

**Teacher Behaviours Leading to A Feeling Of Belonging In Class Among Muslim
Students**

Daphne van Schaardenburg (6313949)

d.d.vanschaardenburg@students.uu.nl

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Universiteit Utrecht, faculty of Social Sciences

Supervisor: Brianna Kennedy

Second assessor: Mayke Vereijken

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Abstract

This study examines the school experiences of Muslim young adults in the Netherlands as being part of a minority group in school as told from firsthand. Within a small sample of Muslim students this study aims to investigate what teacher behaviours lead to a feeling of belonging in class in Dutch schools without Islamic profiling. Interviews were carried out to collect multiple, personal experiences and described in a case study. The cases were compared through cross-analysis. Based on communalities in experiences of the participants, suggestions for teachers of Muslim students were described. It was found that teacher behaviours focusing on mutual respect and genuine communication with cultural sensitivity are more successful than teaching about multi-cultural topics. Additionally, Dutch schools should take practical measures that ensure that Muslim students can practice their faith.

Key words: Muslim Students; School Experiences; Dutch Education System; Class Belonging; Teacher Behaviours; Multi Cultural Education

Teacher Behaviours Leading to A Feeling Of Belonging In Class Among Muslim Students

In the Netherlands, people with a non-western migration background can be regarded as a non-dominant group in terms of racial and ethnic background. We define “non-dominant ethnic and racial backgrounds” as those groups that can be visibly identified in a social setting and that do not occupy most a society’s institutional positions of power (Hand, 2010). Around 5% of the Dutch population identifies as Muslim, of which 95% are from non-western migration background, almost all Turkish or Moroccan descent (Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek [CBS], 2007; CBS, 2020). Islam is not the main religion in the Netherlands, Christians are the largest group regarding religious belief with 35% (CBS, 2020). People with a non-western migration background are a visible minority group in the Netherlands, because Turkish and Moroccan people have physical features that differ from European features, which are most common in the Netherlands (CBS, 2021). There is an intersectionality effect of being a Muslim boy in school, since gender and being part of a minority group are both forms of inequality that reinforce each other (Nelson et al., 2015). Women are more often highly educated in the Netherlands, while men are more often early-school leavers (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau [SCP], 2020). These demographics make it likely for Muslim youth to be a minority at Dutch schools without Islamic profiling and seems to be especially the case for Muslim boys.

What are the academic consequences for these students and how can teachers influence their school experiences? This study investigates the personal school experiences Muslim students in the Netherlands have, what consequences of being part of a minority group as a Muslim do these students face. It is investigated how much these students experience class belonging and if this has influenced their school careers. The way in which their teachers behaved towards them and how this influenced class belonging is examined as

well. Present research is mostly focused on experiences of teachers or the experiences of students through questionnaires, while this study focuses on firsthand experiences of Muslim students to gain in-depth knowledge on how Muslim students experience their school lives in the Dutch school system. Muslim males face a two-fold challenge regarding educational achievement due to their intersectional identities as males and as Muslims. In this study, both males and females are represented.

Literature review

Muslim students in Dutch schools

Muslim students can lack cognitive stimulating resources in their homes growing up, especially when they are second generation immigrants, with higher chances of early school leaving (Boon, 2008; Lam, 2014, Sirin, 2005; Tomul & Savasci, 2012). When these children successfully manage to become highly educated, this is called the multiplier effect (Crul et al., 2017). Teachers should be aware of the disadvantages these students are facing at home and get them extra support, like offering to help with homework outside class or having financial aid protocols when it comes to buying class materials (Crul, 2013; Schnell et al. 2013).

Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims are happening in the Netherlands, like degrading remarks on the streets or social media, to politics and even violent attacks against Muslims which is also noticeable in schools (De Koning, 2016). In their study on perceived level of discrimination of Muslim youth Van Dijk et al. (2011) found that personal level perceived discrimination at school is associated with depressive symptoms among young minority group members in the Netherlands. This indicates that discrimination is an important factor that should be considered when teaching Muslim students. Feelings of depression in secondary school will lead to less psychological adjustment and success in college or university (Gummadam, Pittman & Loffe, 2016). Turcatti (2018) investigated how

Muslim students perceive themselves as students in school and found that Muslim adolescents have developed educational resilience and a positive self-image when they feel supported at school, but also supported by their peers and home community. However, when discrimination is experienced, their positive self-image and resilience can be harmed and the influence of factors outside the school become even more important for educational success, like parental support. So, when discrimination is happening in school and the teacher does not prevent or stop this, Muslim students might seek acknowledgement outside school (Nota et al. 2004; Murray Nettles et al., 2000). Discrimination is also an issue for young Muslims when applying for internships and jobs, since companies tend to choose applicants with a Dutch name over applicants with Arabic names (Blommaert et al., 2014), which can cause problems in the study process and might lead to early school leaving.

Class belonging

Class belonging is defined as the importance of student's relationships with others in the school setting and the way these relationships have impact on classroom participation, classroom engagement and eventually academic achievement (Booker, 2006). Class belonging is shaped by the way in which students form relationships with peers and teachers and by school culture (Brooms, 2019). Class belonging is a pivotal determinant of school withdrawal, students that experience a low sense of class belonging are more likely to drop out (Faircloth, 2009). Students that experience a high sense of class belonging are more likely to have higher academic achievement, because they perceive their educational experiences as positive which enhances motivation to do well in school (Brooms, 2019; Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Gray et al, 2018)

In multi-cultural classes, racist victimization by dominant group classmates may occur, an adequate reaction of the teacher is of big influence of helping the minority group students feel safe and respected in class (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a). If students do not

receive adequate support, their perceived feelings of discrimination may lead to not feeling like belonging in class (Rozek & Gaither, 2021; Verkuyten & Brug, 2003) or even resulting in feelings of alienation towards school (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). This is especially important for schools with a non-diverse student composition, where minority group students are more likely to face discrimination by their peers. When minority students experience positive peer relationships and actively participate in school culture their level of class belonging is more likely to be high. Thus, social relationships are considered a protective factor of class belonging (Morris et al., 2020).

