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Teachers-to-be and Islam. Has a change taken place?

Kandydaci na nauczycieli wobec islamu. Czy zaszła zmiana?

Streszczenie

Artykuł zawiera analizę porównawczą wyników sondażu diagnostycznego (w połączeniu z narzędziem fluencji werbalnej) przeprowadzonego dwukrotnie (czerwiec 2015 i 2016) wśród studentów Uniwersytetu Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach kończących nauczycielskie studia licencjackie na kierunku pedagogika. W przypadku badanych – studentów specjalności Edukacja wczesnoszkolna i przedszkolna, zgodnie z obowiązującymi standardami kształcenia nauczycieli, wraz z uzyskaniem tytułu licencjata stają się oni pełnoprawnymi nauczycielami. Prezentowane tu badania przebiegały w zróżnicowanych okolicznościach społeczno-politycznych dotyczących uchodźców i migrantów, szczególnie wyznawców islamu. W czerwcu 2015 r. było niemal pewne, że absolwenci podejmujący pracę w szkole bądź przedszkolu spotkają na swej drodze zawodowej ucznia/wychowanka i jego rodziców – przedstawicieli obcej kultury i religii. Zakładano, że w grupie tej znajdą się również wyznawcy islamu. Świadczyły o tym ustalenia Komisji Europejskiej w sprawie przyjęcia przez kraje członkowskie określonych liczb („kwot”) uchodźców przybywających na nasz kontynent, głównie z krajów Afryki Północnej. Intencją autorki było wówczas poznanie gotowości studentów na przyjęcie „innego”, ich podstawowej wiedzy na temat islamu oraz stosunku do jego wyznawców zarówno w aspekcie pracy pedagogicznej, jak i życia prywatnego. Wraz ze zmianami na polskiej arenie politycznej, wobec kolejnych (po ataku na m.in. redakcję „Charlie Hebdo” w Paryżu) głośnych wydarzeń z udziałem muzułmanów (np. noc sylwestrowa w Kolonii) nastąpił (nie)spodziewany zwrot. Zgoda na przybycie do Polski imigrantów została wycofana. Media wręcz „bombardowały” informacjami na temat niebezpiecznego islamu. W tej sytuacji autorkę zainteresowało, na ile wśród kolejnego rocznika kandydatów na nauczycieli zmieniła się podstawowa wiedza o tej religii, ich nastawienie do wyznawców Allaha oraz opinia na temat stosunku Europejczyków do nich. Wyniki badań, na tle rozważań teoretycznych, opisuje poniższy artykuł.

Słowa kluczowe: wielokulturowość, islam, islamofobia, nauczyciel, wiedza, tolerancja

Abstract

The article contains a comparative analysis of the diagnostic survey results (in conjunction with the verbal fluency tool) conducted twice (June 2015 and 2016) among Jan Kochanowski University's students, BA undergraduates, major of studies – pedagogics. The respondents have been the students of Early and Preschool Education Faculty. In accordance with the teachers training standards, those who obtain bachelor degree are regarded fully-qualified teachers. The research-project presented in this article was carried out in diversified socio-political circumstances when it comes to relations with refugees and migrants, especially Muslims follower. In June of 2015 it was almost certain that graduates who start working at schools or kindergartens would meet representatives of foreign cultures and religion – students / pupils and their parents. It was assumed that this group would also comprise Muslims, as the result of the European Commission's schemes under which specific numbers of refugees (the so-called "quotas"), mainly from North African countries were to be relocated into the EU Member States. At that time the author's intention was to examine whether students were ready to accept the "others" and what was the student's basic knowledge about Islam. The author also wanted to examine the students' attitudes in the context of pedagogical work and private life. The changes in the Polish political arena, news-front-page incident (like the attack on Paris-based "Charlie Hebdo" editorial office) which involved Muslims (e.g. New Year's Eve in Cologne) triggered an (un)expected change. Poland revoked its consent for immigrants relocation. The media openly "bombarded" viewers with information about how dangerous Islam might be. In this situation, the author became interested in how much the-then teacher-candidates had changed fundamental knowledge and attitudes towards the Allah followers as well as their opinion on Europeans' attitude towards Muslims. The research results supported with theoretical considerations are described in the article.

