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Muslim Parents' Expectations in the Public High School Education System

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts
in English as a Second Language.

Hamline University

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family, who always supported, believed in, and helped shape me into the person and educator I hope to become.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people.”

~Thomas Jefferson~

Introduction

For this project, I have focused on the expectations of some Muslim parents of high school-age children in the public school system and examples of what some schools could do to accommodate such needs. My guiding questions for this project are: *What are the expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students?* and *What are schools doing to reasonably meet these expectations while adhering to Federal, State laws and guidelines?*

According to the 2010 census, approximately 12.9% of the United States population was immigrant with approximately 0.6% (9 million) of them being Muslim immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Population projections showed the number of Muslims rising from 2.6 million in 2010 to 6.2 million in 2030, mostly due to immigration and higher fertility among Muslims. The percentage of Muslims in the U.S. population (adults and children) is projected to grow from 0.8% in 2010 to 1.7% in 2030 (Pew Research Center, 2011). Being an immigrant myself and based on interacting with a lot of immigrant families, immigrant families leave their homeland countries hoping and dreaming of a strong and free education system for their children. These are families coming from war-torn, difficult, and dangerous, or desperately poor countries who are

coming here to live the American Dream. Education is at the top of the list of why they immigrate to the U.S.A.

While Muslim immigrant parents believe and understand the value of a strong education in general, some have other expectations that they hypothesize the public school system would offer. Tindongan (2011) states that schools serve many cultures and yet maintain their hegemonic traditions and structures.

Unfortunately, the majority of these expectations, religious or not, while not entirely denied in some public school systems, do conflict with the hegemonic culture of other schools' guidelines and rules. This general lack of support of adolescents, coupled with Muslim parents who have been labeled as uninvolved or passive, adds to the layers of complexity for Muslim teenagers who attend American public schools (Sabry & Bruna, 2007). I firmly believe that many Muslim students are sometimes faced with family and school expectations that are at odds with each other, leading these students to negotiate their identity through their high school journey.

Students face conflicting expectations as they are expected to follow their family values and honor their culture, which may be difficult or even impossible to do because the students' traditions may conflict with school rules. Sabry and Bruna (2007) have stated that some Muslim students practicing their religion are expected to fulfill obligations that may clash with their school culture or schedule. As a result of being frustrated and disappointed in the public school system, parents may end up paying less attention and providing less support for their high school children. Muslim parents, in particular, have been labeled as uninvolved or passive with regard to their adolescents' schooling (Sabry & Bruna, 2007).

In my experience as an educator, I have seen that while some immigrant Muslim parents and students are confronting these challenges, some try to find solutions and answers as a way of coping with some of these drastic expectation discrepancies. Others are not at all able to make adjustments to their expectations. The latter group of parents may end up withdrawing their children from one particular public school and enrolling them in another. If they could financially afford it, some may think that enrolling their children in a Muslim private school provides the one and only solution to all these problems.

In this capstone, I am studying the expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students and looking at what public schools are doing to reasonably meet these expectations. As described below, the ultimate goal behind my capstone project is to create a professional development plan that will benefit all teachers of Muslim students in public high schools.

My Personal Journey with Muslim Families

As an educator, I serve parents and students in both public and private Muslim schools, and I have shared and lived the everyday frustration, disappointment, and dissatisfaction some Muslim parents were undergoing. Young Muslim students often face difficulties as they see themselves as part of a marginalized group within a cultural milieu (Tindongan, 2011). Every now and then parents approach me hoping that I could offer solutions to their children's problems in the school system. My professional development offered to teachers would also be a resource that both Muslim students and parents could benefit from while making choices for high-school youth. This professional development will be based on what research states can reasonably be done and what public schools could do to accommodate the needs of some Muslim students.

“Prevention is better than cure,” according to an old saying. If Muslim parents and students have some kind of enlightenment into these problems as to why public schools would not meet all or any of their expectations while some private Muslim schools would, they would be able to make informed and educated decisions. That is what I am trying to achieve through this research.

While being approached by Muslim parents and students who were striving to find solutions to problems they describe as pressing, I have come to realize that I am repeatedly providing the same kinds of solutions. Of course, with some willingness, minor adjustments, and a little sacrifice, as they described them, some Muslim families found these solutions to be practical and doable; other families found them absolutely impossible, ridiculous, and offensive. Muslim families who found my words comforting and practical, and therefore started thinking of a roadmap to be followed, always came back to ask some more questions, share their feedback, express gratitude, and offer words of encouragement to keep doing what I am doing. These brief insightful discussions proved to be a source of reinforcing power and provided me with reassurance and a sense of motivation to start this project and make it a reality.

Guiding Questions

If this professional development is to be effective and practical, it should provide information for not just Muslim parents, students, and teachers but all stakeholders who are in a similar or the same situation. While there are many resources that deal with other issues facing immigrant families in general and Muslim families in particular, this project will focus specifically on expectations and interactions of Muslim families within the public school system in the U.S. In this project, I am using the following two questions to guide my research: *What are*

the expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students? What are schools doing to reasonably meet these expectations while adhering to Federal, State laws and guidelines?

Summary/Overview of Chapters

In chapter one, I provided some background, context, and rationale for my research. In Chapter One, I also stated the pressing questions that will form and shape my study from the beginning through the finish line.

Chapter Two will include a literature review of what previous research says can reasonably be done and what some public schools are doing to accommodate the needs of some Muslim students. Unlike private schools, we cannot expect public schools to accommodate all Muslim students' needs since they are strictly governed by federal and state laws, but we can start to see what among the many accommodations parents would accept and what others they would not; they may be better off sending their youth to a parochial school for Muslims. Chapter Three describes the project methods that I will follow to complete my project. Last but not least, Chapter Four is an analysis and synthesis of the results obtained in the research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

In this literature review, I will provide an overview of the research that directly touches upon my research questions: *What are the expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students?* and *What are schools doing to reasonably meet these expectations while adhering to Federal, State laws and guidelines?*

This literature review is respectively composed of three main sections. The first section includes a brief introduction about Muslims, a background of Muslims in the U.S., and a brief review of why education is important in Islam. The second section is a review of the expectations of some Muslim parents who would like to send their high school-age students to public high schools. This section includes school services, such as school schedule, gender separation, food preparation and serving, dress code, special education, holidays, and specialty subjects. The last section before the summary is a rationale for my research and a preview of Chapter Three.

