection denounces Islamophobia as a discursive weapon intended to silence well-justified critique of Islamic practices and dogmas".<sup>10</sup> Both of these criticisms have a share of truth, although the truth degrees of them are not equal.

It is a fact that Islam does not fall from the agenda of the world media in the direction of negative or positive views. We have today a problem called Islamophobia due to some wrong behavior of some Muslims or intentional direction of anti-Islamists. This issue has been the subject of many scientific works in the Western world. Especially on September 11, 2001, many of the victims of the attack at the Twin Towers in the USA lost their lives. This attack was instrumentalized in the occupation of Afghanistan and then Iraq. It also triggered Islamophobia and, anti-Muslim and anti-Qur'anic actions. Additionally, as Allan & Nielsen puts it, Islamophobia is used as a cover for general racism and xenophobia.<sup>11</sup>

Although Islam has had a central role in Europe since the eighth century - southern Spain, Sicily, and central and south-eastern Europe were all parts of Islamic empires- a part of the West is trying to create a distance between Muslims and non-Muslims by spreading the fear of Islam.<sup>12</sup> For that purpose, sometimes states sometimes racist groups and sometimes religious groups propagate against Islam. The rise of Islamophobia in Western countries, where democratic governments exist, seems like a contradiction, but its existence cannot be ignored. As Bunzl puts it, unlike anti-Semitism, which is the means of establishing

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Wike - Bruce Stokes - Katie Simmons, "Europeans fear wave of refugees will mean more terrorism, fewer jobs", *Pew Research Center* 11 (2016): 2016; Nasar Meer - Tariq Modood, "Refutations of racism in the 'Muslim question'", *Patterns of prejudice* 43/3-4 (2009): 335-354; Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Haymarket Books, 2012), 53-55.

<sup>9</sup> Salman Sayyid - AbdoolKarim Vakil, *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives* (Columbia University Press, 2010), 53.

<sup>10</sup> Roland Imhoff - Julia Recker, "Differentiating Islamophobia: Introducing a new scale to measure Islamoprejudice and secular Islam critique", *Political Psychology* 33/6 (2012): 812.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Allen - Jørgen S. Nielsen, "Summary Report on Islamophobia in the EU after 11 September 2001" (EUMC Vienna, 2002): 54; Paul Weller, "Addressing religious discrimination and Islamophobia: Muslims and liberal democracies. The case of the United Kingdom", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17/3 (2006): 318.

<sup>12</sup> Esra Özyürek, "The politics of cultural unification, secularism, and the place of Islam in the new Europe", *American Ethnologist* 32/4 (2005): 511.

pure nation-states in Europe, Islamophobia has been used as a tool to safeguard supranational Europe.<sup>13</sup> Muslims are being demonized beyond otherization. The influence of this propaganda homogenizing Muslims negatively also increases hate crimes against them and can be seen –if the phrase is appropriate– spitting on a religion of the weak.

## **2. ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPEAN SCHOOLS**

Europe is traditionally based on values related to rights and freedoms. It is unthinkable that these rights and freedoms obtained by struggling for centuries are given only to a certain person or group. Increasing non-European migration with industrialization has reached its peak through the colonial period, and immigrants from the colonies of European countries have gradually become a part of European culture.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, a purely European identity cannot be claimed. Similarly, throughout Europe, different religions existed and European civilization reached its present level with the influence of these religions. From this point of view, in the European states based on secular values, the phenomenon of religion in the public arena should be ignored.<sup>15</sup> Although there is cultural diversity in Europe, religious life is not independent from Christian traditions. Europe's Christian history is at the root of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim rhetoric that is experienced in schools openly or secretly.<sup>16</sup>

When today's students are thought to be citizens of tomorrow, schools are an important part of the social structure. In addition, schools are an important social area in which you can follow all situations and events in society. Social institutions are often affected by events such as culture and religion. From this point of view, schools are important as institutions where Islamophobia lives and spreads.<sup>17</sup> People from different religions come together there. Especially with the increasing immigration after World War II, European schools have impersonated a multicultural structure. It is also an important part of European education policy that students from different religions learn in harmony.<sup>18</sup> However, racist and anti-Islamic rhetoric and behavior in European schools have begun to be seen more because of increasing anti-Islamism, xenophobia and far-right tendencies in recent years.

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<sup>13</sup> Matti Bunzl, “Between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Some thoughts on the new Europe”, *American Ethnologist* 32/4 (2005): 499.

<sup>14</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The rise of Christian democracy in Europe* (Cornell University Press, 1996):101.

<sup>15</sup> Grace Davie, *Religion in modern Europe: A memory mutates* (OUP Oxford, 2000):122.

<sup>16</sup> Gerard Delanty, “Dilemmas of secularism: Europe, religion and the problem of pluralism”, *Identity, belonging and migration* 17 (2008): 78.

<sup>17</sup> Aameena K. Jandali, “Muslim Students in Post-9/11 Classrooms.”, *School Administrator* 69/9 (2012): 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ulf Fredriksson, “Changes of education policies within the European Union in the light of globalisation”, *European Educational Research Journal* 2/4 (2003): 524.

There are also some students, especially Muslim ones, who encounter stiff physical interventions as well as behavior that can lead to insults or bullies.<sup>19</sup> In European schools where physical and psychological violence is cumulatively widespread, the biggest victims of this violence are Jewish and Muslim students.<sup>20</sup> Increased restrictions on the use of religious symbols in the public sphere in European countries have led to the enforcement of similar sanctions in schools.<sup>21</sup> Countries across Europe have wrestled with the issue of the Muslim veil, which covers the face apart from the eyes. The headscarf or veil issue is part of a wider debate about multiculturalism in Europe, as many politicians argue that there needs to be a greater effort to assimilate ethnic and religious minorities. The debate takes in religious freedom, female equality, secular traditions and even fears of terrorism.<sup>22</sup> The headscarf is particularly restricted in the public sphere as an important religious symbol. Students wearing headscarves in schools were perceived as terrorists because the headscarf was a religious symbol used by jihadist terrorist organizations.<sup>23</sup> In addition, students with headscarves were alienated from school and other social areas by applying "obscure pressure". Even though the reality in schools was reported to different institutions, no result could be obtained for Muslims; on the contrary, an increase in the intensity of the Islamophobia attacks was observed.<sup>24</sup> It can be said that there is an ambivalent attitude of Europe against different religions. The reason for the restriction of the use of religious symbols is secularism -an important European value. Because of inconsistencies in laicism-based practices, it can be said that especially Muslim students are influenced by these practices.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Muslim students are referred to as "potential terrorists" in schools, creating a different direction of psychological violence, stigmatization, and separation.<sup>26</sup> The isolation of Muslim students who are not interested in terrorism and who are still in childhood with such rhetoric makes discrimination in European schools visible.<sup>27</sup> It is known that some teachers and students, who are influenced by the recent anti-

