

HOW EDUCATIONAL LEADERS INFLUENCE THE EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM
STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By

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To my parents, Dr. Mohammad and Salma Yunus, who have always supported and encouraged me, giving me the confidence to pursue excellence in all aspects of my life.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C.A.I.R. Council on American-Islamic Relations

MSA Muslim Student Association

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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By

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In the U. S., Muslim students have faced bias, bullying, and Islamophobia since the attacks on 9/11. This qualitative study aimed to investigate how educational leaders influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. Data for this exploratory investigation was collected via three one-on-one, semi-structured interviews of educational leaders who serve Muslim students in public schools. Although there were some limitations, the interviews resulted in three themes as findings. The first theme was that educational leaders' cultural knowledge was used to implement accommodations that influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The second theme was that educational leaders' promoting social justice through inclusive practices influences the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The third theme was that educational leaders' cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude and critical self-reflection influences the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. In conclusion, educational leaders must seek knowledge about their Muslim students' cultural and religious practices and must use this knowledge to implement accommodations for Muslim students. Educational leaders must strive to build relationships with Muslim students to understand their experiences and create warm,

inviting, and welcoming spaces for them. Educational leaders should care about Muslim students' experiences in schools by informing the school staff of the basic needs of Muslim students. Educational leaders must self-reflect and think critically about their own beliefs and values to be better suited to execute decisions, practices, and policies that influence students of all cultural and religious backgrounds.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In the U.S. (United States), the inequitable treatment of diverse, minority groups of children in public schools has been a concern for educational leaders for decades (Coleman, 1966; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Leithwood, 2021, Milner, 2012). Many researchers found that racial/ethnic discrimination, or unfair treatment based on one's race or ethnicity, is common for minority students (Benner & Graham, 2013; Coleman, 1966, Ladson-Billings, 2006, Milner, 2012). Minority students face challenges and inequities because of how others respond to their ethnicity and religious affiliation (Leithwood, 2021). Immigrant students are a minority group who face inequities because of how others respond to their lack of citizenship status, and students with minority religious affiliations endure discrimination by others due to differences in belief systems (Uemura, 2017). Educational leaders are at the forefront of influencing minority students' experiences in schools (Leithwood, 2021).

A minority group that faces inequitable treatment based on religious affiliation is the group of Muslim students (Aronson et al., 2016). Notably, there is an intersectionality of race/ethnicity, language, immigration status, and religion that exists for many Muslim students. Reagan (2020) highlighted several characteristics of the U.S. Muslim population, indicating a marginalized identity. Muslims originate from 80 different countries, making them an extremely diverse group both ethnically and linguistically (Regan, 2020). Most Muslims are immigrants, as some 64% of American Muslims were born in a different country; however, an increasing number of American Muslims are now native-born (Reagan, 2020). Reagan (2020) investigated that the number and percentage of the Muslim population in America are growing rapidly, as by the year

2050, Muslims will comprise America's second largest religious group. Still, educational leaders lack familiarity with Muslim students' religious and cultural practices, which are fundamentally different from the dominant culture (Bennouna et al., 2021), and underestimate the cultural gaps Muslim students experience between school culture and home culture (Oberoi & Trickett, 2018).

Muslim students' experiences have been affected by school leadership's lack of sufficient knowledge of Islamic practices and traditions and inability to ensure that their teachers are culturally responsive to Muslim students' needs and that the mission and vision of the school instill cultural responsiveness (Khalifa et al., 2016). Bennouna et al. (2021) discovered that school staff members struggled to handle perceived cultural differences in their interactions with Muslim families. Further, Duckworth et al. (2019) found that injustice and inequity were driving school conflict and preventing a peaceful school culture. Nelson and Guerra (2014) proposed that "the vast majority of educators, including educational leaders, may hold deficit beliefs about culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students and often have insufficient cultural knowledge to recognize and respond to culture clashes" (p. 88).

There is a need to understand how aspiring school leaders understand what it means to promote, challenge, and address issues of social justice and equity in K-12 schools. (Boske et al., 2017, p. 362)

This study aimed to contribute to the literature on the behaviors, practices, and leadership decisions of educational leaders who serve Muslim students in public schools to create a peaceful school culture for all. While the focus of this study is on religion, the evidence related to race/ethnicity and immigration status will be discussed as well.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers determined that ethnic/minority and immigrant youth are at increased risk of bullying victimization (DeNike & Gordon, 2020; Espelage & Kazak, 2016). DeNike and Gordon (2020) defined bullying as a “physical, verbal, or psychological attack that is intended to cause fear, distress, or harm; with an imbalance of power where a more powerful child, or children, oppresses less powerful ones; and the behavior is repeated over time” (p. 181). Furthermore, the more frequent the bullying attacks on a student, the more negative mental health effects increase, and feelings of safety at school decrease (DeNike & Gordon, 2020; Walters & Espelage, 2018). Some of the negative mental health effects included low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and addiction to alcohol or drugs (DeNike & Gordon, 2020; Walters & Espelage, 2018). DeNike and Gordon (2020) asserted that the effects of bullying alter the psychosocial functioning of school outcomes, including disengagement and low sense of school belonging. Absenteeism and school dropout rates were also linked to school violence and bullying (DeNike & Gordon, 2020). In addition, negative school responses to bullying that focus on the perpetrators, including shaming, punishing, and expulsion, rather than on integrating the victims that were involved, often alienate those students, widen the disparities of equity, and fail to repair the harm (DeNike & Gordon, 2020). Schools are facing anti-bullying measures as a public policy concern and are required by federal laws to tackle discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and bullying based on such characteristics as immigration status, religion, race or ethnicity, and nationality (DeNike & Gordon, 2020).

Muslims are one of the religious groups that suffer from the highest percentage of hate crimes in relation to religious affiliation (Aronson et al., 2016). The post-9/11

climate in the United States has increased violence against Muslims; specifically, incidents of hate crimes, harassment, and school bullying have been increasing since 2001 (Bajaj et al., 2016). “The Trump administration actively targeted, scapegoated, and traumatized immigrant communities across the country through executive orders and policy shifts” (Villavicencio et al., 2021, p. 295). Donald Trump’s election campaign was centered on an anti-Muslim agenda (Liou & Hermanns, 2017). For example, during the Trump campaign, a website designed to promote hate against Muslims posted messages to encourage readers to make Muslims feel unwanted and scared (Huang & Cornell, 2019). Moreover, Duckworth et al. (2019) reported:

Over the past several years, both anti-Muslim bias and anti-Muslim hate crimes have increased nationwide. Documented anti-Muslim bias incidents went from 1,408 in 2015 to 2,599 in 2017. Nationwide anti-Muslim hate crimes increased from 180 in 2015 to 300 in 2017. These include hate crimes, street harassment, harassment by officials during travel, in neighborhoods and at schools. Since 2015, anti-Muslim bias incidents have increased 85%. (p. 236)

Muslim students were affected by the increase in anti-Muslim bias and hate crimes. Bajaj et al. (2016) classified five specific forms of bullying against Muslim students: (1) name calling and verbal bullying, including using the words, “terrorist”, “raghead”, “diaper head”, or “towelhead” (p. 491), (2) physical assault and intimidation that included violently removing hijab, or female head covering (3) religious-based verbal or physical bullying that included telling Muslim students they cannot be American if they are not Christian, (4) attacks on families and communities that included statements such as “go back to your country” (p. 491), and (5) ridicule or taunting based on the foods students eat, the clothes they wear, or their smell. Similarly, Houry and Sullivan (2016) documented that Muslim students may experience acts of bullying and harassment by peers and discriminatory comments from school staff due to the

widespread misconceptions, hate, and fear of Muslims. Correspondingly, Oberoi and Trickett (2018) noted that Muslim high school students experienced increased distress from frequent harassment related to representing Islam and religious discrimination.

Muslims of different ethnicities and genders face discrimination and prejudice related to expressing their religious identity which may need attention. GoForth et al. (2016) proclaimed, “Arab American youths, particularly those who are Muslim, experience discrimination and prejudice associated with their ethnicity and religion” (p. 192). Pakistani Muslim students were constantly asked to prove their genuineness in the U.S., making it challenging to combine their American identity with a Muslim one (Villavicencio et al., 2021). Hossain (2017) learned that 29% of female Muslim students who wore hijabs in one high school in California said there was offensive touching or pulling of their hijab by classmates. Accordingly, Duckworth et al. (2019) acknowledged that students who prefer to characterize themselves with a particular faith practice are undoubtedly identifiable in the clothing that they wear and how they act, especially female Muslim high school students.

Aronson (2020) observed, “the mismatch between the predominantly White teaching force and teachers’ abilities to effectively teach children different from themselves warrants attention” (p.1118). Henry et al. (2021) believed there is a lack of educational leaders of color that is a problem that has been exacerbated by the lack of teachers of color, since principals are required to have years of teaching experience before they are qualified to take on a leadership role. Liou and Hermanns (2017) predicted:

By the year 2050, it is estimated that white Americans will no longer make up the majority of the population in the USA. Since the school system has

historically been envisioned as the bedrock of democracy, there is a pressing need for the educational system to respond to issues related to this demographic change and to prepare effective school leaders to establish conditions of equity and excellence for all children across multiple forms of diversity in their local schools. (p. 661)

Villavicencio et al. (2021) deduced that the lack of communication and belonging among religious communities in schools causes significant deficiencies in meaningful engagement with minoritized families or sufficient attention to their students' needs and concerns. If the problem is not addressed, the fixation on cultural differences based on inappropriate assumptions may interfere with the quality of education they receive regardless of their racial or ethnic identity and current socioeconomic position (Bennouna et al., 2021).

In the literature, studies of Muslim students' experiences have been developed by researchers for various purposes; however, the research on educational leaders serving Muslim students and their families is lacking. For example, Seward & Khan (2015) studied the experiences of Muslim American students in high schools and suggested recommendations to school counselors in addressing the development of Muslim American students. Similarly, Isik-Ercan (2015) interviewed Muslim children in schools in America and proposed insights to teachers on how to respond to the biases that Muslim children experience in schools. Further, although researchers have studied educational leaders who serve Muslim students, the setting may not be in public schools. Ezzani and Brooks (2019) examined educational leadership exclusively in Islamic schools in the U.S. While other studies reported administrators' lack of understanding regarding Muslim faith, culture, and practices. For example, Shirazi (2018) described the experiences of Muslim students who endured a suspension of a Muslim Student Association (MSA) by an administrator at the school. According to

Shirazi (2018), “The principal's decision to suspend the MSA was characterized by a narrow understanding of the purpose of the group and the identities of the student members” (p. 519). Thus, while these studies exist in the literature, they are limited in addressing practices of educational leadership who serve Muslim students attending public schools. This study addressed the gaps in the literature on the subject by identifying how educational leaders accommodate Muslim students to practice their religion during school.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate the knowledge, behaviors, policies, and practical strategies of educational leaders who influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. In addressing educational leaders' knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and experiences, teachers and administrators may find best practices in establishing a school culture that is warm, welcoming, and inviting for all students, regardless of cultural or religious background. The concepts of culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership were examined which may provide a framework for educational leaders to use in making an impact on students with various religious affiliations in schools. Specifically, this study determined and illustrated educational leaders' practices, behaviors, interactions, policies, and leadership decisions that accommodated Muslim students' ability to practice their religion in schools by answering the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How do educational leaders describe their cultural knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices?

2. How do educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public-school environment?
3. How do educational leaders respond to accommodation requests of Muslim students expressing their religion during school?

Conceptual Framework

For this study, as I was interested in the level of cultural knowledge, cultural responsiveness, and practices of social justice in educational leadership, the conceptual framework combined culturally responsive leadership with social justice leadership. These two theories fit together because of the goals of the practices of culturally responsive leaders and social justice leaders who aim to create nurturing, safe school environments for students. Cultural responsiveness is at the heart of social justice (Barakat et al., 2019). Educational leaders who practice social justice must be culturally competent to be better equipped to fulfill the mission of creating a school environment where all students of any diverse background can achieve academic success (Bustamante et al., 2009; Barakat et al., 2019).

Cultural Knowledge and Understanding

The conceptual framework used to develop the first research question was based on studies that described how educational leaders with cultural knowledge and understanding of diverse students influenced those students' experiences at school. Bustamante et al. (2009) conducted a study to determine how educational leaders' cultural knowledge impacted schoolwide cultural competence and how well schools respond to the needs of diverse groups of students. Bustamante et al. (2009) recommended school leaders should reflect on their attitudes, beliefs, and values to understand their world views and how past experiences affect their leadership. School

leaders need training in research and instructional strategies that support schoolwide cultural competence as well as immersion in cultures and environments for experiential learning (Bustamante et al., 2009). In addition, school leaders should benefit from taking global perspectives and collecting school-wide level data that gives a holistic view of cultural responsiveness to understand their role as advocates for policy making (Bustamante et al., 2009).

Nelson and Guerra (2014) found that if educational leaders possess cultural knowledge and understanding of the students they serve, then those educational leaders may have more influence on the students' educational experience. Nelson and Guerra (2014) addressed identifying the beliefs practicing educator leaders hold about culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students and families, assessing educator leaders' knowledge of culture, and understanding how educator leaders apply cultural knowledge in practice. Nelson and Guerra (2014) suggested that educational leaders need to critically assess and consider their own beliefs, cultural knowledge, and commitment to equity to facilitate the schooling experiences of diverse students.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

The concept of culturally responsive leadership was used in developing the second and third research questions: (a) How do educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public school environment, and (b) How do educational leaders accommodate Muslim students' ability to practice their religion during school? Khalifa et al. (2016) conceptualize culturally responsive leadership as "the ability of school leaders to create school contexts and curriculum that respond effectively to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of students" (p. 7). One of the focused attributes of

culturally responsive leaders for this study is that they foster and encourage a school climate that makes the whole school inviting, inclusive, and accommodating to minority students (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive school leaders should engage in constant critical self-reflection and promote culturally responsive environments within the school (Khalifa et al., 2016).

The accommodations for Muslim students to practice their religion during school are facilitated by culturally responsive leaders through various means. In a study of school service providers and administrators interacting with Muslim refugee students and their families who settled in the United States, Bennouna et al. (2021) recognized culturally responsive efforts taken by the administrators in accommodating Muslim students. These included providing: (1) prayer rooms, (2) halal food in the cafeteria, (3) schoolwide welcome events and routine multicultural celebrations, (4) system-wide professional development programs, and (5) flexible language supports (Bennouna et al., 2021). In addition, “providers used restorative practices centered on nurturing healthy relationships, creating just and equitable learning environments, and repairing harm due to conflict or perceived misbehavior” (Bennouna et al., 2021, p. 8). Another significant support for Muslim students in the school involved school engagement with families and communities to benefit students’ sense of belonging and overall educational growth (Bennouna et al., 2021).

Social Justice Leadership

The conceptual framework of social justice leadership was also utilized in developing the second research question: How do educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students’ experiences within the public school environment? Social justice leadership involves

promoting leadership practices and policies to ensure justice and equity within the school environment. According to Wang (2018), “social justice leadership is about how to engage in democratic, inclusive, and transformative practices to change social structures and influence all stakeholders to collegially promote justice and equity in schools” (p. 476). Wang (2018) supposed that how principals transform their beliefs and values into practice to address social values such as democracy, inclusion, justice, and equity is what matters. Wang (2018) uncovered how principals mobilize and engage stakeholders to promote democratic, transformative, and inclusive ideals in their schools. Social justice leadership positioning was deemed necessary for constantly reinforcing the concept of being a leader (Wang, 2018). “Principals with a social justice commitment prioritize the needs of students, proactively using various approaches to solicit students’ input, educate them on justice issues, empower them, and work with them to reverse inequitable practices” (Wang, 2018, p. 480). In developing people for social justice, the staff is encouraged to take risks, stay informed, and be empowered to work collaboratively toward school goals regarding social justice issues (Wang, 2018). Through uniting stakeholders with a common purpose to foster an equitable school culture, social justice leaders build a positive school community (Wang, 2018). The social justice leadership framework may provide practical strategies for educational leaders to influence experiences for Muslim students in public schools.

How Culturally Responsive Leadership and Social Justice Leadership Are Connected

Culturally responsive leadership incorporates aspects of social justice leadership that connect the two concepts. Khalifa (2018) argued that culturally responsive leadership incorporates the aspect of social justice leadership, namely, critical

consciousness. Through critical consciousness, an awareness of self is developed, and an awareness of one's values, beliefs, and dispositions about children of color is realized (Khalifa, 2018). Critical consciousness is defined as having an awareness of one's self and one's values, beliefs, and dispositions when serving children of color (Khalifa, 2018).

Educational leaders should be critically self-aware of racism and the history of oppression to embrace anti-oppression and social justice (Khalifa, 2018). Theoharis (2007) found that administrators with critical consciousness are centered on social justice by deepening their self-knowledge. Similarly, Newcomer and Cowin (2018) publicized that social justice leaders were oriented towards social justice through critical reflection. Newcomer and Cowin (2018) suggested that culturally responsive, socially just leaders should not only be critically minded but find ways to be creative in negotiating policies that interfere with the best interests of the children. Examining educational leadership through the lens of the interconnectedness of culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership via critical consciousness grounded my attempt to uncover their influence on the experiences of Muslim students in public schools—depicted in Figure 1-1 at the end of the chapter.