Keywords: multiculturalism, Islam, Islamophobia, teacher, knowledge, tolerance.

Introduction

Presence of Muslims in Europe, especially immigrants and refugees has become a more open, controversial and difficult socio-political problem to solve. In Western countries, Allah followers, representatives of different nations and factions of Islam have become an integral part of social life. At the same time this part of the continent is affected with Islamic fundamentalists attacks (ISIS), e.g. the attack on the "Charlie Hebdo" editorial office in Paris, immigrants offence (e.g. New Year's Eve in Cologne, etc.). They cause anxiety and even panic, which aggravates migration crisis. Many Europeans no longer accept otherness, incompatible with the patterns based upon their qualities (Bauman, 2016). Lack of acceptance, according to Nilufer Gole fuels "political manipulations" (Göle, 2016, p. 56) of the representatives of the extreme right-wing movements which have gained increased popularity and have come to power, e.g. Marine Le Pene, Viktor Orban. This group also comprises Polish politicians.

Zygmunt Bauman calls this governance technique the "securitization" (Bauman, 2016, p. 35). Securitization is associated with increasing sense of insecurity. Migrants have been accused of infectious diseases transmission (Jaroslaw Kaczynski), of the

intention to become social parasites, of plans to convert Europe to Islam (e.g. Czech President Milos Zeman). After Viktor Orban's claim that all terrorists are migrants, Hungarian respondents said that the word "fear" is now more associated with terrorism than with illness, poverty or crime (Bauman, 2016, p. 40, 95). For 83% of Poles surveyed by Ziad Abou Saleh and Marek Bodziany, every Arab is a terrorist (Saleh & Bodziany, 2016). There is a similar perception of Muslims in many other countries, regardless of the differences between them, immigrants types and even absence – said Göle (2016 p. 276).

How does this situation affect the candidates to the teaching profession who under the Teacher's Charter act are obliged to take care "about students' moral and civic attitudes development in accordance with the idea of democracy, peace and friendship between people of different nations, races and beliefs" (Karta Nauczyciela, 2011, chapter 2, p. 6). There was one-year interval between surveys (June 2015 and June 2016). The survey was designed to examine teachers candidates', i.e. Jan Kochanowski University students' basic knowledge about Islam. This examination included opinion survey with regards to Europeans' and students' attitude towards Muslims. The examination incorporated diagnostic survey using tools enhanced with verbal fluency tool (Gawda, Szepietowska, 2015). The examinations were held in different socio-political circumstances. In 2015 (before the parliamentary elections) it was assumed that Poland would accept the immigrants / refugees quotas determined by the European Commission. It was almost certain that some of the graduates would meet Muslim pupils. However, the situation has changed with the advent of the new, right-wing government which does not agree for the "others" to come to Poland. Muslim followers, even those whose countries (e.g. Syria) are at war, are not welcome in Poland. This has been demonstrated with numerous media discussions and the ruling, right-wing politicians' declarations. As the result of "securitization" and stereotypes change reinforcement, has a change occurred among teacher-candidates?

Before further research was conducted, it was assumed that the attitude towards Muslims and the opinion about Europeans' attitude towards Muslims has been negatively affected. Basic knowledge of Islam however has expanded alongside the media discourse. Study on the Muslim religion also contains some aspects respondents' religiousness, as it was the case of 2015's examination (Lendzion, 2016).

Research analysis

The 2015's survey incorporated 123 third-year students of pedagogy, speciality – Early School and Pre-School Education. In the consecutive study (2016) there were 115 respondents. The smaller number is owed to the decline in the number of students at the faculty. In addition to early-education teacher-candidates, the students of educational psycho-pedagogy also took part in the survey. The graduate profile holds it that graduates are to work in the capacity of school pedagogical counsellor.

The questionnaire contained 8 questions – closed, open and semi-open ones.

The first question set concerned determination of respondents' religious / cultural identity. The task of respondents was to name their denomination and the degree

of religious commitment (on a *hot, warm, cold* scale). Non-believers were also taken into consideration. The number of the latter in comparison with the previous year's survey has increased from 2 to 5%. One person identified themselves as an apostate.