<sup>19</sup> Peter Hopkins, "Towards critical geographies of the university campus: understanding the contested experiences of Muslim students", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36/1 (2011): 161; Donn Short, "Queers, bullying and schools: Am I safe here?", *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 19/3-4 (2007): 39.

<sup>20</sup> Renate Ysseldyk - Kimberly Matheson - Hymie Anisman, "Religiosity as identity: Toward an understanding of religion from a social identity perspective", *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14/1 (2010): 60-71.

<sup>21</sup> Ali Baltacı, "The Legality of Religious Symbols in European Schools", *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 21/2 (2017): 801.

<sup>22</sup> Anna Vanzan, "Ever, Hilal. The Headscarf Controversy: Secularism and Freedom of Religion. xiii+ 256 pp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.", *Anthropology of the Contemporary Middle East and Central Eurasia* 3/1 (2018).

<sup>23</sup> Ahmed Al-Rawi, "Video games, terrorism, and ISIS's Jihad 3.0", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30/4 (2018): 740-760; Shridhar Sharma et al, "Symbols and Identity in Islamophobia", *Islamophobia and Psychiatry* (Springer, 2019), 95-100.

<sup>24</sup> Zine, "Unveiled sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and experiences of veiling among Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school", 58; Iqbal, "Islamophobia or Islamophobias: Towards developing a process model", 83; Sayyid - Vakil, *Thinking Through Islamophobia*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> Isabelle Rorive, "Religious symbols in the public space: In search of a European answer", *Cardozo L. Rev.* 30 (2008): 2670.

<sup>26</sup> Jandali, "Muslim Students in Post-9/11 Classrooms.", 11.

<sup>27</sup> Baltacı, "The Legality of Religious Symbols in European Schools", 803.



immigrant far-right currents in Europe, have called Muslim students as 'terrorists, jihadists or crime machines' even if they are innocent.<sup>28</sup> This situation in European schools is not a problem of prejudice but a tendency of violence to be considered. While prejudice is rarely evolving into violence, the tendency to violence can cause extreme emotions to be easily exhibited.<sup>29</sup>

From the Middle Ages, the cultural values of the peoples of Europe emphasizing the Christian identity were in conflict with the idea of a multicultural Europe, and especially in less multicultural societies such as Eastern Europe, the Christian identity and values came to the fore. As a result of this great reference to Christianity, individuals, although not related to religion, tend not to give up their traditions and exhibit racist and Islamophobic tendencies towards Muslims and foreigners.<sup>30</sup> This cultural transformation in the social sphere has also been reflected in schools; Intense Islamophobic tendencies have also become a common cultural phenomenon in schools.<sup>31</sup> Islamophobia experienced in European schools is not only among students but also teachers and staff working at school may also have Islamophobic tendencies. The Islamophobic tendencies of teachers are more alarming; because teachers give direction to students' future. Rather than the qualities of teachers assigned to European schools, their cultural and religious values are influential on their Islamophobic tendencies. Because cultural values are a very complex structure that affects a phenomenon that is open to orientation, such as Islamophobia. Despite the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the European Muslim population, they continue to be cast as potentially threatening persons based on perceived racial and cultural characteristics by teachers. Islamophobic thinking, tendencies, and actions, which develop independently of the prejudices of teachers, are essentially part of a racist, sexist and xenophobic thought.<sup>32</sup> Yet, it is known that Islamophobic tendencies mostly develop with prejudice and stereotyped behaviors.<sup>33</sup> In this respect, teachers' prejudiced attitudes and behaviors towards Islam are the determinants of the prevalence of Islamophobia. It is known that teachers' attitude, racist and Islamophobic discourses, and discriminative behaviors may cause stress and social isolation in Muslim

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<sup>28</sup> Shirin Housee, "What's the point? Anti-racism and students' voices against Islamophobia", *Race Ethnicity and Education* 15/1 (2012): 101-120; Lorraine P. Sheridan, "Islamophobia pre-and post-September 11th, 2001", *Journal of interpersonal violence* 21/3 (2006): 317-336.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Mepschen et al, "Sexual politics, orientalism and multicultural citizenship in the Netherlands", *Sociology* 44/5 (2010): 962-979; Christine Ogan et al, "The rise of anti-Muslim prejudice: Media and Islamophobia in Europe and the United States", *International Communication Gazette* 76/1 (2014): 27. In this context, the tendency of violence in schools is mostly emphasized in physical and psychological violence. While the psychological violence against Muslim or foreign students is usually exclusion and alienation, physical violence has a spectrum ranging from simple bullying events to more advanced injuries.

<sup>30</sup> Chris Allen, *Islamophobia* (Routledge, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Farouk Farid Hafez, "Schools of Thought in Islamophobia Studies: Prejudice, Racism, and Decoloniality", *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4/2 (2018): 210-225.

<sup>32</sup> Mepschen et al., "Sexual politics, orientalism and multicultural citizenship in the Netherlands", 28.