Methodology Overview

The research was conducted using a qualitative, interview-based research design that allowed the collection of qualitative data comprising of rich descriptions of how the participants interacted with Muslim students. “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p. 5). The participant sample included school administrators of varying types,

including principals, deans of educational departments, and curriculum administrators who served in schools with Muslim student populations. A qualitative design allowed the participants to provide their descriptions of how they interacted with Muslim students and their families, what their world views were concerning Muslim students' faith and culture, and how their cultural knowledge contributed to their understanding of Muslim students' experiences in their schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as educational leaders answered open-ended questions for the data analysis. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual school administrators via the video-conferencing software, Zoom.com. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed through Zoom as well. The interview transcripts were coded and themed via Delve Tool, a qualitative data analysis computer software to obtain findings that addressed the research questions.

Limitations

There were limitations to the study that were present. The participants for the study were from public schools in Florida and not from any other state. The participants were of various backgrounds and not from a particular administrative department. The participants were chosen based on whether they serve Muslim students. Consequently, the nonrandom sample from one state will affect the generalizability of the research results. However, as this was a qualitative study, the quest for generalizability was not pursued. "In qualitative research, a single case or a small, nonrandom, purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in-depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.253). The reason for choosing participants from different leadership positions in the school was to attain the descriptions of cultural knowledge and understanding of

Muslim students' faith, culture, and experiences as determined through different areas within the schools. The educational leaders were working with Muslim students.

Significance of the Study

The research was significant because it revealed and contributed to the practices, behaviors, policies, and leadership decisions that may assist educational leaders in influencing experiences for Muslim students in schools. The study provided information to educational leaders on the best practices of educational leaders that may be used to influence experiences for Muslim students. Specifically, the best practices showed how educational leaders carried out their work, supported, promoted, and interacted with Muslim students to ensure their positive school experience. In utilizing the best practices discovered, educational leaders may be able to reduce and prevent bullying and bias against Muslim students and students of other minoritized faiths and ethnicities. The information may further guide leadership training for educational leaders that will benefit not only Muslim students and their families but also students of other faiths and cultures.

Definition of Terms

The following list of terms was used throughout the study.

Acculturation

Assimilation to a different culture or a "cultural change in either or both the native culture and that of the receiving country as a function of intercultural contact" (Oberoi & Trickett, 2018, p. 346).

Critical Consciousness

Having an awareness of one's own self and one's own values, beliefs, and dispositions when serving children of color (Khalifa, 2018).

Equitable

Leithwood (2021) defined “equitable” as a term used to acknowledge that “some students need more of the school’s resources and opportunities than others in order to achieve the same levels of success” (p. 2). Equitable practices of school leaders reflect inclusivity and culturally responsive practices. Leithwood (2021) found that one of the most substantial values held by successful educational leaders is the equitable treatment of students regardless of their cultural and ethnic background or religious affiliation. “Equity-oriented leaders develop deep knowledge about the ethnicities, languages, cultures, religions, and living circumstances of students’ families and use that knowledge to align the school’s priorities with the best interests of their students’ families and the wider community” (Leithwood, 2021, p. 34).

Inequity

Injustice; Unfairness; An instance of injustice or unfairness (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Islamophobia

Hossain (2017) defined Islamophobia, as a term to describe “a social anxiety toward Islam and Muslim cultures” (p. 35). In this study, Islamophobia is one of the many ways in which a fear of Muslims and a fear of students who dress like Muslims is expressed. Bullying and bias of Muslims and students who are perceived to be Muslims may be considered acts of Islamophobia.

Hijab

The traditional covering of the hair worn by some Muslim women (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Kufi

A brimless hat worn by some Muslim males (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Ramadan

Ninth month of the Islamic calendar observed by Muslims worldwide for fasting daily from dawn to sunset (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Summary

The problems and challenges Muslims and Muslim students face in public schools are significant. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate how educational leadership in schools can influence Muslim students' experiences. In order to fulfill the purpose of the study, the answers to three research questions based on the conceptual frameworks of culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership were explored: (1) How do educational leaders describe their understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices, (2) how do educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public school environment, and (3) how do educational leaders accommodate Muslim students' ability to practice their religion during school? The method of exploration for the study involved a qualitative, interview-based research design. There were limitations to the study based on participant sample and location. Yet, the study was deemed significant because it revealed best practices of educational leadership that practitioners and researchers may use to guide them in promoting positive experiences for not only Muslim students but for all diverse students as well as for further educational leadership training. In the next chapters, the literature review, the methodology, the data analysis and results, and the summary, conclusion and recommendations follow.



Figure 1-1. Interconnectedness of Conceptual Frameworks

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the literature and research related to leadership behaviors and practices of educational leaders of culturally diverse, minoritized students. The literature review begins with an overview of religious expression in American public schools. Muslim students' religious expression and practices are important to discuss and are introduced in the following section. The next section focuses on the impacts of Islamophobia on Muslim students in public schools, followed by the acculturation challenges Muslim students face that impact their ability to navigate traditional school settings as their culture and religious practices are vastly different from those of the dominant culture. The next section focuses on the studies describing the leadership behaviors and practices of educational leaders with cultural knowledge of students from diverse backgrounds. The last section explores the literature on culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership. It describes the findings from the research on these theories as they relate to educational leadership in schools.

Overview of Religious Expression in American Public Schools

To investigate how educational leaders influence experiences for Muslim students, it is important to discuss the legal foundations of religious expression in American public schools. The First Amendment of the Constitution proclaims that Congress “shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (U.S. Const. amend. I). Moreover, the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment requires the free exercise of religious expression to apply to state and local governments (Cantwell v. Connecticut, 1940). Hence, the Constitution

protects the rights of students to express their religion in public schools freely (Cantwell v. Connecticut, 1940). Muslims and students from any other religious or non-religious group have the right to express their faith in public schools freely and are not obligated by such schools to adopt one religion (Cantwell v. Connecticut, 1940). Students who remain civilized and respectful of others with various religious views are permitted to freely express their own religious beliefs on public school campuses (Good News Club vs. Milford Central School, 2001).

Although public schools have been prohibited from hosting scripture readings to students (Abington School District v. Schempp, 1963), if the readings were teachings of “moral, literary, or historical points, distinguishing those points from the religious teaching in which those points were embedded, it would be a different case” (Laycock, 2013, p. 71). Further, public schools are not allowed to host invocation and benediction led by clergy at graduation ceremonies since students would feel peer pressure to remain silent, prohibiting them from exercising their own religion (Lee v. Weisman, 1992). Justice Scalia stated in Lee v. Weisman (1992) “that maintaining respect for the religious observances of others is a fundamental civic virtue that government (including the public schools) can and should cultivate.” Mawdsley (2004) related, “to the extent that school officials are willing to create what would be a limited public forum for student speeches during an otherwise school-controlled graduation, case law suggests that a student’s speech with religious content might be permissible” (p. 272).

Students are allowed to lead student-led prayers and student-led scripture readings on school grounds if there is no disruption to the school’s learning environment (Good News Club v. Milford Central School, 2001). For instance, a high school in

Richardson, Texas, updated its prayer policy to accommodate Muslim students by acknowledging their legal right to pray during school hours and setting aside a specific area for them to do so. (Isgur, 2001). When there is a religious school club being held as a “limited public forum” on campus in which students read from scripture, the school may not discriminate based on the views expressed in the club (Good News Club v. Milford Central School, 2001). For example, public schools must permit Muslim clubs or any other religiously affiliated student-led clubs on campus when there is an establishment of limited public forums in school board policy.

Students have the right to wear religious clothing and clothing with religious messages if the clothing is not disruptive to learning, and other clothes with similar messages are allowed (Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 1969). Regardless of the physical activity, sports, or uniform dress code, Muslim females may wear hijab, Muslim males may wear kufis, and Jewish students may wear kippahs during school. Muslim and Christian students who wear loose clothing and long dresses as a religious expression may do so during activities when there is no safety concern (Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 1969). For example, Muslim students who wear long pants for religious reasons during physical education and hijab for swimming classes are permitted to do so without discrimination. Educational leaders have a responsibility to allow students to express their religious beliefs through the clothing they wear.

The role and responsibility of educational leaders are integral in understanding religious expression in public schools. To effectively accomplish their purposes regarding religious expression in schools, educational leaders must articulate morals

and values that are consistent with the cultural goals of the school while at the same time not violate the First Amendment (Fuller, 1994). Hillman (2008) explained that a school's culture refers to the "activities in which members of a group engage and the accompanying meanings that give that group a collective identity" and includes the morals, social norms, dress, art, rituals, myths, and history associated with the group (p. 563). Marshall (2014) informed that some educational leaders use guidance from challenged laws taken to court over the years in interpreting what may or may not be religious expression in schools, but respectable educational leaders work to provide a positive school climate and culture for every student, teacher, and staff member.

The United States Secretary of Education issues guidance to the public and to state and local educational agencies on how to handle constitutionally protected prayer in public schools (Updated Guidance, 2020). Public schools are recommended to adopt policies that adhere to the guiding principles given by the U.S. Department of Education (Updated Guidance, 2020). The Department requires public schools to provide in writing that no policy prevents constitutionally protected prayer or otherwise prohibits participation in constitutionally protected prayer in public schools (Updated Guidance, 2020). Although the Constitution forbids public school officials from directing or favoring prayer in their official capacities, students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate" (Tinker vs. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 1969).

The religious expression of students in public schools is allowed under certain circumstances and is protected by the Constitution. Muslim students express their religion in how they dress, pray, and celebrate their holidays. It is important to

understand that some discriminate against Muslim students because of the expression of their religious beliefs. The acts of discrimination, including bias and bullying of Muslim students, may originate from the impacts of Islamophobia. Although Islamophobia may exist in schools, educational leaders are responsible for protecting and providing for Muslim students' freedom to express their religion in schools. The religious expression and practices of Muslim students is discussed in the next section.

Religious Expression and Practices of Muslim Students

Muslims pray five consecutive and obligatory prayers that have very specific timings, positionings, and sayings throughout the course of the day. The first prayer, Fajr, starts before the first light of the sun hits the horizon and lasts until dawn. The second prayer, Dhuhr, starts just after the sun has reached its zenith and lasts until the length of the shadow of an object is equal to its height. The third prayer, Asr, starts immediately after Dhuhr and lasts until sunset. The sunset prayer is Maghreb and lasts until the sky has no light in it from the sun. The final prayer of the night is Isha and lasts until the Fajr prayer begins. These five prayers may not be delayed nor skipped and must be prepped with a ritual ablution. Muslim students may need a specific place that is clean and quiet to perform these prayers. There is also a Friday sermon and prayer during noon time, which must be prayed in congregation and may not be delayed nor skipped by teen males. Some schools may be able to offer students the time and place to conduct the Friday prayers.

Muslim students wear modest clothing that may or may not reflect their family's country of origin. Females may wear a hijab while praying and throughout the day if they choose to do so. Female Muslims may or may not uncover their hair, neck, arms, legs, and feet. Some female Muslims may wish to cover their nose and mouth as well.

Female Muslims may feel the need to wear extra loose-fitting clothing as a show of modest dress. Male Muslims may wear a kufi and grow a beard to express their faith.

During the month of Ramadan, which is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, Muslim students and families celebrate many rituals and traditions to practice Islam. For one, Muslim students may dry fast or refrain from eating and drinking between the time of pre-dawn and sunset. Students may stay awake during the late-night hours to pray the extra night prayers, Tarawih, in the mosque with their families. At the end of Ramadan, Muslim families celebrate the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr by wearing new clothes, praying, sharing gifts with each other, and having a feast. Muslims may fast throughout the year as an expression of their faith traditions. Including the religious expressions of Muslim students is important to this study on how educational leaders influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools.

Impact of Islamophobia on Muslim Students

There is limited research on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim students (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021). Abu Khalaf et al. (2021) reviewed 44 studies from 34 journals on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim students. Abu Khalaf et al. (2021) defined Islamophobia as acts of hostility and exclusion against Islam and Muslims. Instances of Islamophobia are exacerbated by a lack of understanding of Islam and Muslims (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021). The instances that include name-calling or threats are clear and targeted, yet passive discrimination, such as social exclusion or being watched by authority figures, often go undetected (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021).

These instances of discrimination have affected the behaviors of Muslims by causing them to change how they present themselves or carry out their daily routines while making them feel as if they need to show loyalty to their country of origin (Abu

Khalaf et al., 2021). Muslim students felt they were responsible for denouncing acts of terror, counteracting negative perceptions of Islam, and defending its true beliefs (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021). Institutional discrimination exists in public schools where Muslims are impacted by the effects of Islamophobia. Abu Khalaf et al. (2021) reviewed that:

Institutional discrimination refers to the deeply embedded inequities that exist in cultures and social organizations of schools and universities that are often difficult to record or prove, examples of which include negative or prejudicial interactions with teachers or peers and failure to appropriately support and recognize religious holidays. (p. 2)

Further, Muslim students felt anxious and frustrated when there were discussions about 9/11 or felt isolated when they were the only Muslim student in the class, and speakers or classmates would act overtly racist or demean the Islamic faith (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021)

Bonet (2011) assessed that “living in a post 9/11 America has been an increasing challenge for Arabs, Arab Americans, and Muslims as they are often seen as the ‘other,’ a threat to the nation, and inherently linked to terrorism and violence” (p. 46). Bonet (2011) found that teachers, staff, and school personnel deal with Muslim American youth in often discriminatory ways which affects their academic and psychosocial safety and welfare, as well as their civic engagement and belonging. For instance, Muslim students testified being recommended to general non-academic tracks in school although they had high academic achievement in subjects like math and science (Bonet, 2011). In addition, Muslim female students felt discrimination because they wore the hijab or head covering (Bonet, 2011). Bonet (2011) argued bullying, bias, and instances of Islamophobia may result in the silencing of Muslim youth, disillusionment, and civic disengagement.

Bajaj et al. (2016) studied how instances of Islamophobia were rising in schools. Bajaj et al. (2016) uncovered hundreds of stories retelling xenophobic bullying in schools and “the consequences of the rise of Islamophobia which is the fear or dislike of Islam---in the post-September 11, 2001 period” (p. 482). Bajaj et al. (2016) proved how underdeveloped curricula and nonexistent teacher professional development were linked to social and political powers that fuel one-sided, singular storylines about wars overseas that have given rise to the manufacture of people of brown skin as “Other, terrorist, and enemy” (p. 483). Bajaj et al. (2016) reviewed data collected by South Asian Americans Leading Together, the Council of American Islamic Relations, and the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, that disclosed Muslim American students are not bullied for physical appearance, ability level, or popularity but “because of their ethnicity and religion and out of the belief that they pose a threat to the ‘American way of life’” (p. 488). Teachers were included in the review of reports of bullying and bias against Muslims, as Bajaj et al. (2016) clarified:

In her research on South Asian youth in Brooklyn, New York, Ghaffar-Kucher (2012) relates the following: “Talah, a high school sophomore, relayed an incident in a classroom where a student was asking his teacher how she came to school. The teacher allegedly replied, ‘The Verrazano Bridge. Why, do you want to blow it up?’” (p. 44).

Abu Khalaf et al. (2021) explained that teachers play a key role in students' lives and are significant role models for students. Yet, some Muslim students felt teachers were at the forefront to allowing discrimination by permitting other students to openly criticize Muslim students and their Islamic practices. One group of Muslim students who left the public school to attend private Islamic school cited that the public-school teachers were unwelcoming and lacked interest in their lives (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021). In addition to being discriminated against by their peers and teachers, Muslim students

faced challenges in acculturation, making it difficult to balance school and faith (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021). These acculturation challenges faced by Muslim students are examined in the next section.

Acculturation Challenges Faced by Muslim Students

In addition to the impact of Islamophobia, Muslim students experience acculturation challenges that impact their ability to navigate traditional school settings, as their culture and religious practices are vastly different from those of the dominant culture. “Acculturation refers to cultural change in either or both the native culture and that of the receiving country as a function of intercultural contact” (Oberoi & Trickett, 2018, p. 346). Berry (2005) defined acculturation as “culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems” (p. 701). As this study focused on how educational leadership influenced the experiences of Muslim students in public schools, acculturation challenges faced by Muslim students needed to be explained. In this section, literature regarding the acculturation challenges faced by Muslim students in public schools is presented.

