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DAR AL-KALIMA UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF ARTS & CULTURE

## ***Towards a Regional Interreligious Dialogue Curriculum in the Arab World***

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## ***Executive Summary***

The issue of interreligious dialogue is rarely considered in its didactic aspect in the Arab world, whereas it should become systematically included in official curricula of Schools of Theology, Religious Studies, Islamic Studies, Arts & Sciences, and also, in universities' broader missions and course offerings. The way we see it, the development of dialogue between people through the creation and implementation of a culture of dialogue in public and private educational institutions, is a prerequisite for constructing inclusive mindsets within the young generations, and therefore an imperative for building inclusive societies.

In that perspective, with SDG #16 (Promote Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies) and Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 constituting the framework of its project, Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture (DAK) aimed at contributing to the dissemination of this culture by assessing the needs for an interreligious dialogue curriculum and designing a 3-hour undergraduate course syllabus on interreligious dialogue to be used as a teaching resource on a regional level.

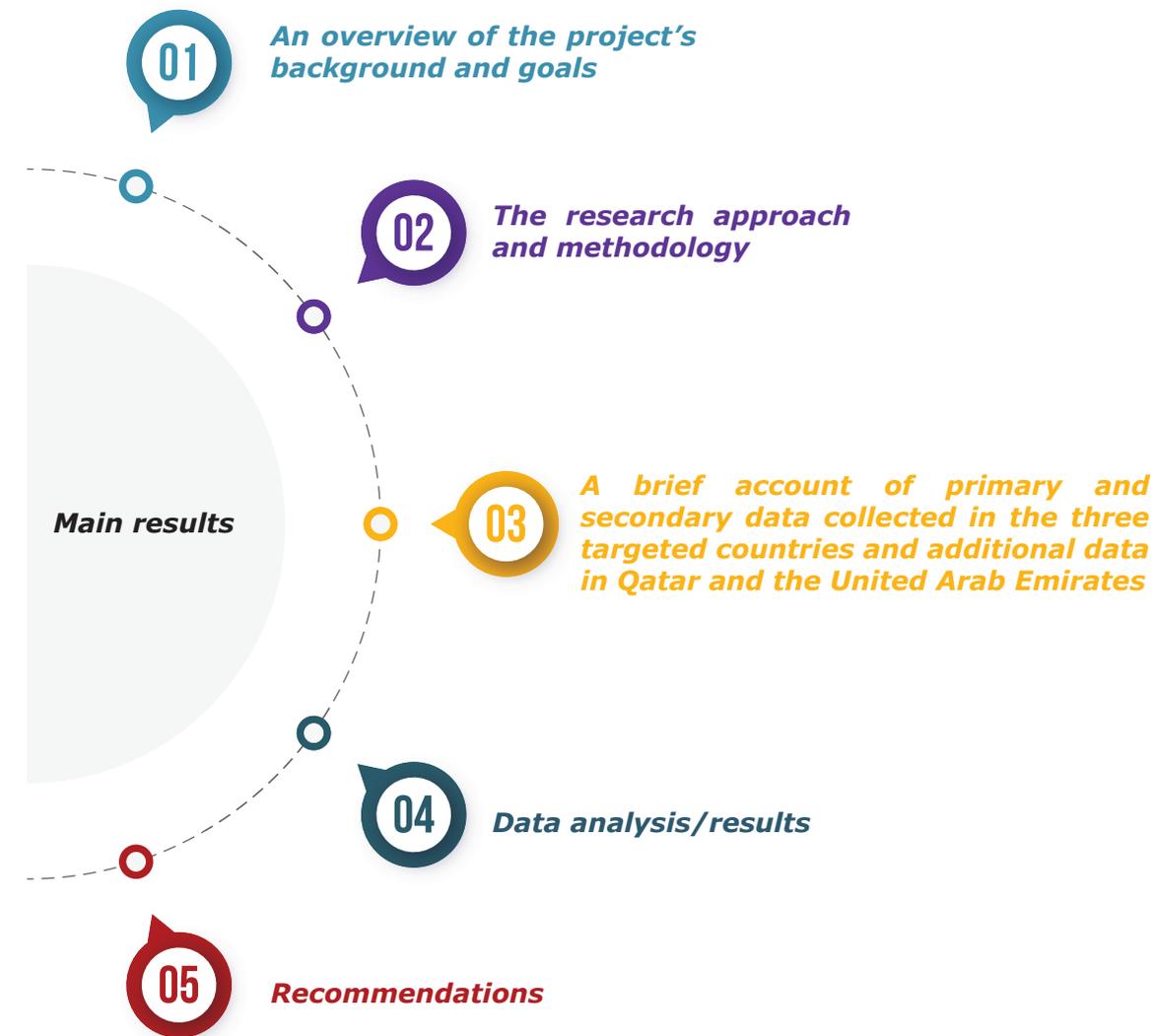
### ***The first phase of the project (February 2020 - March 2021) consisted of:***

- Assessing the current needs for a regional/interreligious curriculum, specifically a common undergraduate 3 credit-hour course and identifying the main challenges and obstacles facing its implementation by conducting research in Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine from February to June 2020.
- Presenting the main results of this research at a first webinar organized by DAK on November 28, 2020, which gathered academics and administrators from several targeted institutions in the region.
- Forming a task force with the academics and administrators who expressed their interest in joining it. Members of this task force first shared their written recommendations and suggestions by email and second participated in a virtual meeting on February 6, 2021, to verbally discuss the course's content, format, and structure.

- Designing a course syllabus based on 1) the research findings and previous successful local/regional experiences in teaching/learning about interreligious dialogue; 2) the outcome of the task force meeting. This syllabus was presented during the second webinar organized by DAK on March 26, 2021.

Its final version was then submitted to DAK in April 2021 following additional recommendations of members of the task force.

This report presents the needs assessment main results. It is divided into 5 main sections:



The research that was conducted for the needs assessment took place from February to June 2020. Despite the Covid-19 virus pandemic and lockdown measures, we collected primary and secondary data in targeted institutions in Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine (along with 2 institutions in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar), and used a qualitative method (content analysis) to analyze the data. Primary data were gathered through direct interaction with +45 key administrators and academics both through online questionnaires and one-on-one meetings (physical/virtual). Key persons that were met and interviewed were chosen according to their expertise in the fields of theology, religious studies, islamic studies, and humanities/social sciences/cultural studies with a focus on education to interreligious dialogue. They were also chosen according to their religious affiliation (Muslims, Christians mainly) and their gender (as we were aiming at including at least 20 to 30% of women administrators/academics when possible).

The total number of filled questionnaires on June 19, 2020, was 49, which exceeded the number (40) we were aiming to obtain at the beginning of our research. The purpose was to gather information about the targeted institutions' needs, the academics/administrators' perceptions of education to interreligious dialogue, how they identify challenges facing the design and implementation of interreligious dialogue curricula, and so forth. The secondary data were mainly collected through a desk research of materials and studies with existing data, including online databases (official academic institutions websites, press articles, peer-reviewed articles, and reports), and available administrative reports and courses' curricula descriptions.

***Our research results can be summarized in the following 6 points:***

- 1 Targeted academics/administrators present both common and different perceptions of interreligious dialogue. These perceptions include multiple definitions of dialogue principles, goals, types/forms, and levels. In addition, the targeted institutions have both common and different profiles, as some institutions have already extensive and successful curricula and programs in the theology of dialogue and interreligious dialogue, and others don't; some offer traditional theoretical courses, and others (rare cases) offer training and organize field trips for instance or both. The course syllabus we propose takes into consideration the two above-mentioned issues.



2

Several causes are behind the absence or lack of education to interreligious dialogue in a number of institutions in the targeted countries -- from the lack of will or interest to the practice of authoritarianism, religious community's institutional veto, etc<sup>1</sup>. However, more than 52% of targeted academics/administrators stated there is a need for courses about interreligious dialogue in their institutions -- and in the case of established programs, there is always room for improvement -- and 88% agreed on the fact that education to interreligious dialogue is a must in academia.

3

According to almost 50% of the targeted academics/administrators, education to interreligious dialogue through the inclusion of a new course (or more) is a possibility. However, for the other half, several challenges/obstacles face this inclusion/implementation -- such as the opposition of other academics, staff, religious institutions, state policies, students' insufficient interest, traditional/conservative approaches to the study of religion(s), economic/financial challenges, shortage of expertise, etc.

4

In order for such a course to be included/implemented, academics/administrators identified the following criteria: it should either be offered as mandatory (almost 39%) or elective (45.5%) -- depending on the institution, or even as extra-curricular (such a series of conferences/seminars or workshops). It should be taught by experts in the field or well-trained educators. It should include innovative content and-or teaching methodology. It should be non-apologetic, non-polemic, and non-preaching. It should focus on both the knowledge of interreligious dialogue and its practice. It should be co-developed between targeted institutions (preferably on a regional level),... and a few academics/administrators referred to the importance of the use of online education/e-learning tools and methods, especially during the Covid-19 virus outbreak and in its aftermath.

5

In addition, many academics/administrators mentioned in the interviews the importance of offering this course as a core course for all enrolled students in the university/college, and the need for this course to be co-created between Schools of Religious Studies and Schools of Arts & Sciences/Humanities.

6

Furthermore, a number of academics/administrators addressed the issue of education to interreligious dialogue in schools, starting as early as in primary/elementary school. Education not only reflects society but also influences its development. As such, schools have a role to play in the development of an

7

intercultural/interreligious society. It has an important contribution to make in facilitating the development of the child's intercultural and interreligious skills, attitudes, values, and knowledge. An intercultural/interreligious education is valuable to all children in equipping them to participate in an increasingly diverse society. Noting that curriculum reform initiatives at this level are being undertaken in Jordan.

Following our research results, two webinars (November 2020 and March 2021), and recommendations of the task force members, we designed a 3-credit hour undergraduate-level course syllabus in Arabic and English that was submitted to Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture in April 2021 where we concluded that such a course can be separately implemented by institutions that do not offer courses about interreligious dialogue and need to include them in their curricula. However, an ideal implementation should be done via the development of an online platform that would include this course, along with other materials such as teaching/learning guidelines and best practices for professors. This platform would be an added value for different institutional profiles. The course's content would be created with the contributions of the targeted institutions in Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. It could be offered both fully online, or with a blended approach, in English or Arabic; it could be easily updated, and could be accessible to multiple students' audiences. In addition, every educator would monitor his/her students and assess their work, and would have the freedom to adapt certain aspects of activities, assessments and content to his/her students' and the context's needs. Also, educators would get the opportunity to interact, create a network, and help one another; and students from different institutions and countries would interact with each other. Furthermore, monoreligious classes would be able to interact with other classes in an interreligious and regional setting.

In that sense, this common platform and course would embody a very much needed regional collaboration in times of Covid-19 pandemic and multiform crises. In addition, such a course -- along with other resources -- would ensure a better understanding of others and their religions/cultures, contribute to develop more inclusive theologies and approaches in humanities/social sciences and cultural studies, as well as to build active citizenship, and preserve human dignity.



# ***1. About the Project***

## ***1.1. Project Background***

The issue of interreligious dialogue is usually considered in its theoretical and methodological aspects, or in its institutional or capacity building aspects, but less in its didactic aspect, especially in Schools of Theology and Shari'a Colleges/Islamic Studies Colleges in the Arab world in general, and in Southwestern Asian countries in particular -- such as in Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. Based on DAK's experience in education to interreligious dialogue, and on our previous and current experience in educating to interreligious/intercultural dialogue and teaching about religious/cultural diversity in the region, as well as on research projects on interreligious/intercultural dialogue and peace education that we have completed, we argue that academic institutions, especially higher education schools and departments that tackle the issues of cultures and religions, should further engage in interreligious dialogue as part of their pedagogical and civic duty. This will ensure a better understanding of others and their religions/cultures, contribute to develop more inclusive theologies and approaches in humanities/social sciences and cultural studies, help build a culture of dialogue and peace towards social cohesion and active citizenship, and preserve human dignity.

How could this engagement be? Multifaceted, with administrators who could include religious diversity as a priority in strategic plans, faculty who could integrate interreligious themes into required courses or developing new courses and programs on interreligious dialogue, staff who could offer interreligious training to student leaders on campus, etc.

The approach of the project employs education and interreligious dialogue and exchange between Christian and Muslim religious educators of seminaries and Shari'a colleges, as well as Humanities professors and administrators, to address religious intolerance and strengthen the resilience of the peoples of the region to combat extremism through the development of inclusive theologies and other approaches or the religious phenomenon.

The main result for this project's pilot phase is an innovative, inclusive and creative interreligious 3-hour course syllabus to be used as a teaching resource for the seminaries and Shari'a colleges, and also, in universities' broader missions and course offerings. SDG #16 (Promote Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies) and Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 constitute the framework of this initiative. In that sense, the project

focused first on assessing the current needs in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine for higher education to interreligious dialogue and second on designing a course syllabus that was submitted to DAK in April 2021. Noting that we recommended the course's content to be co-created on a regional level. In addition, we recommended this course to be offered on an interactive online platform, along with diverse resources and toolkits on education to interreligious dialogue.

### 1.2. Our Definition of Interreligious Dialogue

The way we define it, interreligious dialogue is the equitable multiform communication and exchange between individuals and groups from different religious belongings/backgrounds. Based on mutual understanding, respect and the equal dignity of all cultures and religions; it is one of the essential prerequisites for social cohesion, reconciliation among peoples and peace among nations. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and practices, to increase participation, to foster equality, and to enhance creative processes. In other words, its objective is to enable us to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural and multireligious world, and to develop a sense of community and belonging. Unlike multiculturalism, which aim is the preservation of cultures/religions through separate and isolated coexistence, interreligious dialogue -- which is included in the larger category of intercultural dialogue or is connected to it -- seeks to establish linkages and common ground between different communities and people of faith, and to promote mutual respect, understanding and positive interaction and action.

In the Arab world, and particularly in the three targeted countries in our project (Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon), many individuals are living in a "multicultural/multireligious" reality in which they have learnt to manage their own multiple cultural/religious affiliations, but others haven't learned. Consequently, interreligious dialogue, despite its limits and the obstacles it faces, is an antidote to rejection, extremism, violence and populism, and therefore education to interreligious dialogue should be included in academic curricula and produced/created through unofficial channels and methods too.