Both studies show that only a small number of future teachers can accurately name their own denomination. The vast majority, including those who declare "hot degree" of religious involvement (36% – 2015; 35% – 2016) defined themselves too broadly as Christian. In this group the number of respondents' answers of this kind has increased from 52 to 65%. At the same time, the group of people who were able to define properly their religion increased as a Roman Catholic increased (from 7 to 12%). Among the students who declared "warm degree" of religious commitment, the number of the Roman Catholic Church followers decreased from 10 to 4%. In 2015, none of the respondents who declared "cold degree" of religious commitment provided a full name of their denomination. The following year it was 16% (Roman Catholic denomination). Other students, regardless their declared level of religious commitment, mostly defined themselves as Catholics.

Therefore a question may be asked. Is it justified to study the level of basic knowledge with regards to other religions and followers' attitudes towards other religions in the situation when the majority of respondents show a sense of ignorance towards the religion they declare to be followers of?

Despite this dilemma and in accordance with the research plan, the following part of the questionnaire inquires whether Islam is one of the world's major religions. Contrary to expectations, the level of knowledge has not improved in this respect. Compared to last year, 5% of respondents more gave the affirmative answer (84%). The number of students who gave the negative answer has increased (from 6 to 10%). Also slightly greater number of people (10/11%) were unable to answer this question.

The respondents were also asked about their knowledge of Islam-related figures. In this area the hypothesis has been confirmed – knowledge level has improved. More respondents (41%) compared to 2015's survey (26%) said that they are familiar with these figures, 62% (in 2015 – 56%) mentioned Allah. Fewer people however (20/11%) pointed out to Allah and Muhammad. There was 11% increase in people who know only of Muhammad (23%). In 2016 one student pointed out Aisha next to Muhammad. Other student knows "Muhammad and Fatima – his daughter." It should be noted that in both the first and the second study, Buddha (?) was mentioned in individual cases. In contrast however, in 2016 Dalai Lama (?) was not mentioned.

In the next part of the study, verbal fluency elements were used, o.e. the tools that assume that "studying a language we refer to the meaning, the way a person understands a notion" (Gawda, Szepietowska, 2015, p. 58).

Teacher-candidates were asked to provide four words, phrases or expressions they believe are associated with Islam. There was a slight increase in the number of people (3/5%) who did not provide even one word. Compared to the previous survey, there was a 19% increase of those who offered 4 associations, in 2016 it was 72% of respondents. This group and the words, expressions and phrases respondents offered in both studies require a more thorough examination. Summary is presented in the table below.

Tabel 1

words / phrases / expressions	2015 (N = 65)	%	2015 (N = 65)	%
terrorism, terrorist attacks, terrorists	9	13,8	28	33,7
war, army, fight, battle, weapons	7	10,7	23	27,7
Koran	17	26,1	21	25,3
Allah	9	13,9	21	25,3
assaults, cruelty, ruthlessness, pain	2	3,07	18	21,7
woman deprived of rights, lack of respect for women, men's power over the family	12	18,5	16	19,3
religion	15	23,1	12	14,4
other (deep) faith, denomination	17	26,1	12	14,4
mosque	14	21,5	10	12,0
burqa	3	4,6	10	12,0
aggression, violence, assault, mistreatment, hostility	8	12,3	11	13,2
women's covered body, women's covered faces	6	9,2	9	10,8
daily prayer, frequent prayer, 5 times a day	13	20,0	8	9,6
bigotry, chauvinism, xenophobia, dictatorship, no compromise	2	3,1	8	9,6
Mohammed	-	-	7	8,4
bomb, bomb blasts	1	1,5	6	7,2
death, man-slaughter, murder, killer, killing of innocent people, crimes	3	4,6	6	7,2
strictness, hard rules, dictatorship, obedience, loyalty, imposing views	5	7,7	6	7,2
fear	1	1,5	5	6,0
killing in the name of faith	-	-	5	6,0
suicides	-	-	5	6,0
hostility, persecutions	-	-	5	6,0
Turban	-	-	5	6,0
rigour / rigorism, strict laws, strict rules, disciplines, bans	11	16,9	4	4,8
Arabs	1	1,5	4	4,8
evil, bad people	1	1,5	4	4,8
Jihad	-	-	4	4,8