Oberoi and Trickett (2018) acknowledged that Muslim students experience acculturation challenges related to academic achievement, educational aspirations, and psychological adjustment. For many Muslim students, public schools are not necessarily religion-free spaces because Islamic beliefs and values are a central part of life, guiding them on day-to-day affairs such as the choice of food they eat and the level of interaction with the opposite sex (Oberoi & Trickett, 2018). As increased religiosity was correlated with higher levels of academic achievement, some students in one study reported that having religious support in public schools made them less likely to report psychological distress (Oberoi & Trickett, 2018). Still, Oberoi and Trickett (2018)

exposed a significant acculturative hassle for Muslim students attending New York City high schools who were feeling pressure to represent their religion positively within social circles as well as in front of teachers following the attacks on 9/11. Muslim students who experienced more frequent and severe hassles at school felt higher levels of psychological distress, especially those representing Islam, speaking with limited English competency, socializing with Muslim and non-Muslim peers, and facing religious discrimination (Oberoi & Trickett, 2018).

Through acculturation, Muslim students may deal with the experience of living double lives. Abu Khalaf et al. (2021) determined that being an American Muslim student entailed living with two identities, and the best way to deal with discrimination was to acculturate and blend in with the dominant culture. One of the strategies Muslim students used to acculturate included having a different personality during school (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021). Muslim students decided to code-switch to fit in and prove that they do things “normal people do” (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021, p. 12). Specifically, Muslim females were affected by acculturation challenges in that they lost their cultural identity by making the decision to cease wearing their hijab in fear of discrimination (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021). Abu Khalaf et al. (2021) detailed that Muslim students were constantly challenged to decide which traits of American culture they were comfortable accepting. Nonetheless, Muslim students reported having parental support when facing acculturation challenges was important (Abu Khalaf et al., 2021). Abu Khalaf et al. (2021) revealed that “adolescents with a strong sense of belonging to their Muslim group have more cultural and social resources that may mitigate the detrimental impacts of discrimination on their adjustment to everyday life” (p. 12).

Barakat et al. (2021) explained that the cultural mismatch between home and school could be causing achievement disparities among students from minoritized groups. Barakat et al. (2021) suggested that it is important to change the superficial perception of culture from simply being elements of music, food, and art to how people make sense of the world, develop their identity, recognize their self-worth, and build community. Cultural competence is more than the idea of simple cultural variations and includes an understanding of historic oppression and discrimination with a commitment to eradicating racism and all forms of prejudice and inequity (Barakat et al., 2021). Educational leaders' lack of cultural knowledge could also be a cause of variations in the academic achievement of minoritized groups (Barakat et al., 2021). Nonetheless, educational leaders may acquire cultural knowledge and competence through the development of appropriate understanding, attitudes, and social action skills (Barakat et al., 2021).

Cultural Knowledge

This section contains literature examining how educational leaders with cultural knowledge impacted diverse groups of students in public schools. This study focused on the educational leaders who influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The cultural knowledge of educational leaders needs to be examined to better describe the participants' influence on the experiences of Muslim students. In addition, educational leaders impact schoolwide cultural competence and educators' cultural competence. Thus, both levels of cultural competence are also considered.

Educational Leaders' Cultural Knowledge

In today's ever-changing world, cultural competence is a necessary attribute of educational leaders because they must support developing and achieving a

progressively diverse student population (Barakat et al., 2021). Nelson and Guerra (2014) studied the cultural knowledge of educators, including school leaders. Nelson and Guerra (2014) found that one educator who was also a school leader with cultural knowledge was purposeful in using her cultural knowledge to find solutions when there were culture clashes. The participant in the study used her understanding of culture and linked the understanding to discussing solutions (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). For instance, the participant acknowledged that parents of Latinx children needed to walk their children to classrooms as a form of parental involvement and an establishment of a community of parents within the school (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Similarly, Hansuvadha and Slater (2012) studied two school administrators' cultural competence. Hansuvadha and Slater (2012) found that one participant was concerned about the disenfranchised and respect for students. This participant wanted to develop democratic communication through open and respectful dialogue with students and parents (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). Furthermore, this participant wanted to address the lack of parental involvement by recruiting them with the hope that student test scores and student morale would increase because of increased parental involvement (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). This participant also felt that respecting students and pronouncing their names was significant to helping them find their own identities (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). Hansuvadha and Slater (2012) concluded that the school administrator in the study demonstrated prominent levels of cultural competency.

Schoolwide Cultural Competence

In the discussion of their study, Bustamante et al. (2009) determined how educational leaders' cultural knowledge impacted schoolwide cultural competence and how well schools respond to the needs of diverse groups of students. Bustamante et al.

(2009) related four themes, and five subthemes materialized in their findings. The researchers stated that the first theme was that policymaking was an important factor in improving schoolwide cultural competence (Bustamante et al. 2009). The concept that programs were instrumental to practice and promoted intercultural integration was discovered by the researchers as a theme as well (Bustamante et al. 2009). The third theme was revealed to be that school climate and school culture were used as the same term by school leaders (Bustamante et al. 2009). Lastly, barriers to schoolwide cultural competence included role and responsibility confusion, resource constraints, lack of reference to strategies, lack of awareness of cultural competence indicators, and personal biases also emerged as a theme (Bustamante et al., 2009).

Bustamante et al. (2009) recommended that school leaders reflect on their attitudes, beliefs, and values to understand their worldviews and how past experiences affect their leadership. School leaders need training in research and instructional strategies that support schoolwide cultural competence as well as immersion in cultures and environments for experiential learning (Bustamante et al., 2009). In addition, school leaders should benefit from global perspective taking and collect school-wide level data that gives a holistic view of cultural responsiveness to understand their role as advocates and educators for policy making (Bustamante et al., 2009).

Educators' Cultural Knowledge

Nelson and Guerra (2014) addressed how to identify the beliefs practicing educators hold about culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students and families, how to assess educator knowledge of culture, and how to understand how educators apply cultural knowledge in practice. Nelson and Guerra (2014) proposed that “the vast majority of educators, including educational leaders, may hold deficit

beliefs about culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students and often have insufficient cultural knowledge to recognize and respond to culture clashes” (p. 88).

Nelson and Guerra (2014) supported:

For students who come from homes that share similar cultural norms to those taught in school, school is about learning academic content and reinforcing familiar cultural norms. For students who are socialized with a different set of cultural norms from those taught at school, school is about learning both academic content and cultural norms. Moreover, because culture is taught implicitly in schools, students must infer cultural norms, often through trial and error. Teachers who lack cultural understanding often assume students who do not adhere to expected norms are unintelligent or ill-behaved. (p. 71)

Even when educators have knowledge of culture, they do not apply it in practice consistently (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Therefore, educators and principals should increase and apply their cultural knowledge level to ensure effective interaction with Muslim students, as cultural norms for them may be different from those taught in school.

Social Justice Leadership

Boske et al. (2017) detailed a study conducted to examine how school leaders lead social justice in schools. Developing empathetic responses to increase the capacity to serve in authentic and meaningful ways was central to the social justice leaders in the study (Boske et al., 2017). Identifying social justice pedagogies was also a critical component of social justice leadership which included developing self-knowledge regarding the lived realities of the students who dealt with discrimination (Boske et al., 2017). Participants in the study emphasized the need to understand the components of social justice leadership for educational leadership practices (Boske et al., 2017).

Bosket et al. (2017) explained:

This understanding suggests school leaders understand marginalization as a social construct, the ways in which self-knowledge influences how school communities are served, and how this understanding is pertinent to developing empathy, especially with children and families who are often overlooked. (p. 372)

Bosket et al. (2017) described participants who were concerned about their self-knowledge of social justice-oriented and equity-oriented leadership practices.

Participants confessed the need to promote democracy, encourage student-led points of view, deepen their empathetic responses, and understand systemic oppression in schools (Boske et al., 2017). Furthermore, participants became more aware of their responsibility as learners and engaged with their school community in more authentic ways (Bosket et al., 2017). Social justice leaders serve the school in many ways, and this study focused on social justice leadership practices that are empowering and empathetic. Boske et al. (2017) asserted that “social justice leadership centers on school leaders' holistic and authentic approaches to interrupting oppressive school practices to empower and advocate for those from historically disenfranchised populations” (p. 364). Boske et al. (2017) detailed that participants elaborated on the need to become aware of and develop culturally responsive self-knowledge. Boske et al. (2017) affirmed:

They emphasized a process in which they deepened empathic responses by imagining themselves as Other through an empathic immersion including deepening their understanding of the lived experiences of marginalized populations by seeing the world through Other's eyes; immersing themselves in diverse school contexts; understanding relationships among empathy, action, and increased consciousness; and ultimately engaging in empathic responses often described as authentic and “fitting” to those served. (p. 371).

Theoharis (2007) concluded in a study on social justice leaders that social justice leadership goes beyond simple good leadership practices in several ways. Social justice

leaders place significant importance on diversity, deeply learn about and understand that diversity, and extend respect to other cultures (Theoharis, 2007). Social justice leaders know that schooling experiences cannot be made great until the students with the most serious struggles are given the same rich opportunities as their more privileged peers (Theoharis, 2007). Moreover, social justice leaders collaboratively address the issues of how to achieve success for every student (Theoharis, 2007).

Vassallo (2022) studied school leaders who enacted social justice leadership and educational equity. Vassallo (2022) identified the school leaders' characteristics that exemplified their quest for more just and equitable schooling. One of the characteristics of leadership was that the participants fostered a school environment where everyone felt welcome (Vassallo, 2022). Specifically, the participants wanted to include the voices of students who were traditionally silenced groups (Vassallo, 2022). One of the participants relied on community members' input and suggested strategies for bringing them in (Vassallo, 2022). Another leadership characteristic of the participants was to lead by being an example as a tool to mitigate challenges related to unfairness and inequity (Vassallo, 2022). Dispelling stereotypes was also a leadership characteristic as the participants strove to create an identity-safe classroom environment. "They developed programmes which developed every student's identity, acknowledging and valuing his/ her characteristics, becoming aware of their cultural affinities and striving to heighten their self-esteem" (Vassallo, 2022, p. 29). One of the participants mentioned that she strove to become a role model by taking opportunities and listening attentively to the stories of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Vassallo, 2022).

McKenzie et al. (2008) described social justice leadership with three different goals as the foundation. The first goal was that educational leaders for social justice should help all students in their schools raise academic achievement scores (McKenzie et al., 2008). The second goal was that educational leaders for social justice should advocate for issues of currently marginalized students and prepare students to live as critical citizens in society (McKenzie et al., 2008). “If school leaders are to carry out this agenda, they themselves must hold a critical consciousness about power, privilege, and inequities in society and in schools” (McKenzie et al., 2008, p. 122). The third goal was for educational leaders with social justice leadership practices to implement the first two goals by operating their schools in ways that ensure students learn in inclusive classrooms (McKenzie et al., 2008).

Furthermore, Jean-Marie (2008) publicized the educational practices of four social justice-oriented principals who were faced with the challenges of minority student populations and who believed in social justice leadership. The principals demonstrated a student-centered philosophy by engaging in practices dedicated to social justice and discerning matters from multiple perspectives (Jean-Marie, 2008). The social justice practices that the principals held in common were that they,

- believed in, valued, and were committed to the educability of all students by promoting efforts to build on their diversity
- remained devoted to the progression of conversations on matters related to diversity, equity, social justice, and ethics in school practices,
- fostered and enhanced social justice through ongoing professional development,
- stayed devoted to dismantling the barriers that obstructed the practice of social justice,
- encouraged leadership practices among many different stakeholders (i.e., parents, teachers, students, and community members)

- recruited and retained staff with cultural and ethnic backgrounds similar to the ones in the school. (p. 346)

Jean-Marie (2008) concluded that the four female principals “articulated a selfless desire to both serve and prepare others by creating an organizational system that was committed to developing relationships that drove goodness and fostered spiritual connection” (p. 352). Thus, social justice leaders must have the ability and desire to promote and influence warm, welcoming, and inviting experiences within the school culture.

One practice of social justice leadership that may be effective in influencing Muslim experiences is teaching about Islam through reputable sources to gain multiple perspectives on discriminating matters and dispelling stereotypes. Reagan (2020) discovered a solution to the problem of inequitable treatment of Muslim students in teaching about Islam in public schools using reputable sources of the curriculum. Reagan (2020) advised that most of the information about Islam taught by teachers in public schools is anti-Islamic in nature. Nevertheless, Reagan (2020) revealed ACCESS Islam as an effective curricular package public schools can utilize to teach about Islam and Muslims. ACCESS Islam contains lessons with a standard academic introduction to Islam, providing teachers with well-written, research-based pedagogy (Reagan, 2020). “Such teaching is best understood as part of broader initiatives that are already underway in multicultural education, antiracist education and social justice education” (Reagan, 2020, p. 72). In addition to learning about Islam, Reagan (2020) considered that students in public schools must also learn the narratives of Islamophobia or a dislike of or prejudice against Muslims. Reagan (2020) confirmed that the narratives of Islamophobia would include:

- correcting factual mistakes about the nature and teachings of Islam,
- challenging the conflation of Islam with violence and terrorism,
- pointing out that Islam is not and has really never been “un-American” in any meaningful sense,
- explaining how the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment protections have been misunderstood and misinterpreted in the debates about Islam and Islamophobia, and
- demonstrating the role of Christian exceptionalism in critiques of Islam and Muslims. (p. 72)

Additionally, Reagan (2020) emphasized that students should be able to offer persuasive counter narratives that are based on accurate knowledge and understanding of Islam, familiarity with Muslims, and basic components of inclusive and social justice education. Hossain (2017) recommended that teachers provide students with a more comprehensive and solid understanding of Islam and Muslims. Several cultural concepts can be explored in the classroom to bring awareness to students of how Muslims live. For example, concepts to clear misunderstandings that teachers can explore include: (1) the concept of contributions by Muslims, (2) the concept of diversity, (3) the concept of similarities, and (4) the concept of the historical roots of Muslims in America (Hossain, 2017). In choosing reputable sources for teaching about Islam, educational leaders may be able to influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

In addition to social justice leadership, researchers have studied the leadership practices of culturally responsive leaders that educational leaders may implement to influence Muslim students' experiences in public schools. Genao (2021) conducted a case study on future administrators' culturally responsive leadership themes. Genao

(2021) found six themes in their study on culturally responsive leadership. For one, participants interpreted their understanding of cultural responsiveness within social justice environments (Genao, 2021). The study participants reflected on their biases and desires to learn about removing prejudices (Genao, 2021). In addition, the participants developed a positive sense of their own racial and ethnic identity, which helped them to befriend people from diverse backgrounds (Genao, 2021). Furthermore, the participants “expressed personal and professional skills are essential to creating educational experiences effective as it pertains to diversity” (Genao, 2021, p.163). Another theme was that participants wanted to celebrate all cultures represented in the school and keep cultures alive in the community (Genao, 2021). Moreover, participants wanted to engage in innovative thinking and practice (Genao, 2021). Genao (2021) provided different viewpoints on how to be culturally responsive in socially just environments. Genao (2021) asserted:

Cultural responsiveness requires individuals to be culturally knowledgeable. This skill is having deep understanding of own cultural identity and considers differences, and the skills to understand and develop on the different cultural and community medians of students and families. It is the capacity to recognize the distinctions that make each student distinctive, while honoring the differences within community schools. Moreover, it is critical for culturally responsive leaders to continuously support underrepresented students and teachers through consideration of knowledge and practices around culture, racism, and equity. (p. 165)

In a study of school service providers and administrators interacting with Muslim refugee students and their families who settled in the United States, Bennouna et al. (2021) also recognized culturally responsive efforts taken by the administrators. Bennouna et al. (2021) detected that the schools involved liaisons as cultural mediators who worked closely with students and teachers to establish connections with families

and community organizations. These culturally responsive efforts and themes recognized by educational leaders may build strong relationships with families and communities, including those of Muslim students.

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) conducted a study on a culturally responsive leader who promoted equity in her school and found that the school leader responded culturally on three levels: personal, environmental, and curricular. “Cultural responsiveness validates students’ ways of knowing and doing and therefore allows students the freedom to focus on academic tasks” (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 180). Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) reported that the culturally responsive leader believed it is important to (1) create a school vision that embraces all cultures, (2) foster a school environment that promotes equity and learning, (3) consolidate students’ and teachers’ lived experiences, and (4) utilize the beliefs, values, customs, and socio-cultural experiences of students as the foundations in helping them construct new knowledge and information.

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) revealed that the culturally responsive leader designs a school environment that inspires confidence, interest, and trust among faculty and staff so that they can help students become organized and motivated to learn. Furthermore, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) examined six themes of a culturally responsive leader necessary for the inspirational school environment. The first theme included caring for and desiring minoritized students to succeed (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). The second theme was building relationships by reducing anxiety among students and teachers and utilizing student testimonies (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). The third theme of the culturally responsive leader was a persuasive

and persistent influence on the school community (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). The fourth theme was maintaining a schoolwide presence and a strategic level of communication (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). The fifth theme was to model cultural responsiveness by promoting inclusive curriculum and instructional programs and appreciating culturally responsive teaching practices (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). A sixth theme of a culturally responsive leader was that he or she fostered a school environment that encouraged members of the school community to become more culturally responsive to each other (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). By understanding these six themes, culturally responsive leaders may be able to influence the experiences of diverse groups of students and help them develop confidence, interest, and trust in themselves that they will succeed (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

Scribner et al. (2021) reported on fostering culturally responsive leadership practices in one high school in the United States. Scribner et al. (2021) developed two major findings regarding the culturally responsive leadership practices of a high school principal. Scribner et al. (2021) found that understanding diverse students' basic needs was a fundamental belief and perspective of the participant in the case study. Scribner et al. (2021) narrated that teachers described the participant as having a deep commitment to welcoming students. Furthermore, Scribner et al. (2021) related that the culturally responsive leader made efforts to learn about students' lives and issues that might have affected their engagement. "When necessary, the principal used more direct influencing strategies to instill deeper understanding of and commitment to culturally responsive dispositions and practices" (Scribner et al., 2021, p. 164). Scribner et al.

