
PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF HIJAB IN THE EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM GIRLS IN NON-MUSLIM COUNTRIES, AN ISLAMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceived barriers to education faced by Muslim girls wearing the Hijab in non-Muslim-majority countries, integrating Islamic perspectives and psychological assessments. The Hijab, a symbol of modesty and religious identity in Islam, holds significant spiritual and cultural value. This study examines the relationship between the Hijab and its impact on the educational experiences of Muslim girls. Drawing from Quranic teachings, Hadith, and psychological frameworks, the study emphasizes the Hijab's role in fostering spiritual empowerment and self-respect. However, Hijab-wearing Muslim girls often encounter challenges such as discrimination, social exclusion, and cultural misunderstandings, which can hinder their academic performance, self-esteem, and social integration. Using a qualitative review of existing literature and data collected through a questionnaire-based survey, this study highlights the dual role of the Hijab as both a source of empowerment and a potential barrier to educational access. Recommendations are provided for educational institutions to address these challenges, including the implementation of awareness programs, inclusive policies, and supportive networks. By fostering an environment of understanding and inclusivity, this research suggests that Muslim girls can overcome these barriers

and succeed in their educational journeys while maintaining their religious and cultural identity.

Keywords: *Perceived Barriers, Education, Hijab, Muslim Girls, Non-Muslim Countries, Islamic, Psychological Assessment.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the Hijab in the lives of Muslim women, especially in educational settings, has been a topic of ongoing discussion, particularly in non-Muslim-majority countries. For Muslim girls, wearing the Hijab is more than just a personal choice; it is a deeply held religious and cultural practice that represents modesty, identity, and devotion to Allāh. In the Qur’ān, Allāh commands both men and women to observe modesty in their appearance and behavior. As it says in Sūrah An-Nūr (24:31):

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not to display their adornment except that which [ordinarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests...” (Qur’ān 24:31)

This verse emphasizes the importance of the Hijab for women, not just as clothing, but as a symbol of commitment to Islamic values. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) also stressed modesty in his teachings, as seen in the Ḥadīth: *“Modesty is part of faith”* (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim).

For Muslim girls who wear the Hijab, it is an act of obedience to Allāh and a way to express their religious identity while promoting dignity and self-respect in a society where they may

face marginalization. Despite its significance, however, the Hijab can sometimes be seen as a barrier in non-Muslim-majority countries, where cultural and religious practices are often misunderstood or not widely accepted. Muslim girls who choose to wear it may face challenges, including discrimination, social exclusion, and academic difficulties. These barriers can affect their educational experiences, self-esteem, and overall well-being.

This study aims to explore the perceived barriers to education faced by Muslim girls who wear the Hijab in non-Muslim-majority countries. It will examine how the Hijab shapes their educational experiences—both empowering them and presenting challenges in multicultural settings. The study will also look at the psychological coping strategies these girls use, particularly their faith-based practices and resilience, and the role of educational institutions in supporting or hindering their academic progress.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 *Hijab* and Educational Barriers

The *Hijab*, a symbol of modesty and religious identity in Islam, is deeply rooted in Quranic teachings. In Sūrah An-Nūr (24:31), Allāh commands believing women to observe modesty, including covering their heads. For many Muslim women, wearing the Hijab is an act of obedience and a reflection of faith. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge, as reflected in the Ḥadīth: "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" (Sunan Ibn Mājah). However, in non-Muslim-majority countries, societal

attitudes and policies often create barriers to education for Muslim girls.

2.2 Discrimination and Educational Access

Policies in several non-Muslim countries, such as Hijab bans in France and parts of India, create significant barriers to education. These policies force students to choose between their religious beliefs and educational opportunities, contradicting Islamic principles of religious freedom (Sūrah Al-Baqarah, 2:256). Discrimination, both systemic and interpersonal, further compounds these challenges. Research by Jasperse et al. (2012) and Sheridan (2006) indicates that Hijabi students frequently experience microaggressions, stereotyping, and exclusion, impacting their academic participation and attendance.

2.3 Psychological Impact on Academic Performance

The stress caused by discrimination can affect Hijabi students' psychological well-being. Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) suggests that chronic exposure to prejudice can lead to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Studies by Nadal et al. (2012) and Jasperse et al. (2012) show that these stressors often lead to reluctance in participating in classroom discussions and extracurricular activities, further hindering academic performance.