In a study by Pásztor (2010) on class belonging of Muslim boys and girls, it was found that Muslim girls feel more belonging in class and feel their teachers deal with ethnic inequalities in a positive way, somehow Muslim boys feel a lower sense of belonging in class. Feeling a positive sense of class belonging remains a potentially important influence on academic motivation, engagement and participation (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Goodenow & Grady (1993) also mention the fact that the feeling of class belonging is more often present in girls. Goodenow (1993), in an additional study, mentions that a positive student-teacher relationship is of big influence on the sense of class belonging. Goodenow (1993) also mentions that the claim of the previous research about girls feeling more sense of belonging in class is only true for girls in elementary school, so in secondary school there does not have to be a difference in boys and girls in terms of class belonging. Bonny et al. (2000) even mentions that there might even be a decrease in sense of class belonging for girls. A positive relationship between a teacher from a dominant background and Muslim students enhances social cohesion, the teacher takes on the role of a positive role model in terms of good communication between different cultural backgrounds. Social cohesion within the classroom has a positive effect on the feeling of class belonging of students (Hieronymus, 2011).

Teacher behaviours

What are known teacher behaviours in multi-cultural classes that have a positive effect on class belonging for minority background students? Using principles of democracy critical pedagogy, promoting sociopolitical consciousness, and drawing upon multicultural traditions to ensure a diverse and reflexive curriculum are examples of techniques used by social justice educators in a study on a secondary school in the U.S. (Dover, 2013). The implementation of these principles impacted classroom curriculum and students successfully within the school, and the relationship between school, home and community (Hamm et al., 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Schecter, 2002). It is shown though that teachers have great influence on teaching their students inter-ethnic understanding, which might lead to minority students truly being part of the group and thus improving their sense of class belonging (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013). However, teachers that openly discriminate towards minority students will cause them to have low level of class belonging (Montoro et al., 2021).

In the Netherlands there are secondary and vocational schools with ethnically diverse backgrounds, including large numbers of Muslim students. Diversity in school is not only positive for those with a minority background but enhances social cohesion for both dominant and minority groups (Alexiu & Sordé, 2011). Teachers in such schools say respect and diversity are topics they often discuss in class, but they still struggle to teach culturally diverse classes caused by a self-reported lack of skills (Tielman et al., 2021). Additionally, Thijs et al. (2012) reported that ethnically incongruent relationships between teacher and student may be perceived as less favorable than ethnically congruent ones due to cultural misunderstandings and intergroup bias. This incongruency might be caused by a lack of preparation in teacher-training programmes. Because of this, teachers that belong to the dominant group might not be culturally sensitive towards minority group students. More understanding of multicultural classrooms and multicultural society should be taught to future teachers in teacher-training programmes in the Netherlands (Hermans, 2002).

Muslim identification

In a study about the societal perception of Muslim masculinity, Archer (2003) discussed problems that are linked to the self-identification of Muslim boys in Western Europe, like being associated with terrorism and fundamentalism:

In educational terms, Muslim boys have been identified as under-achieving and problematic pupils, suffering high rates of school exclusion and low rates of post-16 progression. In short, it is fair to say that Muslim boys are indeed 'hot topics' of social and educational debate. (p. 16-17)

This is an example of the societal perceptions that Muslim males face regarding their school and daily life, which might lead to prejudice from their teachers. On the other hand, are Muslim females facing prejudice as well, like being perceived as suppressed by Islamic values and practices, such as wearing the hijab when looking from a western feminist viewpoint, though Muslim women tend to not agree with this prejudice (Zine et al., 2007). These prejudices can be regarded as a focus on perceived gender, but gender is not the only focus here.

Western European society has a mainly individualized focus on people, while Muslims often have a very collectivistic view of life values. This difference between Islamic values and an individualistic society creates polarization between Muslims and society, which also works its way through in schools. This can cause Muslim men to become radicalized (Torrekens et al., 2021). Muslim women who are affected by this polarization, on the other hand, choose to make a strong connection with the Islam in terms of caring for their community and wearing the Hijab, which can be an identifiable target for discrimination. These women strive for a Pure Islam (Ghanem, 2017).

Muslim youth in the Netherlands are struggling to develop a healthy sense of self in between Western and Islamic culture. In a study by Murad et al. (2003) it was shown that

Muslim adolescents tend to feel more anxious and depressed in comparison to their Dutch peers. This group also is highly motivated to maintain their 'native' culture, the culture of their parents, even when they are born in the Netherlands, in addition to adapting to Dutch culture (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). The young people who can successfully balance this maintaining and adapting are often more successful in their educational careers and achieve a high academic level that enables upward social mobility (Schneider & Lang, 2014). They avoid giving up parts of their identity through assimilation by keeping their differences in place where it matters most to them. This juggling of sameness and difference seems to be an individual and situational balancing act, based on an awareness that boundaries exist, and a sensitivity towards dealing with them (Waldring et al., 2014). This process already starts in school and is mostly successful with girls (Pásztor, 2010). Valenzuela (1999) argues that schools are structured in ways that subtract resources from youth, divesting them of their cultures, languages, and community-based identities. Teachers should be purposeful about establishing authentic caring relationships and about countering subtractive policies and practices. In a study on managing Muslim identity on schools, Shah (2007) says that respect and tolerance for different identities, religions, cultures, languages are essential for encouraging educational achievement and for community cohesion.

Current study

While there is plenty of research available on topics like diversity in the classroom, little research has been done on the experiences of minority background students as told by themselves, like in the study of Schlein & Chan (2010), who highlight that a lot of theories about culturally responsive teaching might be experienced different than intended in real life by students. This study intends to investigate how Muslim boys and girls experienced their school life and what their experiences with their teachers have been like. The goal of this study is to try to describe in which ways Dutch teachers can act and teach in a way that

enhances the achievement of Muslim students in their classroom by increasing their sense of belonging in class and if this differs for Muslim boys and girls. Gender is not specifically a topic that is discussed in the interviews but is something that might or might not lead to different answers given by Muslim boys and girls. This leads to the following research question: *‘What teacher behaviours do Muslim young adults say lead to a feeling of belonging in class?’*

Methodology

This study followed the social constructivist research paradigm, which means that the data of this study cannot be separated from the social environment in which this study takes place. Culture and context were the most important aspects of this study. The emphasis in this study lies on human relationships and experiences of the participants. The results which were drawn from the data are applicable to the specific context of the participants.

Positionality

As a White Dutch, heterosexual, ciswoman, my own life experiences in the Netherlands have mostly been situations where I was part of the dominant group. The participants in this study are a minority in ethnicity and religious beliefs and I am aware that they have had life experiences that could be vastly different than mine and that I cannot imagine, coming from a privileged point of view. I realize that my personal experience might be very different from the participants in this study. This demanded extra caution when interpreting data, misinterpreting statements made by participants was prevented by using member checks (see ‘data collection’).