(2021) advised that educational leaders should recognize culturally responsive leadership as a necessary organizational quality for school leaders.

Summary

Chapter 2 started with a review of the literature on the legalities of religious expression in schools. These landmark decisions became the foundation for schools to create policies on students' religious expression. The Muslim students' expression of their religious beliefs during school was described as an understanding of their religious beliefs that was important to the study. The literature describing the issues that Muslim students face because of the impact of Islamophobia and acculturation challenges were then discussed. The educational leadership behaviors, practices, strategies, and leadership decisions incorporating cultural knowledge were then provided. A review of the literature on how educational leaders use social justice leadership practices and culturally responsive leadership practices to promote equity and design a school environment where everyone feels welcome was presented.

The studies presented in the literature review focused on the educational leadership practices for diverse groups of students, yet this study focused on educational leadership practices specifically influencing the experiences of Muslim students. The cultural knowledge, social justice leadership, and culturally responsive leadership practices of educational leaders presented in the literature review were regarding Latinx children, Muslim refugee students, and other diverse groups of students. In this study, I contributed to the literature on the cultural knowledge, social justice leadership, and culturally responsive leadership practices of educational leaders influencing the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. Chapter 3 described and illustrated the qualitative process designed to extract the cultural knowledge, social

justice leadership and culturally responsive leadership practices of educational leaders influencing the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. Research design, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and positionality were explained.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the knowledge, behaviors, policies, and practical strategies of educational leaders who influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. In addressing educational leaders' knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and experiences, teachers and administrators may find best practices in establishing a school culture that is warm, welcoming, and inviting for all students, regardless of cultural or religious background. Culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership were discussed, which may provide a framework for educational leaders to use in impacting students with various religious affiliations in schools. Specifically, this study determined and illustrated educational leaders' practices, behaviors, interactions, policies, and leadership decisions that accommodated Muslim students' ability to practice their religion in public schools.

Research Questions

1. How do educational leaders describe their understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices?
2. How do educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public school environment?
3. How do educational leaders accommodate Muslim students' ability to practice their religion during school?

Research Design

This research study used qualitative methodology to address the problem statement and the research questions. Qualitative research is applied when researchers

study “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 5). A qualitative descriptive study was appropriate as the proposed study sought to answer research questions regarding the participants’ descriptions of their leadership practices, knowledge, understanding, and interactions with Muslim students.

Qualitative data creates a visible picture of the world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative data are necessary for the proposed research when data are not counted or measured but described. Through their own words and meanings, participants of a qualitative study illustrate their perceived experiences and interactions with others. In this qualitative study, I studied how educational leaders influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. Moreover, it was unknown how the educational leaders accommodated Muslim students in schools to practice their religion. Qualitative data consist of the meanings and descriptions that participants share with the researcher in order to provide how they are making sense of their world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A qualitative methodology was utilized for this study as it allowed me to obtain descriptive data through semi-structured interviews to gain the answers to the research questions. By conducting semi-structured interviews with participants, the participants had the opportunity to provide details that described what it meant for them to be in a setting deemed necessary for the research questions to be answered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants were able to describe what was occurring for them in that setting and what they perceived in their interactions with others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Further, the descriptions of the situations the participants experienced and the

context of being there was part of the data analysis and the communication to others needing such information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A qualitative design was used to investigate the phenomena of how the knowledge, behaviors, policies, and practical strategies of educational leaders influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The research design addressed the statement of the problem by obtaining descriptions from educational leaders on how they influence a warm, caring, and inviting school environment for Muslim students. A qualitative design was deemed most suitable to capture the descriptions and understand the phenomena through which firsthand meaningful experiences would be acquired. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) found that qualitative research design attempts to interpret situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there.

Context of the Study

Through the research, I sought to understand the knowledge, behaviors, policies, and leadership practices of educational leaders who serve Muslim students in public schools in the context of the post-9/11 era and post-Trump election. The post-9/11 climate in the United States has resulted in an increase in violence against Muslims; specifically, incidents of hate crimes, harassment, and school bullying have been increasing since 2001 (Bajaj et al., 2016). "The Trump administration actively targeted, scapegoated, and traumatized immigrant communities across the country through executive orders and policy shifts" (Villavicencio et al., 2021, p. 295). Donald Trump's election campaign consisted of an anti-Muslim agenda (Liou & Hermanns, 2017). For example, during the Trump campaign, a website designed to promote hate against Muslims posted messages to encourage readers to make Muslims feel unwanted and

scared (Huang & Cornell, 2019). This study aimed to contribute to the literature on the behaviors, practices, and leadership decisions of educational leaders who serve Muslim students in public schools to create a peaceful school culture for all.

Selection of Participants

The general population of this study comprised all full-time educational leaders with administrative roles from K-12 public institutions in Florida. The unit of analysis is the choice of whom to interview in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The unit of analysis was educational leaders working in administrative capacities because I sought to examine the leadership practices through the descriptions of educational leaders with administrative roles in K-12 public schools. For this study, the data were collected from educational leaders with administrative roles in public schools. These included principals, vice or assistant principals, deans, and/or directors of departments within the schools.

The target population consisted of all full-time school leaders and administrators who work in one school district within a large metropolitan area in Florida and serve a Muslim population of at least 50 students. The sample was three full-time school administrators from a school district within a large metropolitan area in Florida who voluntarily chose to participate in the study. In reference to the legal context of religious accommodations for students to practice their religion in Florida, this may have shaped who responded and how they responded. To be eligible for participation in the study, the participants had to be public school administrators, including charter schools, and serving at least 50 Muslim students. Those participants who were eligible to participate were invited to participate in one-on-one virtually recorded interviews. The participants

participated in only one virtual interview. The interviews were recorded on a date and time that was convenient for the participants and with their permission.

Purposeful sampling was used to locate the participants for the study. Purposeful sampling assumes that the researcher endeavors to bring to light, comprehend, and gain understanding and, therefore, should select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, participants for this study were recruited purposefully because of their knowledge, competence, and expertise in educational leadership and having served or serve Muslim students. I focused on the metropolitan area of Broward County School District in Florida to interview the school administrators for the study. I sent an email questionnaire to 29 school principals in Broward County School District. After several reminders were sent, one participant responded to the questionnaire. One of the participants was additionally recruited by contacting the school via phone. In addition to those attempts, another participant was recruited by reaching out to a friend who was in contact with the participant. These two participants differed from the participant who responded to the initial email as they were recruited utilizing additional steps. The participants voluntarily participated in the study by responding to the email request questionnaire and filling out an informed consent form. After interviewing key participants who met the criteria for study participation, I asked other members of the nearby school community to refer me to additional participants.

Data Collection

For this study, I used two forms of data collection. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data on demographics and select participants based on eligibility criteria. The self-administered questionnaire was only used to determine the participants' demographic profile and not to answer research questions. The

eligibility criteria were that (a) the participant was in an administrative role as a principal, vice principal, assistant principal, dean/director of a department, etc., and (b) the participant served at least 50 Muslims in the school.

For data collection, I conducted one-time, hour-long semi-structured interviews to ask questions of each participant to help uncover the descriptions of the participant’s knowledge and experiences in their own words. Questions are at the heart of interviewing; asking good questions is important for collecting meaningful data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A semi-structured interview is a term used to describe a range of interviews often associated with qualitative research (Brooks & Normore, 2015). The interviews were conducted over video-conferencing software when participants were available either at their school or home, making it more convenient and comfortable for the participants. The interview questions were piloted and designed to extract information from the participants to determine the research questions answers. The interview questions were designed to map to the research questions and the conceptual framework. Table 3-1 illustrates how the interview questions map to the research questions and to the conceptual framework.

Table 3-1. Mapping of Interview Questions to Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

Research Question	Interview Question	Conceptual Framework
How educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students’ experiences within the public school environment	1. What is your general role in ensuring students’ experiences are nurtured within the school environment? a. Probe: What aspect of your role helps you ensure Muslim students’ experiences are nurtured within the school environment?	Culturally Responsive Leadership and Social Justice Leadership

Table 3-1. Continued

Research Question	Interview Question	Conceptual Framework
How educational leaders describe their cultural knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices	2. What is your perception of your knowledge of Muslim faith and culture? a. Probe: What about your knowledge of the Muslim faith and culture has influenced you in nurturing Muslim students' experiences at your school.	Cultural Knowledge and Understanding
How educational leaders respond to accommodation requests of Muslim students expressing their religion during school	3. How do you perceive Muslim students are accepted in your school?	Social Justice Leadership
How educational leaders respond to accommodation requests of Muslim students expressing their religion during school	4. How have you responded to requests of Muslim students expressing their religion during school? Probe: What are some examples of Muslim students being allowed to express their religious practices in school?	Cultural Knowledge and Understanding and Culturally Responsive Leadership
How educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public school environment	5. What are your thoughts on anti-Muslim bullying, bias and Islamophobia? Probe: Have you seen any instances of this, and if so, how was it handled?	Social Justice Leadership
How educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public school environment	6. Tell me about the conversations you have had with Muslim students' families. Probe: What do those conversations tend to be about? (Academics, religious practices, discipline issues, other issues?)	Culturally Responsive Leadership
How educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public school environment	7. In what ways do you promote justice and inclusion within school environment to influence Muslim students' experiences?	Social Justice Leadership

Table 3-1. Continued

Research Question	Interview Question	Conceptual Framework
How educational leaders describe their cultural knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices	8. Where do find information about the Muslim faith and practices that students may demonstrate? Probe: What else would you like to share about your knowledge of the Muslim faith and practices?	Cultural Knowledge and Understanding and Culturally Responsive Leadership
How educational leaders respond to accommodation requests of Muslim students expressing their religion during school	9. In what ways have you encouraged the school staff to stimulate a school environment that is inviting and welcoming of Muslim students?	Social Justice Leadership and Culturally Responsive Leadership
How educational leaders describe their cultural knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices	10. What are some things you wish you knew more about when it comes to understanding Muslim students' faith and culture? Probe: What are some things that you think that teachers should know more about?	Cultural Knowledge and Understanding and Culturally Responsive Leadership

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were coded and themed by searching for meaningful patterns relevant to my study and according to the conceptual framework of my study. I utilized the online qualitative data analysis software, DelveTool.com, to conduct the coding process. First, I read through each transcript carefully to find themes and patterns. As I read through each transcript, I used the method of descriptive coding to assign codes to excerpts by highlighting phrases, sentences, or words (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The list of codes generated from the method of descriptive coding included several nouns which summarized the topic of my study. I also used In Vivo coding to collect codes based on the participants' words (Maher et al., 2018). In utilizing these two methodologies, descriptive coding and In Vivo coding (Maher et al., 2018), I generated a list of codes for the theming process.

Subsequently, I constructed themes by condensing codes related to each other by meanings and patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout theming, I thought about the purpose of my study and the conceptual framework built around my study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I categorized the codes according to the literature review, my own thoughts, and the participant's exact words. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended: "The actual names of your categories/themes/findings can come from at least three sources (or a mix of these sources): (1) yourself, the researcher, (2) the participants' exact words, or (3) sources outside the study, most likely from the literature on your topic" (p. 211). I renamed categories several times because not all the codes created patterns that aligned to certain categories. I first described each participant and the findings as they related to that individual case, and then I looked at how their comments aligned with other participants' comments to find common patterns.

Establishing Trustworthiness

In order to establish trustworthiness, research studies should be rigorous and present conclusive evidence that is true and ethically conducted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used the triangulation strategy to increase credibility by allowing multiple perspectives from different types of educational leaders for the study. Triangulation of multiple sources of data increases credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also utilized member checks as I solicited participant feedback regarding the findings. I took my findings to the participants to allow them to rule out any misinterpretation of what they said in the semi-structured interviews. Member checks are a valuable way to identify the researcher's biases and misunderstandings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also kept a reflexive journal to reflect on what was happening in my beliefs and thoughts during the study. The reflexive journal was an additional way to eliminate the threats to

trustworthiness as I explained my biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also engaged in memo writing to keep themes and key points. Through triangulation, member checks, and keeping a reflexive journal, I was able to establish trustworthiness for the study.

Positionality

Positionality in qualitative research gives information such as training, experiences, beliefs, and biases from the researcher's viewpoint (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The motivation for this study was my own experience growing up in public schools as a Muslim American student. I was compelled to produce this research because I had the desire to hear from educational leaders, inspire critical reflection, and attend to the Muslim student experience in schools. Further, I wanted to fulfill my need to acknowledge the positive influences, accommodations, and social justice reforms that have emerged for Muslim students in public schools since I was in school. I identify as a female, Asian-American, Muslim, middle-class researcher. I have come to understand through my own experiences, stories from other Muslim family members and friends, my research, and literature in the field that many Muslim students face challenges and obstacles to education that serves their needs within schools because they are Muslim. I made every effort to bracket or put my prior beliefs about how school leadership is being conducted regarding Muslim students aside. Bracketing is the practice of suspending one's own beliefs to create a heightened sense of consciousness that can be examined (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This position brought me to conduct research that would enlighten those working in school leadership to understand how to accommodate and create positive, warm, inviting, and equitable schooling experiences for Muslims and students of other religious affiliations. I hope other researchers and

practitioners may gain insight into the knowledge, practices, decisions, and policies promoted by educational leaders who accommodate Muslim students to practice their religious beliefs during school.

Limitations

There were limitations to the study that were present. The participants for the study were from public schools in Florida and not from any other state. The participants were of various backgrounds and not from a particular administrative department. The participants were based on whether they have served or are currently serving Muslim students. Consequently, the nonrandom sample from one district will affect the generalizability of the research results. However, as this was a qualitative study, the quest for generalizability was not pursued. "In qualitative research, a single case or a small, nonrandom, purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in-depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.253). The participants for the study were from one school district in Florida and not from any other state. The participants were of various backgrounds and not from a particular administrative department. The reason for choosing participants from different leadership positions in the school was to attain the descriptions of cultural knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and experiences as determined through different areas within the schools. The educational leaders were working with Muslim students. Another limitation is that participants may give responses with social desirability bias as the topic is about a particular group of students.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the knowledge, behaviors, policies, and practical strategies of educational leaders who influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. This study addressed a lack of prior evidence on how educational leaders influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The research questions were: (1) How do educational leaders describe their cultural knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices? (2) How do educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public school environment? (3) How do educational leaders respond to accommodation requests of Muslim students expressing their religion during school? The study was conducted using a qualitative, interview-based research design that allowed the collection of qualitative data comprising rich descriptions of how the participants interacted with Muslim students.

Overview of Findings

In this chapter, the research findings are presented from interviews that were conducted with three participants. Two of the participants are principals from traditional public schools, and the third participant is a principal from a charter school. The principals' actual names are not used in this study. Instead, pseudonyms are used to distinguish each participant. Basic information was collected to share the participants' educational backgrounds and the paths that led them to become educational leaders in their respective schools.

During the interviews, the participants answered 10 semi-structured, open-ended questions. The questions from the interviews were designed to ask the participants

about their leadership practices, behaviors, interactions, policies, and leadership decisions that influence Muslim students' experiences in schools. I used quotes and descriptions from the participants' answers to develop themes regarding their responses to Muslim students. Table 4-1 shows a mapping of the themes from an example of one of the participants and the rationale behind the theme development.

Table 4-1: Developed Themes

Theme	Example from Participant	Rationale
Theme 1: Educational leaders' cultural knowledge was used to implement accommodations that influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools.	A principal accommodated a Muslim student who wore a kufi while hats were not allowed in that school.	Educational leader had cultural knowledge of the Muslim students' religious beliefs and used that cultural knowledge to implement an accommodation
Theme 2: Educational leaders promoting social justice through inclusive practices influences the experiences of Muslim students in public schools.	A principal encouraged Muslim students to speak to other school principals on how to help Muslim students start MSA's in their respective schools.	Educational leader promoted social justice through the inclusive practice of giving the Muslim students the ability to become leaders and role models for other Muslim students in other schools
Theme 3: Educational leaders' cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude and critical self-reflection influences the experiences of Muslim students in public schools.	A principal said, "We really do strive to be inclusive of all of our populations, both for education and to give people a feeling of we want this to be a home for everybody who comes here."	Educational leader showed cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude when he discussed the desire for everyone to feel at home at his school

The first theme is that educational leaders' cultural knowledge was used to implement accommodations that influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The second theme is that educational leaders promoting social justice through

inclusive practices influences the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The third theme is that educational leaders' cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude and critical self-reflection influences the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. These themes will be presented with more examples from the participants and rationales for the examples after introducing each participant.