words / phrases / expressions	2015 (N = 65)	%	2015 (N = 65)	%
Sharia, obligations, exact knowledge of the Koran, respect for values	-	-	4	4,8
refugees	-	-	3	3,6
punishment	-	-	2	2,4
Allah Akbar	-	-	2	2,4
Ramadan	-	-	2	2,4
abstinence	-	-	2	2,4
garments, scarves, specific outfits	2	2,1	2	2,4
lack of respect and acceptance for other religions, faith imposing / defense	2	2,1	2	2,4
gold, glamour, magnitude, wealth	2	2,1	2	2,4
poverty, poor children	1	1,5	2	2,4
limited freedom	1	1,5	2	2,4

Source: Own research

In addition to the words contained in the table, in 2016 there were new, isolated words, expressions and phrases:

- » Mecca
- » “There is one God, Muhammad is His Prophet”
- » monotheistic religion
- » outlook on life
- » strange laws
- » Bin Laden
- » beating women
- » female circumcision
- » polygamy
- » Turkey
- » Iraq

Besides, isolated words, expressions and phrases have found a place in both studies.

- » different values system
- » chaos, defeat
- » hatred
- » Far East
- » Heat

The analysis of the data presented above proves the initial assumption; the number of teacher candidates who associate Islam with terror, war, attacks, aggression, difficult situation of women etc. has significantly increased. It needs to be emphasized that there are more associations which demonstrate basic information about Islam – Allah or Mohammed. Besides negative associations, there were also isolated terms

such as Ramadan, Mecca, “There is one God, Muhammad is His prophet,” or Islamic countries – Turkey and Iraq. The number of people who associate Islam with gold and wealth has not changed; this is probably owed to the United Arab Emirates. The word refugee has appeared for the first time.

It should be emphasized that there was an increase in the number of people (3/12%) whose “associations set” included only items devoid of negative emotions, e.g. Mosque, Arab, Muslim, burqa; the Koran, deep faith, prayer, Allah. There is slightly fewer people (10.8 / 8.2%) who see Islam only through the prism of war and terror.

The consecutive question was – “Are Europeans are afraid of Muslims?”. 96% of the students gave affirmative answers. As assumed, this number is higher (by 10%) than in the previous year’s survey. When asked to identify the causes for the concerns, the respondents mainly referred to fear of terror attacks, holy war (61%). In this respect, the number of 2016’s survey responses increased by 22% compared to the previous year’s examination. Another reason (53%) was a threat for Christian Europe. In 2015, on 22% of students indicated this cause. In both studies, there was a similar number of responses (below 10%) related to the following causes of concern: lack of knowledge about Islam, Europeans’ intolerance for other religions, impact of stereotypes and the media information.

Those 2016’s respondents who believe that Europeans are not afraid of Muslims (4%) emphasize that Christianity has been and will remain our continent’s main religion, we are strong and we able to win every war. Last year, 14% of this future-teachers group felt that Europeans admitted other peoples’ right to profess their religion, they respect other religions’ representatives, Europeans are tolerant and open-minded.

Given the course of studies the respondents are about to graduate, the author was interested in whether the undergraduates were ready to work with a Muslim student / pupil. Compared to the first study (67%), the number of those who declared to be ready has slightly decreased (63%). Fewer teachers-to-be consider themselves to be tolerant (30/19%). There has been an increase in the number of those who believe that pupil’s religion is irrelevant and all pupils should be treated equally (34/42%). A small group of respondents claimed that “the child has not chosen their faith” (4/6%), and that “children’s views can still be shaped” (2/4%). In 2016, new reasons were indicated by the respondents. 14% of respondents say that not every Islam representative is an evil person; 7% intend to separate work from their world-views and 4% see working with Muslim pupils as a possibility of mutual knowledge transfer with regards to religions and cultures. One person is of the opinion that “a child does not have such radical views”. Another person believes that: “This is only a child, perhaps has not yet been dominated by the religion.” Someone else would like “to show what other religions are like.” There is also a student interested in the culture of the Middle East and therefore keen to work with the Muslim pupils.