Research context

This study is a narrative case study, where the stories of the different participants were seen as individual cases. All participants share a Muslim identity and have attended

Dutch schools. They identify as either male or female. The cases were compared to look for similarities or differences related to the research questions.

Data collection

Participants. Participants for this study included young adults (people in their twenties, 20-29, with the preference of participants with the age of 20-25) who identify as either male or female and who identify as Muslim in religious beliefs. The age group was chosen because it is expected that participants in this age group have already completed both primary and secondary school in the Netherlands and will have vivid memories of their relatively recent school careers. There is a variety in educational careers followed, to discuss different school and teacher experiences. This means different levels of secondary schools (VMBO, HAVO, VWO) and different tracks of professional education (MBO, HBO, University level). The participants attended Dutch schools without exclusive Islamic profiling.

The participants were recruited via personal networks and via university networks. Participants received an information letter on which they had to sign a form of informed consent through e-mail, since all participants are above the age of eighteen, they signed this document themselves. In table 1 an overview of alle participants regarding (pseudonym) names, ethnicity, age, and gender can be found.

Table 1

Participant table Demographic Information

First Name, Last name	Ethnicity	Age	Gender
Rasheed Boulous	Afghani	25	Male
Ferid Ertürk	Turkish	25	Male
Rauf Al Hashim	Iraqi/Palestinian	25	Male
Samiye Aksoy	Turkish	24	Female

Imran Tawfeek	Iraqi	25	Male
Milana Lukic	Bosnian	28	Female
Arif Demirci	Turkish	24	Male
Safiyah Karim	Somalian	26	Female
Yusef Nagi	Moroccan	24	Male

Procedure

The data collection of this study consisted of carrying out one semi-structured interview with each participant either face to face or via Microsoft Teams. The interviews took 30-45 minutes. There were questions on pre-determined topics with room for the participants to share what they feel is worth sharing. The data was stored in a secure university password-protected folder and all recordings will be deleted as soon as interviews are clearly transcribed, and this thesis project is finished. All identifying information was masked by using pseudonyms or deleting names mentioned by participants of other people.

Table 2

Table 2: Interview topic list and analysis indicators

Concepts	Operationalization	Indicators	Interview Questions
Muslim students on Dutch schools	The experiences of Muslims as minority students on a Dutch school and their relationships with peers.	Home support (Boon, 2008; Lam, 2014, Sirin, 2005; Tomul & Savasci, 2012) (Extra) school support e.g. financial aid (Crul, 2013; Schnell et al. 2013). Discrimination by classmates (de Koning, 2016; Van Dijk, 2011; Gummadam, Pittman & Loffe, 2016)	-Which schools did you attend? -Can you describe the population on those schools to me? (In terms of ethnicity of your classmates)
Class belonging	The importance of student's	Overall positive experiences, feeling motivated (Brooms, 2019; Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Gray et al, 2018)	-Can you tell me about a situation where you felt

	relationships with others (peers and teachers) in the school setting and how these relationships impact achievement, engagement and classroom participations.	Dropping out after negative experiences (Faircloth, 2009) Relationships with peers (good or bad) (Morris et al., 2020) Reaction of the teacher (positive or negative) when dealing with discrimination (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a; Rozek & Gaither, 2021; Verkuyten & Brug, 2003; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005) Gender (Pásztor, 2010; Goodenow & Grady, 1993)	accepted, respected and valued by your classmates? -In this situation, what was the role of your teacher? -Can you tell me about a situation where you did not feel accepted, respected and valued by your classmates? -In this situation, what was the role of your teacher? -Which kind of situation did you feel you was most typical of your experiences during your school career of the ones we just discussed?
Teacher behaviours	The behaviour teachers show towards their student which impacts their school experiences and interventions teachers do (positive or negative).	Culturally sensitive teaching methods (Dover, 2013) Good relationship between school, home and community (Hamm et al., 2018; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Schechter, 2002) Teaching inter-ethnic understanding to the class, for example talking about respect and diversity (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013; Tielman et al., 2021) Discriminating (Montoro et al., 2021) Teacher being part of the dominant or minority group (Thijs et al., 2012)	-Tell me about a teacher who you felt connected with. Can you describe this teacher as a person? -What did this teacher do in class that made school a positive experience? -Tell me about a teacher who you felt disconnected with. Can you describe this teacher as a person?

			- What did this teacher do in class that made school a negative experience?
Muslim identification	How a person identifies themselves in Islamic culture within Dutch society and school regarding the dominant culture.	<p>Facing prejudice regarding Islamic values (visible or non-visible) (Archer, 2003; Zine et al., 2007)</p> <p>Feelings of radicalization or rejection towards dominant culture (Torrekens et al., 2021; Ghanem, 2017)</p> <p>Talking about feelings of balancing between two cultures (Murad et al., 2003; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Schneider & Lang, 2014; Waldring et al., 2014)</p>	<p>-As a Muslim student, are their certain aspects or values of Islamic cultures that motivated you in school?</p> <p>-When you were in school, what ethnic backgrounds did your friends have?</p> <p>-To what extent did you feel 'at home' in school?</p> <p>- Who or what has motivated you the most to pursue your education?</p> <p>- What did you miss during your school career?</p> <p>- How can, according to you, Dutch education be more inclusive for students with an ethnic minority background?</p>

Data analysis plan

The data of all individual participants was described as an individual case. The sample size of this study is 9. In this study a small sample size is sufficient, to reach saturation a number between 9 and 17 interviews is needed when doing interpretative qualitative research (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This is applicable to this study as well. First, the transcript of each interview was analyzed. Using different indicators (see Table 2), that were listed beforehand as support during analyzing, the statements made by the participants that are most striking

regarding the research question were marked using four different colors in the transcripts and then listed in a separate working document. Note that these indicators are examples; any remarks made by participants that fitted the indicators, but which were not listed as an example in Table 2 or slightly differed were included. The marked statements together with general information about the participant was used to write a case summary for each case. Thus, the data of this study consists of the individual case summaries. These case summaries were then used to perform cross case analysis by looking for commonalities between the cases.

The trustworthiness of this study is guaranteed by performing member checks. Each participant was sent the case summary of their interview through e-mail and were asked if they agreed with; and if they had any corrections on my interpretation of their statements. Remarks made by participants were used to adjust their case summary.