Participants

Principal David. Principal David was the first participant interviewed. He is originally from the northeast region of the United States and moved to Florida to attend a state university where he attained a bachelor's degree in public relations. Principal David worked in public relations and in marketing for several years before he went back to school to study education to become a social science teacher. He worked as a social science teacher for nine years while completing a master's degree in educational leadership from another state university. Thereafter, Principal David trained as an administrator and was employed as an assistant principal for several years. He was then moved to another school to work as an assistant principal for a few years before settling in at his current school as principal.

Principal David previously obtained cultural knowledge about Muslim students' faith, culture, and religious practices as a world history teacher and taught chapters on Islam. He previously worked for several years with a principal who was Muslim and learned about cultural and religious practices from their conversations. In addition, the District Support Initiatives Department sent information to principals of schools about religious holidays. Principal David knew about Islam and the cultural or religious practices of Muslims.

Principal David knew Muslim students were going to be observing the holy month of Ramadan and would be fasting during the day and staying up at night for prayers. He also knew about halal food choices that Muslim students may request. Principal David remembered that bullying and Islamophobia were of great concern in the past, “When I was still a student, shortly after 9/11, nationally, we were experiencing tremendous issues with Islamophobia, bullying, and things of that nature.” Additionally, he understood that bullying and Islamophobia might be an issue for Muslim girls who need to wear the hijab at school. Principal David had a conversation with a Muslim female student whose grades were falling, and as she complained that her parents were too strict, he advised her to continue to follow her parents’ religious practices at home:

It was very much a generational, cultural divide. Ultimately, at the end of the day, what I will explain to the student is, “Well, provided that your parents are not mistreating you, and they're not starving you. They're not beating you. You know, as long as you live under their roof, you do have to follow their rules” ...It was ultimately rooted in what I believe were their religious beliefs and how they wanted their daughter to act and behave.

Principal David had cultural knowledge about Muslim students’ culture, faith, and practices that they might demonstrate and need accommodations to express during school.

Principal Mary. Principal Mary was the second participant interviewed for this study. Principal Mary’s career began in the legal field as she was a paralegal. She soon returned to school to pursue her associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees in education. Although her master’s degree was in educational leadership, Principal Mary began her education career as a math teacher in middle school. She taught math for about five years in the middle school, and then went on to teach math in high school for another five years. Afterwards, Principal Mary completed administrative training and

became an assistant principal at a local high school. Later, she went through another administrative training program and has been employed as a principal for five years at the same high school in Broward County School District since then.

Principal Mary demonstrated that she had limited cultural knowledge of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices but desired to know more. Principal Mary knew the Muslim girls wore hijabs and Muslim boys wore a kufi. She stated that she was "fascinated by religion". Principal Mary affirmed that she studied religions, and when it came to the faith of Muslims, she learned from talking to Muslim people. She supposed that stigmas and stereotypes surround the faith practices of Islam and that this was the historical nature of all religions, including Catholicism. Principal Mary conveyed that she was interested in others' religious beliefs, and specifically, when she had conversations about religious beliefs with coworkers, she contemplated the similarities of their religious beliefs. She believed this engagement in dialogue was necessary in society for human beings to learn about one another.

Principal Paul. Principal Paul is originally from Florida and began his education in Dade County, Florida. He taught middle school for three years there and then taught in a high school in Broward County School District for four years while working towards earning his master's degree. Principal Paul has been the principal of a charter school in Broward County, Florida for 20 years. He opened the school 23 years ago as the assistant principal. The school is a public school that is run by the city. It is a municipally run charter school system, and the students come from the same populations as the surrounding community, although it is lottery based.

Principal Paul valued his knowledge of Muslim students' faith, culture and practices, the origins of where he received the knowledge, and the constant reminders of new information. He was proud to reference what he knew about the Muslim faith, culture, and practices and proud of his Muslim students' freely expressing their religious beliefs at his school. He bragged that Muslim students were active, engaged, and passionate in areas that mattered to him, including leadership activities:

We have a significant population of Muslim students that are active and engaged in being student leaders and that's where much of my respect and knowledge has come from, from seeing those kids and how well they are passionate about a number of things. Whether it's Muslim Student Union or not, they do other great things as well that have nothing to do with their culture or religion. They're just great kids, and we have done several events.

During the interview, Principal Paul reiterated several times that Muslim students are doing important activities in his school. He boasted about how proud he was of a Muslim senior who wore the hijab and was inspired to talk about it during her graduation speech. He also mentioned that he hosted an event at his school and invited the entire school community and was proud that others embraced the event. Principal Paul confirmed that he and other principals in the area were invited to a Mayor's Breakfast where a representative from C.A.I.R. presented about Muslim students and their concerns. He related an incident in another school where a teacher had "done some stuff" and "it was terrible", and he was relieved that it did not happen in his school. He shared that the regional director of C.A.I.R. spoke about bullying and religious targeting. Additionally, Principal Paul valued the amount of significance that is placed on education by Muslim families. He expected his staff to be educated on Muslim holidays such as Ramadan and inspired more conversations on "where kids are coming from".

He preferred to have constant reminders and constant modes of awareness in his school on all faiths and cultural backgrounds.

Thematic Analysis

I used thematic analysis to take the transcripts from the interviews with the three principals and produce three different themes that were all related to each of the research questions of this study. The themes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts were as follows:

- Theme 1: Cultural Knowledge Used to Implement Accommodations
- Theme 2: Promoting Social Justice Through Inclusive Practices
- Theme 3: Cultural Responsiveness with a Caring Attitude and Critical Self-Reflection

Figure 4-1 shows each theme and the codes mapped to each theme.

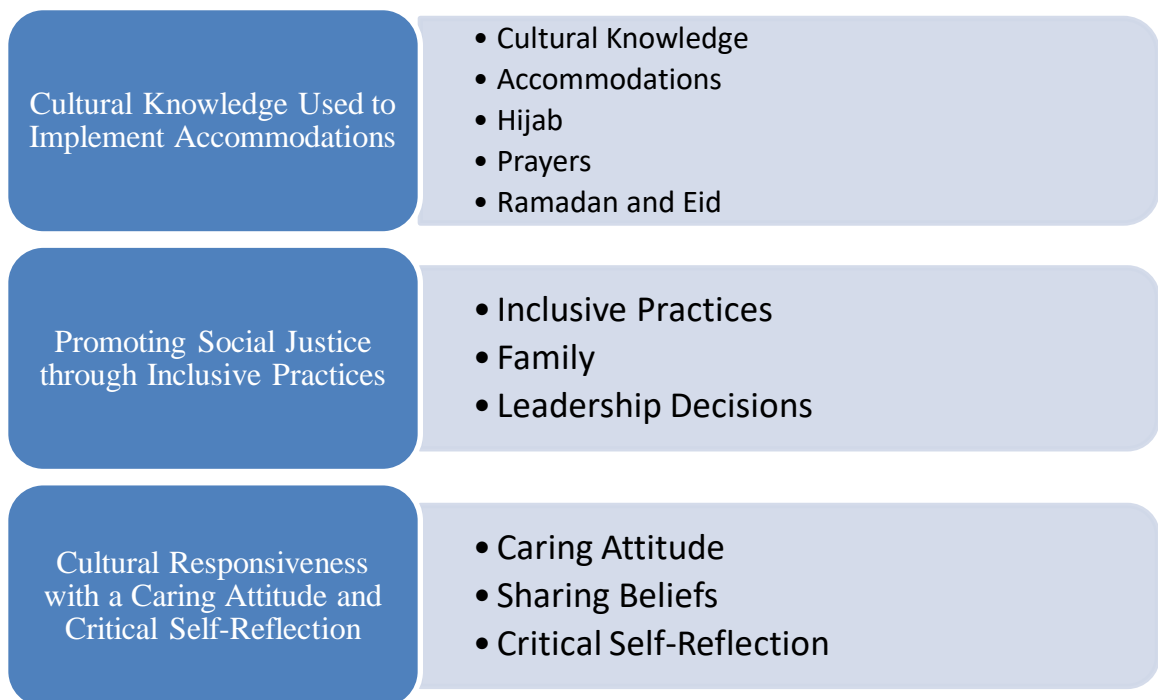


Figure 4-1. Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Educational Leaders' Cultural Knowledge Used to Implement Accommodations Influences the Experiences of Muslim Students in Public Schools.

The first theme is that educational leaders' cultural knowledge contributed to the implementation of accommodations for Muslim students to express their religious beliefs and cultural practices in public schools. The codes that were assigned to develop the theme of cultural knowledge used to implement accommodations included cultural knowledge, accommodations, hijab, prayers, and Ramadan and Eid. This finding is supported in the literature review as educational leaders' cultural knowledge should be used to implement accommodations for Muslim students (Bennouna et al., 2021). All three participants mentioned how their cultural knowledge was used to implement accommodations for Muslim students to express their religious beliefs and cultural practices in public schools.

Principal Mary gave an example of how cultural knowledge was used to create accommodation when a new male Muslim student came to school while wearing a kufi. Principal Mary related that the Muslim student was initially told by security that hats were not allowed:

We did have a student that enrolled recently... You know, we don't allow hats. We don't want any confusion. There was a student who was brand new, so they didn't recognize him. They weren't aware. Not everybody is aware of the security monitor, and they brought him to the office. Obviously, the person he was brought to was very aware, and said, "Oh no, it's ok, we didn't know. He didn't report it when he enrolled, or the parent didn't report it." I don't know if the student was here originally. So, it was okay. You provide information to those teachers and of course you allow the student to express that.

Principal Mary heard of the news and immediately informed her staff to allow the Muslim student to wear the kufi as an accommodation for him to express his religious beliefs

freely. Principal Mary also mentioned the hijab when asked about how Muslim students are accepted in the school:

I've never had a student, in my time here, my tenure here, having a situation because they were Muslim. If any student had a situation of behavior or whatever, it's never been brought to me that it was because he or she was a Muslim. I feel like especially, you know, the girls, are easier to know because if they wear the hijab, you know. They're participating and doing whatever they want. Not necessarily are they focused on being Muslim, but they are just infused in the high school experience overall.

Similarly, Principal David, who was from another school, shared his cultural knowledge of the hijab. He knew about and allowed female Muslim students to be able to wear hijab in his school by stating that "the headscarf is a hijab" and "I get my handful of students that might wear a hijab."

A third participant, Principal Paul, was very proud of his cultural knowledge of the hijab. He described a situation in which a female Muslim student not only wore hijab at his high school, but during her graduation speech, she was able to express her reasons for wearing her hijab and described how the choice to wear the hijab impacted her ability to develop her identity. When asked how Muslim students are perceived at his school, Principal Paul responded:

This is probably my proudest moment. Here at this school, we do a graduation ceremony where we select the speakers, and the class president was speaking but so were the two selected speakers from our top 5%. It's not necessarily the valedictorian. It's the top 5% summa cum laude. ... [A speaker] wears a hijab, and in fact, her speech was primarily about her decision to do so at our graduation ceremony. That was her speech about, being yourself and finding your identity and why she chose to wear the hijab.

Principal Paul related that at his school, Muslim students who formed an MSA club celebrated National Hijab Day, which is a day in February to recognize the wearing of the hijab. He invited the Council on American Islamic Relations or C.A.I.R. to host an

event to recognize and distribute hijabs for the community to support female Muslim students. Principal Paul narrated, “We did celebrate National Hijab Day again, where we did some things in the cafeteria, and we allowed kids who just wanted to support and be exposed to the culture.” Principal Paul asserted that he encouraged female Muslim students to be confident in their religious expressions of wearing the hijab:

We had a student in my middle school just two weeks ago. She turned thirteen. She's wearing a hijab now, and that was in the middle of the school year, kind of a gutsy transformation. We made sure to recognize her just in a nice way without putting her out there.

It was evident that all three participants knew and valued the importance of the religious expression of Muslim girls who wore the hijab at school. Thus, they had cultural knowledge that was used to make the accommodation to allow Muslim girls to wear the hijab at school. In doing so, they were influential in the experiences of all Muslim students attending their schools.

During the interview with Principal David, he confirmed that his cultural knowledge of the importance of prayers was used in making leadership decisions to provide accommodations for Muslim students to be able to pray during school. He understood that the prayer times were during school, and he welcomed the Muslim students' practice of their religious beliefs, specifically that they needed to pray during those times. “We will always find a place for them where they feel comfortable.”

Principal David verbalized:

I have had students who have asked for a spot to, you know, be able to say prayers during the school day. We've always been able to find either a classroom or an office that they can come to, you know, to go ahead during their prayer time. I have had this for both Muslim students and Jews.

Principal David recalled the importance of his staff's knowing and recognizing that Muslim students observe holidays. "I think diversity practices in general, you know, it is important for the staff to have that general awareness of things, like a holiday like Ramadan." Principal David also talked about his own awareness and cultural knowledge of Ramadan when he admitted, "I was not very familiar with Ramadan and the festival of Eid then, so I did just do some Google searches making sure of that because I wanted to understand more." When asked about the aspects of his leadership role in ensuring Muslim students experience a nurtured environment, Principal David responded with how his knowledge of Ramadan was used to send reminders to staff about making accommodations for those students who may be fasting:

I know we're coming to Ramadan, and I know my students and staff are going to be fasting. I always send out reminders to the staff about being sensitive to cultural issues for students and staff and understanding that they're performance could potentially be impacted or even if they see a student who might look like they're falling asleep in class. It could just be that they are hungry from their fast.

Furthermore, Principal Paul gave an example of how he used his cultural knowledge of religious holidays for Muslim students to build awareness in the school. "We put on our master calendar the holidays, so you know, people will be aware of it." Principal Paul wanted his staff to know about absences of religious observances and making accommodations for students who may be fasting in observance of Ramadan:

We do a plan to make sure that our teachers are aware of holidays when kids might be fasting, when there might be absences, or some other things because of being an academic school, teachers tend to pile on the work, and the kids tend to do the work. If there's something that the teacher needs to be aware of because it's not their culture or they're not in the loop on the fact that these kids may be gone for a couple of days or may be fasting and not at their best for a couple of days, we feel like that helps them to adapt in a way that doesn't put them at a disadvantage.

All three participants knew about and acknowledged that there were Muslim faith practices, observances, and religious expressions that needed to be accommodated for Muslim students during school. The participants' leadership decisions were influential in creating experiences for Muslim students that were inviting, welcoming, and inclusive. There seemed to be a great deal of interest from the participants in ensuring accommodations were supported for Muslim students who wished to express religious obligations during school.

Theme 2: Educational Leaders Promoting Social Justice through Inclusive Practices Influences the Experiences of Muslim Students in Public Schools.

The second theme was that educational leaders promoting social justice through inclusive practices influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The codes that were assigned to develop the theme of promoting social justice through inclusive practices included inclusive practices, family, and leadership decisions. This finding is supported in the literature review as educational leaders who promote and engage in social justice through inclusive and transformative practices influence all stakeholders (Wang, 2018). The participants in this study discussed ways in which they promote social justice through inclusive practices. For instance, Principal Paul communicated that “you want to establish a culture and climate of inclusivity”. In addition, he reported that his students who started an MSA also spoke to other high schools about how to start an MSA and offered their assistance if other principals were interested. Similarly, Principal Mary discussed that her students “all have a place at the table with what they bring in. . . all the opportunities are open to all students”.

In addition, Principal Mary disclosed that she promotes and respects student-led initiatives and points of view. Through her social justice leadership decisions, Principal

Mary has processes and policies in place for when students show their diverse interests in school when forming clubs:

You know, it is usually student lead, and I really respect that because the students have to show their interest in order for something specifically to exist. It's student interest. Things that I have done to ensure that everyone feels like they can create, let's say, a club of their interest are there. We have a process in place when they want to request the club. The assistant principal spearheads that process. If a student has an interest, we provide them with the application and everything. They have to find a sponsor because it's their responsibility to get a teacher from the school. Of course, we help them, and we say that you might want to talk to someone so that there's an adult to not just really lead it but just to supervise the students during their call time because they can't be by themselves.

Principal Mary compared the high school experience for all students to being part of a family, which showed that she cherished welcoming and inviting inclusive practices:

I always tell all the students, "You're going to come in these doors with so many backgrounds, so much of your own baggage, your own history, your own this and that, that you have. In order for us to be a strong JPT family, you have to carry that and then come in and understand and accept that this is our family, our JPT family, and you bring all of that to the table.

Principal Mary reiterated that the students' support of each other was important to her, and she wanted to give her students the opportunity to show that support of each other as she stated:

Everything is open to everybody. Even if you know, we have a Muslim Club, and you're not Muslim but you want to join to support your friend, then you go to the Muslim club. There is always the opportunity that they know they can.