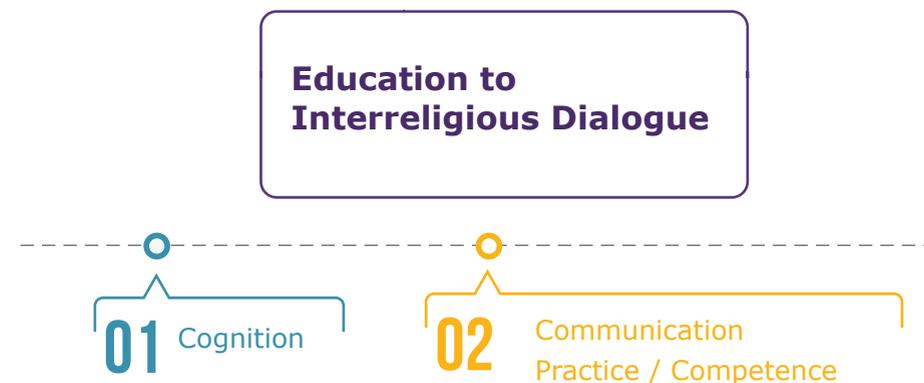
In our opinion, the development of dialogue between people from the bottom-up and thus through the creation and implementation of a culture of dialogue in public and private educational institutions, is a prerequisite for constructing inclusive mindsets within the young generations, and therefore an imperative for building inclusive societies.

Interreligious dialogue cannot remain a response to an emergency, or fear of slipping into a clash, or dealing only with post-war realities. For dialogue to bear fruit, institutions need to play important and direct roles in establishing a culture of dialogue, because, unfortunately, this culture is almost lost in our religiously diverse societies. Therefore, it needs to be built within educational, religious and media institutions. Because attitudes hostile to religion, or to the religious other, are a product of culture. Violent behaviors and killings in the name of religion are also the product of culture - among other factors.

### 1.3. Our Definition of Education to Interreligious Dialogue

The way we define it, education to interreligious dialogue is based on a cross-modal teaching/learning of interreligious dialogue through a combination of official and unofficial teaching methods and channels/frameworks of:

- 1 learning about each other's basic beliefs and practices in our respective religious and cultural traditions/communities; learning about our histories of encounters and conflicts; learning about each other's experiences with dialogue (Cognition).
- 2 learning through the practice of dialogue that not only emphasises study and critical thinking, but also the doing of dialogue, common action and content creation in the presence and participation of the religious other (Communication + Practice/Competence).



The term cross-modal learning refers to the synergistic synthesis of information from multiple sensory modalities such that the learning that occurs within any individual sensory modality can be enhanced with information from one or more other modalities. Cross-modal learning is a crucial component of adaptive behavior in a continuously changing world<sup>2</sup>.

### 1.4. Project's Goals

Due to the Coronavirus outbreak and lockdown in Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and the UAE since February/March 2020, our project's goals and timeline had to be changed as in the following summary:

1 Preliminary primary data were mainly gathered in Lebanon and Jordan (+ two additional academics in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) in February/March before the lockdown -- with more than 45 academics and administrators of a number of targeted institutions -- through meetings (online and offline), interviews, and the questionnaire for academics. Primary data in Palestine were gathered during the deconfinement phase in May and June 2020, as well as additional primary data in Lebanon and Jordan in the same period of time.

2 Preliminary secondary data were gathered from February to June 2020 and analysis of preliminary data (primary and secondary) was completed in June 2020, and included in this report.

3 A first curriculum draft was designed based on the results of this analysis, and included in this report.

4 Academics/administrators from Lebanon and Jordan who were recruited for the regional workshop/conference before the virus outbreak and during the deconfinement period were contacted in May and June 2020 for the webinars that took place in November 2020 and March 2021.

- We base our work on a fundamental respect for human dignity.
- We respect the research participants' autonomy, integrity, freedom and right of co-determination. Thus, research was conducted in accordance with basic considerations for data protection, such as personal integrity, privacy and responsible use and storage of personal data.
- We provided participants with adequate information about the field and the purpose of the research. Participants received access to the information, the intended use of the results, and the consequences of participation in the research project.
- We provided information in a neutral manner, so potential participants are not exposed to undue pressure. The information is adapted to the participants' cultural and religious background and communicated in a language they understand.
- We explained to the participants the limitations, expectations and requirements associated with our role as researchers.

## OUR RESEARCH VALUES

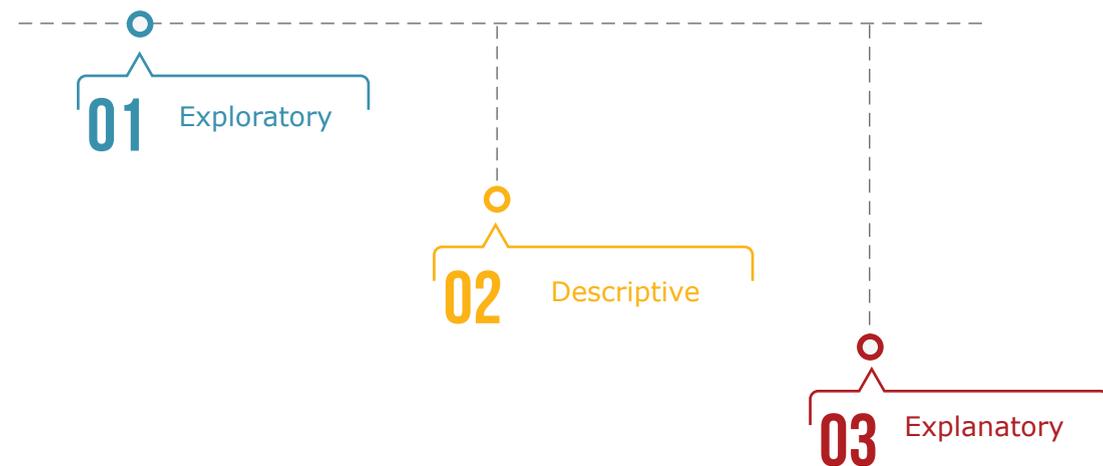


## 2. Research Approach and Methodology

### 2.1. Research Types

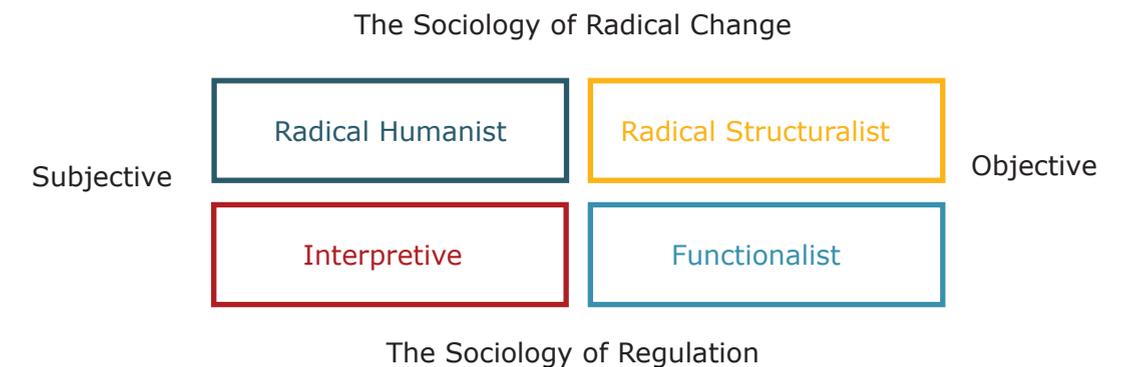
Our research combined three research types: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory, as 1) we were looking to scope the nature and extent of the issue at hand so it would serve later on more in-depth research (the issue being: is a curriculum about interreligious dialogue relevant/needed in higher education in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, and if it's the case what would be its characteristics?); 2) we tried to describe current perspectives, experiences and best practices by gathering and analyzing primary and secondary data; and 3) we tried to understand the reasons behind the development or on the contrary the lack or absence of education to interreligious dialogue in a number of academic institutions, so we would be able to recommend new strategies for teaching/learning about interreligious dialogue.

#### 3 Research Types



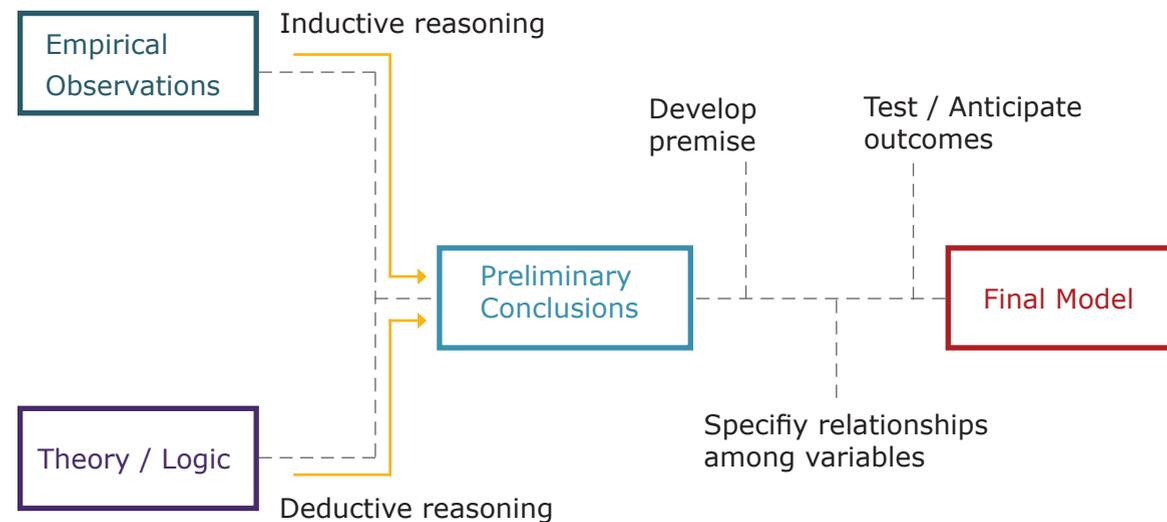
As for our epistemological framework, we used a combination of the 4 quadrants as described by Burrell and Morgan<sup>3</sup>, as our research needed a multiparadigmatic approach, from a continuum between subjectivity and objectivity while focusing much more on an interpretivist research design, to touching on the sociology of regulation and the sociology of radical change, as we were not only concerning ourselves with what already exists and how it operates, but also with anomalous occurrences (what stands out from the crowd) and what could happen when shifts take place.

#### Epistemological Framework



## 2.2. Process of Theory

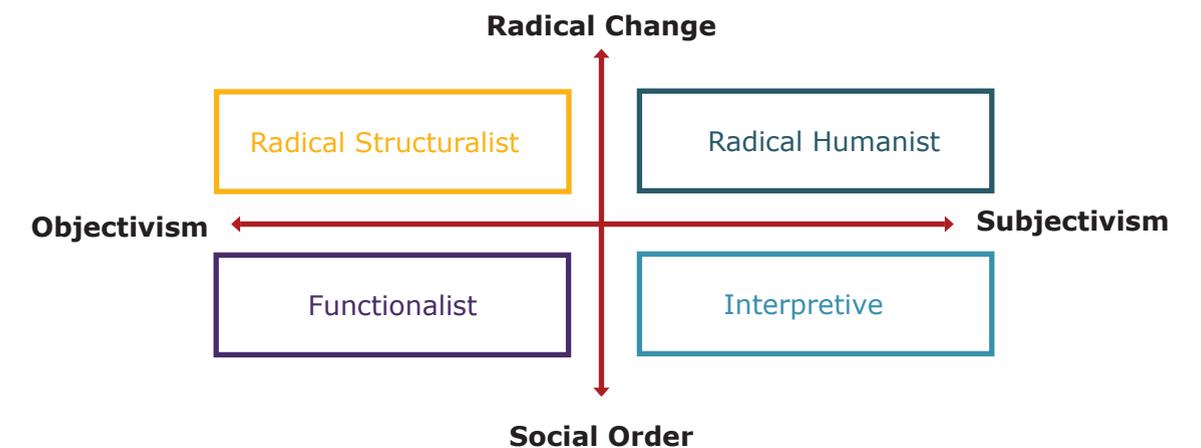
Our process of theory involves inductive and deductive reasoning<sup>4</sup>. Deduction is the process of drawing conclusions about a phenomenon or behavior based on theoretical or logical reasons and an initial set of premises. In contrast, induction is the process of drawing conclusions based on facts or observed evidence. Inductive conclusions are therefore only a hypothesis, and may be disproven. Deductive conclusions generally tend to be stronger than inductive conclusions, but a deductive conclusion based on an incorrect premise is also incorrect. As shown in the below figure, inductive and deductive reasoning go hand in hand in theory and model building. Induction occurs when we observe a fact and ask, "Why is this happening?" In answering this question, we advanced one or more tentative explanations (hypotheses). We then used deduction to narrow down the tentative explanations to the most plausible explanation based on logic and reasonable premises (based on our understanding of the phenomenon under study). In that sense, we moved back and forth between inductive and deductive reasoning throughout our research.



## 2.3. Research Approach

We used a multiparadigmatic approach to conduct our research, combining<sup>5</sup>:

- 1 The objective approach (epistemology) -- independent of the person conducting the observation or interpretation, such as by using standardized data collection tools like surveys, and therefore the use of a paradigm of functionalism.
- 2 The employment of an interpretivism paradigm because we also believe that the best way to study practises of education to interreligious dialogue is through the subjective interpretation of participants' views, such as by interviewing different academics and administrators and reconciling differences among their responses.
- 3 In addition, we believe that changes should take place in the higher education system in the Arab world, therefore we seek to understand and enact change using an objectivist approach -- thus the use of a radical structuralism paradigm.
- 4 However, we aimed at understanding this change using the subjective perspectives of the participants involved, thus the use of a radical humanism paradigm.