Who are Muslims?

According to Britto (2008), “A Muslim is a person who follows the religion of Islam irrespective of that individual’s ethnic background, geographic heritage, or language” (p. 137).

Hoot et al. (2003) acknowledge that:

The word “Islam” is an Arabic word meaning “submission or resignation to God.” Followers of this religion are called Muslims. Islam is guided by two holy books —the *Qur’an* and the *Sunnah*. The Qur’an is believed to be the written record of God’s word revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century A.D. The Sunnah is a collection of sayings and actions of the Prophet

Muhammad. As do the holy books of Judaism and Christianity, these volumes require followers to believe in one God, to help those in need, and to always strive to become better human beings. Also, similar to Judeo-Christian beliefs, Muslims believe in many of the same long line of prophets such as Abraham, Moses, and David. In Islam, Muhammad is recognized as the final prophet. Followers of Islam are also required to respect both Jews and Christians who they regard as ‘People of the Book.’” (p. 86)

Background of Muslims in the U.S.

The earliest Muslim immigrants were brought from Africa as slaves as early as 1501. A number of scholars have offered varying estimates of their absolute numbers, with Allan D. Austin putting their number at 40,000 (for the United States alone) and Sylviane Diouf estimating between 2.25 and 3 million (for the Americas as a whole). (Pipes & Duran, 2002). Today, the general population of Muslims in the United States is ethnically diverse. Muslim immigrants to the US have come from more than 80 different countries (Read, 2008). Around 41% of Muslim immigrants hailed from the Middle East or North Africa, 26% came from South Asia with Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India on top among these countries, 11% from sub-Saharan Africa, 7% from Europe, 5% from Iran, 9% from other countries, and 20% are those who converted to Islam (Pew Research Center, 2011; Read, 2008).

Muslims are diverse ethnically, linguistically, socio-economically, theologically, and ideologically (Peek, 2005; Read, 2008; Tinker & Smart, 2012). Nearly a quarter of all Muslim Americans hold a bachelor's or a higher degree; approximately one-fourth earn \$75,000 or more annually; and 60% are employed (Read, 2008). While the majority of Muslims living in the United States speak English at home, others speak Arabic, Bengali, Persian, Turkish, or Urdu.

There are, however, a few Muslims in the U.S. who live in poverty and speak very little English. Muslims are also diverse in their devotion to the religion of Islam. In 2011, the Pew Research Center reported that 69% of Muslim Americans consider religion to be very important in their lives.

Similar to what is observed in other belief systems, some Muslims are devout, others are moderately religious, and others are Muslim in name only and do not practice the religion. Some Muslims perform their daily prayers and attend the mosque frequently, while others do not engage in either of these practices. Some identify themselves as Muslim culturally and politically but are secularist, and others identify as Muslim based on nationality and citizenship. In addition, Muslims differ in their interpretation of the Qur'an and in the way they dress (Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Read, 2008). For example, not all Muslim women believe that wearing the veil (i.e., hijab) is mandatory in Islam (Bartowski & Read, 2003). Having briefly covered some basic information on the background of Muslims in the U.S., the next section is a brief review of how important education is in Islam in general and particularly the effect of this importance on how parents and students view schooling in the U.S.

Importance of Education in Islam

According to Soliman (2016), education is critical in Islam. Islam commands its followers to educate themselves about the Islamic religion and gain worldly knowledge that can benefit themselves and others. Both commands place a special obligation on Muslim parents and their children. Prophet Muhammed (peace and blessings be upon him), emphasizing the importance of seeking knowledge, stated, "If anyone goes on his way in search of knowledge, God will thereby make easy for him the way to Paradise."

Wani and Maqbool (2012) stated that:

Islam provided great impetus for the human pursuit of knowledge. The first verse that descended on the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was *Iqra*, meaning "read," opening the door to read, write, and ponder. The Qur'an urges mankind to think, ponder, reflect, and acquire knowledge that would bring them closer to God and his creation. The Qur'an uses repetition to embed certain key concepts in the consciousness of its listeners. Allah (God) and Rab (the Sustainer) are repeated 2,800 and 950 times, respectively, in the sacred text; Ilm (knowledge) comes third with 750 mentions. (p.718)

Pipes and Duran (2002) identified education as the second main reason for immigration in the US. By the 1990s, over a half-million foreign students were attracted to U.S. colleges and universities. Most of these students chose to remain in the United States after successfully completing their degrees, where facilities for their profession are superior, political freedoms are wider, and economic opportunities are greater. Having briefly described the importance of education in Islam, I will now move on to the second section of Chapter Two and show what research states on the different main points/subsections that are directly or indirectly connected.

Some Muslim Parents' Expectations

Soliman (2016) asserted that parents' perceptions about the schools they send their children to may reflect misconceptions or prevalent issues that need to be understood and addressed. These perceptions may be directly or indirectly related to the school's academic quality and curricula, school climate, and student safety or other personal, social, ethnic, faith-based, and cultural factors. For the purpose of this project, I cover the following parent expectations respectively according to importance: culture and religious beliefs, school services, curriculum, and school staff.

Culture and Religious Beliefs. Most, if not all, Muslim parents assume that the majority of teachers in the U.S. are fully equipped with the knowledge and the understanding of their cultures. Rather than trying to prove how far their assumption is valid, let us look at the implications of this assumption in regards to teachers' knowledge of students' cultures. Hollins (2011) emphasized the importance of how well the teacher knows the learner as the most essential aspect of teaching and learning. This knowledge includes, but is not limited to, the learner's background experiences, values, and culture. To facilitate and scaffold learning for their students, teachers will heavily depend on their knowledge of the background experience and the values of the particular learners.