Both Principal David and Principal Paul engage stakeholders on campus through inclusive practices in promoting social justice leadership. Principal David and Principal Paul revealed that they have an Equity Liaison on campus who works on inclusive practices and programming and maintains awareness campaigns for all students of diverse backgrounds. Principal David asserted:

So one staff member that I have here is an Equity Liaison, and that's one of their roles; that's not their only full-time job. So, you know, we work together as a team, of course, directed by admin, but mostly my Equity Liaison, my Social, Emotional Learning Liaison, and my School Counseling Director will work to go ahead and create programming for students. For example, they're currently working on all of our plans for our Black History Month education next month. We've got Caribbean History Month coming up in May. We celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month earlier in this school year. So we really do strive to be inclusive of all of our populations, both for education and to give people a feeling of how we want this to be a home for everybody who comes here.

Principal David confirmed that his Equity Liaison sends out information on holidays and religious observances regularly to inform those who may or may not know and to build a general awareness in the school as well: "I work with a tremendous staff to go ahead and make sure that we're putting, you know, proper supports in place for all of our students". Similarly, Principal Paul announced that an Equity Liaison on his campus guarantees the teachers are aware of religious observances of students. "We do have an Equity Liaison at my campus because we do a plan to make sure that our teachers are aware of holidays." Principal Paul mentioned the Equity Liaison is directed to work in different departments as well.

Principal David was clear on making leadership decisions and taking policy seriously to promote social justice in his school in his response to the question asking him about his thoughts on anti-Muslim bullying, bias, and Islamophobia:

Regardless of what the bullying is based upon, we take that very seriously, zero tolerance. My staff, my administrative team are aware, and we are going to go ahead and give consequences, you know, contact parents. We have an established bullying reporting system, in Broward schools, including the initial reports, the witnesses, the timeline, and sending letters home via certified mail to go ahead and make sure that all parties are kept abreast of the investigation of what's going on all the way through the conclusion of the investigation.

Principal David went on to say that he believed bullying of any kind was “unacceptable, and we are absolutely not going to stand for it”. He was adamant about nurturing an environment promoting social justice with inclusive practices such as making himself available to students during convenient times for them to talk to him on any concern that they may have:

We do offer different programming and town halls. I do monthly events, and again, though it's not for any specific student group, it is open for any student that wants to come, talk and meet with me because I know sometimes the principal can seem out of touch or maybe not out of touch, but out of reach, you know, for students. So, I try to make sure I'm out on the patio during lunch. I try to create situations where students can feel comfortable seeing me in the hallway and a classroom, in the gym during an event, or at a football or soccer game, where they know they can always come up and talk.

Principal David also responded that his staff could create forums for students to feel free to talk to someone if need be. In keeping with open discussions and forums, Principal David ensured that he was promoting social justice initiatives through inclusive practices in his school.

Principal Mary gave an example of how she handled a discipline issue of a Muslim student by first talking to him to make him feel welcome and comfortable which showed her inclusive practices as well:

Yeah, he got in trouble. And you know, I happen to walk by the office, and somehow it came up in the conversation that he was here from Afghanistan. So you know, I'm just curious and I love talking to people. You know he's been here, I think, almost two years, and I said, “Oh, so how did you feel like? How did everything with your family go? Where did you come over? With both your parents? Are you okay? Do you have a family?” And so he told me a super interesting story. We talked for a little bit, and then I told him, “Listen, you got in trouble. Get your consequence. We don't hold grudges, you know.” I tell that to all the kids. “You got to learn from your consequence, and then we move on.” So he was very, you know, respectful, but that was an interesting case.

Principal Paul acknowledged that Muslim students face religious bullying even though it did not happen to his knowledge at his school. He spoke about an event that included a speaker from the Council on American Islamic Relations who discussed anti-Muslim bullying and Islamophobia with principals in Broward County:

The Speaker from C.A.I.R. was the regional director from Tampa. He was fantastic, and he did a really good job of communicating. He did touch on the concern about bullying, suicide, and some of the, you know, concerns we have for all teenagers at this age, but particularly when it comes down to religious, you know, targeting. The Muslim kids are what I would consider as somebody that needs to be looked after in a way because I haven't seen it, but it wouldn't be a surprise, either, you know.

Principal Paul appreciated the speaker from C.A.I.R. coming in to talk about experiences that Muslim students may face regarding bullying and Islamophobia. He articulated that Muslim students should be watched over because of the experiences they go through in expressing their religious beliefs. He showed that he cared for Muslim students, which was the third theme of the study.

Theme 3: Educational Leaders' Cultural Responsiveness with a Caring Attitude and Critical Self-Reflection Influences the Experiences of Muslim Students in Public Schools.

The third theme of the study is that educational leaders' cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude and critical self-reflection influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The codes assigned for this third theme were caring attitude, sharing beliefs, and critical self-reflection. This finding is supported in the literature review as culturally responsive leaders influence students' experiences by exhibiting a caring attitude, responding to critical self-reflection, and encouraging the school community to do the same (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Each participant highlighted actions of cultural responsiveness and reflections on how they were being culturally responsive toward influencing the experiences of Muslim students during the interviews.

For example, when Principal David described how he encouraged his teachers to be sensitive towards the cultural issues of students as they were fasting for Ramadan, he showed that he had a caring attitude in his cultural responsiveness. He knew students would be sleepy and hungry, and he empathized with those students, although he was not fasting. He was concerned that they might be at a disadvantage academically. Also, he wanted his teachers to try to be understanding of the students who were fasting and adjust teaching and learning for them. Principal David wanted his teachers to know how to express a similar caring attitude so that Muslim students would feel understood and valued for their religious belief in fasting during Ramadan. He was being a culturally responsive leader and influencing the Muslim students' experiences through his caring attitude. He affirmed, "we want to understand where everyone is coming from and what their background is."

Principal David shared that he had a general caring attitude and strong beliefs about being culturally responsive to all students regarding expression of their religious beliefs and cultural practices. He vocalized that learning about other students' religious beliefs may be challenging but specifically learning about certain things which are shared values should be important:

I think it would be great for everybody to kind of have a general background on, you know, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, just so that we can all understand everybody's background and where they're coming from. I know that could be tough, and I think there are some specific things that we do want to make sure we share.

Principal David tended to be generalized in his beliefs about being inclusive to all students. He wanted to be clear about being inclusive and caring towards students of diverse backgrounds. "I think diversity practices in general, you know, it's important for

staff to have that general awareness of things like Ramadan.” He stated that he wanted his school to feel like home and did not look at certain groups in certain ways:

So we really do strive to be inclusive of all of our populations, both for education and to give people a feeling that we want this to be a home for everybody who comes here. I don't necessarily look at any one group to say I want to make sure this versus that. I try whether it's our LGBTQ students or various religious groups.

Principal David reflected on how he believed students should feel at this school regardless of their diverse backgrounds. “And a lot of it is just about relationship building with students in general and making sure that they know we're here for them, here to listen to them so that they all feel accepted.” He believed students had a positive outlook toward other students when it came to diversity. “I really believe that, especially our students today, I think they look at students from different races and religious backgrounds as just other students. I don't necessarily think there's any negative perception regarding Muslim students on campus.” He responded as a culturally responsive leader and a social justice leader.

For example, Principal David was being a culturally responsive leader when he discussed Muslim students' need for halal food choices in the cafeteria:

We as a blanket policy, we don't allow food deliveries to school, even from parents. It's just an interruption to the school day into the office for those deliveries. “Students, you are welcome to bring whatever you would like with you to eat.” You know the cafeteria cannot accommodate the different dietary meals. I mean, we have salads for students that are vegetarian. But for students that are strictly halal or kosher, that is something they have to do on their own.

Although Principal David could not provide halal meat choices, he acknowledged the Muslim students' religious beliefs by speaking to them about bringing their own food from home. He had a generally caring attitude and understanding toward Muslim students with religious beliefs regarding what they prefer to eat. Principal David was

able to voice his policy to the Muslim students in a welcoming manner, and it influenced the experiences of Muslim students during school.

Additionally, when Principal Paul spoke about the Muslim girl who started wearing hijab, he mentioned that it was a “gutsy transformation,” and he wanted his student to know that she was recognized in a “nice way”:

“You look great”, or, you know, just encouraging, so she knew. I'm sure when you make that decision that people are gonna maybe look at you differently or all of a sudden have something to say, and we wanted to make sure that it was nothing but positive from us.

He was also sharing his beliefs and showing his caring attitude in that he knew it took bravery on her part to transform herself from having an uncovered head and showing off her hair to having a full time covered head. He knew other students and staff may look at her differently and she might endure some negative attitude from responses of others. He wanted to recognize her courage in his critical self-reflection. He cared about her showing up to school and believing in herself, and he wanted all his staff to be aware of and be a part of her bravery. He indicated to them that caring for Muslim girls who express their religious beliefs in wearing the hijab was important to him. Principal Paul was a culturally responsive leader in his decision to influence the staff and school community in their reaction to the female Muslim student's experience.

Principal Paul delved into critical self-reflection when he discussed how proud he was of three girls who spoke at graduation who were from three different faiths. He felt a great sense of pride in his school and in his own ability to influence others to feel proud of their individual expression of their beliefs freely. He mentioned that the students who spoke at the graduation were of the Muslim faith, Jewish faith and of the Catholic faith, yet they were all there giving speeches without being recognized for their religious

beliefs. Principal Paul believed the event should have been announced in national news so that everyone could benefit from witnessing such a momentous occasion and reflected on how the event was so moving to him:

The great part about that graduation was that each kid spoke. Each kid did a fantastic job, and they all kind of overlapped each other. They were friends, but the most proud thing I had was that nobody even noticed that we had a Muslim, a Catholic, and a Jew, giving a speech which would have been national news, I think, in some parts of this country. It was just like, these are great kids. Wow! They are what they believe. They weren't trying to convince anybody to see things their way. They were just doing it from the heart, in all sincerity. The fact that nobody noticed the distinction between the three, that wasn't the focus of the speeches that I look at, you know. Look at what we're doing here; that's just how we are. ... That is what really made me proud.

Principal Paul shared his own beliefs in respecting others' cultural and religious background when he related that he made sure students knew, "If this is the way you know you believe and have been raised, and it was important to you culturally or religiously, then we respect that." He was proud that his students were representative of a diverse group and acknowledged that it was encouraging to view this diversity in the current society:

We have a Black Student Union, a Jewish Student Union, and a Muslim Student Organization, and they overlap in many ways. I think it is very positive, and they respect each other in ways that I think is encouraging in this day and age. Sometimes you go into the cafeteria and look at some of our tables, and it looks like the United Nations is having a meeting there because it's like this.

In another instance, Principal Paul talked about a previous teacher who started an MSA and designed T-shirts to spread awareness of the cultural values of Muslim students in his school:

When that teacher started the club, she made these really cool "Embrace Peace" shirts. I don't know if you've seen them. But it's in Arabic, and then it says, "Embrace peace," And I would wear it to school. A lot of kids would. It's still one of our most popular shirts that we have as a club.

Principal Paul was influencing the Muslim students directly by being proud of wearing their shirts. He had a genuine interest in his Muslim students and wanted Muslim students to know that he cared about respecting their values and that what they believed in was important. He described a significant moment of critical self-reflection when he shared what someone negatively expressed about the shirts:

I remember a parent making a really off comment about it, you know, about embracing peace. And I don't even want to repeat it. But I was offended myself, and it just reminded me that, you know, not everybody is on the same page, and not everybody sees these kids for the great students that they are, you know.

Principal Paul expressed that he believed Muslim children were great students and that not everyone sees them as great students, which he felt was unfortunate. He also noted that the differences we all have do not have to be misunderstood, but instead, there should be more awareness of the differences in each of us:

I just think there's got to be more of a systemic way to make sure people are on the same page. Not that they have to be on the same page, but that they're aware of the pages that we're all on.

Principal Paul showed he had a caring attitude in knowing how to be culturally responsive and wanted more people in his school and school community to have such a caring attitude. For example, he sent two of his students to present to principals of other schools on the logistics of creating clubs that were for Muslim students. Principal Paul wanted other children to be supportive of and relate to students who wear the hijab when he allowed his MSA to host National Hijab Day.

When I asked Principal Paul what things he wished he knew more about when it came to the Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices, his response showed his caring attitude through critical self-reflection. First, he described what he desired

regarding having more understanding of the Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices.

Yeah, I think that I wish we had more conversations, so people could have a better understanding of where the kids are coming from. The Mayor's Breakfast was kind of a good reminder for me because there are things you think you know, and then you hear from somebody else. You hear some information that maybe you didn't realize or had forgotten. It's just a constant reminder. I feel like you are never done, you know. It's always like you have to constantly do that.

Next, Principal Paul discussed what he valued about wanting to learn more on not only the Muslim students' faith culture and practices but on all perspectives through the school district services as well:

There was a course that was offered that I took through Broward called Courageous Conversations, and I learned the other day at the meeting that it's been cancelled by the State which was a disappointment because I felt that it wasn't all about obviously just the Muslim culture, but just about understanding various perspectives. And I feel like that's a valuable exercise for anybody.

Then, Principal Paul proposed there could be a negative outcome for those who do not want to respect diversity and learn about others' faith, culture, and practices:

So, you see, some of the things that could be of concern were where it seems to be more narrow-minded thinking instead of inclusive. Well, you might be able to fool yourself in other parts of the state, but we're very diverse here. We're very diverse. And you miss out on so many great things, you know, great kids, great food, and this nice thing that people just want to be respected for. And I don't see the harm in that.

Principal Paul had a caring attitude on how he wanted to lead in a way that made all students feel welcome and included.

Principal Mary also displayed a caring attitude when she was asked questions about how she influenced the experiences of Muslim students in being a culturally responsive leader. For example, Principal Mary said that she communicated to her students that she cares about their diverse backgrounds:

In order for us to be a strong JPT family, you have to carry that and come in and understand and accept that this is our family, our JPT family. And, you bring all of that to the table...What we bring to the table is like the blessings of it, the diversity, and the ability to discuss. You have students here that have lived on the other side of the world, and they can talk about their experiences with the students that have never left Florida. So all of that comes to the table together. They're young. They're very influenced by social media and the things that they see and everything. But I just stick to that message because they need to know that when they come in here, I'm not saying they're all the same because that's not true. But they all have a place at the table with what they bring in.

Principal Mary also talked about how she wanted her students to have positive memories of high school by saying to them, "You only go through this one pastime in your life, and I want it to be a positive thing in their memory." She displayed a caring attitude for all her high school students and wanted them to be a positive influence on their experiences.

Additionally, Principal Mary shared what she was doing as a culturally responsive leader with a caring attitude in her school. When asked about her role in the school, Principal Mary mentioned that she "provides resources and removes obstacles". For example, Principal Mary was proud of designing a way for every club to communicate with others in a physical space on campus:

You know, we're so now into the social media, and everything's online that we kind of lose like that tangible stuff. So we created this whole wall by the cafeteria. It's full of bulletin boards so that each and every club has a poster or a flyer of their days that they need and whatever activities are coming up. It's a work in progress because we just started that one this year. But I think that it's good because it also catches the eyes of the adults. Sometimes the teachers in the school don't even know all the clubs that we have.

Principal Mary understood that students and teachers may or may not be aware of all the events and activities that were available in her school since many of the clubs were only sharing the information on social media. Thus, she designed a physical space for

them within the school halls to post information to make the information visible to all the school community. Principal Mary was open to supporting any club that originated from students' interest as she mentioned the students could establish a Muslim Club, and she believed other faith backgrounds were "fascinating" and "beautiful". Principal Mary also acknowledged that she believed there were stereotypes associated with Islam, "but that has existed in faith throughout history". She shared her belief that religions evolve over time, and she was interested to learn about how Islam evolved. She spoke about her interest and love of learning and how she wanted to start something in her school for her staff to be exposed to diversity, including Muslims:

It will probably, especially for the staff, be good to expose them to something with different cultures here and there. Even though we do have our own cultural thing that we do here. But maybe just for them during planning week or something, they kind of get a little feel without the kids. Just so that they can interact with it, and it's not just for the students, but really just for the adults. I mean, that's something that just sparked right now. So it might be something that I will do during that planning, just diversity in general, but Muslim being a part of that diversity.

Principal Mary believed in sharing commonalities and in sharing different points of view. She deduced that those who recognized their commonalities and different points of view with others were engaging in positive interactions, and the positive interactions would not diminish the quality of each human being but would only enhance it. She felt that it is necessary for society to have such positive interactions:

You may have a point of view on something, and the other person may have the opposite point of view, and you know that's okay because it's not gonna take away what we do have in common. I think we need it in society.

Principal Mary delved into critical self-reflection when she disclosed an awareness of her beliefs and values regarding her and others' religious beliefs, including those of Muslims:

I have a faith that I follow, but I don't, just because that's my faith, I don't impose that. I love when others feel like they need to believe in something because like something is bigger than you and bigger than your ego. And I think it's beautiful. If you look at all the different religions, and I actually studied a little bit, they really have a lot of similarities in things and how they practice their faith. So when it comes to the Muslim faith, I get more of my education on that besides what is on the surface. I studied with actual people of the Muslim faith, who, you know, I asked like a Zillion questions because it fascinates me.

Principal Mary had strong positive feelings about people who were religious in general and believed religiosity was a beautiful concept. She was proud of knowing and studying Islam beyond the basics. She cared about knowing more by asking Muslims questions. Her critical self-reflections showed that she was a culturally responsive leader.