<sup>33</sup> Erik Bleich, "What is Islamophobia and how much is there? Theorizing and measuring an emerging comparative concept", *American Behavioral Scientist* 55/12 (2011): 1599; George Morgan, *Global Islamophobia: Muslims and moral panic in the West* (Routledge, 2016): 58.



students. In addition, recent findings show that Muslim students isolated in schools and other social areas can seek retaliation, are susceptible to radicalization and become harder to integrate into society.<sup>34</sup> However, it is known that teachers give lower grades to Muslim students than Christian, Jewish or Buddhists.<sup>35</sup> Teachers give more homework to Muslim students and they are given lower scores by examining their homework in more detail than the other students.<sup>36</sup> It is also known that teachers tend to place Muslim students in parts of the class that are not preferred by other students, such as the cold and the glass edge.<sup>37</sup> In this respect, it is important to determine the Islamophobic tendencies of teachers. Thus the existence of Islamophobia in European schools will become visible.

The way to measure Islamophobia in schools means trying to find the most direct indicators of ‘indiscriminate negative attitudes or emotions’ directed at Islam or Muslims.<sup>38</sup> However, it seems that the majority of studies in the schools about Islamophobia are based on experiences among students. Although there are some studies on the opinions of teachers about Islam, Muslims and Muslim students in the literature, it has been determined that these studies are mostly examined in a single sample group and quantitative scales are used to determine the attitudes of teachers.<sup>39</sup> This study is important in that it is a pioneering work that focuses on teachers’ Islamophobic attitudes in different countries of Europe. The main aim of this study is trying to reveal the Islamophobic attitudes, behaviors, and tendencies that exist in the schools in various European countries, in a limited context, with a limited sample of teachers through phenomenological research methodology. The secondary aim of the study is to determine the perceptions of teachers who were selected based on the discriminatory attitudes and behaviors experienced in previous years- working in European schools about Islam, Islamophobia, Muslim students and struggle against Islamophobia. In addition, this study also aims to present the available data on Islamophobia in literature.

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<sup>34</sup> Short, “Queers, bullying and schools: Am I safe here?”; Morgan, *Global Islamophobia: Muslims and moral panic in the West*; Bunzl, “Between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Some thoughts on the new Europe”; Sheridan, “Islamophobia pre-and post-September 11th, 2001”; Jandali, “Muslim Students in Post-9/11 Classrooms.”; Rorive, “Religious symbols in the public space: In search of a European answer”.

<sup>35</sup> Reyn Van Ewijk, “Same work, lower grade? Student ethnicity and teachers’ subjective assessments”, *Economics of Education Review* 30/5 (2011): 1045-1058.

<sup>36</sup> Natasa Zenic et al., “Gender-specific analyses of the prevalence and factors associated with substance use and misuse among Bosniak adolescents”, *International journal of environmental research and public health* 12/6 (2015): 6626-6640.

<sup>37</sup> Karen J. Aroian, “Discrimination against Muslim American adolescents”, *The Journal of School Nursing* 28/3 (2012): 206-213; Daron Acemoglu - James A. Robinson, *Economic origins of dictatorship and democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 88-89.

<sup>38</sup> Van Ewijk, “Same work, lower grade? Student ethnicity and teachers’ subjective assessments”, 1046.

<sup>39</sup> Hafez, “Schools of Thought in Islamophobia Studies: Prejudice, Racism, and Decoloniality”; Short, “Queers, bullying and schools: Am I safe here?”; Zine, “Unveiled sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and experiences of veiling among Muslim girls in a Canadian Islamic school”; Aroian, “Discrimination against Muslim American adolescents”; Weller, “Addressing religious discrimination and Islamophobia: Muslims and liberal democracies. The case of the United Kingdom”.

### **3. METHOD**

#### **3.1. Pattern**

This research is designed by using a qualitative research method. In this study, the phenomenological approach, which is one of the methods of flexibility that allows detailed and in-depth focus on qualitative research, is taken as a basis. Phenomenology examines phenomena that are known about any subject but cannot be determined in detail, sharpening the facts.<sup>40</sup> In this research, unlike Edmund Husserl's conscious-based phenomenological approach, Alfred Schutz's interpretive research is used. In order to be able to solve the disagreement, social phenomena or individual actions and behaviors, it is necessary to examine the experiences of those who practice these events. In the interpreting pattern, reasons for attitudes and behaviors exhibited by people are religious, ethical or cultural value judgments often held with personal interests and purposes.<sup>41</sup> The interpretive design is possible by understanding the experiences of the persons, grasping the nature of the phenomena that appear under their own conditions, resolving and capturing the essence.<sup>42</sup> This process requires a careful focus on research data. The concentration of this research is on the views of teachers working in European schools and on their Islamophobic or anti-Islamic actions and behaviors.

#### **3.2. Participants**

The study was conducted on non-Muslim and ethnically European teachers working in high schools in Germany, France, England, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and Sweden. In the research, critical state sampling is used from the purposeful sampling approaches. Critical situations are situations that clearly reflect a significant event or have special importance under normal conditions.<sup>43</sup> Specific criteria have been determined in the selection of teachers in the sample group. First, it was stipulated that teachers should provide at least two years of education to a minimum of ten Muslim students. Another criterion is that teachers are not Muslims or have no spiritual experience related to Islam. Moreover, the other criterion in the selection of teachers is the discriminatory attitudes and behaviors experienced in previous years and the punishments of the teachers on these actions.<sup>44</sup> It is also necessary that teachers work in public schools and these schools should accept students from a multicultural environment. Within the scope of the study, the first teacher in any country was asked to propose different teachers who could contribute to the research. Thus, snowball sampling has been tried to be done. However, since this sampling method could

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<sup>40</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A phenomenological study* (Indiana University Press, 2009): 13.

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan A. Smith - Mike Osborn, "Interpretative phenomenological analysis", *Doing social psychology research* (2004): 231.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher R. Burton, "Living with stroke: a phenomenological study", *Journal of advanced nursing* 32/2 (2000): 301.

<sup>43</sup> Ali Baltacı, "A Conceptual Review of Sampling Methods and Sample Size Problems in Qualitative Research", *Journal of Bitlis Eren University Institute of Social Sciences* 7/1 (2018): 231-274.