2.4 Protective Factors and Resilience

Despite these challenges, many *Hijabi* students show remarkable resilience, often drawing strength from their faith. The Quran encourages perseverance in adversity, stating:

"Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease" (Sūrah Ash-Sharḥ, 94:6). *Hijabi* students often view wearing the Hijab as a form of worship and empowerment, which bolsters their self-esteem and life satisfaction. Abdul-Khalek (2011) found that Muslim girls with strong religious convictions reported higher life satisfaction. Community support also plays a crucial role in enhancing resilience.

2.5 Hijab, Body Image, and Objectification

The Hijab offers psychological benefits, particularly in shaping positive body image and reducing societal objectification. Studies by Swami et al. (2014) and Dunkel et al. (2009) indicate that *Hijabi* women report higher body satisfaction and are less pressured to conform to Western beauty norms. This allows *Hijabi* students to focus more on their academic achievements than societal expectations based on appearance.

2.6 Academic Integration and Participation

Inclusivity in educational environments fosters greater participation and leadership among *Hijabi* students. Haddad et al. (2016) found that when schools support diversity, students are more likely to engage in extracurricular activities. However, a lack of inclusivity often leads to isolation, as seen in Sheridan's (2006) study, which found that *Hijabi* students may avoid certain subjects or activities due to perceived incompatibility with their attire.

2.7 Religiosity and Life Satisfaction

Religious conviction plays a significant role in life satisfaction and academic engagement. Studies by ten Kate et al. (2017) and

Abdul-Khalek (2011) link higher religiosity to greater life satisfaction and resilience in *Hijabi* students. For instance, Jasperse et al. (2012) observed that religious conviction helps *Hijabi* students maintain resilience despite discrimination.

2.8 Research Gap

Although substantial research highlights the challenges faced by *Hijabi* students, there are gaps in understanding their long-term academic outcomes. Future studies should focus on evaluating interventions that reduce discrimination and foster inclusivity. Additionally, more research is needed on the experiences of *Hijabi* students in diverse non-Muslim contexts and on psychological resilience factors that support their academic success.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study explores the educational experiences of Muslim girls who wear the Hijab, focusing on how it impacts their identity, self-confidence, academic outcomes, and the challenges they face, including discrimination and cultural bias. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of these experiences.

3.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was used to gather data from Muslim girls wearing the Hijab in educational settings. This design allowed the researcher to collect responses at a single point in time, making it suitable for understanding the

experiences of Hijab-wearing students in various cultural contexts.

3.2 Participants

The study included 33 Muslim girls aged 16 to above 25 who wore the Hijab while attending educational institutions, both in Muslim-majority and non-Muslim majority countries. Participants were selected through convenience sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

3.3.1 Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire with 20 items was developed to assess participants' experiences of wearing the Hijab in educational environments. The questions addressed key areas such as empowerment through the Hijab (self-confidence, academic motivation), experiences of discrimination or exclusion (bias, stereotyping), coping mechanisms (e.g., *Tawakkul*, prayer, Quran recitation), and the influence of teachers and educators on their educational experiences. The open-ended questions allowed participants to share detailed personal insights.

The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms, ensuring accessibility and anonymity. All questions were provided in English for the participants.

3.3.2 Literature Research

In addition to the survey, literature research was conducted to supplement the data, providing background on the impact of

the Hijab on educational outcomes and relevant psychological theories.

3.4 Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Data:** Responses to the closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies) to identify patterns in how the Hijab affected self-confidence, academic motivation, and the types of challenges participants faced.
- **Qualitative Data:** The open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, providing deeper insight into the psychological and emotional impact of wearing the Hijab in educational environments.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were informed about the study's purpose and provided written consent before participation.
- **Confidentiality:** All data were kept confidential, and participants' identities were anonymized during analysis.
- **Right to Withdraw:** Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.

4. ANALYSIS: OVERVIEW OF THE DATA

The dataset captures the experiences of Muslim girls wearing the Hijab in non-Muslim educational environments. Participants were categorized based on the duration of wearing the Hijab and their perceived educational impact. The key results include data on the prevalence of discrimination and its relationship to the Hijab-wearing experience.