Podikunju (2008) suggested that cultural considerations were on top of others that significantly impact every aspect of the Muslim student including academic, social, educational, and psychological. Podikunju further added that in order for schools' staff and counselors to better serve and help Muslim students, they need a better understanding of that minority group's cultural characteristics.

Alghorani (2003) shed light on the Muslim student's issues of identity, acculturation, and adjustment. Acculturation is the process by which a minority individual adapts to a dominant culture as well as the changes in beliefs, values, and behavior that result from contact with that culture and its members (Berry, 1997). In his acculturation theory, Berry (1997) proposed four patterns of acculturation that immigrants of other cultures undergo, not just Muslims: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. In *assimilation*, the host culture is embraced and the home culture is rejected. In *integration*, a balance between host and home cultures is achieved. In *separation*, the host culture is rejected and the heritage culture is retained. In *marginalization*, both the host and the heritage cultures are rejected.

In a research study by Mastrilli and Sadro-Brown (2002), a twenty-question survey was conducted on pre-service teachers. In this survey, pre-service teachers lacked a "rudimentary understanding of the nature of the Islamic faith" as well as "the global nature and influence of Islam" (p. 159). Among this group of pre-service teachers, a third thought that the influence of Islam was a negative one, another third thought that Islam has a positive one, and the rest thought that Islam does not have much influence on the world. In answers to a question like "As a teacher how do you anticipate you will treat any of your students who are followers of Islam?" (p. 161) some teachers expressed that they would try to be sensitive to their Muslim students' religious celebrations, some would try to teach their culture and religion, some others would try to educate themselves more about Islam, some thought that bringing up religion in a public school setting was not a possibility, and some responded they would stress in their classes that the fact that Muslims are not terrorists. Pew's research (2019) indicated, among other findings, that the more people are familiar with a religion, the more favorable views they hold about members of that faith.

To be more informed on the topic of culture and religious beliefs, I choose some subtopics such as daily and Friday prayer, fasting Ramadan, Islamic holidays, American holidays, gender separation, school picture, and school uniform to portray experiences in the public schools. In the following pages, I discuss them in more detail.

Salat (daily prayer). Eck (2001) quotes Mian Ashraf of the Islamic Center of New England,

We have a tendency to take Islam for granted, especially those of us who grew up in an Islamic environment before coming to America. But here you have to work at it. We're scared that we're going to lose our identity. Our kids are going

into this melting pot, where they might not be able to maintain their religious values, and we'll lose them (pp. 20–25).

Jilani (2015) explains that Islam requires its followers to adhere to the five basic pillars of Islam. One of the pillars of Islam is the commandment of the five daily prayers. The afternoon prayer is what is referred to as the Dhur Salah and the late afternoon prayers are referred to as 'Asr. The prayers are timed according to the position of the sun; therefore, the timings of all the daily prayers fluctuate depending on Daylight Savings Time. It is suggested that this fluctuation, in turn, may cause students to miss their prayers while in school because of the school schedule. Some students would just wait to go home and pray or during daylight savings they present a note from home so that the teacher can offer some space for them to pray. Some other schools with more history of Muslim students allow for a designated prayer room in the library to offer prayer. Not only do students struggle to find a designated area/room to offer their prayers, but they also find it difficult to get permission for their prayers because of their tight school schedules.

Prayers in Islam require ablution (the act of washing oneself) prior to offering prayer. Ablution and prayer would require more time than that allocated for transition times between classes. This requires students to seek permission to be a little late to class. Some students feel courageous enough to ask their teachers; others do not feel that teachers and administration would be as accommodating. Due to these reasons, Muslim students would miss prayers, which for Muslims are seen as missing on one of the key commandments of God. Therefore, Muslims are closely monitoring prayer time/schedule. This sense of urgency to offer prayers on time falls within school environment where Muslim students' struggle may not be known or valued. Ballinger (2011) suggests that providing "simple, discreet" modifications for religious practices

is equally as important as accommodating other students with different school-related activities (p. 45).

Salat-ul-Jumu'ah (Friday congregational prayer). The Qur'an emphasizes the significance of Friday as a sacred day of worship in a chapter called "Al-Jumu'ah" (the day of congregation), which is what Muslims call Friday in Arabic. It is stated in that chapter, "O you who believe! When you are called to the Friday congregational prayers, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave off your business. That is better for you if you but knew (what is best for you)." (The Qur'an, Friday Chapter). Generally, Muslim men are obliged to attend Friday prayers as long as they are not traveling, while women have the choice to opt out, given their traditional role in the household when Islam was established. In almost all mosques, men and women pray separately. Women usually pray behind men in the same room in the mosque, while in other mosques they may pray in a different room or behind a barrier. Women in the West often attend Friday Prayer when they have the time to spare from work or other responsibilities. Friday Prayer is a congregational Muslim prayer, and as with any other Muslim prayer, preparation for it requires ablution just before it is offered.

Parents perceive public schools as no different institutions and they appreciate the constitutional principle of freedom of religion. It is the very same principle that we teach in our public institutions and one of the tenets that make America revolutionary. Parents regard the prohibition of prayer rooms in the public schools as a breach of their fundamental rights. One of the greatest things about American secularism is that no religion is privileged over the others. Exactly under this premise, prayer rooms in schools are legal as long as students are not required to use them and the practice is not promoted by school officials. In all fairness, such spaces must also be made available to followers of other religions and belief systems. It would be illegal if

public schools allow any of these privileges for one group but not for the next. From Orthodox Jews to some followers of lesser-known religious groups, all would equally qualify. A public school needs to be public with equality and the same accommodations for all groups.

Ramadan. Haynes (1998) provides some important points about the month of Ramadan:

During the Islamic month of Ramadan (a lunar month of 29 or 30 days), Muslims abstain from all food and drink from dawn to sunset. This religious duty is known as “sawm” in Arabic. Many Muslim students observe the fast. Consequently, they will be unable to participate in meals or refreshments during daylight hours. In addition, they will not be able to engage in heavy physical exertion often required in physical education classes during this time. (Fasting section)

He further suggests:

If students eat lunch in a common cafeteria, Muslim students should be allowed to spend lunchtime during Ramadan fasting in an alternative location, such as a study hall or library. Physical education teachers should provide alternatives to rigorous physical exercise during Ramadan (pp. 17-21).