<sup>44</sup> The penalties they received in order to protect the personal safety of the teachers and the reasons for taking these penalties are not considered within the scope of this research. In this context, a confidentiality statement has been prepared for each teacher and assurance is given that their personal information will not be decrypted within the scope of this study.

not be applied in certain countries, the practice of recommending teachers to other colleagues was abandoned. In the selection of the teachers who were reached within the scope of the research, assistance was received from Muslim associations in Europe. The Muslim associations informed the researchers about which schools could be reachable and provided easy access to teachers in different countries.

The sampling group of the study: eight working in six cities of Germany (Munich, Cologne, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Berlin, Stuttgart); six working in five different cities of France (Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse, Nice); eight working in four UK cities (London, Manchester, Southampton, Liverpool); three working in two cities of Belgium (Brussels, Ghent); four working in three different cities of Holland (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht); three working in two cities of Denmark (Copenhagen, Odense); four of which are working in three cities of Sweden (Stockholm, Malmö, Goteborg) so it consists of thirty-six (36) teachers.<sup>45</sup> In this study, since every teacher did not accept the interviews, the ones who accepted the interview were determined as "participant". Each participant was given detailed information on the purpose and scope of the research and a voluntary declaration form was filled with those who agreed to participate in the study. In the context of this research, we did not focus on any personal information of any participant but considering the majority of the participants' request, the nicknames were used instead.

### **3.3. Collection of Data**

An open-ended interview form has been prepared to collect the participants' views. The draft form was presented to experts who had previously conducted phenomenological research and were familiar with qualitative research designs and made the necessary arrangements according to the feedback received. The interview form was tested by interviewing two teachers who were not in the research group. That form consists of these questions: "(1) What do you think about Islam? (2) How do you see the way of life suggested by Islam? (3) What do you think about anti-Islamism? (4) What are your views about Muslims in the region you live in? (5) What do you think about Muslim students in the schools you teach? (6) Are there any differences between your attitudes towards Muslim and non-Muslim students in the school you work in? (7) How can we fight against Islamophobia or reduce it in society and schools?" All answers were recorded by voice or camera recorder. The questions were asked in different ways when they were not understood by the participants. Negotiations were recorded at different time intervals, face-to-face or in real-time audio and video transmission programs (Skype, CamSurf, etc.). In all calls, English was used as the communication language. The participants were asked to read the dictated interview forms and to correct any mistakes. The interviews with the teachers were completed in 86 days and the video interview records lasted 58 hours 43 minutes in total. During the interview, the withdrawal of two teachers who did not want their voice or image to be recorded was excluded. In order to minimize the "researcher influence" while qualitative data were gathered, attitudes and behaviors that could negatively or indirectly influence the participants were not made as possible. Repeated calls were made on different days in order to avoid exhibiting behavior that could affect the participants' views, such as "gesture, mimicry, comment or implication".<sup>46</sup> With the open-

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<sup>45</sup> Demographic information of participants can be found in Annex.

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth A. Hoffmann, "Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor", *Journal of contemporary ethnography* 36/3 (2007): 344.

ended interview form, the collected data were dumped into the lettering by electronic dictation program, and necessary corrections were made by hand and tried not to lose data.

### **3.4. Analysis of Data**

In this research, phenomenological analyzes began with the reading of interview texts at different times. First, all interview texts were read and tried to grasp the participants' views on Islam and Muslim students from a deductive point of view. These views were categorized. In this first group, the researcher's knowledge, opinions, attitudes and prejudices about the subject were limited by a technique known as bracketing, in order to reduce the researcher's influence to a minimum level. Therefore, the researchers repeatedly iterated all texts at different times. The other phase of the analysis is the phenomenological reduction. At this stage, the units of meaning were created by clearing the qualitative data. The next step in the phenomenological analysis is the 'imaginative differentiation', which is the identification of the relations between the meaning units and the footprints after the first coding. Imaginative differentiation is the phase in which the first categories are created. These first categories are repeatedly tested with different encodings and reduced to secondary categories. The final stage of the phenomenological analysis is the determination of meaning. The determination of meaning emphasizes the nature of interpretative research. In the analysis of these research data, Miles and Huberman model (1994) was applied.<sup>47</sup> This model can be defined as a classification of verbal or written data in terms of a specific problem or purpose, summarization, measurement of certain variables or concepts, and categorization by culling to extract a specific meaning. The answers to the questions in the interview form were examined in four steps: (1) coding the data, (2) specifying the categories, (3) organizing the data by code and category, and (4) ensuring reliability.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.5. Organizing and Validating Data**

The credibility of phenomenological research depends on the validity and trustworthiness of the research. It is important that phenomenological investigations are convincing, reproducible, transferable, and verifiable. The credibility of this study is ensured by the use of the data obtained from the teachers without being changed. The data obtained at the end of the interviews are only dictated. No grammatical correction has been done on dictated texts. For the research to be reproducible, it was noted that the sampled teachers had critical available knowledge. From then on, it is evident that the research is repeatable since similar studies can be selected in the literature to be done on this topic. To ensure the validity of the study, three different coding specialists trained at the doctoral level coding concurrently. Experts gathered at different times to compare coding; thus the coding process was deepened. The encodings made by different encoders were compared using the "reliability percentage formula" determined by Miles and Huberman (1994). In this study, the consensus between the researcher and the coders was calculated as 85%, 88%, and 86%. The reliability ratio is determined to be 'reliable' based on the view that Miles and Huberman (1994) have at least 80% of the reliability coefficient in an ideal interview form. In order to ensure external

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<sup>47</sup> Matthew B. Miles - A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (Sage, 1994): 81-84.

<sup>48</sup> Ali Baltacı, "Miles-Huberman Model in Qualitative Data Analysis", *Ahi Evran University Journal of the Institute of Social Sciences* 3/1 (2017): 1-15.

validity, the method and application guidelines of the research were tried to be described in detail, and the findings were also compared with the literature.

#### 4. FINDINGS

In this section, the answers given by participants to the interview questions are examined. These findings do not reflect all set of data. Because in phenomenological studies, it is possible to reach different points from the subject are being investigated. In this respect, very rich and various findings have been reached. This diversity will be discussed in the conclusion section.