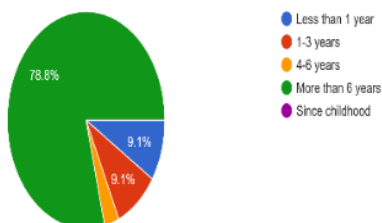
4.1 Duration of Wearing the Hijab

Table 1. Duration of Wearing the Hijab

Duration	Participants
Less than 1 year	3
1–3 years	3
4–6 years	1
More than 6 years	26

How long have you been wearing Hijab?

33 responses



4.1.1 Positive Impact

Majority of long-term wearers: 19 out of 26 participants (more than 6 years) reported a positive impact. This suggests that prolonged wearing of the Hijab fosters a stronger sense of identity, confidence, and focus in educational settings. Moderate response among newer wearers: 2 out of 3 participants who wore the Hijab for 1–3 years reported a positive impact, indicating that the hijab can still serve as a source of empowerment even in its earlier stages.

4.1.2 Neutral Impact

Among long-term wearers, 3 out of 26 reported a neutral impact, suggesting that, for some, the environment or institutional support may influence the perceived impact more than the Hijab itself.

4.1.3 Negative Impact

Participants across all durations reported negative impacts: 2 participants who wore the Hijab for less than 1 year, 1 participant who wore it for 1–3 years, 4 participants who wore it for more than 6 years. These reports highlight the persistence of challenges such as social stigma, exclusion, or misunderstandings despite prolonged hijab-wearing.

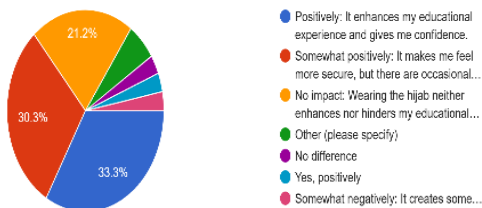
4.2 Impact of Wearing *Hijab* on Educational Experience

Table 2. Impact of Wearing *Hijab* on Educational Experience

Impact	Responses
Positive	22
Negative	8
Neutral	3

How do you feel wearing the hijab affects your educational experience?

33 responses



4.2.1 Chi-Square Test for Independence

A Chi-Square test was performed to determine the relationship between the duration of wearing the Hijab and its perceived impact on the educational experience. Null Hypothesis: No significant relationship between the duration of wearing the Hijab and the perceived educational impact.

Chi-Square Calculation: Chi-Square statistic = 10.73, Degrees of freedom = 6, p-value = 0.099

4.2.2 Interpretation

Since the p-value (0.099) is greater than the significance level of 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. There is no statistically significant relationship between the duration of wearing the Hijab and its perceived impact on educational experience. However, a trend suggests that longer durations of hijab-wearing tend to have a more positive impact, warranting further exploration with larger or more diverse samples.

4.3 Discrimination due to Wearing Hijab

Table 3. Discrimination due to Wearing Hijab

Response	Percentage
yes	42.42%
No	42.42%
Not sure	15.15%

The prevalence of discrimination is a significant factor affecting the educational experience for many Hijab-wearing students. This data reveals a complex picture. While some participants experience significant challenges, others report little to no issues. This variation could depend on factors such as institutional support, peer relationships, or individual resilience.

4.3.1 *Impact of Discrimination*

Supportive environments: For many, discrimination is mitigated by institutional support and peer relationships. The fact that 42.42% of participants reported no discrimination underscores the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive environment to combat bias.

4.3.2 *Communication and Interaction Challenges*

Several participants highlighted key challenges related to wearing the Hijab:

- Visibility and Communication Issues: Difficulty with eye contact and communication, leading to feelings of isolation or being misunderstood.
- Stereotyping and Judgment: Many participants reported being judged based on appearance rather than abilities, reflecting societal stereotypes of Hijab-wearing women as oppressed or less capable.
- Rudeness or Bias from Institutional Staff: Some participants experienced discrimination or unresponsiveness from institutional staff, indicating bias from authority figures.
- Cultural Misunderstanding: The Hijab was often misunderstood, with some participants facing intrusive requests to remove it or inappropriate comments, revealing a lack of respect for cultural differences.