The data directly derives from the interviews which came straight from the source: the participants own words. The findings are only applicable within the contexts and experiences of the participants, which impacts transferability in a way that the data of this study is applicable to these participants only. However, this is not problematic since high transferability is not aimed for. This is also true for credibility and confirmability of the study, since using the study design on different participants will result in different experiences, thus different content of data and findings. However, since this study is a small case study this will not affect the trustworthiness of the study, because it is implied in the design that data is exclusively applicable to the current study and data consists of personal stories which cannot be replicated. The dependability of this study was high, since the experiences the participants discussed have already happened, so their view on the discussed events will probably not change, which could have been the case if current events were being discussed.

Findings

This study aimed to answer the research question *‘What teacher behaviours do Muslim young adults say lead to a feeling of belonging in class?’* To answer this question, four domains were focused on: Muslim Students On Dutch Schools, Class Belonging, Teacher Behaviours and Muslim Identification. The findings on these are written out in four sections below. The case narratives are found in appendix E: case summaries, therefore the described findings are about the commonalities between different narratives. In the discussion section of this thesis, the general conclusion will be discussed and linked to previous research.

In short, the findings can be summarized as the participants felt that class belonging is not necessarily enhanced by lessons on multi-culturalism or informing non-Muslim students about their religion. To conclude, teacher behaviours that are regarded as behaviours that enhance class belonging by the participants of this study can be translated into an open, respectful, and tolerant attitude towards minority group students, like Muslims. This includes, being alert on discrimination by classmates and actively stepping up for them. Schools should also keep in mind the practical needs Muslim students might have, like a designated prayer room in the school building.

Muslim Students on Dutch Schools

On the domain of Muslim Students in Dutch schools it was found that there were vast differences between the home situations of the participants regarding the level of support and involvement of their parents. However, most parents expect their children to do well in school in search of higher academic achievement than they had themselves. Teachers should keep in mind that every home situation is different, which is applicable to both Muslim and non-Muslim students but can take advantage of the motivation to perform well by actively supporting these students.

Most of the participants (6) that were interviewed grew up in a family that moved from their home country to the Netherlands in search of work and in general a better life before the participants were born. This put a certain pressure on them to perform well in school and make this better life scenario true. Participant 'Rasheed' mentioned: 'So yes, you did have the feeling of... it was, I did have a lot of pressure from... a kind of my family, specifically my parents that I had to perform. I wasn't allowed to underperform and yes, I was supposed to do my best and my, that was the biggest motivating factor for me to say my high school career as best I could.... To follow.'

Some participants (5) had strong home support, their parents were strict and actively supported the educational career of their child. Other parents (of 4 participants) felt that this was not a task for them. These students were motivated through their home situations, whereas schools sometimes failed to motivate them. One participant, 'Ferid', talked about how he had a Dutch language deficiency because the language spoken at home was not Dutch. He felt that he received little support from school on this issue: 'So I had a significant language deficiency, which also caused me to have a developmental delay. In hindsight, I think that this could have been prevented if my primary school had taken the necessary steps to deal with the fact that so many pupils of migrant origin are at school together and that this has a negative impact on their language development. That they could have dealt with it in a certain way, with more attention to Dutch language development. Or yes, in one way or another to ensure that we could develop our language. Because I was certainly not the only pupil who had a language deficiency at that school.'

Class Belonging

On the domain of Class Belonging, it was found that most class belonging is experienced in elementary school and that this changes after going to high school. In high school the participants encountered discrimination for the first time, this might be a result of

the age group, where teenagers are probably more aware of differences and similarities between peers. It is of utmost importance here that teachers are aware of classmate discrimination and are certainly not engaging in it themselves.

All participants mentioned that they did feel at home at school in general. It is striking that in primary school all participants had positive experiences with teachers and classmates. This was the case for both participants who were in minority as a Muslim student and those who were in a class where majority of the student were Muslims. Also, all participants mentioned that the step from primary to secondary education was a big step, where many of them started to have experiences with discrimination by classmates or teachers; like jokes or scolding. This seems to be especially the case for the participants who went from a primary school where they were not in minority to schools with mainly White Dutch students. In total 8 participants mentioned feeling discriminated against in high school by classmates and/or by teachers.

One participant, 'Arif' mentioned that for him it was shocking to see the difference in economic status between him and some of his classmates, which made it harder for him to connect with his classmates, because they were engaging in different activities: 'It was more, yes, from that perspective that you felt a bit left out because you yourself... I don't come from a very rich family... And if you had, yes... Other classmates, who had, I'll give you an example, a swimming pool at home, yes, and that they went swimming at home during a break and had a 1000 euro jacket for example. That sort of thing. Then you feel a bit, OK, I... You feel a bit more insecure, I think, next to them.'

All participants appreciated when teachers stood up for them during moments when classmates were being discriminative, to show that this is not an acceptable way to treat each other in class. What made the participants feel like they belonged in class was when

classmates showed interest in them and their religion and showed respect, like not eating in front of them during Ramadan.

Participants said they felt like the minority students were gravitating towards each other, but at the same time they all mention having made White Dutch friends at school.

Teacher Behaviours

On the domain of Teacher Behaviours, it was found that certain teacher behaviours have positive outcome on the school experience and feeling of class belonging of participants and that other behaviours have negative outcome on this. To summarize, being (culturally) sensitive to the needs of students and fulfilling the role of coach towards students is considered positive behaviour. Being passive in stopping discrimination by classmates or even engaging in discrimination towards Muslim students is considered negative, which is not surprising since this was also mentioned in the domain of Class Belonging above. The participants mentioned a lot of different teacher behaviours that had either positive or negative outcomes on how the participants experienced their school times. The behaviours described below were mentioned by multiple participants.

Teacher behaviours that were experienced as positive were focused on the approach the teacher uses in class towards all students, like being sensitive to individual needs of each student and using humor in the lessons. It also seems that teachers who practice a coaching role in their relationships with students have positive outcomes on the experiences of the participants; like pushing students to do their best and being a personal mentor to the students. Participant 'Rasheed' experienced this with one of his teachers and described this thoroughly: 'And that he really wants the best for you. So that he doesn't, also just during the explanation or if you ask a question, that he really takes the time and really...also listens to what you have to say. That's very important as a mentor, of course, and... yes, that was it, little things like physically coming down to, say, crouch down and making eye contact,

instead of from above. Do you know that things like that and yes, also just remember things, ask again how things went with that and that? That you just notice 'hey this...this person really...yes he really values the relationship'. You know.' These factors are applicable to Muslim and non-Muslim students, in addition it is mentioned that multi-culturalism is something that should be discussed in lessons according to the participants. They mentioned that teachers should take active interest in multi-culturalism in society and organize class discussions on multi-culturalism in their classes and taking active lead in those.