##### 4.1. Views on Islam

All participants expressed their views on Islam, which have been examined under social, economic and cultural themes, and findings for each theme have been set down below.

##### 4.1.1. Findings Related to Social Theme

Participants reported that Islam affects European public sphere negatively. They think that especially Islamic terrorist incidents and incompatible experiences of Muslims without Western values restricted public spaces. States are resorting to excessive security measures to protect their citizens against Islamic threats, causing intense concern. Some of the participants' opinions on this theme are below:

... "Islam affects our social life every day in a negative way. In streets, parks, everywhere there is a headscarved woman or a Muslim refugee. Mosques are becoming increasingly common. Our public space is becoming narrower due to the spread of Islam" (Sebastian, Male, 32, Hamburg).

... "Muslims say that Islam is a social religion and that it brings people closer. They collect money on their behalf called zakat; where is this money going? Is Islamic terrorism financed by these funds? I think Islam is not a religion in the West, it is just cumulative of systematic beliefs, yet it is seen as a religion that is prejudiced against the Jews and trying to send everything to hell. From a Western standpoint, Islam is the only basis for the underdevelopment of Muslims." (Lizbeth, Female, 47, Malmö).

##### 4.1.2. Findings Related to Economic Theme

Participants do not know the views and aspects of Islam on current economics; however, they regard the negativities of immigrants and Islamic countries as part of Islam. The majority of the participants criticize immigrants not being qualified and being a burden to the economy. There are also participants who think that Muslims are incompetent, unqualified and lazy for various reasons. Some of the participants' views on the economic theme are as follows:

... "Islam is threatening continental Europe in economic terms. The increase in the number of immigrants is fuelling unemployment. Perhaps the unemployment in Germany is decreasing, but increasing Muslim immigrants cause our resources to be consumed faster. There is no such thing as an Islamic economy, Muslims are unskilled slaves. They are on the streets when they wait to be picked up or sold." (Martha, Female, 34, Cologne).

... "I will soon be unemployed due to the religion of Islam. Unemployment is rising again because of Islam. Islam is everywhere. Newcomer Muslims and immigrants are limiting our business areas if they are qualified. Historically Europe is Catholic, but it is now becoming something called "Islam-Catholica". This

transformation has started economically. Those who came first enriched and worked in simple jobs; the followers came to replace them. First arrivals were bourgeois; Islam became bourgeois or oligarch. Traders on the stock market, buyers of football clubs, everywhere is filled with Muslims, old Christian Europe, unfortunately, fade away." (Kingsley, Male, 33, Southampton).

#### **4.1.3. Findings Related to Cultural Theme**

Participants said that Islam affects Western culture and cultural life negatively. Islam shows an intense cultural spread; corrupts aesthetic values in society. Muslims have forced non-Muslims to comply with Islam's own lifestyle and cultural values. In addition, they pointed out that traditional religious and cultural values were corrupted; People take away from traditions and religion. Participants reported that Islam transformed them into separate and lonely people; moreover, art, education, and aesthetic values were also negatively affected. The participants' views on the subject are down below:

... "I regret to say that Islam affects our culture negatively. As far as I remember even every corner in the city, there was a kebab restaurant, now we see Arab dressed Muslims or headscarved girls everywhere. They deliberately change our culture by intermingling themselves. We are different from them, our lifestyle and our culture are based on the fear of Islam and strangers. Now we cannot ignore all these values, we cannot ignore Christianity or history. We must take Muslims out of society and make our culture unique." (Edgar, Male, 30, Amsterdam).

According to this study findings, in the majority of the participants' views, Islam seems against by modern culture or modern values. There is prejudice when something is not recognized or unknown. Such negative prejudices and attitudes towards Islam make it basically not well-known and misidentified in European public opinion. It has a negative image in the West, but it is thought-provoking that the teachers who are in charge of educating members of the society are of such prejudices and unreal opinions about Islam.

#### **4.2. Views on the Way Suggested by Islam**

All participants expressed their views on Islamic practices or lifestyle. Views on the way of lifestyle by Islam have been examined under social, economic and cultural themes, and findings for each theme have been set down below.

##### **4.2.1. Findings Related to Social Theme**

Islamic principles lead the way of life of Muslims. For example, praying five times a day is an Islamic obligation. Muslims plan their lives according to these obligations. Non-Muslims see these practices as a different culture, lifestyle, or coercive pressure. Some of the answers given by participants in the context of social themes are mentioned below:

... "The public sphere, especially the shopping malls, had churches and synagogue, etc.; but now the mosques have begun to open. This increasing of places reserved for Muslims creates uneasiness in society. We are afraid that the Muslim's way of life will harm our social structure. In addition, radical Muslims are a particularly dangerous source. It is known that the younger Muslims gathered in Muslim associations in the mosques are radicalized. However, the state also offers financial assistance to Muslim associations by supporting them. When it comes to 9/11, London, Nice, and other Islamic terrorist acts, this reminds me of



the movie named 'sleeping with the enemy'. I am not saying that Muslims are our enemies, but we should isolate them from social spheres." (Sven, male, 33, Stockholm).

... "I have never understood the pilgrimage and prayers of Muslims when I first saw these strange beliefs and rumors of Muslims in Morocco. Just as we go to church, they also have a time frame called 'Friday prayer' and worship together in the mosque. But these extreme prayers and practices must not be part of Europe; when we give them religious freedoms, they can work to preach this religion to us. Christianity and perhaps being Jewish are among the historical values of Europe, but I oppose the existence of Islam. Islam is not our cultural value. I think that Islamic associations, mosques or prayers that we witnesses are bothered our social life (Kevin, male, 40, Brussels).