23% of respondents (1% fewer than last year) are of the opposite opinion. 54% admit that they have not had this kind of knowledge and experience. In 2015 this response was given by 88% teacher candidates. In the second study, fear of Islam was expressed by 35% of the respondents, 11% admitted that they did not know any Islam representatives. Such opinions were not expressed in the previous year’s study.

This year’s respondents explain that, e.g.: “I do not know this religion and I do not want to become familiar with that”; “I do not know how I would react to their [pupils]”

aggression”; “I do not know whether I would be able to approach such a student without bias.” Someone other respondent does not know how they could “work with people who are taught to be aggressive ever since they are born.” Another person would not overcome their reservations “to work with such a student because of students’ evil intentions.” Other person would be afraid about their lives and children. One candidate teacher clearly declares their “cultural prejudice and intolerance towards Islam representatives.”

Students were also asked about their opinion on Christian-Muslim marriages and families. In both studies, those who did not have an opinion were the largest group (43/50%). There was a considerable decrease from 35 to 20% of students who claim that such relations may be successful (“It depends on the partnership relations”). At the same time the number of opponents increased from 22 to 30%. In their opinion, such mixed marriages have no chance of surviving (“Europeans are converted, not vice versa”).

The author of the study was also interested in seeing to what extent teacher candidates are open for closer relations with Islam followers (e.g. are they ready to neighbour Islam followers). As expected, the number of people ready to establish such contacts decreased in 2016 by 19% (from 84 to 56%).

28% of this year’s respondents (compared to previous year’s 41%) believe that a religion does not show what is man’s real nature. Besides, not every Muslim is a bad person. 17% (previous year – 26%) of respondents think that such relations offer new experience, allow to become familiar with Islamic culture and religion. Respondents in the second study say (15%) that Muslims are people like us. Unlike 2015’s study, 26% of students declared that they were open for the establishing closer relations with Muslims, however under certain conditions. They do not want to be imposed Muslim religion, Christianity ought to be accepted by the other party; they need to become more familiar before establishing a relation and establish trust; find common interests; avoid harm. One person writes: “If these are true Islam followers who respect their religion and principles – I would certainly develop a closer relation.” There were also such statements as: “Every day I would think whether they would be able to harm another person”; “In the beginning I would be careful, mainly because of my little daughter”; “I do not think they would harm me if I’m good for them.” Some other person writes: “Personally, I am a Christian and I do not care about others’ faith.”

53% of respondents declare reluctance to establish close relations with relations with Islam followers (previous year it was 50%); fears, anxiety, possible conflicts and religion-related persecution are expressed in the study (e.g. “I would be worried about my life, because I am an active Catholic,” “I do not know what they are capable of,” “They do not respect our religion”). 26% of respondents in this year’s study are not open (“I think they should live in their own countries”, “Too many cultural differences”, “Their lifestyle, so distant from European style would be problematic”). 10% declare that they do not know Islam representatives (previous year – 20%), and 4% demonstrate their mistrust. 8% of respondents did not explain their choice, which was not the case in 2015’s survey.

The author of the study, taking into account the variable degree of the students’ religious involvement has decided to analyse selected areas with regards to those who declared to be “hot” Christianity followers, i.e. the followers of the religion in which

love to God and every human being is the highest value. This group has most significantly demonstrated the decline in the number of students (89/40%) who are open to establish closer relations with Islam followers. There was a decline from 73 to 63% in the number of students ready to work with a Muslim student / pupil. At the same time the number of reluctant to work with the Muslim child (23/20%) decreased compared to those who do not have an opinion (4/17%).

Analysis “hot” Christians’ / Catholics’ opinion about mixed (Christian-Muslim) marriages follows the trend shown before – there was a decline in the number of respondents (34/19%) who believe that such a relation can be successful. Thus, compared to 2015’s results, the percentage of students who disbelieve such relation can survive (18/27%) and those who have no opinion (48/54%) have increased.