On the other hand, the participants talked about teacher behaviours that negatively impacted their school experiences. It was mentioned multiple times that participants experienced situations where they were being openly discriminated by classmates and that the teacher had a passive attitude and did not intervene during these situations, like in the situation that was mentioned in the quote on discrimination mentioned before. Some participants even mentioned being discriminated by their teacher or their teacher having clear Islamophobic tendencies. At last, while leading class discussions or teaching multi-culturalist topics in class was mentioned as positive, when teachers only do this in a too global or in a subjective manner, this causes an opposite effect.

Muslim identification

On the domain of Muslim identification, it was found that being a Muslim student in the Netherlands and growing up with the Islamic faith can be a personal struggle. Muslim students feel like they belong in class when they feel like their journey of discovering faith is supported in school, mostly in terms of facilitating practical needs, like a prayer room in school. It seems that these measures should be taken in school level and are not necessarily linked to teacher behaviours.

All participants grew up in the Netherlands and had Islamic upbringing. Above that all participants mentioned also growing up with the culture of the native country of their

parents or where they were born before moving to the Netherlands at young age. They mention feeling like they had always the feeling of commonalities or differences between the cultures. One participant, 'Rauf', explicitly mentioned that this was a negative experience for him, because he feels like a foreigner in either country: 'Yes, so of course you are officially an immigrant here, but when you go on holiday to where you come from, then you are actually a bit of a foreigner there as well.' On the other hand, one participant, 'Safiyyah', explicitly mentions that she feels enriched by this, because she can speak multiple languages: 'I find that very pleasant, that has more to do with the fact that I now speak 3, 3 maybe 3 and a half languages and that enriches me, that is a huge enrichment but... it also does something to you mentally, cognitively because you pick things up a little faster.'

Multiple participants mention that they feel like always having to prove themselves as a good person, fighting stereotypes that are shown in Dutch media. What also came forward was that most participants started doing research on their faith, asking questions and looking for their Muslim identity as adolescents. Before this they had an Islamic upbringing from their homes but were not as invested as they are now as adults. As a result, almost all participants (8) are now convinced Muslims, one participant decided to stop practicing. Participants mentioned that they want schools to provide practical tools, like prayer rooms, to be able to practise their religion in day-to-day life.

Conclusion

To conclude based on the experiences shared by the participants of this study, teachers of Muslim students can improve their class belonging by providing a class culture that raises awareness and openness on multi-culturalism, establishing and encouraging classmates of different cultures to connect with each other and being alert on discrimination. It is very important that teachers provide the good example themselves, by not discriminating Muslim or other minority group students or showing Islamophobic tendencies. Outside of the

classroom, teachers can have a coaching role for their students, it is important to know what the home situation of a student is and what struggles they are facing, even though the teacher might not have direct influence on these factors, it will help students feel seen and supported. Teachers should be culturally responsive when taking up this role, especially when they are part of the dominant culture, because their own experiences of situations at school might be interpreted different.

Discussion

Muslim students encounter different teachers throughout their school career, from primary to secondary school, to their professional education. Something that was very striking in this study was the gap that almost all participants noticed between primary and secondary education. In primary school all participants felt at home and had good relationships with classmates and when moving on to secondary having some sort of difficulty getting used to school culture on their new school. An explanation for this might be that in the Netherlands primary schools are often located close to home, therefore students are often living in the same neighborhood, encountering children with similar backgrounds, like most participants experienced. Only one of the participants grew up in a White Dutch neighborhood. Secondary schools are larger and have a more regional function, attracting students from different neighborhoods and places. Secondary school is often the first place where the participants encountered discrimination, making the adjustment and connection to their new school and classmates harder than they expected. This aligns with previous research stating that most Muslim students encounter discrimination against them in secondary school, negatively impacting their school careers (Gummadam, Pittman & Loffe, 2016; De Koning, 2016). What shocked some participants was that in situations where they were being discriminated against by classmates, the teacher often did not react or intervene, giving them a feeling of hopelessness. This could have had detrimental effects on the participants, because

they might have felt less belonging in class (Rozek & Gaither, 2021; Verkuyten & Brug, 2003), explaining their struggle to feel at home in secondary school. Participants mentioned that they felt that they and other Muslim (or another minority group) students were gravitating towards each other. This might be caused by the fact that teachers permit, hereby implying that not reacting is the same as permitting, discrimination of minority students in secondary schools. The participants felt that only other minority students understood how they felt at school. This pattern seems to continue after secondary school when going to professional education. Here lies a task for secondary schools to help Muslim students, and probably other minority group students, feel at home in their schools by actively fighting discrimination by peers and making teachers aware of these situations happening in their classroom (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002a). Perhaps some examples the participants mentioned were not experienced as a 'big deal' by the teachers, because they did not comprehend the impact peers have on each other during such a sensitive age period. However, ignoring this problem might lead to Muslim students seeking acknowledgement outside of school, like focusing on street activities that have nothing to do with school (Nota et al., 2004; Murray Nettles et al., 2000). However, none of the participants in this study talked about street culture, but this might also be, because most of the participants indeed had successful educational careers.

As mentioned in the findings section, the participants were very much able to describe the teacher behaviors that have either a positive or negative impact on their school careers in a concrete manner. The behaviours that were mentioned are not only applicable to Muslim students but are behaviours that will impact the entire class and are focused on establishing a culture in class that is centered around a positive approach and awareness of the different aspects of multi-culturalism which raises class belonging (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2013). This

can be summarized as providing a culture in class that makes every student feel at home, not necessarily treating Muslim students different than any other (Alexiu & Sordé, 2011).

Adolescent Muslim students are often in a period in their life where they are experiencing that they are juggling between different cultures, because they are becoming more self-aware (Murad et al., 2003; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). For the participants in this study, this often led to a journey of investigating their religion. It is important for teachers to know that this is something they might struggle with, because helping them to find a good balance is something that has positive influence on their school career (Schneider & Lang, 2014). This can be done by establishing authentic caring relationships between teacher and student (Valenzuela, 1999) and by being openly respectful tolerant for cultural differences between the dominant and the minority culture (Shah, 2007).