#### 4.2.2. Findings Related to Cultural and Economic Theme

In this theme, participants noted that Islamic practices and lifestyle are contrary to the modern world's economic life and mode of production. It is also a problematic of the fact that the exclusion of economic means from Islam cannot be understood by the participants. Moreover, they are reported that Islam is far from meeting the conditions of the modern economy within this theme. Participants, who thought that the cultural life in Europe was limited by Islamic practices, emphasized that Islam is an invader culture. Islamic practices contradict European cultural values. Also, the deterioration of Christian cultural values has been examined within this theme. Some of the participants' opinions within this theme are below:

... "Europe, which has a tradition of the industrial revolution, is based on work discipline. While Europe is experiencing an industrial revolution in the face of reason and enlightenment, Islamic societies continue to live in tents and as primitive tribes. Over time, this primitive lifestyle changed with the intervention of the Europeans and they now have modern cities. But Islamic societies far from an important economic competence: economic reason and work discipline. The prayer that takes place in Islam is 5 times a day and the most important production hours of the day are passed by prayer. Each prayer lasts for at least 30 minutes. This time is longer in most cases; which requires a choice for many manufacturers. Employees generally use this choice for their jobs and stop praying instead of going out from work and living their religion. Yet, Islam is based on prayer and it is a big contradiction that the working Muslims prefer Islamic lifestyle to their work." (David, male, 44, London).

... "Historically, Islam is culturally an invader religion. The Islamic prayer event is contrary to the religious experience of the Europeans. Our culture and Christian values are being put under pressure by the collective practices of Islam. Islamic terrorism also compels us to stay in the restricted public spheres." (Bridgette, female, 29, Rotterdam).

According to this study finding, Islamic practices have been studied in social, cultural and economic themes. The view that Islamic practices limit social spheres and that it does not match the cultural values of Europe has been widely expressed by participants. It has also been reported that Islamic practices cause a serious labor loss.



### 4.3. Views on Islamophobia

Participants have expressed different opinions about Islam and Islamophobia, which they mostly mean negatively. Some of the participants' opinions about Islamophobia are below:

... "Islam is a swamp; so Islamic thought radicalizes people and directs (leads) them to the Islamic terrorism. Islam is not a religion of peace, friendship or brotherhood. I consider Muslims who follow the people with their knives and kill them or constantly thinking of violence, cutting people's throat or burning them, etc. Islamophobia is a necessity of modern the Western world; it is a kind of social reality. Because we "modern Europeans" do not want to live with reactionary/fundamentalist Muslims. I am also aware that I define myself as a Buddhist, that is, I do not care about Christian beliefs, but I am also aware that Islam is an enemy belief in all other religions. The writers of the Qur'an have used such a language of violence that we cannot ignore this racist / anti-Semitic rhetoric. Islamophobia reflects particularly fearful aspects of the invading identity of Islam. Modern Western values have a secular faith against the absurd beliefs of Islam. I know that values such as freedom and justice are not in Islam; because today there are strange Shari'a practices in many countries. How is it possible to unaware of this absurdity and still follow Islam?" (Nicolas, male, 33, Munich).

... "There are four different religious thought aspects in Islam today: (1) The "Salafists", whose numbers are extremely minor, but relatively common in the Arab world (ISIL), (2) The Hanafi-Maturidi "Sunnism" which had been implicated by Nakshī-Hâlidī Sufism. (3) The "universalists" who regard the Qur'an as "universal/absolute" and critical of other sources. (4) "Constant Religion or Dynamic Shariah" (Historicalists). Islam is the religion of conflict within itself. Today, Muslim countries are at war and most Muslims kill other Muslims. There is no peaceful Muslim for them. Muslims are ignorant and easily radicalized, and they tend to terror and militia movements. Muslims are powerful worshippers; something to be worshipped according to them. Arab countries love to live British and American values, and they also have a religiously modified capitalist/evangelist idea. Spiritual heretics such as mystics create a new deity (sheik, mentor, spiritually leader, etc.). Islam is such a heretical religion. The Arab world is in strange delusions and obsessions and the Arabs are so radical in themselves that they do not accept any other culture members as Muslims. Even in the Palestinian case, the Islamic world cannot cope with being unity. So it is a dream to expect them to be united." (Linette, female, 34, Manchester).

According to research findings, a large majority of participants view Islamophobia as an important concept. The view of Islamophobia is accepted and supported by all of the participants. The main cause of Islamophobia is cultural values, religious traditions, and the spreading of Islamic terrorism. In addition, the media and politicians have a special place in the rise of anti-Islamic thought.

### 4.4. Views on Regarding Attitudes and Behaviors against Muslim Students

Teachers who have internalized Christian and Western values, attitudes and behaviors towards Muslim students in schools are very important for the understanding of Islamophobia in schools. The views of the participants on the Islamophobic behaviors and attitudes towards the Muslim students are given below.

... "I usually do not discriminate among my students. However, after the Muslim terrorist attacks especially in the Western world, unfortunately, I am making such discrimination. Although I do not define

myself as anti-Islamic, it gives me worry that the foreigners and especially the Muslim students increase geometrically in the schools. I think that Muslim students cannot have the values of the Western world and they should be extracted from our schools... Plus I hate Muslim students and discriminate them to the Catholics or others. Especially in student evaluations, and I give them to lower marks than non-Muslims... I even think that Muslim students do not have the right to a good education." (Marie, female, 40, Paris).

... "A secret Muslim enmity is being made in European schools. If we openly express our Islamophobic thoughts, we can expose to the kind of Muslim react and we can even be fired. I know that the majority of European schools, Christian, and Jewish teachers, hate Muslim students. We talk secretly among ourselves and say: "How can we get revenge from Muslim students?" In fact, even though Muslim students are not directly responsible for the terrorist attacks now, they will also be a potential threat to our society in the future." (Patrick, male, 43, Utrecht).

Participants' views on Muslim students are differing. According to participant opinions, discrimination is still a privileged phenomenon in European schools. In addition, the participants do not trust Muslim students and see them as a potential threat. However, the participants assume that Muslim students can easily radicalize. There are also participants who indicate that the use of religious symbols in schools increases the likelihood of a physical and psychological attack on students.