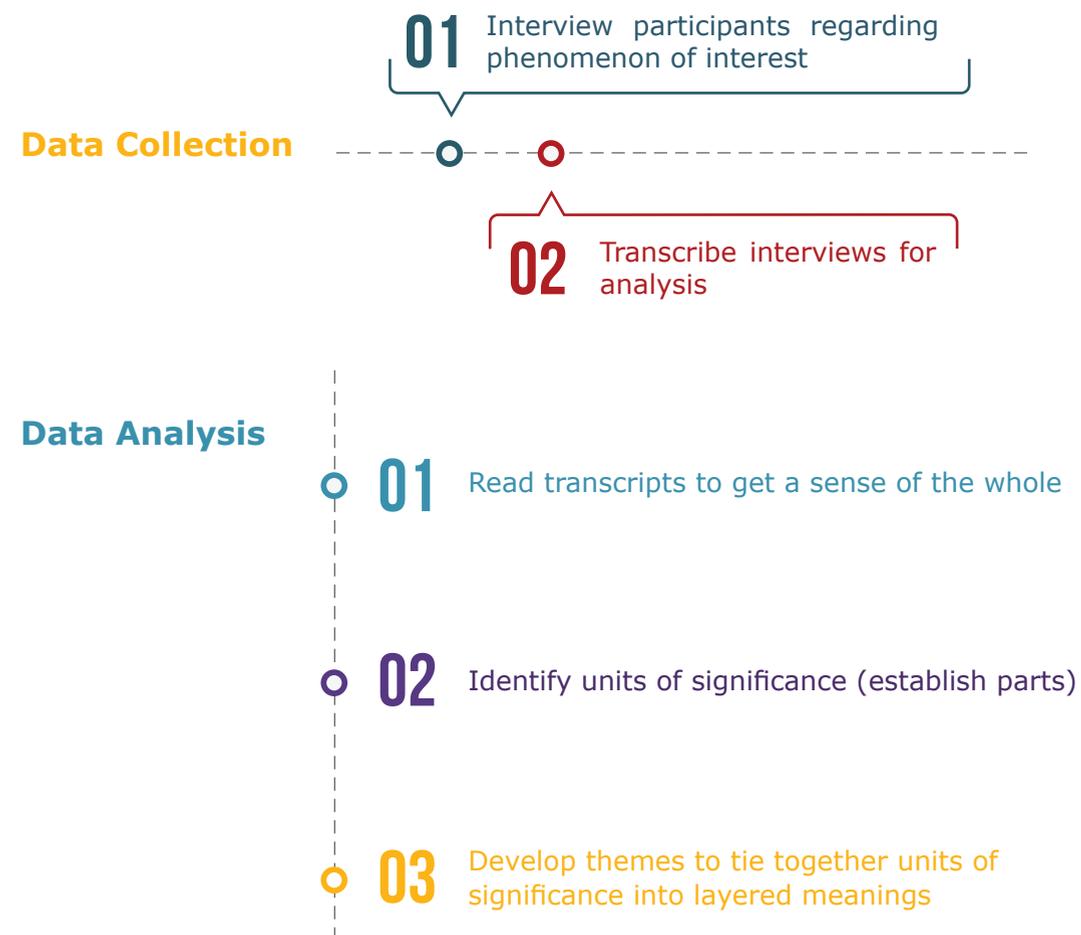


## 2.4. Research Design

Our research design is more interpretive than positivist<sup>6</sup>. Positivist designs are meant for theory testing, while interpretive designs are meant for theory building. Positivist designs seek generalized patterns based on an objective view of reality, while interpretive designs seek subjective interpretations of social phenomena from the perspectives of the subjects involved.

Therefore, we used a questionnaire/survey with targeted academics and administrators + secondary data collection and analysis; and we used case research (in our own settings of education to interreligious dialogue and in others') and interviews with targeted academics and administrators.

### Interpretive Research Design



## 2.5. Sampling Methods

We used cluster sampling<sup>7</sup> as our targeted population is dispersed over a wide geographic region - 3 countries mainly - so it was not feasible to conduct a simple random sampling. Clusters along geographic boundaries included the following characteristics:

- Educators, scholars and administrators in a number of Schools of Theology, Schools of Religious Studies or Islamic Studies, and in Schools of Arts and Sciences/Humanities.
- Having extensive experience in education to interreligious dialogue/ intercultural dialogue and-or theology of dialogue, comparative religions/ cultures, etc.
- Muslims and Christians.
- Women and men.

We are aware that results are not generalizable to ALL academic institutions in the targeted countries.

Noting that we have also used expert sampling which is a technique where respondents are chosen in a non-random manner based on their expertise on the phenomenon being studied. The advantage of this approach is that since experts tend to be more familiar with the subject matter than non-experts, opinions from a sample of experts are more credible than a sample that includes both experts and non-experts, although the findings are still not generalizable. In addition, we have also used snowball sampling -- when we started by identifying a few respondents that match the criteria for inclusion in our study, we then asked them to recommend others they know who also meet our selection criteria. Although this method hardly leads to representative samples, it may sometimes be the only way to reach hard-to-reach populations.

## 2.6. Qualitative Data Analysis Method (Content Analysis)<sup>8</sup>

- 1 First, we began by sampling a selected set of content for analysis. This process was not random, but instead, pertinent content was chosen selectively.
- 2 Second, we identified and applied rules to divide the content into segments that can be treated as separate units of analysis.



3 Third, we identified common themes in the targeted contexts and how they are related to each other.

4 Fourth, we also identified variations and differences.

## 3. Primary and Secondary Data

### 3.1. Primary Data

Primary data were collected through direct interaction with +45 key administrators and academics both through online questionnaires and one-on-one meetings (physical/virtual) from February to June 2020.

Meetings were conducted with the use of semi-structured informal interviews, including open-ended questions, and as instruments of data gathering that are accompanied by an online questionnaire for administrators/academics.

Key persons that were met and interviewed were chosen according to their expertise in the fields of theology, Islamic studies, and humanities/social sciences/cultural studies with a focus on education to interreligious dialogue. They were also chosen according to their religious affiliation (Muslims, Christians mainly) and their gender (as we were aiming at including at least 20 to 30% of women administrators/academics when possible -- noting that most of the targeted institutions are still highly patriarchal and academics/administrators are predominantly men).

Interfacing with key administrators/academics was a must, not only for the sake of getting accurate data but also for gaining acceptance, legitimisation and support from them. Continued interaction throughout this one-year project remains crucial.

As for the questionnaire for academics, it included a set of questions given to a sample of key administrators and academics in targeted institutions in Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. Two key academics/administrators in Qatar<sup>9</sup> and the United Arab Emirates also filled the questionnaire. The total number of filled questionnaires on June 19, 2020 was 49, which exceeded the number we were aiming to obtain at the beginning of our research (40).

The purpose was to gather information about their institutions' needs, their perceptions of education to interreligious dialogue, challenges facing the design and implementation of interreligious dialogue curricula, and so forth. We compiled both quantitative and qualitative data in order to help us assess basic needs and challenges. This needs assessment technique is more structured than meetings/informal interviews and was administered online, using structured questions with fixed choices, along with short open-ended questions. We set up an online database using Google Forms by directly accessing potential respondents in order to raise the average return rate to more than 20%. The sample we identified in the three countries is representative of the targeted population.

Due to the Covid-19 virus spread and lockdowns in all targeted countries, we were not able to engage with a higher number of academics between March and June 2020. For instance in Lebanon, only 5 academics filled the questionnaire during the lockdown whereas more than 8 were contacted, and many others postponed previously scheduled meetings until further notice and did not accept to participate in an online meeting. Same scenario was applied/found in Jordan, although we were able to reach more academics in June 2020. In Palestine, most academics were contacted in May and June, during the deconfinement period as well.



**Country - Targeted institutions**

**Lebanon:**

- Saint-Joseph University (School of Religious Studies)
- Balamand University (School of Arts and Sciences)
- Arab Baptist School of Theology (ABTS)
- Al-Makassed University (School of Islamic Studies)
- Lebanese University
- Notre Dame University
- Lebanese American University

Number of Academics who were contacted	Number of Academics who were interviewed	Number of Academics who filled the online questionnaire	Number of Academics who agreed to participate in the regional workshop/conference
18	10	14	8

**Jordan:**

- University of Jordan Department of Philosophy, School of Islamic Studies
- Aal al-Bayt University
- Philadelphia University
- The Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies
- American University of Madaba
- Latin Primary School, Al Fuhays

Number of Academics who were contacted	Number of Academics who were interviewed	Number of Academics who filled the online questionnaire	Number of Academics who agreed to participate in the regional workshop/conference
16	10	11	8

**Qatar:** Hamad Bin Khalifa University, School of Islamic Studies

**United Arab Emirates:** American University in Dubai

**UK:** Exeter University

Number of Academics who were contacted	Number of Academics who were interviewed	Number of Academics who filled the online questionnaire	Number of Academics who agreed to participate in the regional workshop/conference
1	1	1	1
5	1	6	1
1	0	1	0

**Palestine:**

- Bethlehem University
- The Bible College in Bethlehem
- The Seminary College in Beit Jala
- Al-Sharia College in Al Najah University
- Al-Quds University
- Mada (Al-Karmel Center of Research)
- Al-Qasimi University
- Dar al-Kalima University

Number of Academics who were contacted	Number of Academics who were interviewed	Number of Academics who filled the online questionnaire	Number of Academics who agreed to participate in the regional workshop/conference
15	7	14	7

**Academics Profiles - Lebanon (Gender and Religious Affiliation)**

	Gender	Religious Affiliation/Belonging
Academics who were contacted	<b>11 men 7 women</b>	<b>60% Christians and 40% Muslims</b>
Academics who were interviewed	<b>6 men 4 women</b>	<b>2 Muslims &amp; 4 Christians 1 Muslim &amp; 3 Christians</b>
Academics who filled the questionnaire	<b>8 men 3 women 3 anonymous</b>	<b>2 Muslims &amp; 4 Christians 1 Muslim &amp; 2 Christians 3 anonymous</b>
Academics who accepted to participate in the conference	<b>5 men 3 women</b>	<b>2 Muslims &amp; 3 Christians 1 Muslim &amp; 2 Christians</b>

**Academics Profiles - Palestine (Gender and Religious Affiliation)**

	Gender	Religious Affiliation/Belonging
Academics who were contacted	<b>12 men 3 women</b>	<b>60% Muslims 40% Christians</b>
Academics who were interviewed	<b>7 men</b>	<b>3 Muslims &amp; 4 Christians</b>
Academics who filled the questionnaire	<b>13 men 1 woman</b>	<b>9 Muslims &amp; 4 Christians</b>
Academics who accepted to participate in the conference	<b>7 men</b>	<b>3 Muslims &amp; 4 Christians</b>

**Academics Profiles - Jordan (Gender and Religious Affiliation)**

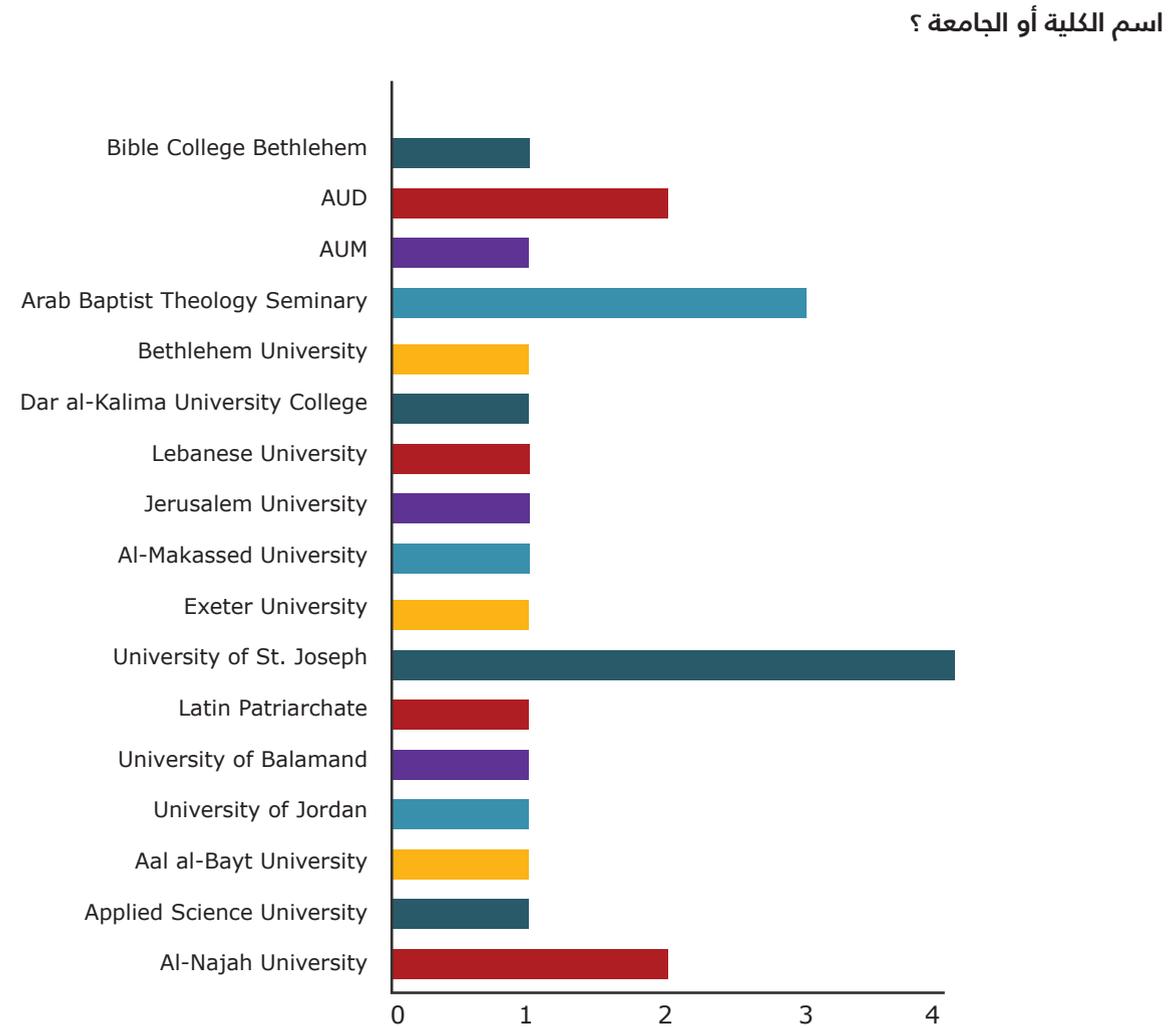
	Gender	Religious Affiliation/Belonging
Academics who were contacted	<b>9 men 7 women</b>	<b>75% Muslims and 25% Christians</b>
Academics who were interviewed	<b>6 men 4 women</b>	<b>4 Muslims &amp; 2 Christians 2 Muslims &amp; 2 Christians</b>
Academics who filled the questionnaire	<b>6 men 5 women</b>	<b>4 Muslims &amp; 2 Christians 4 Muslims &amp; 1 Christian</b>
Academics who accepted to participate in the conference	<b>4 men 4 women</b>	<b>3 Muslims &amp; 1 Christian 2 Muslims &amp; 2 Christians</b>

