



By: Hassina Alizai, Ph.D., OCT

Purpose of Study

To examine the experiences of Muslim teacher candidates (TCs) and the various challenges they encounter while enrolled in teacher education programs in Ontario through an examination of their in-class and practicum placement experiences.

Research Questions

- What are the experiences of Muslim TCs in Canadian teacher education programs?
- To what extent are Muslim TCs affected by a program's culture, structures and demographics?
 - How are these experiences and practices affected by the intra-categorical diversity of the participants?

Methodology

Utilized qualitative methods to examine the experiences of Muslim TCs (N=18) in three university base Ontario teacher education programs that differ demographically. Interviewed participant-nominated individuals (e.g. instructors) who explicitly contribute to equity and the well-being of racialized TCs (N=8).

Meta-finding

Initially intended to report site-specific findings. Participants' experiences showed little variability despite demographic and contextual variations among the three programs.

Recommendations

- Adopt a purposeful approach towards admissions
- Restructure cohort composition
- Practicum placements for Muslim TCs must be intentionally assigned
- Religious sensitivity training for faculty, staff, and students
- Address anticipated discrimination

"I had an AT, [during] my first practicum, told me [to] introduce myself to the class as Canadian ... so they can see that someone like you can become a teacher."

Valy chose to add an emoji of herself to her email signature: "It just gave me a little bit of relief to have that there, and so that they know that 'hey like I am visibly Muslim.'"

"Students calling me terrorists and, like, the first day I wasn't even speaking, like in the first days of your practicum you just sit in the corner."

"Don't want to ruffle any feathers."

"I have never had someone told me that I should not be an educator" (The faculty liaison's response).

"The onus is on us. The person who was my practicum prof. wasn't the most present person. I didn't feel like they made space for me in a way that made me feel comfortable to even bring up what had happened on my practicum."

"I had to essentially take over a whole parent-teacher night because someone's parents just thought ... how could I be teaching English? They were surprised that I was a [SCU] grad."

Theme # 1: Micro Conditions – Microaggressions in Muslim TCs' Teacher Education Experiences

- Experiences of Islamophobia as microaggressive
- Stereotype-based expectations: Bigotry of low expectations
 - Assumptions of unfamiliarity and illegitimacy with/in Canadian education
 - Ostracizing Muslim TCs
- Assumptions of homogeneity
 - Devoutness
 - Muslim women are oppressed and silenced

Theme 2: Macro Conditions - Systemic Practices or Structural Conditions of the Teacher Education Programs

- Religious practices and lack of accommodations
 - Christian-Judeo calendar
- Eurocentric curriculum as a structural barrier
 - Silencing Muslim TCs' voices
- Lack of consideration for TC demographics in practicum placements
 - Demographic mismatch between associate teachers and Muslim TCs
- Professionalism discourse as structural barrier (e.g. dress code)

Theme 3: Muslim TCs' Resilience and Resistance to Macro/Micro Barriers

- Developing a "thicker skin"
- Prayer: Drawing strength from the power of the divine
- Creating a counter space: Support and solidarity within formal groups or clubs
- Informal support networks: Connecting with individuals of similar race and faith
- Assertiveness as a survival strategy