Islamic Holidays. Haynes (2007) identifies the two major Muslim religious holidays during the year. Eid-ul-Fitr (a 3-day festival that marks the ending of the fast right after Ramadan) and Eid-ul-Adha (festival of the sacrifice), which lasts for four days. In the morning of the first day of both festivals, in a new attire (or the best they have), Muslims attend a worship service (prayer and sermon) at a local mosque and then visit family members, relatives, and neighbors to celebrate, share meals, and exchange gifts. These festivals are as significant to Muslims as are Christmas and Easter to Christians and Hanukkah and Passover to Jews.

School schedule. Through my interactions with the Muslim parents, the majority of them expect the school schedule to accommodate daily prayers that should be performed during the day. Haynes (1998) states that Muslims observe a formal worship or prayer (salah in Arabic) five times daily. Due to seasonal time changes and school schedules, one or two worship times (midday and afternoon) may fall during typical school hours, and a suitable arrangement should be made for those students wishing to fulfill their religious duty. During lunchtime or afternoon break, teachers should provide Muslim students who are conscientious about observing their prayers with an open area for a few minutes so they can observe the prayers. Ballinger (2011) offers this solution:

During the religious holidays, when fasting takes place, students can be given the option of scheduling physical activities before sunrise or after sunset, or of making up work after the end of the fasting period. The common U.S. school calendar has built the vacation schedule around Christian holidays (e.g., “winter break” coincides with Christmas). We need to be sensitive to the observances of all students and find ways to be inclusive with respect to religion. (p. 46)

Food. *“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” – U.S. Constitution, First Amendment.* Minns (2001) acknowledges the fact that the founders of the United States Constitution envisioned a nation with a strong separation between church and state. However, he claims that such an ideal is unrealistic in some situations because inter-relationship is inevitable. One of these situations is a public school student relying upon their school lunch program. In response to that situation, if the government does not provide halal food to students in public schools, this is considered denying the individual access to halal. If the government offers it, then it is an explicit

encouragement of religious practice. The Fourteenth Amendment includes “*the equal protection of the laws,*” and that simply means that “Muslims have a constitutional right to receive the same religious dietary protections that are offered to other religions” (Minns, 2001, p. 714). Minns concludes that these religious accommodations should apply to all religious groups, not just Muslims; otherwise, the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause is violated.

Vanhuysse and Sabbagh (2005) find it a difficult task to provide a liberal education while maintaining a balance between aspiring to respect diversity at the level of community and values of individual choice and inclusion. Such a balance cannot be achieved solely through curricula, teaching specific skills and knowledge, but also by establishing the practices and values of citizenship in a liberal democracy. As Giddens (2006) notes, it can be quite difficult, given the extent of cultural diversity, to understand or sympathize with the practices of those from a different community.

The curriculum. The curriculum in American schools is highly centered around Eurocentric ideology. According to Susan Douglass (2003), the United States is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse countries; therefore, the educational leaders of the nation should offer a more inclusive model for social education to address this diversity and the need for a “more perfect union.” Some teachers also misunderstand how to handle teaching religion in the public school system (Moore, 2006). Pre-service teachers reported that teaching religion is in direct violation of the separation of church and state (Chang et al., 2011). However, it is a teacher’s obligation to teach about world religions and their tremendous impact on world civilizations. The teaching of this subject needs to be carefully crafted, without proselytizing or expressing individual points of view (Moore, 2006). Moore (2006) further asserted that very often, administrators and teachers offer only a single perspective, failing to account for opposing

views or varying views that Muslim students in the classroom can identify with. Often, Muslim students do not correct teachers out of respect for authority in the classroom (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

Meacham (2009) described a course in which he taught his students about Islam. In designing his course, his goal was not to encourage students to agree with the tenets of Islam or to convert to Islam, but rather become more familiar about Islam, become more familiar with what Muslims believe and do in their everyday life, and reject common stereotypes and misunderstandings.

Gender separation and physical education. Li et al. (2015) believe that there are no religious obligations against Muslim women participating in sports; however, they expected that there are a number of reasons why they might be less engaged in daily sports than men (Benn et al., 2011). One of the primary reasons is the belief among the majority of Muslim women to cover all or most of their bodies when outside of the home (Dagkas et al., 2011). Due to the difficulties involved in exercising while wearing concealing and modest clothing, many Muslim women believe that it is important to exercise in private spaces, with only women present. Jawad et al., (2011) suggest that such spaces may not be generally available.

Through the lens of a Muslim parent, Sabry and Bruna (2007) explain that one of the reasons teachers are unwilling to provide alternatives to accommodate Muslim students' needs is that teachers are not familiar with Islamic values and teachings. As a result, teachers would sometimes come up with arrangements that are not at all appropriate for Muslim students. In a particular situation where a teacher tried to exempt a Muslim student from participating in a swimming class due to religious reasons, the teacher offered that student to walk around the swimming pool. "The student felt that she was being punished and humiliated in front of her

peers instead of being provided the opportunity to practice an alternative and equivalent sport” (p. 47). As Hassim and Cole-Adams (2010) mentioned, Muslim girls view swimming as an important life skill, but they would not participate in swimming unless it is an all-female pool and they are modestly covering their bodies with an attire such as the ‘burkini’. Zanetti (2016) said, “When I invented the burkini in early 2014, it was to give women freedom, not to take it away” (p. 1). Zanetti described the burkini as a garment that symbolized leisure, happiness, fun, fitness, and health. Ballinger (2011) points out that physical education teachers in the United States, influenced by American religious and cultural influences, employ practices that always conflict with individual and family values of the Muslim culture. In addition to that, Ballinger suggests, Muslim boys and girls find many of today’s physical education uniforms violating their rules of public decency. Let us look at some of the practical ideas that physical education professionals should consider when working with Muslim students:

- recognize that dress code should be modified to meet cultural standards of modesty;
- relaxing rules about tucking in shirts and allowing girls to wear shorts under dresses, or warm-ups rather than shorts or physical education uniforms, will suffice in many cases;
- students can be asked to teach games or activities native to their homeland and to provide terminology for posters or visual aids in their native language in their first or second language is not English;
- dances can be taught either through the use of video or a guest teacher if the student does not know them or is not yet capable of peer teaching;

- students can be assigned to write about or present an athlete from their country or religious faith, and pictures posted on a bulletin board should reflect cross-cultural diversity (Ballinger, 2011, pp. 45-46).