Perhaps in spite of a deeper than the average religious involvement declared by the respondents (imprecise determination of their denomination allows to assume that the respondents are the Roman Catholic Church members), the respondents do not listen carefully enough to Pope Francis’ message or they interpret the message in their own way. They probably have not reached to the Vatican Council relevant and applicable documents. One of the documents, dated 1965 – *Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions* reads that the Catholic Church has revised its attitude towards non-Christian religious communities. The Church requires its members to witness to Christian faith and in love to establish dialogue and cooperation with followers of other religions, to explore their socio-cultural values. This also applies to Muslims. Despite the fact that “in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.” (Deklaracja, 2002, p. 335).

The study indicates that neither the *Teacher’s Charter Act* provisions quoted in the introduction nor the Vatican document affect the attitude towards Muslims demonstrated by future teachers – a particular professional group that greatly influences the public opinion. Will this group become a part of today’s dominant discourse based on fears? Or they may decide to resist the stereotypes and independently seek knowledge necessary to shape their opinion based on tolerance and Christian love?

The research results / Discussion

The survey analysis confirmed the initial hypothesis. It has been demonstrated, as assumed that there has been a negative change in the attitudes towards Muslims and the opinion about Europeans’ attitudes towards Muslims. Compared to the previous year’s survey there is a greater number of statements indicating antipathy towards Muslims both in private and future professional life. However, basic knowledge of Islam, though rather superficial has increased. Compare to 2015 there has been a greater number of emotionally neutral words, phrases or expressions which are characteristic of the controversial religion.

It is hoped that the will “normalize” with teacher-candidates ready for lifelong self-education. Over one-year period Poland has started to be considered “a selfish nationalist country.” This expression was used by Guisi Nicolini – the mayor of the Italian island of Lampedusa – the destination for thousands of immigrants from Africa many of whom never reach the island because they drown during the Mediterranean Sea voyage. The article heroine was called “Conscience of Europe” who treats newcomers on a par with the natives. For her Poland has so far been associated with solidarity (Żyła, 2017 p. 12). “What happened to you, Polish brethren?” – asks Bassam Aouil, a psychology professor, a Syrian who has lived in Poland for 22 years noting the wave of hatred, xenophobia and contempt expressed in the streets, in the media and on the Internet (Zdanowicz, 2017, p. 36).

One cannot stay indifferent in the face of these facts. Therefore education is necessary. Especially teachers (this includes teacher candidates) should feel the need to expand their knowledge regarding Islamic culture, religion and civilization. “There is no other way to fight Islamophobia than fighting with lack of knowledge” (Tahar Ben Jelloun, 2015, p. 132). Criticism of Islam should be complemented with thorough knowledge on the differences between Sunnism and Shiism, between the Afghan Taliban and the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. “Sharia is referred to without specifying the meaning of the term. Everything is confused: political issues, nasty terrorism, opium wars, stoning of unfaithful wives, veiling, wearing a full burqa, fanatics’ preaching and spirituality-related texts, Saudi Arabia Islam and for example, the French Islam” (Tahar Ben Jelloun, 2015, p. 8).

“Ordinary Muslims” – immigrants living in Europe scared of vicious attacks in the name of Islam should be considered. It is worth knowing that on 10 September 2014 in the UK, an international campaign *Not In My Name* was established as the expression of Europeans’ civic attitude. The organization condemns the atrocities of the so-called Islamic State (Goals, 2016, p. 284). One must not forget that many Muslim immigrants belong to the European middle class, many of them are representatives of highly valued professions; they work as lawyers, doctors, artists in all field of art, business-people, non-governmental organizations members. They try to “unite their faith and culture with citizenship” (Göle, 2016, p. 11), however in today’s situation they are becoming less visible.

This knowledge is essential because, according to Zygmunt Bauman mass migration is not likely to finish (Bauman, 2016, p. 11). Therefore it can be assumed that some of the teacher-candidates who have taken part in the study will soon start and even have already started their professional life in one of Western Europe’s countries. Meeting Muslims not only in the street, but also in the place where teachers live, at school is inevitable. Therefore teachers should be prepared for such encounters. I wish they had been prepared by schools and universities.

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