In the beginning of the discussion section, it was mentioned that teachers should also be aware of factors outside their classroom when teaching Muslim students, since class belonging might also be influenced by the home situation of a student. The amount of support a Muslim student receives might differ a lot between different students. Because of cultural implications, some Muslim parents might see education solely as a task for the school, therefore leaving their children with little to no home support, increasing the chance of early school leaving when learning does not come easily (Boon, 2008; Lam, 2014; Sirin, 2005; Tomul & Savasci, 2012). On the other hand, Muslim parents can put a lot of pressure on their children to have educational success and climb up the ladder of society, which causes them to be very involved with their child's education, causing them to become more highly educated than their parents. This will positively influence class belonging, because the student will consider school as a place of opportunity, thus triggering the multiplier effect (Crul et al., 2017).

This study aimed to formulate which factors and behaviours teachers who teach Muslim students can use in their daily classroom practice to enhance class belonging for these students, coming from personal experiences of Muslim students. All participants were enthusiastic in sharing their stories and were very well able to describe their experiences, this could indicate that statistics on Muslim students in the Netherlands are different from the experiences of these students and might be something that more research should be focused on more often, because it might lead to surprising insights when directly asking people to share their story.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study could have had a bigger sample size, but this was not possible because of time limitations. It is therefore not known if there would have been more factors that could have been used to conclude the research question, perhaps the current conclusion is too narrow. On the other hand, within the small sample size, commonalities were found between the participants, suggesting that more participants might have told similar stories. Within social research topics, the social aspect of doing research should not be overlooked.

In this study a small majority of participants was male. During the interviews, there were no questions asked about the experiences of being a Muslim male or Muslim female, while in literature it is mentioned that Muslim males seem to suffer from certain stigmas (Archer, 2003; Torrekenes et al., 2021), while Muslim females are the ones who a more visible target for discrimination (Ghanem, 2017; Zine et al., 2007). Gender might even influence class belonging (Pásztor, 2010). Without asking the participants some of the female participants did mention that they felt that males have more pressure to perform well to get a well-paid job in the future and provide for their families, while the female participants had the feeling that they had more of a choice whether to pursue their educational career. Male participants did not talk about this. A suggestion for future research would be to dive deeper

into the intersectionality of being Muslim in the Netherlands, and therefore being part of a minority group, and gender. According to literature, it seems that Muslim boys face different struggles in school and in society than Muslim girls, like fighting negative stereotypes about terrorism for boys (Archer, 2003) and being viewed as oppressed by Western society for girls (Zine et al., 2007). Different male participants talked about encountering stereotyping in secondary school. This might have a relationship with the amount of discrimination experienced, which was something that all participants mentioned to have encountered in secondary school and sometimes in professional education.

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Appendix A: Information letter and informed consent

Onderzoeksstudie informatiebrief

Februari 2022

Beste Participant,

Met deze brief willen we u uitnodigen om mee te doen in het onderzoeksproject: **Teacher behaviours leading to a feeling of belonging in class of Muslim young adults.**

Het doel van dit onderzoek is het verkennen en verklaren van de ervaringen van jongvolwassenen met een Islamitische achtergrond op hun schoolloopbaan en de ervaringen die zij hadden met hun leraren. We hopen de resultaten van deze studie te publiceren en de uitkomsten te delen met andere geïnteresseerde belanghebbenden.

Wat wordt er van u verwacht als Participant

Als u instemt te participeren, vragen we u om één interview af te leggen van ongeveer 30-45 minuten. Tijdens het interview zullen we u vragen naar uw etnische/culturele achtergrond en naar uw schoolloopbaan en de ervaringen met leerkrachten die u heeft gehad.

Vertrouwelijkheid van de Data Verwerking

Er wordt op de volgende manier omgegaan met persoonlijk identificeerbare gegevens: De interviews worden met alleen audio opgenomen om te worden getranscribeerd. Alle persoonlijk identificeerbare gegevens zullen worden verwijderd van de transcripten en de audiobestanden zullen worden vernietigd zodra deze getranscribeerd zijn. De sleutel die uw identiteit of andere identificeerbare gegevens, zoals de naam van de school, linkt aan het pseudoniem dat gebruikt wordt in de dataopslag wordt bewaard op een wachtwoord-beveiligde universiteitsserver tijdens de data-analyse. Deze sleutel wordt vernietigd zodra de studie afgerond is. Geanonimiseerde interview transcripten zullen worden bewaard op wachtwoord-beveiligde servers voor ten minste 10 jaar. Dit is in overeenkomst met de richtlijnen van de VSNU Associatie van de Universiteiten in Nederland. Andere onderzoekers hebben in de toekomst mogelijk toegang tot deze geanonimiseerde data. Toegang tot de data wordt alleen verleend wanneer de onderzoekers ermee instemmen de vertrouwelijkheid van de informatie te waarborgen zoals beschreven staat in deze brief. Eventuele toegang tot de data vereist ook toestemming van het originele onderzoeksteam.

Risico's, Voordelen, en Vrijwillige Participatie

We verwachten dat er geen risico's zijn verbonden aan deze studie. We verwachten ook geen directe voordelen voor u persoonlijk. Uw participatie is volledig vrijwillig en u mag op ieder moment besluiten om te stoppen met de studie. Hieraan zijn geen negatieve consequenties verbonden en u bent de onderzoekers geen verantwoording schuldig. Als u besluit uw participatie te beëindigen zullen wij de data die tot dat moment verzameld is over u gebruiken, tenzij u expliciet aangeeft dit niet te wensen. Als u een officiële klacht wilt indienen over de studie, kunt u een e-mail sturen naar de klachtenfunctionaris op het e-mailadres: klachtenfunctionaris-fetsocwet@uu.nl.

Als u instemt te participeren, vragen wij u dit ondertekende formulier *binnen twee weken* op te sturen naar een van de onderzoekers betrokken bij dit onderzoek. Indien u verdere vragen heeft kunt u contact opnemen met de hoofdonderzoeker op het e-mailadres: b.l.kennedy@uu.nl.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Daphne van Schaardenburg

d.d.vanschaardenburg@students.uu.nl

tel. 06 40349832



Toestemmingsverklaring

Ik verklaar hierbij dat ik de informatiebrief over het onderzoek 'Teacher behaviours leading to a feeling of belonging in class of Muslim young adults' heb gelezen en stem hierbij in te participeren in dit onderzoek.