**Academics Profiles - Qatar, UAE & UK (Gender and Religious Affiliation)**

	Gender	Religious Affiliation/Belonging
Academics who were contacted	<b>4 men 3 women</b>	<b>80% Christians 20% Muslims</b>
Academics who were interviewed	<b>1 man 1 woman</b>	<b>1 Christian 1 Christian</b>
Academics who filled the questionnaire	<b>4 men 4 women</b>	<b>3 Christians &amp; 1 Muslim 2 Christians &amp; 2 Muslims</b>
Academics who accepted to participate in the conference	<b>1 man 1 woman</b>	<b>1 Christian 1 Christian</b>

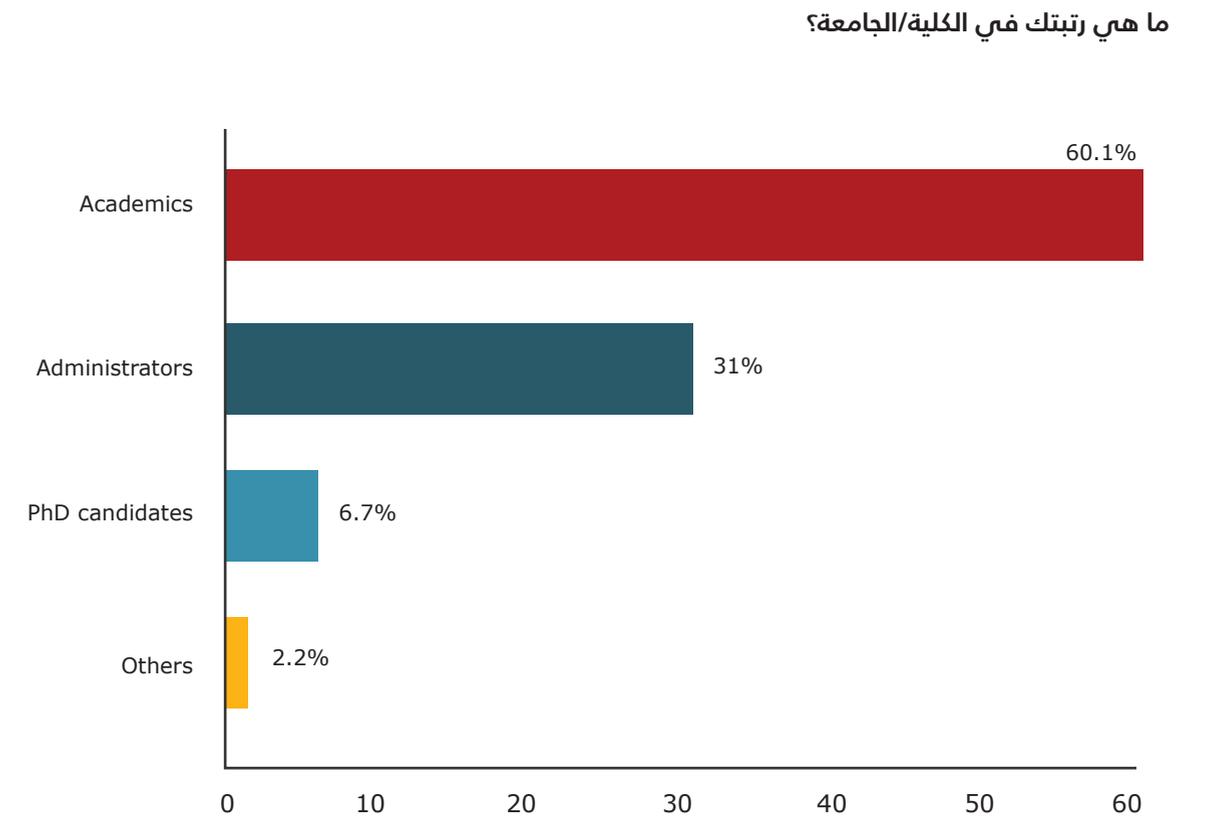


**Academics who filled the Questionnaire Profiles - Institutional**



As indicated in the previous sub-sections and in this graph, several institutions were targeted for our research, and each institution was represented by at least 1 to 6 academics/administrators who filled the questionnaire.

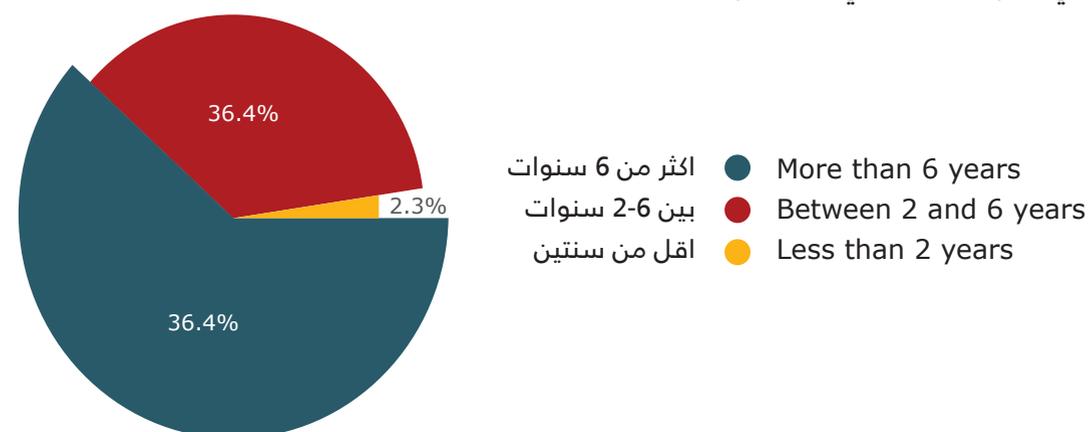
**Academics who filled the Questionnaire Profiles - Academic/ Administrative Position**



As indicated in this graph, positions of targeted academics/administrators were diverse, from part-time and full-time faculty to Program Directors, Deans and PhD students. Noting that a majority of part-time and full-time faculty filled the questionnaire.

### Academics who filled the Questionnaire Profiles - Number of Years working at the Institution

ما هي سنوات عملك في هذه المؤسسة؟



Most academics and administrators who filled the questionnaire have been working in the targeted institutions for more than 6 years and have extensive knowledge of their institution’s mission, policies and bureaucracy.

### Academics who filled the Questionnaire Profiles - Courses Taught/Expertise

Most academics/administrators who filled the questionnaire have expertise in Religious Studies/Sciences of Religions and-or Theology, and a minority have an expertise in Humanities, Media, and Social and Political Sciences.

Studying interreligious dialogue and education to interreligious dialogue (including assessing its current practice in academia in the Arab world) requires a multi-disciplinary/inter-disciplinary approach and skills, thus the need to target different expertise areas and levels.

We do believe in the importance of combining outside-in and inside-out investigation<sup>10</sup> and teaching of interreligious dialogue. The outside-in can be of two kinds: phenomenological -- seeing the faith as it is practised and understood, not as it should

be -- while the other is the judgemental approach, which tends to look at another faith by keeping some criteria in mind, and judging it from that perspective -- without producing and promoting polemical discourses. The inside-out approach, on the other hand, can be characterised by describing a faith by the relevant community as it perceives its own faith from within, not as perceived and interpreted by others.

The remaining primary data (quantitative and qualitative) are included in the data analysis section which combines the analysis of other questionnaires’ answers, the interviews’ main points, and the secondary data.

### 3.2. Secondary Data

Secondary data were mainly collected through desk research of materials and studies with existing data, including online databases (official academic institutions websites, press articles, peer-reviewed articles and reports), and available administrative reports and courses’ curricula descriptions. Most administrators/academics -- minus a few exceptions -- did not share detailed information about their curricula beyond what was found online or in published catalogues, or what was verbally (and briefly) shared during the meetings/interviews and in the questionnaire for academics. Therefore, we, for instance, could not have access to detailed syllabi in Lebanon and Jordan, except for a course at ABTS (Lebanon) and another at the University of Jordan. In addition, where online information that is visible/accessible belongs to high-profile institutions such as the Royal Institute for Interfaith Dialogue in Jordan and St Joseph University in Lebanon, other institutions do not have an effective online presence. Furthermore, due to the long and rich history of multiform dialogue in Lebanon, local practices of education to interreligious dialogue and academic studies are more prevalent than in surrounding countries -- with minor exceptions such as in Bethlehem.

### Regional and International

There are numerous courses and programs on religious diversity and its management, theology of dialogue, and interreligious/intercultural dialogues that are offered in several institutions worldwide, along with online courses offered by international organizations for capacity building such as the UNESCO’S “Interreligious Understanding Today Online Course”<sup>11</sup>. The purpose of this report is not to identify and analyze these courses/programs, but to understand that the current global market is becoming more competitive at this level, and that there is also room for contextual (local/regional)



knowledge production and innovative pedagogical strategies and education tools -- especially online or blended -- in Arabic as they are considered to be a rare offering. Note that in the Arab world, the UNESCO Chairs play a fundamental role in developing courses and programs fostering interreligious dialogue, generally in association with intercultural dialogue, within institutions of knowledge. However, it is important to know that there is a significant shortage of resources in this theme applied to regional cultures -- except for instance St Joseph University UNESCO Chair<sup>12</sup>.

There are a few regional initiatives in Education to religions, religious diversity and to interreligious dialogue, and most have been recently done online, such as the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) 8-week course for individuals and institutions looking to broaden their knowledge of interreligious dialogue as a tool to support conflict resolution and peace processes. Designed to meet the evolving needs of religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society organizations, the 8-module course addresses a number of global challenges through topics such as: establishing a shared ethical framework, using dialogue to support peace processes, and implementing initiatives to address Islamophobia, Christianophobia and Anti-Semitism at the national and local levels. The course -- offered in English and French -- has been specifically adapted for busy career professionals, allowing users to take the course at their own pace<sup>13</sup>. The objectives of the course are to provide basic knowledge and skills on interreligious dialogue and historical information on interreligious dialogue in the five major religions of the world (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism) and clarify the geopolitical aspects of the concerned religions; to present the various elements of interreligious conflicts through real examples and case studies; to explain how to use key theories, models and methods in interreligious dialogue as scientific tools in a given conflict situation, and illustrate the diversity and the complexity of the factors and elements that play a part in interreligious dialogue; and to explain and analyze the roles and interactions of different elements in a given interreligious conflict situation, and analyzing them with a critical mind<sup>14</sup>.

### *Lebanon*

There are approximately 20 schools of theology/religious studies/islamic studies/shari'a in Lebanon that state or mention (on their websites) offering courses and-or programs in religious/cultural diversity, religious/cultural management, theology of the other (and other religions), and interreligious/intercultural dialogue. Some of these institutions also address these issues through various conferences, talks, workshops and seminars with diverse target audiences. Cooperation between two or

several higher education institutions on these subjects has been a rare phenomenon -- refer for instance to that between the School of Religious Studies at Saint Joseph University and the School of Islamic Studies at Al Maqasid that includes the exchange of students and professors. We contacted the institutions which we knew are pioneers of higher education to interreligious dialogue and they offer successful courses/programs focused on theology of religions/theology of dialogue, religious diversity and-or interreligious/intercultural dialogue -- mainly the University of Balamand (School of Arts and Sciences and checked their Cultural Studies program<sup>15</sup>), St-Joseph University (School of Religious Studies<sup>16</sup>), the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS)<sup>17</sup>, and Al Makassed University (School of Islamic Studies)<sup>18</sup>. We wanted to first reach institutions that are already familiar with the subjects at hand but haven't necessarily expanded their education to dialogue programs at the regional level -- meaning developing a curriculum in cooperation with academics from diverse institutions in the region -- which we are proposing to do in our project. Once the course/curriculum is developed, implemented and assessed, the second step would be to contact other institutions such as the Holy Spirit University (USEK), the Near East School of Theology, the Institute of Middle East Studies, Sagesse University, Antonine University, College Saint-Paul, Notre Dame University, BIU, Al Maaref University, Global University, etc. Note that a few academics from the Lebanese University (State-sponsored university) who teach Political Sciences were interested to share their thoughts while staying anonymous. This institution was not targeted per se, but contacts in targeted institutions shared the questionnaire with them<sup>19</sup>.