Discussion

I found that the participants' answers to the questions from the interviews are in alignment with how educational leaders influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. All three of the participants confirmed that they used their cultural knowledge to make accommodations for Muslim students to express their religious beliefs during school. For instance, one principal provided spaces for prayers, another principal allowed a student to wear a kufi during school, and a third principal ensured there were learning accommodations for students who were fasting during Ramadan. Similarly, the three principals spoke about how they were promoting social justice through inclusive practices in their leadership decisions, policies, and practices. A principal encouraged his students to teach principals of other high schools the method for establishing an MSA, and another principal made efforts to be available to students so that they could talk to him about any issues or concerns they faced from bullying and

Islamophobia. Furthermore, the third principal handled a discipline issue with a Muslim student first with a welcoming and inviting conversation.

In addition, each principal discussed their application of cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude and with critical self-reflections that influences the experiences of Muslim students. One principal talked about making sure there was only positive encouragement from his staff when a Muslim girl started wearing hijab in the middle of the school year, and another principal mentioned that she wanted the students to have a positive high school experience and feel that they were all part of a school family. Additionally, the responses given by the participants to the interview questions that described their influence of the experiences of Muslim students are validated in the literature.

Although researchers have found Islamophobia and bullying to be a concern for Muslims (Houry & Sullivan, 2016), it is not necessary that these principals experienced dealing with such incidents or have been contacted regarding these concerns by the Muslim students that they serve. The reasons for this might include that the Muslim students did not report the incidents, or teachers and staff handled the issues without informing the administration. Thus, the experiences of the Muslim students may not directly align with the experiences of the principals. In addition, as principals must follow school district policies and procedures regarding bullying, the principals' individual responses to such acts may be different from how Muslim students interpret those responses. Comparisons of what is known based on the literature of the study to what has been found about the research questions are made in chapter 5. Conclusions are also made in the next chapter as well as contributions this study will make to the

knowledge base of how educational leaders influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was to investigate the knowledge, behaviors, policies, and practical strategies of educational leaders who influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. In chapters 1 through 4, I presented the foundational information that supported the need for the research, an extensive literature review, the methodology of the research, and the results from data collection and thematic analysis. In this chapter, I summarize the study, the results, and the findings. I conclude the chapter with an interpretation of the findings, including the implications and the recommendations for further research, followed by a chapter summary.

I used a qualitative interview-based research design to collect data for this study. The following research questions I chose for the interviews addressed the educational leaders' knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and experiences in their schools: (1) How do educational leaders describe their cultural knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices? (2) How do educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public school environment? (3) How do educational leaders respond to accommodation requests of Muslim students expressing their religion during school? I used purposive sampling to recruit participants who served Muslim students from three different high schools. I asked the participants 10 semi-structured and open-ended interview questions. After conducting a thematic analysis, three key findings were identified: (1) educational leaders utilize their cultural knowledge to implement accommodations, (2) educational leaders promote social

justice through inclusive practices, and (3) educational leaders demonstrate cultural responsiveness through a caring attitude and critical self-reflection.

Findings, Interpretations of the Findings, and Recommendations

Finding 1: Educational Leaders' Cultural Knowledge Was Used to Implement Accommodations for Muslim Students to Express Their Religious Beliefs during School.

During the interviews, the participants shared their cultural expertise on accommodating Muslim students' religious practices during school hours. They specifically discussed allowing religious attire such as the hijab and kufi when hats were not permitted. Additionally, they noted that important holidays like Ramadan and Eid were added to the school calendar and communicated to staff members. Students were granted the ability to take breaks or absences on these days as needed. Participants ensured staff members were aware of and informed to make accommodations for students who were fasting during Ramadan. Accommodations were made for Muslim students who requested time and space for specific daily prayers by a participant. Participants acknowledged that Muslim students are given accommodations for hosting cultural events and for forming MSAs in their respective schools.

Interpretation of the finding

There is literature on the topic of how educational leaders' cultural knowledge was used to make accommodations for Muslim students to express their religious beliefs during school. Bennouna et al. (2021) reported that school administrators provided prayer rooms, schoolwide welcome events, cultural celebrations, as well as support for Muslim students through school engagement with families and communities. In addition, Nelson and Guerra (2014) found that educational leaders' cultural knowledge of the students that they serve was influential on the students' educational

experience. Reagan (2020) emphasized that students should be allowed to offer narratives to teachers that are based on accurate knowledge and understanding of Islam and familiarity with Muslims. Genao (2021) confirmed that educational leaders must have cultural knowledge and understand the distinctiveness of students' cultural backgrounds to honor their differences. Participants realized cultural knowledge was utilized to make accommodations for Muslim students. The participants talked about kufi, hijab, Ramadan and Eid, and prayers. Although schools do not have spaces and times for religious obligations to be observed, the participants allowed Muslim students to express their religious beliefs because the participants knew it was important for the students' experiences during school. Thus, the leadership practices, policies, and decisions of the educational leaders were made to accommodate Muslim students and influence the experience of Muslim students in their respective schools.

Recommendations

It is imperative that educational leaders in public schools gain the essential knowledge to ensure that they can provide suitable accommodations for the basic needs of all students, including Muslim students and other diverse populations, consistently every year. I strongly recommend this practice to ensure that all students can receive the educational experience they deserve. Scribner et al. (2021) asserted that educational leaders had a deep commitment to welcoming students and learned about students' lives, including what affected their overall engagement in academia. The influence of educational leaders' leadership decisions, practices, policies, and behaviors on the experiences of Muslim students starts with what the educational leaders know about the basic practices of their respective Muslim students. Once they have a basic needs assessment, then the educational leaders can use that knowledge

to create accommodations that align with the school's mission. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) emphasized the significance of creating a school mission that embraced all cultures. For example, the hijab is one of the most fundamental practices of most Muslim girls, and many of them start wearing the hijab in middle school. One of the participants in this study talked about his experience in learning that a student started wearing a hijab in the middle of the school year and understood that it might be an issue for her well-being. His cultural knowledge was used to make an accommodation to allow her to wear the hijab and influence her experience at school by making sure it was positive. He aligned the accommodation with his vision for students to have a positive experience at school. Leadership actions of educational leaders involving learning about the cultural knowledge and basic needs of students influences the experiences of students in a positive way and have elements of a deep commitment to welcoming students (Scribner et al., 2021).

I suggest school districts provide training to educate educational leaders on basic cultural understanding of diverse student populations and how to meet their basic needs. As mentioned by a participant, one such training is provided by the Council on American Islamic Relations to schools. It's important to undergo this training as school districts are becoming more diverse and not everyone understands Muslim students' religious practices and cultural background. Besides, so many cultural and religious practices of Muslim students are a necessary part of Muslim students' daily activities, including prayers and fasting during Ramadan. One of the participants of this study expressed that their school district previously held courses for educational leaders to understand important aspects of various cultural backgrounds of students, which

included Muslim students' perspectives. Educational leaders who have cultural knowledge should discuss accommodations with each other at school district meetings and convey the different methods of allowing accommodations for Muslim students and students of all faith backgrounds to have a positive experience in expressing their religious beliefs during school.

Finding 2: Educational Leaders Were Promoting Social Justice through Inclusive Practices That Influenced the Experiences of Muslim Students in Public Schools.

The second finding was that the participants promoted social justice through inclusive practices and ideals within their respective schools. As the literature presented social justice leaders, the participants believed in and acted upon inclusive practices to influence Muslim students' experiences in school. The participants articulated all students were valued and important regardless of their religious beliefs and one participant mentioned the students should feel a sense of "family" at her school. The participants firmly agreed that Muslim students are frequently subjected to discrimination and harassment due to their religion, and they were resolute in their decision to prevent such behavior in their school. The participants made it clear that they were available for Muslim students and students of any faith or religious background to talk to them. They emphasized their open-door policy and their efforts to establish connections with students. One participant actively engaged with students throughout lunch, events, games, and in the hallways. A participant encouraged Muslim students to share their experiences and start Muslim clubs or MSAs by speaking at graduation and to other principals. All three participants highlighted the crucial role of inclusivity and inclusive practices in creating a welcoming school environment for Muslim students and students from diverse backgrounds.

Participants were strong proponents of inclusive practices and shared some of these practices that were upheld at their school. It was highlighted by one of the participants that students have the freedom to initiate any club they feel strongly about, provided that a teacher is present to oversee it. Student-led ideas and student-led points of view were strongly encouraged by allowing students to take responsibility for leading clubs on campus. In addition, participants welcomed and created spaces for students of other faiths to support Muslim students in clubs and events to allow for exposure to the Muslim faith, culture, and practices. These participants desired to create opportunities for inclusive spaces for all students to be in open dialogue with one another and show support for one another's diverse backgrounds. Two of the participants mentioned the district employed an Equity Liaison for their respective schools to ensure inclusive practices were being scheduled and organized. One participant articulated the job of the Equity Liaison was to provide warm, welcoming, and inclusive spaces for everyone to develop a feeling of being at home for Muslim students as well as students of all diverse backgrounds. The participants understood that promoting social justice through inclusive practices was necessary to ensure that Muslim students had positive school experiences.

Interpretation of the finding

Literature on the topic of educational leaders promoting social justice through inclusive practices exists (Bosket et al., 2017; Theoharis, 2007; Wang, 2018); however, I did not find literature on the topic of educational leaders promoting social justice through inclusive practices to influence the experiences of Muslim students. In order to gain a deeper insight into this matter, I related an extensive analysis of existing research on the attributes of social justice leaders to the various inclusive approaches

that educational leaders can employ to positively influence the educational journeys of Muslim students in schools. Previous researchers from Boske et al. (2017) acknowledged the need for social justice leaders to promote democracy, encourage student-led points of view, deepen their empathetic responses, and understand systemic oppression in schools. In this study, participants suggested supporting Muslim student-led perspectives, being available to Muslim students both physically and emotionally, and acknowledging the possibility of bullying against Muslim students. Also, when asked what aspect of his role helps ensure that Muslim students' experiences are nurtured within the school environment, one participant mentioned, "my goal is to be holistic", and Boske et al. (2017) stated social justice leaders wanted to center on holistic approaches. Similarly previous research from Theoharis (2007) reported social justice leaders placed significant importance on diversity and extending respect to other cultures. When asked about anti-Muslim bullying, bias, or Islamophobia happening in her school, a participant emphasized that her students were taught to be understanding and respectful of each other by developing in them a sense of being part of a family.

The participants in this study encouraged Muslims to lead student organizations as well as teach others how to lead Muslim student organizations, which was reported by Vasallo (2022) as a characteristic of social justice leaders who fostered a school environment where everyone feels welcome. A participant promoted the National Hijab Day event at school to invite students to support a Muslim student-led event acknowledging and valuing Muslim students' characteristics, becoming aware of their cultural and religious practices, and striving to heighten their self-esteem, all of which

were described as characteristics of social justice leaders by Vassallo (2022). Another participant stated that students who were not Muslim were invited to avail an opportunity to become aware of Muslim students' culture by joining and supporting Muslim organizations on campus. Similarly, researchers Mckenzie et al. (2008) concluded social justice leaders ensured their schools operated with inclusive spaces for students to learn from one another. During the interview with a participant, I inquired about what they believed their teachers should know more about regarding the faith and culture of Muslim students. The participant expressed a desire for teachers to be exposed to various cultures during planning week. Jean-Marie (2008) listed that principals who fostered social justice held ongoing professional development for staff.

Recommendations

I recommend that educational leaders should seek authentic and meaningful ways when promoting social justice through inclusive practices to influence the experiences of Muslim students. A critical component of social justice leaders was developing an empathetic response to increasing the capacity to serve in authentic and meaningful ways (Boske et al., 2017). Firstly, educational leaders should know about the inclusive spaces that are available to Muslim students for their voices and ideas to be heard. Educational leaders can be more authentic and meaningful by encouraging staff to watch over Muslim children in a more thoughtful and protective way. For instance, one principal started a warm, welcoming conversation with an Afghani student before taking action to discipline the student on a misbehavior issue. She was protecting the students' feelings and being thoughtful in her behavior and leadership practice. Another recommendation is for educational leaders to learn deeply about Muslim students' faith, culture, and religious practices. Theoharis (2007) confirmed that

social justice leaders address the issues of how to achieve success for every student by placing significant importance on diversity. Principals should spend time with Muslim students by creating spaces for conversations, asking questions to open dialogue, and making inquiries on the basic needs of Muslim students. One principal made himself available to students in the hallways, during lunch, and at games and events so that he could understand more about their lives and experiences in school.

I recommend educational leaders use inclusive practices in establishing a school culture that is warm, welcoming, and inviting for Muslim students and for all students regardless of their cultural or religious background. Wang (2018) suggested principals should prioritize the needs of students through various methods to solicit students' input, empower them, and work with them to terminate inequitable practices within the school community. One way is to designate multi-use prayer rooms for all students which can be used for prayers, meditation, quiet time, or as a space for students to study for exams when fasting for Ramadan. On Fridays, when high school Muslim students need to pray a congregational prayer called Jumu'ah, the students can use the space for their Jumu'ah services. Educator leaders can be more inclusive of students of different faiths by providing their basic needs during school.

Educational leaders must take action to ensure that Muslim students can connect with their peers in school. This must involve the establishment of a student organization that focuses on their cultural identity, the planning of events that celebrate their heritage, and the promotion of awareness within the larger school community. Educational leaders should support the Muslim student organization fully and encourage Muslims to host events and gain support from other staff and students who

are not Muslim. One participant mentioned that students who were not Muslim were encouraged to join the Muslim student organization to be supportive of each other. Educational leaders should create inclusive spaces and foster a school environment that is warm, welcoming, and inviting for Muslim students and for all students so that they can achieve academic success.

Finding 3: Educational Leaders' Cultural Responsiveness with a Caring Attitude and Critical Self-Reflection Influences the Experiences of Muslim Students in Public Schools.

The third finding was that educational leaders' cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude and critical self-reflection influences the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. Participants in the study reflected on their own attitudes and beliefs when sharing how they were culturally responsive. A participant discussed how he cared about students who were fasting in Ramadan and wanted his staff to be sensitive to Muslim students by understanding why they may be sleepy and tired during class. The participant cared about learning about Islam as well as the faith backgrounds of all his students and wished that specifics could be shared within the school community to build awareness. All three participants reflected upon being caring and inclusive towards all groups of students from different cultural and faith backgrounds.

The participants exhibited a commendable level of cultural responsiveness towards Muslim students, displaying a genuine and compassionate demeanor while engaging in introspection. Additionally, they expressed a sense of pride in their Muslim students' accomplishments. A participant expressed concern for his Muslim students who wanted halal food options. Although some public schools in the U.S. do provide halal food options (Bennouna et al., 2021), he couldn't provide such options and did not say why. However, he wanted to reassure the Muslim students to feel comfortable

bringing their own food from home. Another participant mentioned that a female student started to wear a hijab in the middle of the school year, and while it showed bravery on her part to take such bold action, he knew it might be challenging for her to deal with possible unenthusiastic reactions from students and staff. Thus, he guaranteed that his staff was very positive towards her and her transformation to make her feel good about her decision. Similarly, the participant was proud of his graduates who spoke in support of each other at graduation, although one was Muslim, one was Jewish, and one was Catholic. The participant wanted people of different faiths from his school community to be more understanding of one another and was proud to share that his Muslim students presented at a school district event to teach other high school principals how to establish an MSA in their respective schools. Another participant wanted to share that making her students feel accepted was very important to her, as she related that she told them they were part of a school family. The participant was proud that she designed a method of communication for diverse students and staff to meet by placing a bulletin in the cafeteria for clubs to post announcements and invitations to events.

Interpretation of the finding

The literature on the interconnectedness of social justice leaders and culturally responsive leaders aligned with the finding that educational leaders' cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude and critical self-reflection influences Muslim students' experiences in schools. Critical consciousness is reflecting on one's own attitudes and beliefs and is a core attribute of the interconnectedness of social justice leaders and culturally responsive leaders shown in Figure 5-1 (Khalifa, 2018).



Figure 5-1. Interconnectedness of Conceptual Frameworks Revisited

During the interview, the participants demonstrated care and critical reflection in their responses. This showcased their social justice leadership and culturally responsive behaviors, which can positively impact the experiences of Muslim students. Boske et al. (2017) found social justice leaders and culturally responsive leaders deepened their empathetic responses to diverse students' needs. When the participant discussed they cared about Muslim students' basic needs as they were fasting in Ramadan, the participant showed an empathetic response to the Muslim students' refraining from food and drink during the school day. Similarly, another participant desired to build awareness about Islam so that others could be empathetic with Muslim students' basic needs to practice their religious beliefs.