Williams (2010) finds research available on PE levels of male and female PE students in coed and same-sex settings to be very limited. Hannon and Williams (2008) recommend additional studies to be conducted on student PE levels in coed and same-sex settings utilizing various types of instructional models.

Teachers' insensitivity and unawareness. Sabry and Bruna (2007) found that both Muslim students and parents expressed their discontent towards teachers who could not hide their biases about different issues. Ballinger (2011) asserts that in order to promote cross-cultural understanding, culturally competent practitioners must understand various religious belief systems and help students to understand and embrace the similarities and differences in thought, word, and deed among religious cultures, just as the practice regarding race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and ability.

Students' relationships with their teachers have a profound effect on their academic achievement. Therefore, teachers, administrators, and counselors must be well trained or have experience in dealing with multicultural students in a classroom so that they may attend to the needs of their learners. Teaching in a multicultural classroom requires that teachers are fully trained and exposed to methods of teaching in a diverse classroom in pre-service programs. It has been the goal of most pre-service programs to integrate service-learning into curricula, cultivate positive beliefs and dispositions about students and communities of color, and work with families and children who have been marginalized (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004; Burant & Kirby, 2002; Kidd et al., 2008).

Public school obligations. In a journal article, Markind (2015) reviewed three American public school districts that provided taxpayer-funded meals that met the Muslim students' dietary requirements. This move caused a problem in the U.S. Constitution due to the following reasons:

- the districts had not catered lunches that met the religious standards of students believing in other religions;
- halal foods cost a lot more than comparable non-halal foods;
- the districts violated the separation of "church" and state.

According to Haynes (2011), schools must include all sides in the decision-making process in order to avoid conflict and achieve a sense of common ground. Moreover, he notes that since public schools belong to all citizens and serve the entire community, it would be appropriate to develop policies that incorporate the input of all the community's stakeholders. Assuming that parents, teachers, local leaders, students, and school board members are given the chance (and the ground rules of the First Amendment), most will commit to principled dialogue in order to create policies and practices that serve the common good.

Research Rationale

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two focused on the expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students and what selected public and private schools can do to reasonably meet these expectations while adhering to Federal, State laws and guidelines. As mentioned earlier, my ultimate goal is to create a resource that will be useful to educators and parents alike. If this resource is to be effective and practical, it should provide information for not just Muslim parents and students, but all stakeholders who are in a similar or the same situation.

Haynes (2011) argues that we still have some distance to go. Agreement by some or all of us on some issues does not mean agreement on everything, but the work of building consensus on a national level must continue and expand to address new divisions and conflicts. Haynes (2011) recommends six strategies to avoid conflict and find common ground:

- using national guidelines to explain the role of religion in public school under the First Amendment, would build trust among all stakeholders;
- developing sound policies that reflect a commitment to the First Amendment and an understanding of current laws;
- including all sides in the decision-making process;
- informing the community on a regular basis;
- providing periodic professional development;
- working to reform preservice preparation (Haynes, 2011, pp. 8-14).

Research has defined a “civil school” as a school that may not inculcate or inhibit religion, but a place where religion and religious convictions are treated with fairness and respect. Public schools upholding the First Amendment must protect the religious liberty rights of students of all faith or none. “Schools demonstrate fairness when they ensure that the curriculum includes study about religion, where appropriate, as an important part of a complete education” (Haynes & Thomas, 2007, p. 12).

Summary

Chapter Two includes a literature review of what previous research says can reasonably be done and what two schools (one public and one private) did to accommodate the needs of some Muslim students. Unlike private schools, we cannot expect public schools to accommodate all needs since they are strictly governed by Federal and State laws, but we can start to see what

among the many accommodations parents would accept and what others they were keen on not making any adjustments to their expectations, they may be better off sending their youth to a parochial school for Muslims or have them homeschooled.

Chapter Three Preview

Chapter Three describes the study methods that I will follow to bring this project to a culmination. Last but not least, Chapter Four is an analysis and synthesis of the results obtained in the study. First, I will start Chapter Three by giving a description of the project, including my framework for answering the research question. Second, I will provide a research rationale for my choice of one framework over others. Third, I will identify my project audience (who will benefit from the work of this project) and setting (where it will mostly be used). Fourth, I will project how the effectiveness of the project is to be measured. Finally, I will include a timeline for project completion.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

For this project, I have focused on the expectations of some Muslim parents of high school-age children in the public school system and examples of what some schools did to accommodate such needs. The goal of this project is to design a professional development workshop for high school teachers and staff in the public school system to address my research question: *What are the expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students?* and *What are schools doing to reasonably meet these expectations while adhering to Federal, State laws and guidelines?*

First, I will start Chapter Three by giving a description of the project, including my framework for answering the research question. Second, I will provide a research rationale for my choice of one framework over others. Third, I will identify my project audience (who will benefit from the work of this project) and the setting (where it will mainly be used). Fourth, I will project how I would measure the effectiveness of the project. Last, I would include a timeline for project completion followed by a summary of Chapter Three.

Description of the Project

In Chapter One, I presented my research topic and explained the reasons it captured my interest. My final product would be a professional development showcasing the main expectations of Muslim parents in the public schools that I covered in Chapter Two. The literature covered in my professional development would also be an academic resource offering practical solutions and answers that could benefit all stakeholders sharing the same issues. In

Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature based on what research says can reasonably be done and what public schools did to accommodate some Muslim students' needs. In this chapter, I describe the methods that I followed to bring this project to a culmination.