As for civil society initiatives: Muslim-Christian institutional encounters, spiritual form of dialogue, and dialogue of common action were already taking place throughout the 20th c. (and even before), and natural dialogue (dialogue of life) has been practiced for centuries in most cities and villages. An extensive literature in Arabic, English and French pertaining to these issues is available and proves the possibility, existence and historical continuity of these forms of dialogue in Lebanon. Refer for instance to Dar al Machreq (St Joseph University) publications and the +700 p. Hyphen Islam-Christianity edited by Nada Raphael and dedicated to natural forms of dialogue in +1000 villages and cities in Lebanon. Training centers were established as early as in the 1950s such as the Institute for Research and Training in Development (IFRED). However, the 1990s and 2000s are considered to be the years of official interreligious dialogue at the spiritual and common action (civil society) levels, as well as in higher education and in terms of national initiatives. Both secular and religious individuals established groups of dialogue, faith based organizations and NGOs, or were part of national commissions such as the Arab Group for Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Nahwa



al Muwatiniya, Ensemble autour de Marie (Notre-Dame de Jamhour), Assaad Chaftari and Muhieddine Mustapha Chehab's initiative, the Garden of Forgiveness initiative with Mrs. Alexandra Asseily, the National Christian-Muslim Committee for Dialogue, etc. then Adyan, the Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue (FDCD), the Imam al Sadr Foundation, Darb Maryam, and others. In addition, Lebanon's President Michel Aoun has recently appointed a chargé de mission for dialogue and its UN proposal for the establishment of an Academy for Human Encounters and Dialogue in Lebanon was approved in 2019. We have contacted Sheikh and Dr. Mohamed Nokkari, a Judge at the Sunni Courts in Beirut, former Secretary General of Dar al Fatwa -- Lebanon's official Sunni Institution --, co-founder of Ensemble autour de Marie, and university professor at USJ, NDU, LAU and Makassed in which he teaches/taught about Islam and interreligious dialogue. Dr. Nokkari's input was highly valuable as both an academic and civil society actor.

In addition, the practice of using interreligious dialogue for building social cohesion, peace and reconciliation has specifically emerged in the late 1990s and the 2000s in Lebanon (following the 1970s-1980s multiform war) as a necessary tool for the twenty-first century education tool-box. Some civil society initiatives such as those of ADYAN Foundation<sup>20</sup> and FDCD have been targeting youth (mainly in schools) and school educators with a focus on interreligious dialogue on local intra and inter levels in the last few years<sup>21</sup>.

## *Jordan*

Jordan's official involvement in interfaith activism extends for more than one decade and a half. Most of the data collected in Jordan showed that many of the interfaith dialogues activities in Jordan are rotating around the issue of peacebuilding<sup>22</sup>. Reflecting on interfaith programs or initiatives in Jordan, we noticed that a discourse between Christianity and Islam is both living and politically significant on local and global scales. This is perceived in the establishment of a number of institutions and centers working in partnership with leading global institutions. Among many initiatives one cannot ignore pioneering associations such as: (1) The Royal Institute of Interfaith Studies founded by Prince Hassan of Jordan in 1994 which has been the most influential for more than 30 years<sup>23</sup>. (2) The Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC) founded by Reverend Father Nabil Haddad in 2003<sup>24</sup>. (3) Generations for Peace founded by Prince Feisal Al Hussein of Jordan in 2007<sup>25</sup>. These centers offer important programs, conferences, workshops and other related activities designed to bridge the

gap between diverse groups, train them on how to resolve conflicts or disagreements, and offer intercultural training sessions with peacebuilding modules.

However, as we investigated, none of these initiatives provides academic courses on the issue of interfaith/interreligious dialogue<sup>26</sup>. In addition, we found that a few courses in comparative religions are offered in some Jordanian public and private universities as part of the schools of Islamic studies curriculum.

For instance, throughout its 4 major departments, the School of Sharia (University of Jordan) "aims at serving the local community, the Arab and Islamic world, and the globe, through preparing qualified Islamic teachers, preachers and scholars who are capable of conveying the message of Islam in a professional and devoted manner." It offers both undergraduate and graduate programs. The courses offered at this university focus on the history of Judaism and Christianity, along with main beliefs, traditions, sectarian branches, scriptures and holidays, with a comparative perspective vis-à-vis Islam. As for the teaching methodology, the department applies a traditional model - lectures, research papers, texts reading and debates, and relies on local/regional sources/references with focus on Muslim scholars

As for the Applied Sciences University (private)<sup>27</sup>, students enrolled in the Department of Sharia and Islamic Studies are required to complete 136 credits to obtain their BA in Islamic Studies which include only 2 elective 3 credits courses requested about the "other religion". In addition, the Graduate Institute for Islamic Studies of the Al al-Bayt University<sup>28</sup> offers several programs and is perceived to be an important institution in Jordan. Although its objectives include the importance of tolerance, and struggle against extremism and violence, and its mission tackles issues of Islam in the Modern World, we did not find courses that address religious diversity, interreligious dialogue, comparative religion, etc.

## *Palestine*

In Palestine, interfaith dialogue became institutionalized through the Al-Liqa Center that was established in 1982. It organized national interfaith conferences and workshops for over 30 years and became the forum for Christian-Muslim dialogue in Palestine. Unfortunately the center stopped most of its activities after the death of its founder. In the last ten years there were small interfaith projects at private schools that were eager to teach students about the others, yet without a clear philosophy or pedagogy. Of all universities, Bethlehem University<sup>29</sup> seems to be the only one which offers one



course in interreligious dialogue, Al Najah University offers a course on “Comparative Religions”<sup>30</sup>, the Bethlehem Bible College offers two courses in Comparative Religion as part of the Theology diploma<sup>31</sup>, and other universities do not see this as an important issue to tackle or simply do not offer a course on interreligious dialogue such as Al Quds University<sup>32</sup>, Beit Jala Seminary<sup>33</sup>, Hebron University<sup>34</sup>, Al-Qasemi College<sup>35</sup>, and the Nazareth Evangelical College<sup>36</sup>.

Religious Studies at Bethlehem University specialize in Christian studies. However, a course about the three monotheisms (RELS 300 Cultural Religious Studies) is offered as an elective, with a large number of students who choose to enroll in it. The course is taught by Christian and Muslim professors, each on its own (a Christian priest for the Christianity sessions, and a Muslim for the sessions about Islam).

In addition to the previously mentioned institutions, there are several local non-profit centers and organizations that seek to develop multiple effective interreligious activities and programs which play a major role in informal educational settings, such as Beit al Liqa’ (Beit Jala) and Baladna (Haifa).

## 4. Data Analysis

We analyzed the primary and secondary data gathered between February and June 2020 by looking for common themes/issues/needs, main categories, regularities etc. We also looked for the results that are in conflict.

### 4.1. Perceptions of Interreligious Dialogue

Targeted institutions and academics presented both common and different perceptions of “interreligious dialogue”<sup>37</sup>. These perceptions included multiple definitions of dialogue principles, goals, types/forms and levels. Therefore, we will tackle this diversity in the proposed course that we are developing. Our main goal is to introduce students to the multiplicity of principles, goals, types/forms and levels of interreligious dialogue that we can find in the region -- especially in Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan as it will be illustrated in the in the following pages.

## Principles of Interreligious Dialogue

- Interreligious dialogue is about learning, changing and growing in the perception and understanding of reality, then acting accordingly.
- Interreligious dialogue is a two or multiple-sided project. Its process cannot be ‘complete’ unless two or multiple parties are involved.
- In interreligious dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner’s practice, but rather our ideals with our partner’s ideals, our practice with our partner’s practice.
- Interreligious dialogue can only take place between equals, on the basis of mutual trust, and all parties must come to learn from each other.
- Entering/practicing interreligious dialogue requires a minimum of self-criticism.
- Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner’s religion or ideology ‘from within’; for a religion or ideology is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and ‘whole being,’ individual and communal. To truly understand another religion or ideology one must try to experience it from within, which requires a “passing over”, even if only momentarily, into another’s religious or ideological experience.
- Interreligious dialogue is about respect for others’ religions/faiths and histories/narratives. It is about forgiving one another, seeking forgiveness and committing to new beginnings.
- Interreligious dialogue contributes to open the way to better social relations and peace within a society, and between societies.
- Interreligious dialogue helps deconstruct stereotypes/misconceptions and is an effective response against extremism and violence .
- Interreligious dialogue teaches individuals to learn from other religions so that they can value religious plurality as a factor that enriches diverse communities.



## GOALS OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

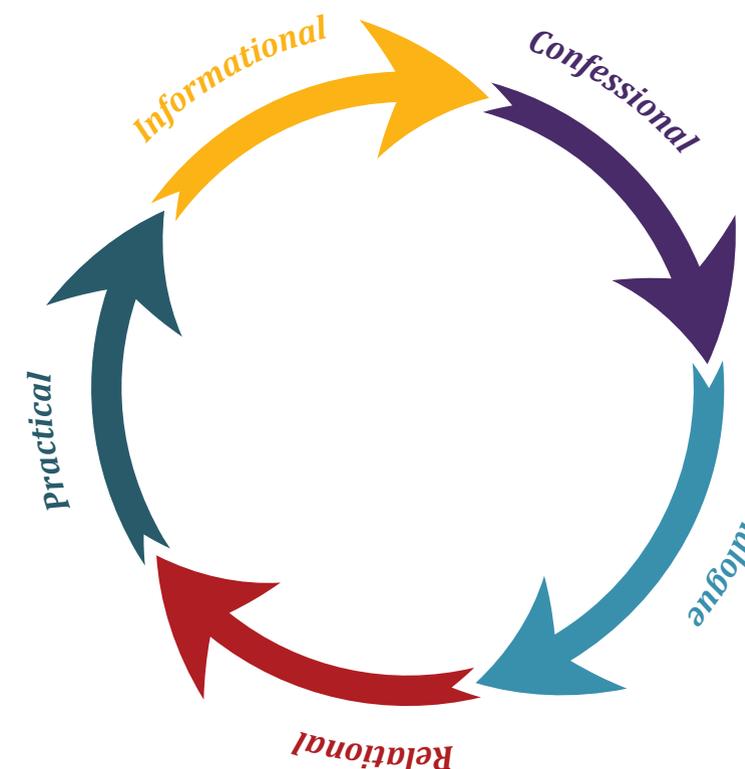
- To know oneself more profoundly and enrich and round out one's appreciation of one's own faith tradition.
- To know the other more authentically and gain a friendly understanding of others as they are and not in caricature.
- To live more fully accordingly and to establish a more solid foundation for community of life and action among persons of various traditions.
- To rethink one's own identity and rethink together the national identity.
- To deconstruct the minority-majority framework that is used in the Arab world.

- The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joy and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.
- The dialogue of action, in which persons of all religions collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
- The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.
- The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.
- The institutional dialogue, where religious leaders cooperate with one another, publish common statements, stand together against war or terrorism, etc.

*We propose the structure of the course be based on these levels.*

## LEVELS OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

## Types of Interreligious Dialogue



### **Informational**

Acquiring of knowledge of the faith partner's religious history, founding, basic beliefs, scriptures, etc.

### **Confessional**

Allowing the faith partners to speak for and define themselves in terms of what it means to live as an adherent.

### **Dialogue**

with faith partners from within the partner's tradition, worship and ritual – entering into the feelings of one's partner and permitting that person's symbols and stories to guide.

### **Relational**

Develop friendships with individual persons beyond the "business" of dialogue.

### **Practical**

Collaborate to promote peace and justice.

## 4.2. Challenges of Education to Interreligious Dialogue

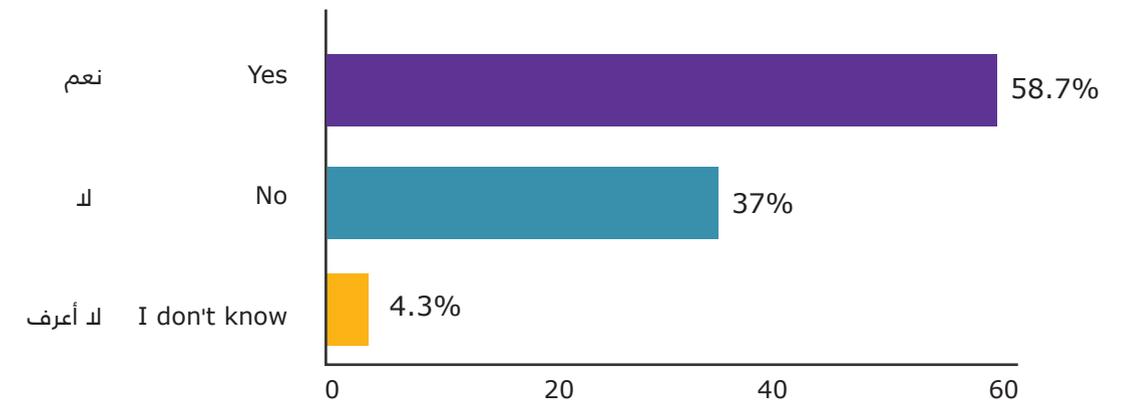
Education to interreligious dialogue, and therefore, interreligious learning, involves its own set of challenges which brought a number of questions we were able to identify during the research process including the following:

Is interreligious learning designed to take place solely in the classroom, or in the general academic setting, or beyond? What theological presuppositions (e.g., religious truths) must be discussed during interreligious learning? What type of teacher is best suited for realizing interreligious learning? Is knowledge of one's own religious traditions sufficient for participation in interactive learning? How does interreligious learning relate to the institution's identity? How does interreligious learning occur in a pluralistic classroom (i.e., one containing participants of different beliefs) or one with students of the same religious background? What pedagogical principles (e.g., dialog, hermeneutics, deduction, or induction) are appropriate for interreligious learning? Which didactical instruments are needed to realize the goals of interreligious learning? How can interreligious learning be evaluated according to obtained skills, attitudes, and insights?

## 4.3. Diversity of Institutional Profiles

As per our analysis of the questionnaire results, some institutions have already extensive and successful curricula and programs in theology of dialogue and interreligious dialogue (or at least one or many courses). In fact, more than 58% of targeted institutions include these courses in their curricula, and others do not; some offer traditional theoretical courses, and others offer training and organize field trips for instance, or both. A "common curriculum/course" that we propose as part of this project takes care of this issue -- i.e. addressing different and even sometimes contradictory needs. As for institutions that are not interested in teaching about religious diversity or interreligious dialogue, such a course won't be welcome for now. Therefore, "preparing the ground" would be a necessary step to start with -- through further contacts and meetings, circles of dialogue, awareness programs, invitations to conferences, etc.