5. DISCUSSION

This study provides insights into the experiences of Muslim women wearing the Hijab in educational settings, highlighting both empowering and challenging aspects of their academic journeys.

5.1 Empowerment Through the *Hijab*

The Hijab enhances self-confidence and academic motivation, serving as a symbol of religious commitment and personal dignity. Many participants noted that it reinforced self-discipline and purpose, consistent with Dunkel, Davidson, and Qurashi (2009) and Ahmed (2013). This empowerment, rooted in Islamic psychology, fosters resilience in academic environments.

5.2 Challenges and Discrimination

Despite its empowering role, the Hijab also presents challenges, especially in non-Muslim-majority settings. About 40% of participants experienced discrimination, including microaggressions and overt stereotyping, reflecting broader societal Islamophobia. This aligns with Sheridan (2006) and Jasperse, Ward, and Jose (2012), who documented the psychological stress caused by religious discrimination.

5.3 Faith and Coping Mechanisms: The Role of *Tawakkul*

Faith-based coping mechanisms, such as *Tawakkul* (trust in Allāh) and prayer, helped participants manage challenges, fostering emotional resilience and offering psychological comfort, as noted by Abdul-Khalek (2011) and Saeed (2019).

These practices act as psychological buffers and reinforce emotional stability.

5.4 Institutional Support and Cultural Competence

Teacher support and institutional attitudes were crucial, with 60% of participants reporting positive experiences. However, 30% encountered bias, underscoring the need for cultural competence in educational settings. Haddad, Smith, and Moore (2016) emphasized the importance of inclusive policies to support Hijab-wearing students.

5.5 Regional and Cultural Variations

Participants in Muslim-majority countries reported positive experiences, while those in non-Muslim-majority settings faced misunderstanding and bias. These findings align with Swami et al. (2014), who noted regional differences in Hijab perceptions. In Islamophobic environments, students often felt pressured to justify their practices, leading to psychological strain (Sheridan, 2006).

5.6 Implications for Future Research

This study highlights the empowering yet challenging experiences of Hijab-wearing Muslim women in education. Faith-based coping mechanisms, like *Tawakkul*, provide resilience, but discrimination persists, especially in non-Muslim contexts. Educational institutions must implement inclusive policies to support diversity. Future research should explore institutional interventions and the intersectionality of experiences based on ethnicity, socio-economic status, and nationality.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The experience of Muslim girls wearing the Hijab in non-Muslim-majority countries is shaped by both empowerment and significant challenges. The Hijab, as a symbol of modesty and religious identity, plays a vital role in their educational journey. It offers a sense of spiritual fulfillment and self-confidence, but also marks them as different in societies where cultural and religious practices may not always be understood or accepted. Many Muslim girls face barriers such as discrimination, social exclusion, and cultural misunderstandings, which can negatively affect their self-esteem, academic motivation, and well-being. However, their resilience, supported by faith and family, enables them to navigate these challenges and succeed academically.

To foster a more inclusive and supportive environment, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Educational Awareness and Sensitivity Training:** Implement training programs for teachers and students to raise awareness about the cultural and religious significance of the Hijab, reducing misunderstandings and discrimination.
2. **Supportive Policies:** Establish clear policies that protect the rights of Muslim girls to wear the Hijab without fear of harassment, promoting respect and security in educational settings.
3. **Peer Support Networks:** Develop peer support groups for Hijab-wearing students to provide mutual

encouragement, share experiences, and foster a sense of belonging.

4. **Counseling Services:** Offer counseling services tailored to address the unique challenges Muslim girls face, including discrimination and social exclusion, with counselors familiar with Islamic values to build confidence and resilience.
5. **Empowerment Initiatives:** Organize mentorship programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns to celebrate the strength and achievements of Hijab-wearing students, boosting academic motivation.
6. **Inclusive Curriculum:** Incorporate diverse cultural and religious perspectives into the curriculum to promote understanding, eliminate stereotypes, and foster interfaith respect.

By implementing these measures, educational institutions can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Hijab-wearing Muslim girls, empowering them to thrive academically and contribute to a harmonious society.

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