Naam _____

Datum _____

Handtekening

Appendix B: Interview tool

English

Name of the participant:

Date:

Introduction

1. Please tell us a bit about yourself.

For example:

a) Where did you grow up?

b) Where are you currently living?

2. How would you describe your ethnicity and cultural background?

Educational Experiences

1. Which schools did you attend?

2. Can you describe the population on those schools to me? (In terms of ethnicity of your classmates)

3. When you were in school, what ethnic and cultural backgrounds did your friends have?

4. To what extent did you feel 'at home' in school?

5. A Can you tell me about a situation where you felt accepted, respected and valued by your classmates?

B In this situation, what was the role of your teacher?

6. A Can you tell me about a situation where you did not feel accepted, respected and valued by your classmates?

B In this situation, what was the role of your teacher?

7. Which kind of situation did you feel you was most typical of your experiences during your school career of the ones we just discussed?
8. A Tell me about a teacher who you felt connected with. Can you describe this teacher as a person?
B What did this teacher do in class that made school a positive experience?
9. A Tell me about a teacher who you felt disconnected with. Can you describe this teacher as a person?
B What did this teacher do in class that made school a negative experience?
10. Who or what has motivated you the most to pursue your education?
11. What did you miss during your school career?
12. Are there certain aspects or values of Islamic cultures that motivated you in school?

Closing

1. How can, according to you, Dutch education be more inclusive for students with an ethnic minority background?
2. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Dutch

Naam van de deelnemer:

Datum:

Introductie

1. Vertel wat over jezelf.

Bijvoorbeeld:

- a) Waar ben je opgegroeid?
 - b) Waar woon je op dit moment?
2. Hoe zou jij je etniciteit en culturele achtergrond omschrijven?

Onderwijservaringen

1. Op welke scholen heb je gezeten?
2. Kun je de samenstelling van leerlingen, wat betreft etniciteit en culturele achtergrond, op deze scholen beschrijven?
3. Toen je op school zat, welke etniciteit en culturele achtergrond hadden jouw vrienden op school?
4. In hoeverre voelde jij je thuis op school?
5. A Kun je mij vertellen over een situatie op school waarin je je geaccepteerd, gerespecteerd en gewaardeerd voelde door je klasgenoten?

B Wat was de rol van de leerkracht in deze situatie?

6. A Kun je mij vertellen over een situatie op school waarin je je niet geaccepteerd, gerespecteerd en gewaardeerd voelde door je klasgenoten?

B Wat was de rol van de leerkracht in deze situatie?

7. Welke van de besproken situaties was voor jou het meest typisch tijdens je schoolcarrière?
8. A Vertel me over een leraar waarmee je een goede band had. Kun je deze leraar voor mij omschrijven?

B Wat deed deze leerkracht waardoor je een positieve schoolervaring hebt gekregen?

9. A Vertel me over een leraar waarmee je geen goede band had. Kun je deze leraar voor mij omschrijven?

B Wat deed deze leraar om jou een negatieve schoolervaring te geven?

10. Wie of wat heeft jou het meest gemotiveerd om je onderwijs carrière te vervolgen?

11. Wat heb je gemist tijdens je onderwijs carrière?

12. Zijn er bepaalde aspecten of waarden uit de Islamitische cultuur waardoor je werd gemotiveerd op school?

Afsluiting

1. Hoe kan het onderwijs in Nederland volgens jou inclusiever gemaakt worden voor leerlingen met een migratie achtergrond?

2. Is er nog iets wat we nog niet besproken hebben, maar je wel wilt delen?

Appendix C: FETC form

D.D. van Schaardenburg - 30 January 2022 - 13:30:56

(1.1) Title

Teacher Behaviours Leading To A Feeling Of Belonging In Class Of Muslim Young Adults

(1.2) Study type

New data collection

(1.3) Division

Educational Sciences

(1.4) Start date

09 February 2022

(1.5) End date

10 June 2022

Basic information

D.D. van Schaardenburg - 30 January 2022 - 13:48:00

(1) Name(s) and surnames(s), Solis ID and e-mail address of the student(s):

Name and surname Student number E-mail

Daphne van Schaardenburg

6313949

d.d.vanschaardenburg@students.uu.nl

(2) Name and surname, position and division of main thesis supervisor:

Name and surname Position Division E-mail

Brianna Kennedy

Assistant professor

Education & pedagogy

b.l.kennedy@uu.nl

(3) What is the study's (main) research question?

What teacher behaviours do muslim young adults say lead to a feeling of belonging in class?

(4) Will you be following a previously approved project or research programme/line?

Yes, a FERB approved research programme

Yes, a FERB approved research project

Yes, a project which was approved by another Social Science ethical review board (affiliated with Nethics)

Yes, a METC approved project

Yes, an ethical review board of an external organization, please explain

No

FETC19-306

Research line

D.D. van Schaardenburg - 30 January 2022 - 13:48:00

(1) The number of the FERB approved research programme or project

FETC19-306

(2) The invasiveness of the new data collection is not larger than the invasiveness described in the application of the approved research line or project (Discuss this with your supervisor)

Correct

Incorrect, the invasiveness of the new data collection is larger, please explain

(3) Date at which the approval was provided

03/01/2021

(4) Date at which the new data collection will end:

06/10/2022

(5) I will collect personal data

Yes

No

Data management 1

D.D. van Schaardenburg - 30 January 2022 - 13:48:00

(1) Data will be handled in accordance with faculty protocol

Yes

No, because data are not allowed to leave the external institute where the research project takes place

No, but a copy of the anonymized raw data will be stored on the faculty servers Other, please explain

(2) Access to data is limited to student, supervisor(s) and related UU researchers

Yes

No, please explain

(3) Storage period is in accordance with faculty protocol and/or additional statutory provisions.

Yes

No, please explain

(4) Data are not shared with external organization

Correct

No, please explain

Some pages were not filled in yet

Appendix D: Assignment 4

Academic integrity

- **Sample characteristics and consent procedures**

The sample will consist of at least 10 participants who:

- Are all persons who identify as Muslim
- Are in the age group 20-25
- Attended Dutch schools which were not profiled as Islamic
- Identify themselves as male or female

I consider these participants to be adults who can make the choice themselves to participate in this study, the participation is voluntarily. This is explained in the letter potential participants receive, so participants should not feel forced. The participants do not speak to each other during the data gathering, each interview is set up in an individual meeting, so the personal information they share with me is only accessible by me and the supervisors. Participants have the right to withdraw their consent. All data described in this thesis will be anonymized, so no personal information of participants will be made public.