هل يدرّس في كليتكم مساقا عن الحوار الديني/الثقافي او التعددية الثقافية/الدينية؟

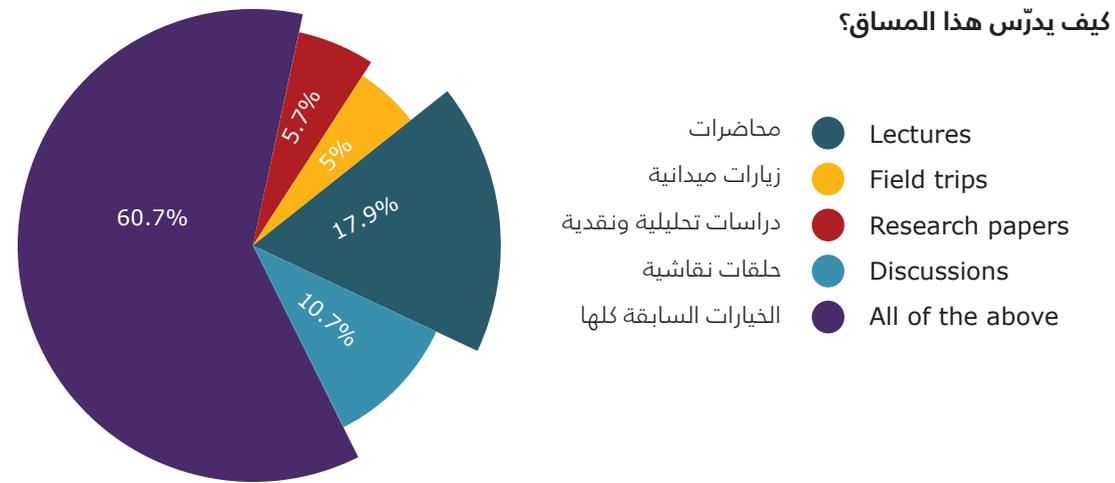


## 4.4. Diversity of Teaching Methods

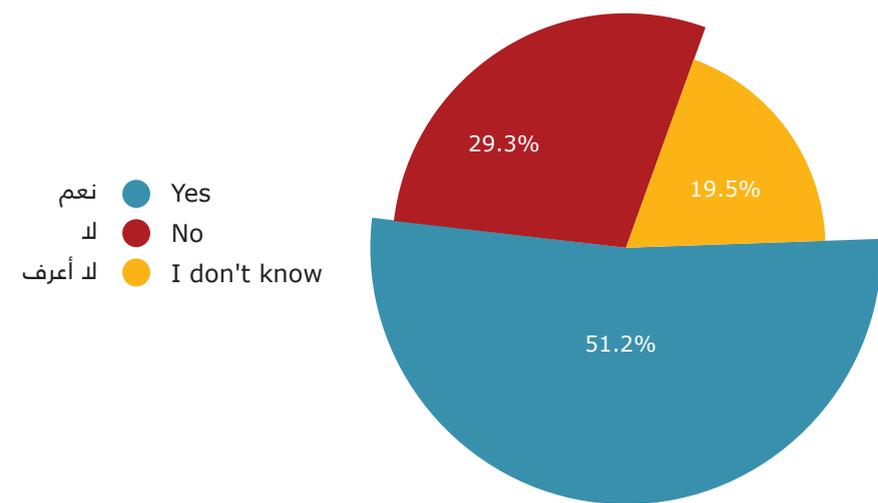
As indicated by the academics/administrators in the questionnaires, during interviews and in collected secondary data, education to interreligious dialogue in targeted institutions and in other institutions in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, encompasses the offering of undergraduate and graduate courses and programs by a few institutions as well as training in dialogue. Topics include theology of dialogue, historical study of interreligious relations, study of common statements, comparative religion, introduction to the three monotheisms, introduction to the study of religions, social ethics, anthropology of religions, introduction to Christianity, introduction to Islam, introduction to Judaism, Islamic and Arab thoughts/philosophy, History of Religions, Palestinian Theology, Religious Cultures, Basics of Dialogue with Islam, Religions of the Middle East, Religions of the World, Cultures of the Middle East, Sufism and Spirituality in Christianity and Islam, Basic beliefs in Islam and Christianity, Religion and Philosophy, Cultural Studies, etc. These courses are either taught by a cleric -- whether Muslim or Christian --, a secular man (more often than a woman), or by several professors/educators -- rare cases of partnerships. Most professors are experts in Theology, Sharia, Islamic Studies, Religious Studies, Biblical Studies, and less in Sciences of Religions, Humanities, Social and Political Sciences, etc. The teaching method is either traditional and conservative, or non-traditional and innovative -- note that the results of the questionnaire differ from the collected secondary data and interviews as we had more academics/administrators stating in the questionnaire that the teaching method was multiform and non-traditional. Courses are offered as either 2, 3, 4 or 6 credits,



depending on the institution. Classes are either monoreligious -- in most cases -- or plurireligious -- in rare cases. Some of these courses are mandatory, others are optional or even electives for all students at the university. Some have been successful, enrolling a high number of students, and creating a positive impact and encouraging conviviality at the university level.



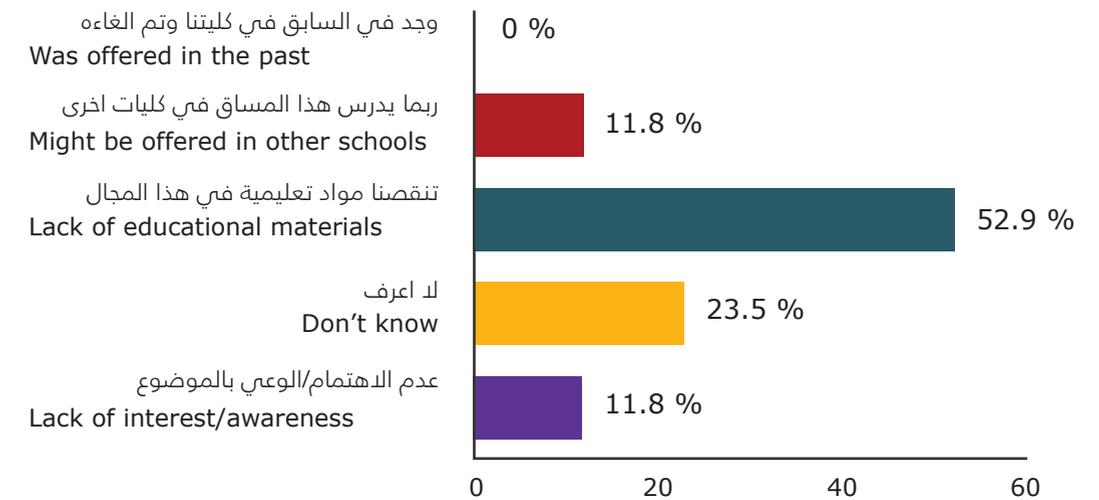
هل توجد زيارات ميدانية لأماكن مقدسة عند الطرفين (مسيحية وإسلامية)؟



#### 4.5. Absence or Lack of Education to Interreligious Dialogue: Diversity of Causes

As indicated by the answers to the 6th question in our questionnaire and based on the analysis of interviews that were conducted with targeted academics/administrators, several causes are behind the absence or lack of education to interreligious dialogue in several institutions in the targeted countries, from the lack of will or interest, to the practice of authoritarianism, religious community's institutional veto, etc. More than 52% of those who filled the questionnaire stated that there is a need for courses about interreligious dialogue in their institutions, and 88% agreed on the fact that education to interreligious dialogue is a must in academia. In addition, during the interviews, many academics/administrators mentioned the importance of offering this course as a core for all enrolled students in the university/college, and the need for this course to be co-created between Schools of Religious Studies and Schools of Arts & Sciences/ Humanities. Furthermore, a number of academics/administrators proposed to address the issue of education to interreligious dialogue in schools, starting as early as in primary/elementary school as in the case of Jordan where curriculum reform initiatives are being undertaken on the grassroots level.

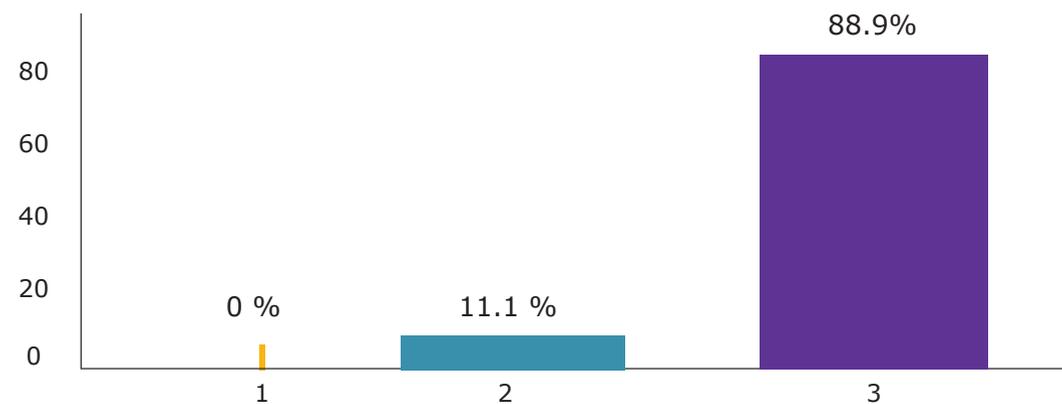
برأيك لماذا لا يوجد في مؤسستكم مساق عن الحوار الديني/الثقافي او التعددية الثقافية/الدينية؟



#### 4.6. Urgent Need for Education to Interreligious Dialogue

The previously mentioned high percentages and the feedback we received from our interviews with most academics and administrators, indicate the urgent need for education to interreligious dialogue. In addition, as stated by many of them, education to interreligious dialogue is important for the purpose of keeping our societies cohesive and/or developing inclusive societies, not to mention that education to interreligious dialogue is an important part of the process towards the goal of living and working together in solidarity and successfully within diversity.

أرى أهمية قصوى لتدريس هذا المساق في كليتنا



#### 4.7. Goals of Education to Interreligious Dialogue

The academics and the administrators who filled the questionnaire mentioned important goals for education to interreligious dialogue and stated that our proposed course should aim at achieving the following: :

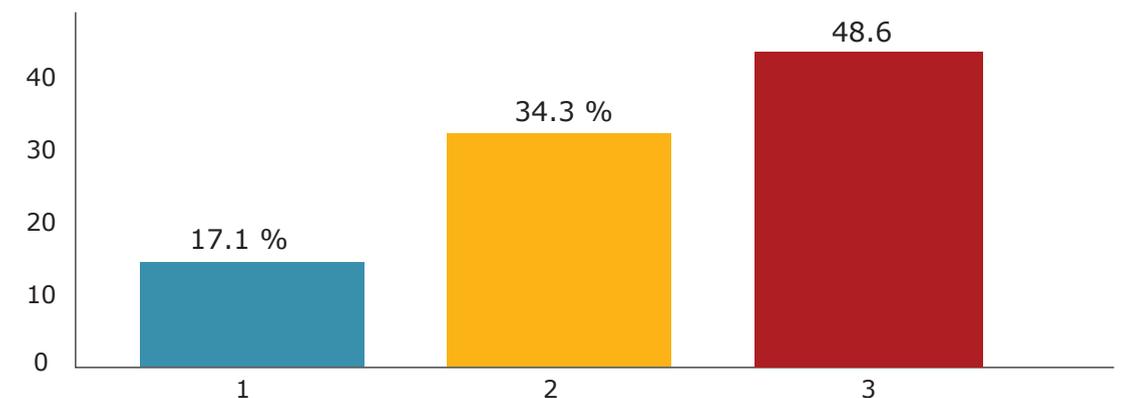
- Deconstructs stereotypes and misconceptions about each other and the diversity of religions.
- Promotes mutual respect and understanding, cooperation, conviviality and peacebuilding.
- Fights ignorance -- especially 'religious and cultural' ignorance.
- Helps build bridges across religious, cultural and sectarian differences.

- Helps new generations understand the 'true' face of religion.
- Helps students understand world heritage and cultural diversity.
- Helps students identify what is common and what is different with others, for instance when it comes to main beliefs and religious/cultural practices.
- Helps students rediscover the sources and foundations of their own religion, along with others'.
- Helps students learn the lessons of the history of encounters between Muslims and Christians in the region.
- Helps students discover and experience dialogue as an expression of Islamic and Christian belief in the value and dignity of others.
- Helps students acquire critical thinking and avoid the trap of extremism and ghettoisation.
- Helps students become better citizens, capable of actively being engaged for the betterment of their communities and societies.

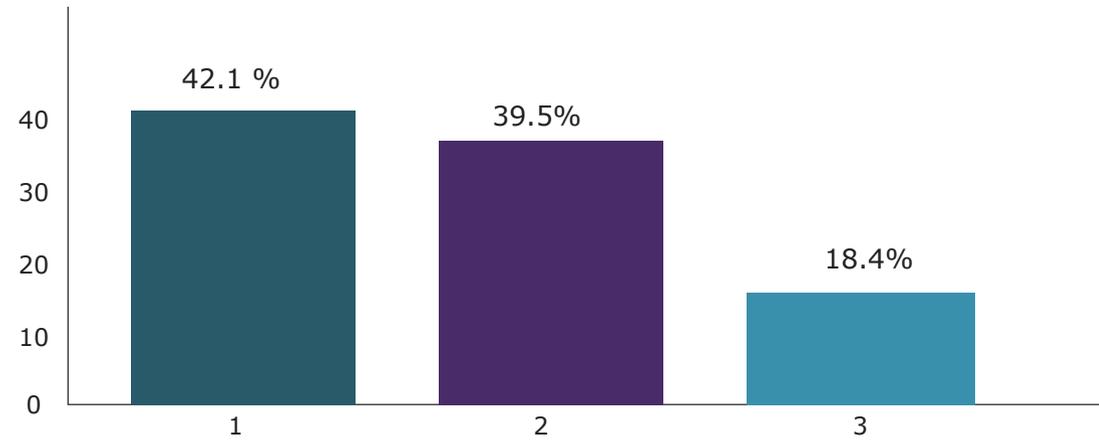
#### 4.8. Institutional Inclusion is a Possibility

According to almost 50% of the academics/administrators who filled the questionnaire, Education to interreligious dialogue through the inclusion of a course (or more) in their institutions' curricula is a possibility. This percentage is echoed by qualitative answers to our question during interviews, as almost half our interviewees stated the prevalence of this possibility. However, according to the other half, several challenges/obstacles face this inclusion/implementation as described in the following graph.