Project Framework

I frame-worked this project following Knowles' andragogical theory as it specifically focuses on adults' learning process. Andragogy is defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). The first principle of andragogy is the need to know, "Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking it" (Knowles, 1998, p. 43). Muslim parents of high-school-age children need to know the needs of their children in the public school system before they start to seek solutions. Parents will then devote a considerable amount of time and energy in an effort to understand the value of learning about their children's needs in high school.

The second principle of andragogy states, "Adults have a concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives" (Knowles, 1998). Like all other parents, Muslim parents are responsible for their children's education and all the decisions that have to do with it. It is the parents' decision to send their children to public schools versus private or parochial ones.

The third principle of andragogy asserts that adults have more experience and more diverse experience than children. In general, parents have more knowledge than their children, and this experience is much more diverse than that of their children. More specifically, parents, having been through this educational stage in their own lives, have more experience than their high-school-age children. It is worth noticing that Knowles acknowledges that children can also have experiences, but the relationship between adults and their experiences is different than the relationship between children and their experiences. Adults derive their self-identity from

experiences, while children derive their identity from shared social connections, such as friends, family, or a sports team. Because of the integral nature of prior experience to the identity of the adult learner, when their “experiences are ignored or devalued, adults will perceive this as rejecting not only their experience but rejecting themselves as persons” (Knowles, 1998, p. 44).

The fourth principle in andragogy assumes that adults are living their lives while learning. The contexts of life demands lead adults to prioritize different learnings at different points. At any given point in life, adults are “ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations” (Knowles, 1998).

Andragogy suggests that real-life situations are significant, contextual situations. Parents are ready to learn about their children’s needs at the high school and find solutions because it is an integral part of coping effectively with their real-life parental situations.

The final principle characterizes adult learners as life-centered, problem-centered, and task-centered in their approach to learning. Practically speaking, these three orientations build on each other: task-centered techniques are most useful when the task is relevant to a significant problem, while problem-centered techniques are most motivating when the problem is a life issue rather than a trivial issue. Parents trying to understand their children’s needs at the high school and finding practical solutions are task-centered, problem-centered, and life-centered.

Project Rationale

While being approached by some Muslim parents and students who were striving to find solutions to problems they have been facing at the public schools they were attending, I realized that I am able to offer some different solutions to troubled families. These brief discussions proved to be a source of reinforcing power and provided me enough motivation to start and continue working on this project and make it possible.

For this project, my ultimate goal is to create a professional development workshop that is both effective and practical, not just for teachers and school administration but also for Muslim parents, students, and all stakeholders in the same or similar situations. It includes expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students and what some schools are reasonably doing to accommodate these needs.

Project Audience and Setting

The audience for my project would mainly include high school administrators, teachers, staff members, community members, and anyone invested in the welfare and success of a school with any number of high school Muslim students. This professional development will help stakeholders create an inclusive and safe learning environment for high school Muslim students.

This project's setting is public high schools where some Muslim families have certain expectations. These expectations include prayer, food preparation and serving, dress code, special education, holidays, school picture and video, art, and music classes, gender separation, Ramadan, and PE classes. As discussed in Chapter Two, public schools, while accommodating these needs and expectations, must adhere to Federal and State laws and guidelines.

Project Description and Assessment

For the purpose of making this project assessment easy and manageable, the project will be assessed by administrators, teachers, and support staff within one public school with a considerable population of Muslim students. The assessment will be divided into two parts within the course of a semester or trimester. The first step of the assessment process will start with surveying as many stakeholders as possible to determine what are the most pressing needs of the Muslim students within that particular school. This phase of the survey is significant as it compiles different views and actions of all stakeholders in one place. Stakeholders will be

surveyed as to what they have reasonably done to resolve these issues and what could be done further in the near future. The second step of the assessment will be toward the end of the semester or trimester when stakeholders take another survey. This time the survey is geared towards getting feedback on the effectiveness of the accommodations practiced by all stakeholders participating in the survey. This is an excellent time to reflect on what went well and what did not. The progress that has been made and what the stakeholders feel about it, and what else needs to be added or addressed.

Timeline

With the permission of the school leaders, I will be organizing and offering my professional development within the first week of teachers' return to school. In such sessions, I will present the main points of my research in the form of a PowerPoint. The sessions will last for two hours daily over the duration of a week to provide a total of 10 hours of professional development. In these sessions, and specifically, towards the end of every session, I will meet different members of the school community to discuss and evaluate the needs of some Muslim students and suggest other practical ways to accommodate such needs while adhering to State and Federal laws, policies, and guidelines.

In the past few years, I have been approached by parents of high school-school-age students in a very informal way. For the purpose of this research project, I am planning to document stakeholders' viewpoints and actions in a formal way. I will be starting this Fall and will be done by Winter of 2022. The project's final revisions will be available in the Spring of 2022.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three constitutes a roadmap for this research project. I outlined the phases taken to answer my research question: *What are the expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students?* Following the introduction, the first part of this chapter was a description of the project. The second part was my research rationale, where I pointed out the research framework of my choice to guide my research. The third part of Chapter Three was an identification of the audience and setting for my research project. The next part was an assessment of how the effectiveness of the project will be measured. The last part was a timeline for this project's completion. Chapter Four will include an analysis and synthesis of the results obtained in this research project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion/Reflection

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to focus on the expectations of some Muslim parents of high school-age children in the public school system and examples of what some schools could do to accommodate such needs. My guiding questions for this project are: *What are the expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students?* and *What are schools doing to reasonably meet these expectations while adhering to Federal, State laws and guidelines?*

Overview

Chapter Four, as the last the final chapter in this project, will highlight my personal reflection, revisit the literature review in Chapter Two, provide implications and limitations, include future research projects and recommendations that are strongly tied to my research topic, and finalize with a summary. In the next lines, I will provide a brief overview of each main part of this chapter and how they are crucial to the understanding of the chapter as a whole before I go through each main section in detail.