Khalifa (2018) affirmed social justice leaders and culturally responsive leaders are critically self-aware of racism and the history of oppression. One participant was passionate about being there for Muslim students, being available to attend to Muslim

students' basic needs, and standing by Muslim students when any act of bullying was reported. Another participant spoke passionately regarding anti-Muslim bullying and mentioned that if a Muslim student felt and reported there was harassment, bullying, or intimidation of any kind, then the school leaders would be involved, parents would be notified, and there would be a thorough investigation. One participant, when asked about anti-Muslim bullying and Islamophobia, observed that Muslim students were a group who especially needed safeguarding because he believed that Muslim students might be religiously targeted. The participant briefly revealed that an anti-Muslim bullying incident led by a teacher occurred in another school and was relieved it did not happen in his school. Previous researchers from Boske et al. (2017) said educational leaders with social justice leadership behaviors deepen their empathetic responses. Bustamante et al. (2009) recommended that school leaders should reflect on their attitudes, beliefs, and values to understand their worldviews and how past experiences affect their leadership.

Recommendations

I recommend that educational leaders reflect on their attitudes and beliefs about Muslim students to ensure they influence Muslim students' experiences in school. Specifically, educational leaders should be culturally responsive with a caring attitude by informing the school staff about Muslim students' basic needs. Educational leaders should provide information and training seminars to teachers on how to be more culturally responsive to the diverse student body that they serve. Teachers should be made aware of Muslim students' needs to attend daily prayers, fast in Ramadan, and celebrate Eid as an excused absence. Teachers should be informed about allowing Muslim students to go to the restroom before the prayer times to make ablution or

Wudu. For Ramadan, the school should have a designated space for Muslim students who are fasting so they can be away from the cafeteria. One such space could be a prayer room, a meditation room, or a game room where students can pass the time with other Muslim students in a productive socializing manner. In addition, teachers should take care in giving less work during Ramadan to Muslim students who are fasting. For example, physical education and gym teachers should reduce physical inducing activities during Ramadan and Muslim students should be looked after to make sure they are not dehydrated or sleepy. Muslim students need to be excused to either leave for Friday prayers, or Jumu'ah, or a space needs to be available for Muslim students to conduct their own congregational prayer during school on Fridays. Efforts should be made for Halal food availability in the cafeteria. Muslim boys should be able to have beards and wear kufis, and Muslim girls should be able to wear hijab and loose clothing even during physical education classes. Educational leaders should ensure the curriculum is accurate regarding Islamic history and current events regarding Muslim majority countries. Some public schools in the U.S. are already implementing these recommendations (Bennouna et al., 2021). These are only some of the recommendations that are necessary for educational leaders to be more caring towards Muslim students in public schools.

Limitations

There were limitations associated with this study. The participants were from public schools in Florida and not from any other state, and they were all principals. The participants were chosen based on if they were currently serving Muslim students and were working with them. Consequently, the nonrandom sample from one state may have affected the generalizability of the research results. However, as this was a

qualitative study to understand the in-depth responses from the participants, generalizability was not pursued (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another limitation is that participants may have responded with social desirability bias as the topic concerns a particular group of students. Some of their answers may have been swayed by the fact that I, their interviewer, am a Muslim. These limitations may have existed in this study.

Implications

Several implications for educational leaders were considered for this study. First, the finding that educational leaders' cultural knowledge was used to accommodate Muslim students to express their religious beliefs during school included gaining knowledge and spreading awareness of other students' religious beliefs, cultures, and diverse backgrounds. In addition, this finding may enhance educational leadership training. As part of an educational leadership program, multicultural and diversity training courses may help educational leaders become more knowledgeable about the diverse backgrounds of the students they serve. One participant mentioned there was a course offered by the school district for principals to learn about the cultural backgrounds of students and various groups. Thus, having such knowledge might increase their effectiveness as leaders of diverse groups and provide them with tools to create accommodations that students need at school. Specifically, the cultural knowledge of educators may help them find better solutions to the challenges that diverse populations of students face in schools (Nelson and Guerra, 2014).

Furthermore, concerning the finding of educational leaders promoting social justice through inclusive practices, there are numerous implications for educational leaders. Educational leaders may provide voices to students who are marginalized, underserved, and oppressed, such as low-socioeconomic students, minority students,

immigrant students, and others. Through this study, future educational leaders might be encouraged to promote justice and equity through the inclusive practices implemented by the participants in their schools. Educational leaders may further investigate or prevent harassment, bullying, bias, and Islamophobia, by reading about the understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and experiences that the participants described in this study. Regarding other marginalized, diverse groups of students, researchers may be able to find out how educational leaders' behaviors, policies, and practices influence their experiences in schools as well.

The finding of educational leaders' cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude and critical self-reflection included reflecting upon one's own beliefs, attitudes, and values, which may develop stronger leaders who serve students who are marginalized and/or are from a minority group. One participant stated that he showed respect for all students and their families; hence he was reminding himself of his own values and personal views. All the participants expressed the desire to show more care, to be more available, and to be more responsible regarding being culturally responsive to students from diverse backgrounds, and researchers may be able to study how Muslim students respond to such behaviors of educational leaders. Future researchers may study the outcomes of how different groups of marginalized students respond to educational leaders' caring attitudes and critical self-reflection.

Principals of schools may be reluctant to provide accommodations due to the prohibition of religious practices led by schools (U.S. Const. amend, I). Thus, researchers have an opportunity to provide school leaders with information on the legalities of providing religious accommodations. Researchers can study in-depth how

accommodations are legally provided. The studies can be set in different locales, about certain groups of Muslims from different cultures, or regarding different religiously affiliated groups of students. These and other studies may benefit principals who struggle with ideas that emerged with the separation of church and state under the Establishment Clause (U.S. Const. amend. I).

This study focused on the educational leaders' behaviors, policies, attitudes, and leadership practices that influenced Muslim students in public schools. Future research may include the lived experiences of Muslim students to add depth to the understanding of how far educational leaders' influence may reach Muslim students. For instance, researchers may study the effect of the accommodations that Muslim students are provided in schools. Studying such data may provide an alternate perspective when coming from the students. Findings could guide research on the effects of accommodations on other student populations based on gender, race, religious beliefs, cultural background, etc. Research on how leaders influence Muslim students' experiences may be studied in different settings, including in private schools, higher education, or even in non-educational and corporate settings with Muslim employees.

Summary

In this study, I investigated the answers to three research questions that highlighted how educational leaders influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. The research questions asked the following:

1. How do educational leaders describe their cultural knowledge and understanding of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices?
2. How do educational leaders use culturally responsive leadership and social justice leadership to influence Muslim students' experiences within the public school environment?

3. How do educational leaders respond to accommodation requests of Muslim students expressing their religion during school?

The answers to the research questions emerged through a process of interviewing participants and developing themes which were the findings of the study.

One finding was that educational leaders' cultural knowledge was used to implement accommodations for Muslim students to express their religious beliefs during school. Participants discussed how their knowledge of certain religious dress, religious holidays, and religious observances was used to design accommodations for Muslim students to express their religion during school. Previous literature supported educational leaders' use of cultural knowledge to create accommodations for Muslim students and students of other faiths to express their religious beliefs during school. This finding meant that the interviewed educational leaders described their cultural knowledge of Muslim students' faith, culture, and practices. These educational leaders were responding to accommodation requests of Muslim students. Thus, these educational leaders were influencing Muslim students' experiences at school as the accommodations took place and Muslim students' religious expressions were being provided space and value. I recommend that educational leaders seek to gain knowledge about Muslim students' cultural and religious basic practices and should use this knowledge to implement accommodations for Muslim students to have a positive influence on their experience during school.

Another finding was that educational leaders' promoting social justice through inclusive practices influences the experiences of Muslim students in school. The participants affirmed that they value and promote social justice through inclusive practices for all students regardless of cultural or religious background. It was

acknowledged by the participants that individuals of the Muslim faith are subjected to bullying. Participants invited Muslim students to have spaces to speak on their issues and share their experiences with others in the schools. The study's literature showed that educational leaders support inclusive practices for students but not necessarily for Muslim students. Thus, in this finding, the inclusive practices of educational leaders to influence the experiences of Muslim students were interpreted. Previous research has shown that student organizations play a crucial role in ensuring that students' voices are heard within schools, particularly regarding inclusive practices. These educational leaders have promoted social justice by creating spaces for Muslim student organizations, which allow Muslim students to express their views. I recommended that educational leaders should try to seek authentic and meaningful ways to promote social justice through inclusive practices to influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. Educational leaders should build relationships with students to understand their experiences and create warm, inviting, and welcoming spaces for them to feel comfortable and included. Educational leaders should provide spaces for Muslim students to get to know other Muslim students to gain a sense of belonging.

A third finding was that educational leaders' cultural responsiveness with a caring attitude and with critical self-reflection influences the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. Participants mentioned they cared about Muslim students in many ways, including how they fast in Ramadan and how they wanted to learn more about Islam. Participants discussed the significance of making Muslim students feel welcome and were proud of their achievements. Previous researchers studied how culturally responsive leaders cared about students of diverse backgrounds and critically reflected

on their attitudes, beliefs, and values toward understanding students' cultural backgrounds. Through this critical self-reflection, educational leaders were being social justice leaders and culturally responsive leaders as their thought processes showed caring attitudes and empathy. I recommended that educational leaders should care about Muslim students' experiences in schools by informing the school staff of the basic needs of Muslim students. In addition, educational leaders should be willing to strive to respond to Muslim students' requests for accommodations even if only one Muslim student exists in the school, as every student has the right to express his/her religious beliefs. Educational leaders should be culturally responsive with critical self-reflection by ensuring the school provides accommodations that are needed for Muslim students who are fasting, praying, and observing holidays during school.

I identified with many of the responses that were given by the participants to the questions because of my own lived experiences as a Muslim student experiencing public school and as an educational leader working with Muslim students. I felt that my experiences brought context and meaning to the findings as I understood the educational leaders' position and the Muslim students' cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices. I was heart-warmed by the desire of the principals that I interviewed to help Muslim students have positive experiences during school. The school principals showed empathy by expressing their willingness to be more available to Muslim students' needs, creating more spaces for them, and engaging in more conversations with them. I intended to generate thoughtfulness in educational leaders who are willing to be culturally responsive and seek cultural knowledge about Muslim students for the sake of preventing anti-Muslim bullying and safeguarding Muslim students' experiences in

school. So long as educational leaders care about their students' experiences, they will be better suited to execute decisions, practices, and policies that influence students of all cultural and religious backgrounds in a positive way.

APPENDIX A
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM



* [RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM \(TO BE COMPLETED AND SIGNED BY PARTICIPANTS DIGITALLY\)](#)

* Please read this document carefully before you decide to participate in this research study. Your participation is voluntary, and you can decline to participate or withdraw consent at any time, with no consequences.

* [Study Title:](#)

“How Educational Leaders Influence the Experiences of Muslim Students in Public Schools”

* [Person\(s\) conducting the research:](#)

Principal Investigator: Maryam Hasan, a graduate student at the University of Florida, email: m.hasan@ufl.edu

Faculty Advisor: Frank C. Curran, Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy, University of Florida, email: chriscurran@coe.ufl.edu

* [Purpose of the research study:](#)

To investigate the leadership practices, behaviors, and cultural knowledge of educational leaders who influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools in America.

* [What you will be asked to do in the study:](#)

You will be asked to complete a one-time, 30 minute, semi-structured interview using the online video conferencing software, Zoom. The interview will be audio and video recorded, and transcribed. The recordings will be deleted. The transcription will be emailed to you for verification. At that point, you will be able to “redact” any statement you don’t wish include in your data.

* [Time required:](#)

A one-time, 30-minute time frame for an online video interview conducted by the Principal Investigator and a few minutes of your time to verify the transcript of the interview.

* [Risks and benefits:](#)

There are no risks or discomforts anticipated, and there are no direct benefits of participation for you.

* [Confidentiality:](#)

There is a minimal risk that security of any online activity can be compromised, but Zoom uses encryption and other security methods to protect your information. Here is a link to Zoom’s privacy/data security policy statement:

<https://explore.zoom.us/docs/ent/privacy-and-security.html> Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. The audio and video recordings of the interview will be deleted immediately after the transcription is generated. The transcription of the interview will be generated through an online transcribing service, Rev.com and uses several methods of privacy/data security to keep the transcription safe. Please visit <https://www.rev.com/legal/privacy> for more information on Rev.com's privacy statement. The transcription will be sent to you for verification. The verified transcription will be used anonymously and for the purpose of answering the research questions. Quotes and paraphrased quotes from the transcription will be used in reports, but we will strive to avoid inclusion of anything that might identify you or others in the reports. The transcription will be numbered for identification and de-identified of any information related to your identity. The principal investigator and the faculty advisor are the only ones who will be able to read the transcriptions and kept securely by them.

* Compensation:

No compensation is included

May the researcher(s) benefit from the research?

We may benefit professionally if the results of the study are presented at meetings or in scientific journals.

* Withdrawal from the study:

* You are free to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this study at any time without consequence. You can decline to answer any question you don't wish to answer. If you withdraw, your information will be discarded. If the researcher deems your information is not needed, then it can be withdrawn from the study and deleted immediately.

* If you wish to discuss the information above or any discomforts you may experience, contact one of the research team members listed at the top of this form.

* If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB02) office (University of Florida; PO Box 100173; Gainesville, FL 32610; (352) 392-0433 or irb2@ufl.edu.)

* Agreement:

* I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study, and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant Name (Signed/Typed digitally)

Date

Name of Person obtaining informed consent (Signed/Typed digitally)

Date

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

1. What is your general role in ensuring students' experiences are nurtured within the school environment?
 - a. Probe: What aspect of your role helps you to ensure Muslim students' experiences are nurtured within the school environment?
2. What is your perception of your knowledge of Muslim faith and culture?
 - a. Probe: What about your knowledge of the Muslim faith and culture has influenced you in nurturing Muslim students' experiences at your school.
3. How do you perceive Muslim students are accepted in your school?
4. What are some examples of Muslim students being allowed to practice their religious practices in school?
 - a. Probe: How have you accommodated Muslim students?
5. What are your thoughts on anti-Muslim bullying, bias and Islamophobia?
 - a. Probe: Have you seen any instances of this, and if so, how was it handled?
6. Tell me about the conversations you have had with Muslim students' families.
 - a. Probe: What do those conversations tend to be about? (Academics, religious practices, discipline issues, other issues?)
7. In what ways do you promote justice and inclusion within school environment to influence Muslim students' experiences?
8. Where do find information about the Muslim faith and practices that students may demonstrate?
 - a. Probe: What else would you like to share about your knowledge of the Muslim faith and practices?
9. In what ways have you encouraged the school staff to stimulate a school environment that is inviting and welcoming of Muslim students?
10. Has there been any professional development in the school or district regarding understanding Muslim students' faith, culture, and experiences?
 - a. Probe: What are some things you wish you knew more about when it comes to understanding Muslim students' faith and culture?

b. Probe: What are some things that you think that teachers should know more about?

APPENDIX C
PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Maryam Hasan
Doctoral Candidate
University of Florida

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Pre-screening to request participation to conduct research.

My name is Maryam Hasan.

I am a graduate student at the University of Florida seeking a doctorate degree in educational leadership. I am requesting your participation in my research for my dissertation.

I am conducting research to investigate the leadership practices, behaviors, and cultural knowledge of educational leaders who influence the experiences of Muslim students in public schools. I have chosen this topic because I am very passionate about educational leadership and the public school education of Muslim students. I believe this research is necessary because there are only few studies in this topic of interest. I hope that through my research, I can add to the literature on how educational leaders influence the experiences of not only Muslim students but all students with different cultural and religious backgrounds.

In order to be eligible for the research, participants need to be an administrator at a Florida public school and serving Muslim students in the school. If you are interested in participating in the research, please answer the following questions so that I may determine your eligibility.

1. What is your specific job title at the current school?
2. What are your specific job duties and responsibilities?
3. Are there Muslim students enrolled in your school currently?
 - a) Does your school have a Muslim club or student association?
 - b) Have you had requests to make religious accommodations for Muslim students?
 - c) Does your school serve a community with a significant Muslim population?

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

Maryam Hasan

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maryam Siddiqā Hasan was born in Dothan, Alabama to Pakistanis Dr. Mohammad and Salma Yunus. After graduating from Holmes County High School in Bonifay, Florida, she went to the University of Oklahoma and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics education in 2003. Her teaching career began in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where she worked as a secondary teacher in a private school to teach 6th grade mathematics, pre-algebra, and algebra 1. After several years in Oklahoma, one year in north Florida, and one year in South Carolina, she moved to her current home in central Florida. She taught for 8 years at a private school in Orlando, Florida as a math teacher in middle and high grade levels spanning different mathematics subjects each year including 6th grade math, pre-algebra, algebra 1, algebra 2, and geometry. In 2019, she graduated from the University of Florida with a Master of Education degree in educational leadership. While volunteering with the Muslim Women's Organization in Orlando, Florida, she continued her education by earning her doctorate degree in educational leadership from the University of Florida in 2023. Her experience as a teacher leader in a private Islamic school helped to shape her awareness of the impact that the cultural knowledge of educational leaders can have on diverse students' experiences. This revelation prompted her to seek to deepen her knowledge of how educational leaders influence the experiences of Muslim students. These goals were realized through completing her doctorate degree in educational leadership. Currently, she plans to pursue a career in research and higher education and volunteers with the Muslim Women's Organization in central Florida.