ما هو احتمال ادخال هذا المساق في كليتنا؟



برأيكم، هل توجد صعوبات لادخال هذا المساق ضمن مواد كليتكم؟

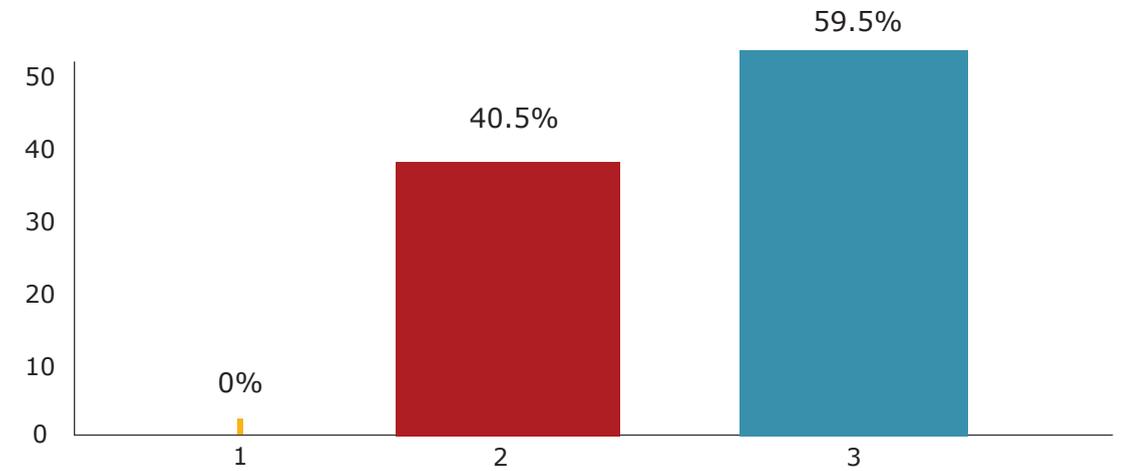


#### 4.9. Challenges/Obstacles Facing Institutional Inclusion

Among the many challenges or obstacles facing the inclusion and the implementation of a course on Education to interreligious dialogue are the following:

- Committee/Program/School/University Approval.
- Traditional/Conservative Approach versus Innovative/Non-Traditional.
- Opposition by other academics within the department/School/university for several reasons.
- Students' lack of interest -- 40% versus 60% as indicated in this graph.
- State opposition - depending on state policies, local culture, legal framework,...
- Opposition to including professors and-or students from other religions.
- Economic/Financial challenges.
- Lack of expertise in the fields of Sciences of Religions/Religious Studies (especially in interreligious dialogue) and lack of training of educators to the basics of dialogical communication.
- Some institutions require the approval of religious authorities such as the Vatican.
- The fear of the other.
- University's policies.

ما هي توقعاتك لرغبة الطلاب في الالتحاق بهذا المساق؟

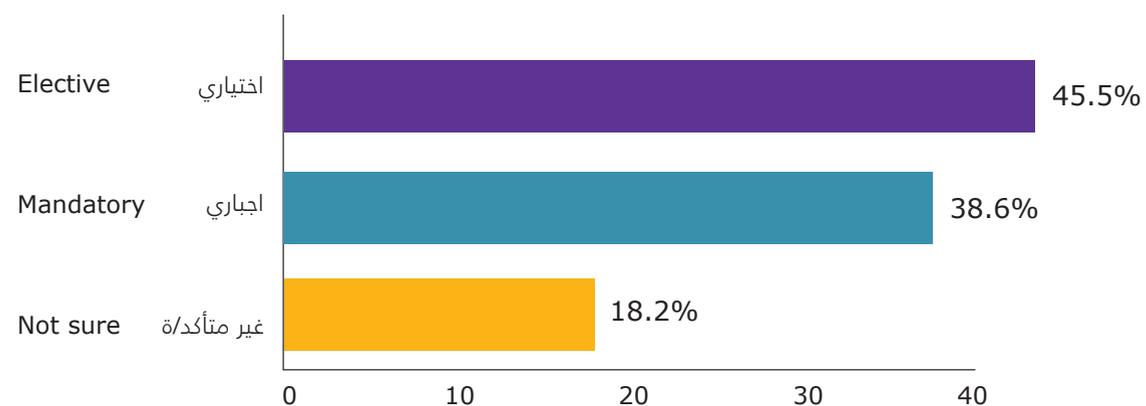


#### 4.10. Criteria for Institutional Inclusion and Implementation

In order for such a course to be included/implemented, academics/administrators stated the following criteria:

- Offered either as mandatory (almost 39%) or non-mandatory/elective (45.5%) -- depending on the institution, or even extra-curricular (such a series of conferences/seminars or workshops) -- refer to the below graph.
- Taught by professors who are experts in the field and-or are well trained for an optimal teaching/learning experience.
- Innovative content and-or teaching methodology.
- Positive challenge for students.
- Non-apologetic/ non-polemic and non-preaching approach.
- Focus on knowledge, awareness and practice of dialogue.
- Inter-institutional (local or regional) cooperation.
- Harness students' curiosity to learn about the unknown 'other'.
- Focus on real-time events, not only on history.
- Internal conviction of faculty and administration in the necessity of always improving their institution's curricula.

### هل من المفضل أن يكون هذا المساق إجباري أو إختياري؟



In addition, a number of academics/administrators stated in the interviews the fact that education to interreligious dialogue in universities is part of a larger cultural reform towards a reconstruction of the society's system of knowledge.

#### 4.11. Steps to be Taken for Institutional Inclusion and Implementation

According to the academics/administrators who filled the questionnaire, the following steps should be taken in order to help include/implement a course (or courses) about interreligious dialogue in their School/University:

- The course's detailed description should be approved by academics and administrators.
- Training or awareness sessions should be organized/offered to academics within the School/University about the importance of this course and the teaching methodology.
- Dar al Kalima should engage in dialogue with religious authorities to help implement this course.
- Targeted academics/administrators by this project and who will be attending the Conference should cooperate on designing the course and developing its content.
- The course should not only be offered to students of Theology/Islamic Studies/Religious Studies, but to a wider audience.

- Assessing the needs of every institution, including students and faculty needs.
- Reforming the university's mission and goals.
- Making changes in the courses/programs that are already offered.

In addition to the above-mentioned points, a few of the academics/administrators we interviewed highlighted other important points including the importance of managing time, democratizing school/university's governance, refining the aesthetic environment, allowing financial autonomy, providing proper monitoring and evaluation systems, maintaining and developing staff training and building constructive relationships with NGOs and public authorities, etc.

Furthermore, if we continue to think about education as the burden of academics/professors to instill knowledge into their students, then we will always be missing some important links in the chain of social cohesion. Just as the academic/professor-student relationship does not operate in a vacuum, neither is the school/university environment operating in isolation from the rest of the society. Thus, we see that there is an urgent need for cooperation across a variety of sectors and members of the civil society even beyond the borders of academia, in order to successfully effectuate or improve any implementation of education to interreligious dialogue.



## 5. Recommendations

Based on the previous analysis of preliminary primary and secondary data, we recommend the development of a regional undergraduate 3 credit-hour course in Arabic or English on interreligious dialogue spearheaded by Dar al-Kalima, which framework and content -- produced in cooperation with academics of other institutions -- are found online (interactive website/online platform), and therefore can be taught remotely or via a blended method.

The content of the course can be remotely easily updated, it can be also accessible to different students' audiences and can be adapted to different learning settings via several methods of teaching/learning including experiential activities. Targeted institutions can fully implement it, or can include specific modules or activities in their already established curricula or programs and the course can be entirely taught with local adaptations.

Based on our research, we believe this type of course that combines regional content creation in Arabic or English, multiform teaching/learning methods, taught online or by using a blended approach, is practically nonexistent in the Arab world, and therefore could become an added-value to multiple institutional profiles.

We also recommend that whenever possible, this course be taught as a mandatory course in the targeted institutions, or to be offered as an one of the main electives in any undergraduate field of study, along with other humanities courses. Last but not least, we recommend the development of similar graduate courses on interreligious dialogue.

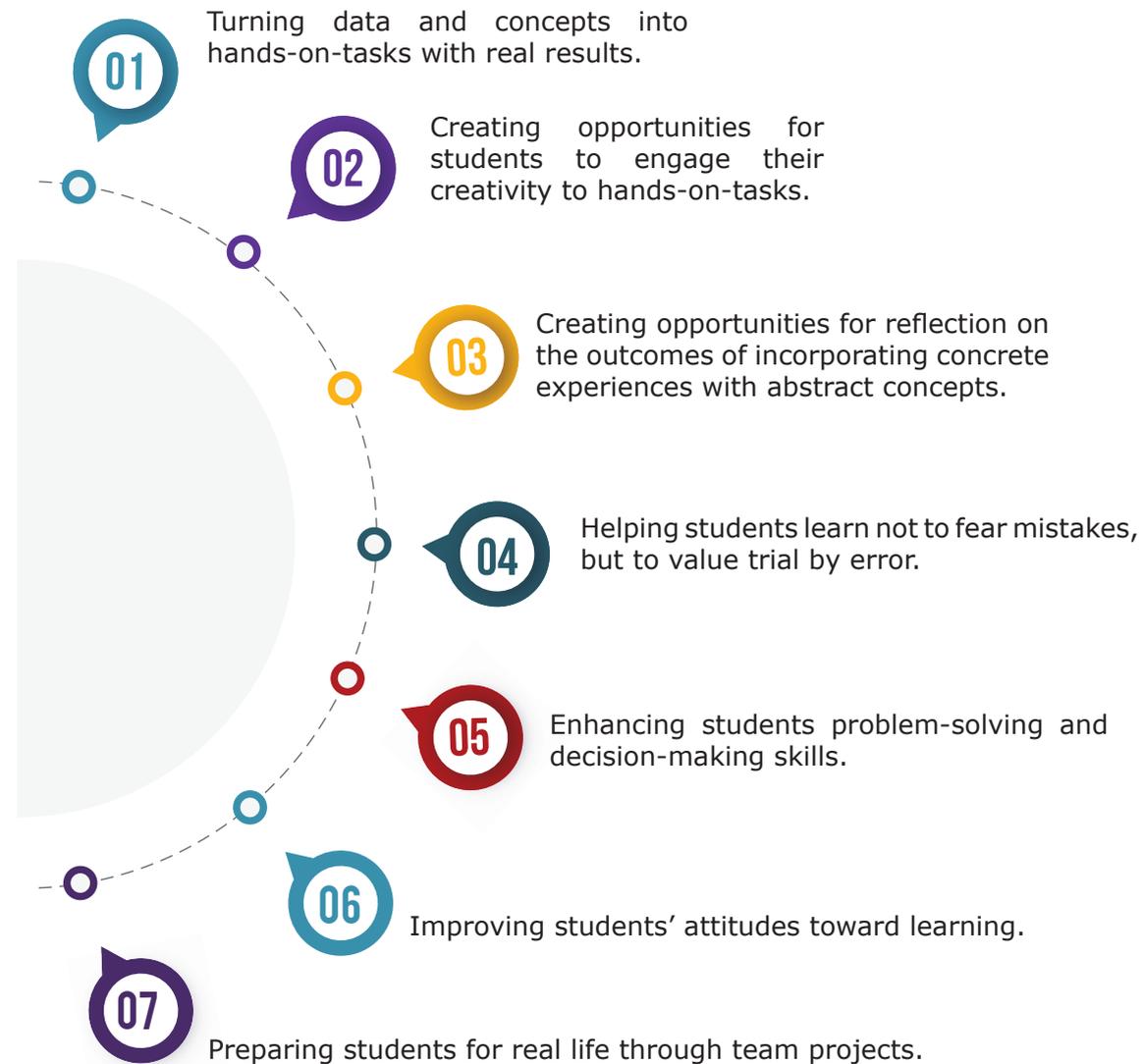
As previously mentioned, we propose to involve academics from different targeted institutions in Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and other Arab countries if possible in the creation of the main aspects of the course's content where such a regional content creation process is considered as a novelty. The course's modules could for instance include a max of 3 to 7 minutes long video-conferences (each) of several academics who would present their analysis/points of view/conceptual approaches on the same topic/subject of investigation. Some modules could be also the product of common work between Muslim and Christian academics.

The course should include experiential activities that can be organized both online and-or offline, and that target all of students' senses for a more holistic and deep learning experience -- also novelties for institutions that usually adopt traditional teaching of theology, sciences of religions and interreligious dialogue, and added-value to institutions that already adopt non-traditional teaching/learning methods.

### 5.1. Benefits of Regional Content Creation



## 5.2. Benefits of Experiential Activities



## 5.3. Benefits of E-Learning

- 1 Generating relevant, mobile, self-paced, and personalized content.
- 2 Offering real-time content updating.
- 3 Ensuring accessibility.
- 4 Enabling educators to get a higher degree of coverage to communicate their message.
- 5 Enhancing the profitability of an institution -- cost-effective.
- 6 Ensuring resource scalability.
- 7 Improving metrics -- more effective learning management system.

Noting that internet penetration in the Arab world counts for more than 70% of the population, up to 99% in several countries, and that the COVID-19 pandemic has made many universities adapt their teaching to physical distancing by closing campuses and shifting to emergency online forms of distance learning, despite the fact that several institutions and educators have been scrambling to develop online engagement due to the lack of training, overall strategy and proper tools and methods.