The personal reflection includes all the positives and negatives that were both informative and eye-opening during the course of the research. It also includes how my personal experiences as an educator and a community leader affected the project. Generally speaking, my professional knowledge and personal views on formal education in the US have totally changed since I started this research. Not only did I become a better writer and researcher, but I also gained a somewhat deeper understanding of other topics through reading my peer researchers' papers. As a learner, I always thought that a Master's Degree in Education would be sufficient; now I feel a genuine

thirst for more knowledge about my research questions and other topics as well. In the next section, I will go through my personal reflection and major learnings throughout the process of working on this project.

Personal Reflection and Major Learnings

Looking back, I am satisfied with my choice of the research topic and I feel grateful to my professors and class peers who encouraged me to keep the one topic I have passion for. Not only did I learn a lot of information on the different topics and sections in this research paper, but as more time went by, I also found that these findings are adding to my personal joy as daily achievements. The topic of choice does not just represent my interest and passion, but it also has roots in my culture and Islam as my religion.

My first major learning from this project as a researcher is to make professional connections through professional contributions such as articles, YouTube videos, and other different publications. Examples of that could be best portrayed when, through research, I found a TEDx Talks under the title of “Raising a Muslim daughter in America | Ranna Abduljawad | TEDxFSCJ” by one of the parents that I get to meet at least twice Monday through Friday during drop-off and pick-up times. I connected with the parent about it only to find out that she participated in a lot of interfaith events focused on Muslim parents in the US. In the same exact way, I came across a handbook for teachers and administrators that was co-written by a close friend of mine and published by Hamline University. The handbook is published under the title of *Accommodating and Educating Somali Students in Minnesota Schools*. Another example is a school principal that was my direct supervisor in the past and a contributor and a co-author in a picture Somali - English dictionary and the author of *Somalia and the Somalis - A Handbook for Teachers*. Last but not least, the fact that I am being introduced to many local educators,

researchers, and book authors who are Minnesota residents. The direct result of this process is having a network of professional educators, which makes me personally feel that this is the most precious wealth that every educator should secure.

Of course, some of these learnings were unexpected, but I would like to think of them as pleasant surprises and life-changing experiences. They are pleasant surprises because they are eye-opening when it comes to my overall educational experiences. They are also life-changing experiences because the chances are that I would apply my learnings in my everyday professional life as an educator and a stakeholder.

In the next lines, I will reflect on my major learnings as a writer, a learner, and an educator. My learnings as a writer include three main points. First, through necessity and urgency, I learned how to be more organized and more thorough. I have always used highlighting, numbering, and underlining as ways of organizing my writings, but not that heavy nor frequent. The formal and professional nature of this project compelled me to pay undivided attention to the smallest details of organizational skills and to carry out this learning throughout the course of the project from start to finish.

As a researcher, I scrutinized a lot of research readings and could not help noticing a lot of grammar and spelling errors. I learned to be more consistent in checking these errors and more vigilant in eliminating them.

My audience, as discussed in chapter three, includes a lot of Muslim immigrant families who are not proficient in English; English could be the third or fourth language used in spoken and written communication. To address this issue, I used simple language and used term definitions where applicable.

The first and foremost essential skill that I developed as a learner is staying focused and avoiding distractions. Through repeated experiences, I have come to realize that once being distracted, it is hard to bring your attention to the exact point where you left off. Oftentimes, I picked up my work from different and random sections of the project for the sole purpose of keeping myself going. In general, keeping focused helped me achieve more in the research and writing processes more efficiently and effectively.

As an educator, researcher, writer, and learner, my precious takeaway as a lifelong lesson is to appreciate other cultures through gaining more knowledge and thus understanding them. Within every culture, families view, value, and balance it differently among other factors such as religion and personal preferences. For example, two Muslim families attend the same public schools; given the option between two choices, religion matters the most, then culture comes next; to the other family, culture may come first before religious considerations. Oftentimes, families try to have a balance between the two or place personal preferences first and then follow religious considerations and cultural norms.

Throughout the writing process of this project, I kept thinking about making this PD as current and as valuable as possible for all stakeholders to benefit from. The PD is an interactive one as I intentionally left the door open for questions, welcomed feedback, and anticipated different challenges. The PD starts with me but does not end at one person; rather, the conversation keeps going with Muslim families adding richness to it, finding more solutions to their problems, and through an effort, closing on that gap one day in the near future. There is also a comment page where families could add any other variables that they think pertain to their situation, religion, culture, or personal preferences.

In this concluding chapter, Chapter Four of the capstone, I followed a very important personal writing tactic that I followed in Chapter One as they are both reflective narratives: to outline my ideas, organize my sections and subsections, and generate a rough draft before I look at other capstone project examples in Hamline's digital repository. This way I am making sure to voice out my thoughts and share my personal experiences before getting influenced by other researchers' opinions and philosophies and being on the verge of adapting to or adopting other ideas that are not genuinely mine, which I view as a steep slippery slope in the wrong direction.

To sum up, in the previous section, I covered my personal reflection on the paper as a whole and added my major learnings and takeaways. Having covered this section, I will now move to the next main section: the literature review.

Literature Review Revisit

As stated in Chapter One, I was inspired to pursue this project by Muslim families trying to find solutions to the challenges their high school children are facing in the public school system. However, revisiting Chapter Two over and over again proved that some resources/parts stand out more than others do. This also means that these resources/parts were directly related to that specific section being researched, adamantly reinforcing the idea or strongly speaking against it.

Looking back at Chapter Two, I could clearly see that I was influenced by Haynes' (1998, 2007) work in more than one aspect. Through Haynes, I now know that the Council on Islamic Education (CIE) identified the needs of Muslim students in the public school system while upholding their faith. In a nutshell, Haynes (1998) summarizes,

Local and national organizations have urged public schools to make accommodations for Muslim students so that they may practice their faith. These accommodations, already

implemented to some degree in many states, help practicing Muslims attending public schools meet very real religious needs. However, some schools, as state-sponsored institutions, may find some of the identified accommodations difficult to make (p. 18).