#### **4.5. Views on the Fight against Islamophobia in Schools**

When Islamophobia is defined as an act of hatred based on prejudice against non-Muslims, it is important to reduce these prejudices and Islamophobic behaviors in schools. Participants' views on how to fight Islamophobia in schools are given below.

... "I think struggling with Islamophobia is like achieving the impossible. Prejudices can only be eliminated by spending time together and understanding each other. But Muslims do not have to care about spending time with Christians for their religious beliefs. Islam forbids friendship with other religions; for this reason, we do not know enough Muslims. Muslim students in European schools are also introverted and antisocial and communicate only with other Muslims. Thus, the possibility of preventing the Islamophobic behaviors that are living in schools today also goes away." (Charlotte, female, 29, Liverpool).

... "First, we must listen to the problems of Muslim students and understand them, which we cannot associate with them without knowing their problems. Of course, there must be mutual tolerance for the effectiveness of the communication. In addition, we must give each other time. In time, Muslims will abandon the rhetoric of violence and approach the Western values and lifestyle; we must, of course, try to change our own discriminatory thinking. To halt the Islamophobia only this can be done." (David, male, 44, London).

As seen on participants views', the participants have different ideas about the fight against Islamophobia. Most of the participants reported that Islamophobia is a prejudice attitude; they suggested that prejudice can only be removed by communication. Besides, the point reached by the consensus is that Islamophobia can be eliminated by communication and prejudice education.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study aims to define the variability range between the Islamophobic teachers and determine the status of Islamophobia in European schools. Within the scope of the study, the focus was on participant' views on the religion of Islam, Islamic lifestyle, Islamophobia, Muslim students, and fight against Islamophobia in schools. Participants' views on Islam religion have been examined under social, economic and cultural themes, and it can be said that the majority of these views are contradictory. Within the scope of the study, it was determined that the majority of the participants were biased, non-questioned and negatively approaching Islam. The participants, who stated that they were influenced by the negative news about Islam, also expressed that politicians are also exposed to the way they do in a prejudiced manner about Islam. They also agree that Islam is a religion that is called together with terrorism and war. Participants, who thought that the Islamic symbols (headscarf, etc.) restricted the public sphere, also stated that the mosques were also spreading. It is also remarkable that there are also participants who think that Muslims working in Europe are providing monetary support to radical Islamic or jihadist groups. It was also determined that migrants coming to Europe due to wars also had a negative impact on the security of the cities and that they had narrowed their business areas.

It can be said that the participants' views on Islam religion are not related to the knowledge and practices of Islam. Islam is a religion of peace and reason, but it is an important consequence of this study that terror and other negative epithets which are mentioned together with Islam in the recent period harm the image of Islam. This result of the research is similar to the various research made in the literature.<sup>49</sup> Islam is a religion that is open to interpretation in terms of practices like other religions and contains various denominations. In this respect, a controversial concept such as jihad, misinterpreted by the Western world and associated with terrorism, is an important prejudice reflex against Islam. The reduction of the prejudices concerning Islam can be achieved by a balanced communication of the precise knowledge and practices that constitute the essence of Islam. In this respect, it is important that the Muslims living in Europe are equipped with the correct Islamic knowledge. In addition, these people who live in accordance with Islamic philosophy and practices in an exemplary way and present Islam towards the Western world will contribute to reducing prejudices of Islam.

Some of the participants who argued that Islamophobia is a social necessity rather than a cultural orientation points out that almost every Christian has to be Islamophobic, although not directly exhibited. Emphasizing that Islamophobia is a historically evolving concept, the participants signified that this negative attitude of Christianity towards Islam is undeniable. Moreover, the Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors of the media and politicians are also influencing the public and schools. In addition, participants noted that Islamophobia is often triggered by the negative attitudes and behaviors of some Muslims in European society. At this point, it can be said that this situation in the society is exaggerated by the media and politicians and announced to the public, which in turn increases anti-Islamism or Islamophobia in the public opinion. In many types of research in the literature, it is reported that the media and politicians can

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<sup>49</sup> Jandali, "Muslim Students in Post-9/11 Classrooms.": 34; Dhaya Ramarajan - Marcella Runell, "Confronting Islamophobia in education", *Intercultural Education* 18/2 (2007): 88; Zaal, "Islamophobia in classrooms, media, and politics": 553.

direct the attitudes and behaviors of the people.<sup>50</sup> It can be said that Islam and Islamophobia as a constantly discussed subject in the Western world, especially Islam, will be subject to the direction of the media and politicians. In this respect, the reaction of the social paradigm, which governs media and politics, towards anti-Islamic discourses is important.

One of the important facts revealed in this study is that teachers who have an important cultural role in the public sphere and who constitute the sample group have Islamophobic attitudes and behaviors. Of course, the education system and the teachers are not separate from the social system. Teachers serving the majority of society cannot be expected to be in a separate and sophisticated experience from society.<sup>51</sup> However, the opinions or actions of teachers' anti-Islamism are an indication of the far-right and racist political formations that are increasing in Europe. In the West, it is noteworthy that the news and comments of the media institutions and the intensification of anti-Islam thoughts in the statements of the politicians. This concentration in anti-Islamic discourse shows its effect in social areas, a divergence occurs in society and individuals are increasingly exposed to negative opinions or misinformation about Islam. In these debates that divide the society, the recent far-right movements also play a role. Generally, the far-right currents observed in non-multicultural societies are supported by groups who do not want the society to have a multicultural structure. In addition, wars in Asia and the Middle East, the immigrant issue and the terrorist attacks such as 9/11 have been associated with radical Islamist / jihadist terrorist organizations, and the Islamophobia offense has become widespread in the Western world. Of course, every thesis contains an anti-thesis, in this context; the criticisms directed to Islam, the relative correctness is obvious. It is especially problematic to try to show Islam as a pro-violence with radical interpretations. Although Islam is not a violent religion, the emergence and spread of Islam in the historically dominant geographic areas of the war creates a sense of conceptual integration between Islam and violence. In this sense, the culture of war has been perceived as a part of Islam and identified with Islam. Eventually this misunderstanding, even in schools which have a special position in the Western world, the religion of Islam is mentioned together with terror and war. As a result of this study, teachers working in European schools were found to be anti-Islamic in a large measure, the importance of correct presentation and introduction of Islam also emerged.