"The crash transition to online education has sped up some reforms Arab educators have sought for years, and now they see the potential for long-lasting change (...). Why go to the trouble of developing online education? Some academic leaders say it provides resilience against future shocks, can reach students who don't have time for long commutes to classrooms, and can leverage the region's best teachers to reach a rapidly growing young population (...). Strengthening universities' capacity to teach online creates greater resilience in case of future natural or man-made disruptions, say educators. The coronavirus will stay around for a long time, predicts Haffani, at the University of Manouba. "We may have a lockdown again". Finally, Abaher El-Sakka, a



professor of sociology at Birzeit University, a leading Palestinian institution, says the current closure of institutions in the West Bank and Gaza is forcing them to plan greater investments in their online capacity, even as it “pushes professors with old-school attitudes to open up to new technologies.” “For a colonized society like Palestine,” he adds, “with many problems getting around, like curfews and roadblocks, that’s a good thing.” (Al-Fanar Media<sup>38</sup>)

“Technology has the potential to increase access to education. Therefore, with digital learning, we can reach more learners. However, digital learning also has equity implications as not everyone can access specific technologies, and some learners have special needs which can be difficult to address through distance learning. In any case, it is important to continue to support efforts of universities in Lebanon to pursue digital learning, and perhaps encourage institutions to share good practices. It is equally important that institutions build the capacity and resources needed to develop effective, equitable and quality online programs and that policymakers develop policies that acknowledge and recognize online learning”. (AUB Lebanon<sup>39</sup>)

#### ***5.4. Training Teachers/Educators for Realizing Interreligious Learning***

We believe in the importance of training teachers/educators to be able to realize interreligious dialogue learning, as well as granting them an understanding of the roles of higher education institutions, their students, and their staff in making this learning successful/impactful. Tools and methods of teaching/learning can be created to ensure that attitudes and values gained through higher education can be transmitted to society more broadly.

In that sense, we recommend the development of a tool guide (or a toolbox) for academics (preferably online) and-or a series of free virtual and-or physical webinars for training -- intro to how to produce content and activities for such a course, how to guide students in their learning experience, and how to assess collected data from assignments, discussions and feedbacks -- before the implementation of the course.

## ***Conclusion***

Following our research results, two webinars (November 2020 and March 2021) and recommendations of the task force members, we designed a 3-credit hour undergraduate-level course syllabus in Arabic and English that was submitted to Dar al-Kalima University College of Arts and Culture in April 2021. In conclusion, we are convinced that such a course can be separately implemented by institutions that do not offer courses about interreligious dialogue and need to include them in their curricula. However, an ideal implementation should be done via the development of an online platform that would include this course, along with other materials such as teaching/learning guidelines and best practices for professors. This platform would be an added value for different institutional profiles. The course’s content would be created with the contributions of the targeted institutions. It could be offered both fully online, or with a blended approach, in English or Arabic. It could be easily updated and be accessible to multiple students’ audiences. In addition, every educator would monitor his/her students and assess their work, and would have the freedom to adapt certain aspects of activities, assessments and content to his/her students’ and the context’s needs. Also, educators would get the opportunity to interact, create a network, and help one another; and students from different institutions and countries would interact with each other. Furthermore, monoreligious classes would be able to interact with other classes in an interreligious and regional setting.

In that sense, this common platform and course would embody a very much needed regional collaboration in times and in the aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic and multiform crises. It will contribute to the integration and-or expansion of interreligious education in higher education institutions. The platform and course, along with other resources, would ensure a better understanding of others and their religions/cultures, contribute to develop more inclusive theologies and approaches in humanities/social sciences and cultural studies, as well as to build active citizenship and preserve human dignity.



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**Dr. Nadia Wardeh** -- samples of publications and conference papers: Organizing conferences, intellectual & cultural events

Program Director of the BRISMES/AUD International Conference (April 2015): The conference held under the theme 'Re-Locating Middle East Studies: New Geographies of Discourse' explored new ways of academically perceiving and geographically organizing regional studies. The conference was a resounding success on all levels: over 110 participants from various locales (Europe, North America, North Africa, West and Southeast Asia) attended the panel presentations, engaged in intellectual dialogues with speakers and other delegates, and participated in the conference's dinners and cultural activities.

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## ***Panelist/Session Moderator***

"Cultural Identity Challenges Between Arabization & Westernization." the Annual Arabic Tweetup Conference held at AUD (Nov 2013): [http://aud.edu/news\\_events/en/view/190/current\\_upcoming/archive](http://aud.edu/news_events/en/view/190/current_upcoming/archive)

## ***Founder of the MEST Forum***

A monthly series of intellectual/scholarly activities held every last Tuesday of each month during the fall and the spring semesters. The goal of the MEST Forum is to provide opportunities for AUD academics and visiting scholars from a range of disciplines to share their research related to Middle Eastern and North African issues. The Forum also intends to bring together MEST scholars and AUD's community, including staff, students and professors who are interested in Middle Eastern historical, political, economic, religious, artistic, social and cultural issues. Some of the forum achievements include:

Women in the UAE: Past and Present (conference with Dr. Saeeda al- Marzooqi and Dr. Alia al-Bawardi, representing the Women Museum in Dubai. (2015) First MEST Alumni Professional Gathering: (January 2016)

Eid al-Adha Celebration: (Sep 2015)

Press for Progress Sociocultural Event: celebrating the International Women Day (March 8, 2018)

Conferences & Scholarly Contributions AUD Peace Forum: Bridges to Inclusivity - Program and Conference Director, and Moderator-Chair of the Culture and Arts Panel, Dubai, October 2019. The session explores the ways film, literature, and art open up powerful imaginative potential, making us more sensitive to the attitudes and emotions of our fellow citizens. Art embraces tolerance through expression and exploration of diverse cultures

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Thanking Dr. Inas Deeb for her contribution in collecting and sending the data related to Palestine.



## Endnotes

1. Refer also to Dr. Josef Meri (one of the members of our project task force) article "Teaching Interfaith Relations at Universities in the Arab Middle East: Challenges and Strategies", recently published by MDPI: <https://bit.ly/3x5EXjI> and that explores several key factors in Arab society that have prevented the teaching of Interfaith Relations in universities. Meri also introduces readers to our project and its significance for teaching Interfaith Relations in the university.
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8. Content analysis is the systematic analysis of a content in a quantitative or qualitative manner.
9. Noting that in Qatar, The College of Islamic Studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University had previously offered the M.A. course on "Islam and Its Relations and Dialogue with Other Faiths," "which focused only on Islam and other faiths, including dialogue and relations between the world's religions. Since 2018, an interdisciplinary thematic approach has been adopted that recognizes the social and historical diversity in Interreligious Studies and includes a practical training component within an academic context that aims to look at practical issues in Interreligious Studies. The present version of the course which focuses on Islam and the Other explores the use of language and incorporates discussion of conflicts and coexistence

throughout history" (Josef Meri, "Teaching Interfaith Relations at Universities in the Arab Middle East: Challenges and Strategies", MDPI, 2021, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/5/330/pdf>, p.4). As for the United Arab Emirates, we contacted the American University in Dubai which does not offer courses or programs dedicated to Interreligious dialogue, but whose provost Dr. Sabrina Joseph, was interested in including an undergraduate course on this subject within the Arts and Science School's course offerings. Noting also that we had the opportunity of teaching about interreligious dialogue at the same university as sections of our courses on religions and cultures of the Middle East (Certificate of Middle Eastern Studies). Refer to the bibliography at the end of this report for further information about our work at the American University in Dubai.

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11. <https://bit.ly/3ioXtiA>
12. <https://bit.ly/3zbbg2c>
13. <https://bit.ly/3cpE5hF>
14. <https://bit.ly/3z5eZOW>
15. We were able to receive positive feedback from one of their academics who usually introduces his students to religious/cultural diversity in his courses. <https://bit.ly/2T7nbhf>
16. The School of Religious Studies offers extensive undergraduate and graduate programs, along with seminars and training that deal with religious diversity and interreligious/intercultural dialogues. The methodology of several courses is based on teaching topics from both Islamic and Christian perspectives, and often given by two teachers, one Christian and one Muslim. We were able to have meetings with 6 key administrators/academics at the School, and discuss needs, obstacles and opportunities for new ventures. What could be of interest to this School are innovative ideas and new practices, such as a regional cooperation and online courses, as it is already considered to be pioneer and well-established institution when it comes to the education to interreligious dialogue in Lebanon and the Arab world since the 1970s, and thus it does not need an additional regular/classical curriculum or course. Further information about the School's programs pertaining to interreligious dialogue is found in: <https://bit.ly/3uZWYhV>



17. We were able to contact the Chief Academic Officer and Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at ABTS. The meeting was highly productive and positive. The interest in our project was obvious, but we were told that a new course/curriculum would be welcome as extra-curricular due to possible higher administration and the community's opposition. Note that courses about Islam and dialogue are taught by Christian professors, and that ABTS holds an annual consultation and conference on Muslim-Christian relations.
18. We were able to have a fruitful meeting with the Director of the School of Islamic Studies who expressed his interest in our project and conference. This School offers courses on interreligious dialogue and has a partnership with St Joseph University's School of Religious Studies. The Director was interested in the regional aspect of our project, and stated he encouraged innovative teaching/learning methods which focus much more on the practical than on the theoretical.
19. Further information found in: Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad & Rahel Fischbach (2015): "Interfaith Dialogue in Lebanon: Between a Power Balancing Act and Theological Encounters", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, DOI: 10.1080/09596410.2015.1070468 - <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2015.1070468> and in Dr. Pamela Chrabieh, *Quelle gestion des diversités au Liban? Du confessionnalisme au pluralisme médiateur*. Sarrebruck, Germany : Editions Universitaires Européennes, 2010.
20. <https://bit.ly/3z8dboe>
21. Further information about the 1990s and 2000s initiatives for peacebuilding in Lebanon and in the diaspora is found in Pamela Chrabieh. *Voix-es de paix au Liban*. Dar el Machreq, 2006. Check also the Faith for Rights (Beirut Declaration and Toolkit): <https://bit.ly/3gjcUpQ>
22. Noting that representatives of most of the targeted institutions attended our project's online activities.
23. The Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, it is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that provides a venue for the interdisciplinary study of intercultural and interreligious issues with the aim of defusing tensions and promoting peace, regionally and globally." The work of RIIFS involves research and publication, the organization of events, including conferences, workshops and lectures, and it offers trainings, but it does not offer any degree program or offline/online courses about interreligious dialogue as was it confirmed by 2 key persons contacted at the center who welcomed our project and agreed on contributing to it. <https://bit.ly/3z8Ee32>
24. The Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC) was established in 2003 in Amman and is concerned with the issue of coexistence in the world in general and within the Middle East region and Jordan in particular. Its primary objective "is to provide advice and assistance to governments, organisations and individual decision-makers on religious-based peacebuilding, based on fourteen centuries of peaceful interfaith coexistence in Jordan. It employs research, dialogue, and practical initiatives to promote values of peaceful interfaith coexistence as models for building a better political, social, economic, cultural, and security environment." On the local level, the center is mainly focused on "Coexistence programs" with an aim "to reach all the critical members of society invested in peace and understanding – clerics and imams, women, and youth." On the global level, JICRC is active "through hosting and participating in various conferences to promote interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence among different faiths. Key programs include: nonviolence, conflict resolution techniques, democracy, disarmament, gender equality, human rights, environmental responsibility, history, communication skills, coexistence, & international understanding and tolerance of diversity. In order to create public dialogue, the center aims at often bringing together different groups to participate in their peace education programmes; including civil society groups, schools, tribal leaders and the media. <https://bit.ly/3vWb450>
25. The Generations for Peace, it is a leading global non-profit peace-building organisation with its headquarters in Amman. It is ranked "#30 in the Top 500 NGOs in the World" by Global Geneva -- making it the second-highest-ranked peacebuilding NGO. "The ranking is based on an assessment of innovation, impact, and sustainability." Its main objective is to be "dedicated to sustainable conflict transformation at the grass roots in communities, by promoting youth leadership, community empowerment, active tolerance, and responsible citizenship." According to their website this initiative is no longer active in Jordan. <https://bit.ly/2Takfk0>
26. Also, most academic institutions do not offer such courses or programs, for instance, the Jordanian Evangelical Theological Seminary (<http://www.jets.edu/>). One of the programs of the Seminary is the Salaam (Peace) program that focuses on language and culture, however, no courses about other religions or interreligious/intercultural dialogue are offered.
27. <https://bit.ly/3x1U79t>
28. <https://bit.ly/3v15Q6T>



29. <https://bit.ly/2T7mJQ5> Noting that two academics and the head of the religious studies department were interviewed for the sake of our report. "Bethlehem University's relationship with the Muslim community goes back to its inception when the Sheikh of the Muslim city of Hebron in southern Palestine, Mohammad Ali Al-Ja'bari, visited the University in 1975. At the time, the University served mainly Christian students from all over Palestine. His visit was a breakthrough because it was the first time a renowned Sheikh toured the new University. As a result, a close relationship was forged between Bethlehem University and the Sheikh, so close that he even sent his daughter to study there. Relationships such as these continue to this day and are a result of efforts from both communities". More recent interreligious initiatives are listed in the university's website.
30. An interview was conducted with the Dean of the Sharia School who explained that this non-compulsory elective course introduces students to several religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Confucianism, with a focus on the history of these religions, and a few of their beliefs and practices. The dean encourages the implementation of a new course to be taught in a non-traditional way. <https://www.najah.edu/en/>
31. An interview was conducted with one academic who expressed his belief in the importance of education to interreligious dialogue. Noting that this College offers a few lectures about Islam -- mainly from a Christian point of view. <http://bethbc.edu/>
32. An interview was conducted with the dean of the two faculties dedicated to Quranic and Islamic Studies. No courses of interreligious dialogue are offered, and there is a long difficult road in order to obtain approval to include a new course. Only in the Master's program a few lectures are offered on Christianity but not with a dialogic perspective. The Christian teacher offers his insights on Christian contents and it's the same with the Muslim teacher on Islamic content. There is no dialogue or joint planning between the two, neither on the level of the content nor on the course's goals.
33. As explained by the academic who was interviewed and who teaches the only course about Islam, the focus is on the history of Islam, and all students are Christians.
34. <http://www.hebron.edu/>
35. <https://www.qsm.ac.il/>
36. <http://www.nazcol.org> Noting that an interview was conducted with the dean of academic affairs.

37. Sources: secondary data and interviews.

38. <https://bit.ly/3inV7R3>

39. <https://bit.ly/3zjbQeC>