He provides some solutions for the state as in being balanced and not providing any kind of extensive attention or support without providing it to other beliefs. Not only does Haynes shed light on many important issues that face Muslim students in the high school, but he also offers very EDUCATED suggestions that suit not just Muslim students but EVERY student who may choose to go the same routes/options. Examples of these issues include the daily worship, the Friday congregational worship, dietary needs, fasting, mixing the sexes, Islamic holidays, modesty and Muslim modes of dress, and curriculum issues. Here are some of his suggestions:

- The daily worship (salah), “Allow students to conduct their daily prayers in an empty room on campus during lunchtime and/or breaks.”
- The Friday congregational worship (Jumah), “Allow students to perform the Friday worship in an empty room on campus during lunchtime. Allow students to be excused for the time required to attend a local masjid and to make up any missed work.”
- Dietary needs, “Muslim students can be asked to bring halal meat dishes for parties, picnics, and potlucks. Vegetarian alternatives can be provided for Muslim students who only eat meat available directly from Muslim sources. Baked goods made with vegetable shortening should be requested for such events in order to avoid products or foods containing lard or animal shortening. Teachers should be made aware of gelatin as a source of pork derivatives when they provide treats.”

- Fasting, “If students eat lunch in a common cafeteria, Muslim students should be allowed to spend lunchtime during Ramadan fasting in an alternative location, such as a study hall or library. Physical education teachers should provide alternatives to rigorous physical exercise during Ramadan.”
- Mixing the sexes, “Well-meaning school personnel should avoid putting unnecessary stress on youngsters by encouraging them to participate in what they consider "normal" socializing activities such as dances or giving the impression that a student who is not involved in these activities is antisocial or socially immature and needs to be coerced into participation.”
- Islamic holidays, “Muslim students should be given excused absences to participate in the two major religious holidays in Islam. School officials and teachers are requested not to schedule standardized testing or exams on these holidays and to allow for makeup time on important assignments so that Muslim students can avoid any adverse effects upon their academic efforts.”
- Modesty and Muslim modes of dress, “During P.E. activities allow female Muslim students to wear long-sleeved T-shirts and sweat pants, instead of tank tops and shorts, and male students to wear long shorts. Also, Muslim girls who observe hijab must be allowed to wear appropriate modest attire and head covering in mixed classes. Moreover, swimwear that covers more of the body than most swimsuits should be allowed for Muslim students.”
- Curriculum issues, “Instructional materials and classroom activities should adhere to the civic framework and approaches to teaching about religion. As it is very common for such materials to contain major errors and misconceptions that

contradict the guidelines for accurate and authentic portrayal of Islam, Muslim students should be allowed the opportunity to prepare research reports and state their opinions regarding errors they have identified in mandated material.” (pp. 19-21)

As a summary, in this literature review revisit section, I have focused on the writer/author that has influenced me the most throughout working on Chapter Two. I have included a summary of his thoughts on Muslim students’ issues in public schools and his suggestions to address them. In the next few lines, I will shed light on the implications and limitations I faced through this research project.

Implications and Limitations

One of the implications encountered through the research project actually provides me with a double-fold sense of gratification. First, this research project will inspire parents who are in charge of making family decisions for their children. Second, hopefully, it will help school administrations, who are in charge of making educational decisions, act in the right direction when Muslim student issues in the public schools are on the table.

“Who saw this coming?” After moving permanently to the United States in 2000 and residing in Minnesota since 2003, I feel that my most immediate limitation is moving out to another state due to COVID-19 and accepting a job there. Most of my conversations, observations, and takeaways in this research project were based in Minnesota, and I was hoping to be able to share everything in person, not just virtually. I do not think at all that it is impossible if practiced virtually, but sharing results might be limited because of that. Advocating for this research project and sharing it with Muslim families call for virtual and in-person/on-site communication.

For the purpose of this research project, this PD is not meant to be an all-inclusive one that includes all Muslim students' issues faced in the public school system yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It is meant to be one that leads to more conversations between student families and school administrators, a PD that encourages more educators to be advocates for their students, and a source of illumination for future researchers to build on it facing the same or different types of issues that are brewing right now. As for this PD, my hope is that I share it with public schools' administrators and Muslim families during the 2021-2022 school year teacher workshops, in-service, professional development, or PLC days if it is all possible. At the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, a survey that covers all areas/sections covered in this PD will be conducted in some public schools where a heavy Muslim population attends prior to sharing the PD with all stakeholders involved. After sharing the PD, there will be a way to leave the discussion door open, find suggestions/solutions to new issues, and again share the results of the new educational cycle/phase in the life of the Muslim student facing issues in the public schools.

Future Research and Recommendations

My main recommendations could be summarized in Haynes' (2011) educated recommendation. He suggests that in order to avoid conflict and find common ground, public schools should include all sides in the decision-making progress. He further argues that since public schools belong to all citizens and serve the entire community, local policies should be developed with input from all stakeholders in the community. Given the opportunity (and First Amendment ground rules), most parents, local leaders, students, educators, and school board members will commit to principled dialogue and work for policies and practices that serve the common good.

I am planning to communicate my results with key stakeholders and community members in multiple schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts as they get to face and deal firsthand with the issues specified here. Once this PD is published, I am hoping that parents, in particular, and all stakeholders where Muslim students are facing issues in the public school system, in general, find it an eye-opening opportunity not to necessarily acculturate themselves with the Muslim community but to familiarize themselves more with their Muslim students' culture and religion. In every school that Muslim students attend, I am hoping more educators be more proactive in leading the initiative and opening these conversations with Muslim student parents rather than being reactive when such issues come up to the surface causing tension and requiring immediate attention.

Summary

Throughout this paper, I have been trying to answer the questions: *What are the expectations of some Muslim parents of high-school-age students?* and *What are schools doing to reasonably meet these expectations while adhering to Federal, State laws and guidelines?* Chapter Four started an overview, including how chapter four is planned to be designed. Next, I highlighted my personal reflection on this research project as a whole. Under my personal reflection, I also included my major learnings as a researcher, a writer, and a learner throughout the course of the capstone project process. The following main section included the literature review in Chapter Two, focusing on the parts that proved to be most important and new connections and understandings established. The next section provided implications and limitations that I encountered since the start of the project. The final section showcased future research projects and recommendations and ended with this summary.

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