Participants, who stated that Islamophobia is a reality in European schools, say that Islamic symbols draw the attention of other students to Muslim students who use those symbols and may cause discrimination against them. It is also important that teachers consider Muslim students as "slaves of the modern age" or "primitive tribe". Teachers stated that they discriminate against Muslim students, especially in student evaluations, and give them to lower marks than non-Muslims. Besides, another important finding of the study is the perception of participants that minority groups such as foreigners and immigrants cannot adapt to the Western values of Europe. According to the theories of radicalization, the social and cultural

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<sup>50</sup> Amir Saeed, "Media, racism and Islamophobia: The representation of Islam and Muslims in the media", *Sociology Compass* 1/2 (2007): 448; Diane Frost, "Islamophobia: examining causal links between the media and 'race hate' from 'below'", *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 28/11/12 (2008): 569; Rod Gardner et al., "Islamophobia in the media: A response from multicultural education", *Intercultural education* 19/2 (2008): 123.

<sup>51</sup> Ali Baltacı - Mehmet Kamil Coşkun, "The Development of Teacher Perception Scale towards Religious Education Teachers", *OPUS International Journal of Society Researches* 8/15 (August 2018): 1463.

discordance experienced by the person evolve into an increasingly alienated character and thus radicalization at the individual level occurs. There are also teachers who think that Muslim students will become radicalized over time, and harm Western society. Moving from the findings of the research, it can be concluded that discrimination is still a major problem for European schools. Moreover, separating students because of their existential qualities such as race, mother tongue, and religion is also contrary to European values. From this point of view, it can be understood that open or confidential discrimination is against basic human rights and that the teachers behave erroneously. However, of course, it is unthinkable that an issue such as anti-Islamism, which has been socially overturned, can be reduced to a fact like discrimination. At this point, it is important to reconsider educational policies in order to reduce prejudiced and discriminatory teacher behavior.

To reduce prejudiced behaviors among social groups, it is necessary to bring these groups closer together. Thus, prejudiced behaviors that occur between individuals or groups are reduced by mutual interaction. But this is not as easy as it seems.<sup>52</sup> It is quite complicated to provide social interaction in conflicting issues, especially in the case of religion. Since Islamophobia is a fact that is based on prejudiced behaviors, a social solution requires a complex interaction. The majority of participants think that struggle with Islamophobia is a complex and difficult process. The participants who emphasize that the easiest way to reduce prejudices against Islamophobia and Muslims, are to spend time with Muslims, and underline the importance of social projects and cultural events. There are also teachers who think that the reduction of Islamophobia in the schools can be achieved by accepting Western values of Muslim students. In addition, participants point out that Islamophobia is not only a case of school life, but that anti-Islamism is spreading throughout the society, emphasizing the importance of the government to create policies that prevent prejudice. However, the majority of participants stated that an important method of reducing Islamophobia is to communicate. At this point, communication is effective in reducing prejudice-related events such as Islamophobia. It is known that societies that communicate with each other and understand each other's problems are less prejudiced. Islamophobia is a communication problem developed by people who have in essence a prejudiced attitude but who do not really try to understand each other. It may be possible to transform into a group and to understand each other by keeping communication channels open even if there is no connection between race, religion and mother tongue.

The most criticized aspect of qualitative research is the difficulty in obtaining generalizable results with limited samples. However, with the help of qualitative studies, as in this research, very important and detailed information can be reached. Small sample groups appear to be a significant limitation in studies investigating the social prevalence of, particularly difficult and contradictory concepts. Although this research was conducted on a group determined in accordance with the qualitative sampling methods, the most important limitation was the low sample size and the problems encountered in sampling access opportunities. Within the scope of the sample, care and attention have been paid to selecting teachers from different countries in order to provide maximum diversity. Nevertheless, working in a larger and wider environment is essential for such detailed research. In future studies, it may be advisable to use different

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<sup>52</sup> Lincoln Quillian, "New approaches to understanding racial prejudice and discrimination", *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 32 (2006): 321.

types of samples. In addition, quantitative methods are required to ensure universality, which is the greatest limitation of this research. Based on the assumption that these research results are limited to participant opinions and that changes in social events will affect the participants’ views, it may be the case that future studies will reach different findings from these research results.

#### ANNEX

No	Nickname	Gender	Age	City	No	Nickname	Gender	Age	City
1	Sebastian	Male	32	Hamburg	19	Caren	Female	41	Manchester
2	Rodina	Female	35	Stuttgart	20	Elisa	Female	29	London
3	Martha	Female	34	Cologne	21	Kingsley	Male	33	Southampton
4	Nicolas	Male	33	Munich	22	Steven	Male	37	Liverpool
5	Henning	Male	27	Frankfurt	23	David	Male	44	London
6	Clara	Female	51	Berlin	24	Linette	Female	34	Manchester
7	Hans	Male	32	Hamburg	25	Charlotte	Female	29	Liverpool
8	Ursula	Female	55	Munich	26	Shaun	Male	41	London
9	Yannick	Male	32	Lyon	27	Ulrich	Male	29	Odense
10	Marie	Female	40	Paris	28	Niklas	Male	50	Copenhagen
11	Sophie	Female	51	Marseille	29	Henrik	Male	47	Copenhagen
12	Roland	Male	37	Nice	30	Edgar	Male	30	Amsterdam
13	Jacque	Male	44	Toulouse	31	Anette	Female	33	Amsterdam
14	Jasmine	Female	28	Paris	32	Bridgette	Female	29	Rotterdam
15	Lizbeth	Female	47	Malmö	33	Patrick	Male	43	Utrecht
16	Sven	Male	33	Stockholm	34	Kevin	Male	40	Brussels
17	Isabella	Female	45	Goteborg	35	Thomas	Male	35	Ghent
18	Gustav	Male	52	Stockholm	36	Joliet	Female	29	Brussels

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