- **Choice of instruments and possibly sensitive questions**

The instrument in this study is semi-structured interviews. In setting up the pre-determined questions, I have tried to leave the questions as open as possible, so that participants have a lot of control in what they share with me. Since the questions are centered about the participants' school experiences as someone who identifies as Muslim, and I am not Muslim, it is important for me to be sensitive to the cultural values of the participants, which might differ from mine. I want to pilot the questions with a close friend of mine, who is Muslim and will be able to be honest with me

whether certain questions might be considered inappropriate and might need adjustment.

- **Effort required from participants and how this weighs against the relevance of the study**

What is required from the participant, once he or she signed the consent form and thus agrees to participate in the study is to have one meeting with me in which I will interview them for 60-90 minutes. What I ask from the participants is mainly their time and openness in answering the questions. I am expecting that the results of this study will be mostly interesting for teachers who teach Muslim students, but I will share the results with the participant even though they might not necessarily have any benefit from it. However, the participants will also not be disadvantaged by doing the interview. This study will probably have a neutral impact on the participants, but does cost some of their time.

- **Data handling and storage**

The data collected, which will consist of audio- or Teams recordings, will be stored in a secure university password-protected folder and all recordings will be deleted as soon as interviews are clearly transcribed. All identifying information will be masked.

- **Any other issues concerning the academic integrity of your study**

Since this study consists of a small sample size, the data gathered will be very compact. Thus, it will not be complicated to keep all the things described above in control. However, since it is my first-time doing actual research in which personal information is the data source, I will make sure to consistently ask my supervisor on feedback concerning the data gathering and data handling to make sure that the academic integrity of this study is always maintained.

Appendix E: Case Summaries

Case summaries

Arif Demirci

Arif is a 24-year-old male who has recently moved from Enschede to Apeldoorn where he works as an optometrist in a hospital. His parents are from Turkey, and he is a practicing Muslim. After primary school, he attended VWO but graduated at HAVO level, because he was facing some private issues which temporarily kept him from studying. After HAVO he followed an HBO study Optometry, which he recently graduated from. At all these schools he was part of a minority group.

Arif feels he was extra motivated at school, because his parents told him about the way they left their home country to provide a better future for their children. He wanted to make his parents proud, thus he had a reason to take his education seriously. He feels that schools lack to provide students with a sense of awareness of why their education is important.

In secondary school Arif noticed that there was a gap in economic status between him and some classmates who came from wealthy families. He noticed that these classmates were participating in different activities together than he was used to, like going swimming in their private pools at home. At first, he felt excluded, because his family has a lower economic status. Arif describes himself as a social easy-going person, eventually he managed to make friends with these classmates despite their differences.

Arif talks about how he thinks it is important that teachers take on other roles besides teaching their subject to students. According to him, teachers should be sensitive to how their students are doing on a personal level. If teachers make that connection, they will not have to punish their students as much, because you get to know each other better and encourage having conversations from a positive approach.

Arif was raised between different cultures, even between the Turkish and the Islamic culture he encountered some clashing. Because of this he felt an urge to prove himself that he is different from certain stereotypes about Turks or Muslims. The Islam has motivated him to acquire knowledge and to accept other people no matter their religion or looks, because he knows how frustrating prejudice can be.

Ferid Ertürk

Ferid is a 25-year-old male who lives in Gorinchem. His parents are from Turkey, he was raised as a Muslim, but is currently not practicing although the Islam still has influence on his daily life. He went to a primary school where there were mostly Turkish children. At secondary school (VMBO) he noticed that for the first time he was part of a minority group, but he considers this a positive thing, because it helped him improve his Dutch language skills. After graduating from VMBO he completed both an MBO level 2 and level 3 training and continued studying at HBO level. At the HBO he had major trouble finding an internship and therefore did not continue studying. Since then, he is still struggling about what to do for his future.

His childhood home situation had high impact on Ferid's life. His parents had a very troubling relationship, which caused him to perform poorly on primary schools.

Additionally, he suffered from a language deficiency. Although he went to a Dutch primary school, he mainly spoke Turkish to his friends and at home he only spoke Turkish, since his parents did not speak Dutch. He feels that his primary school failed to notice the lack of home support but did not offer students like him extra help or extra language lessons which caused him to perform not as good as he could have in hindsight. At the HBO he also noticed this lack of sensitivity and support from school, which led to the decision to not pursue his degree.

In secondary school Ferid had an incident where he was openly discriminated against by a classmate, the teacher failed to react accordingly in this situation. Other than that situation, he generally had good relationships with classmates and teachers. His friends were the ones who motivated him to pursue his school career. Especially at his MBO school he felt respected by his classmates.

In secondary school he noticed that the teachers were willing to help him develop his Dutch language skills. A positive experience he had with a teacher was a teacher who used humor in his teaching, which made the lessons more vivid and interesting. The teacher from the incident on the other hand, was passive in reacting to such a situation. Ferid had to demand for the classmate to be punished.

Ferid experienced major discrimination at the HBO when searching for an internship, he got openly discriminating or Islamophobic reactions to his applications. The school did not offer him any support, despite the fact that Ferid specifically asked for this. Other Islamic students had the exact same problem, but no action was taken. At that moment, he did not know how to take further action, so he dropped out. Only later he

realized how troublesome this situation had been. He strongly feels that the school failed on helping him and other Islamic students. He says that the school wanted to treat everyone equal, but he thinks that there is no equality when you come from a minority position and that schools should acknowledge that.

Imran Tawfeek

Imran is a 25-year-old male who lives in Gorinchem, he has his own business which he runs from home and is also a part-time student architecture. Imran was born in Iraq and came to the Netherlands with his family as a refugee when he was three years old. He was raised with the Arabic and the Islamic culture. He first attended a primary school which had a population of mainly foreign students, but later switched to a Christian primary school where he was part of the minority group. This switch was made because the Christian school had better results than his previous school. Imran attended secondary school (VMBO) at a Christian school again. After graduating VMBO he completed MBO and continued studying HBO architecture, first fulltime, but he switched to part-time because of his own business.

His parents were very strict about his school results. They kept a close eye on his school results and how many times he spent doing homework. His mother would often go to school if there was a problem to talk to the teachers.

Imran mainly made friends who were also Muslim. In secondary school he noticed a lot of bullying towards him, because he was a Muslim and not White Dutch. His classmates did this by making jokes that were harming, but also making very racist remarks. He had a teacher that stood up for him in these situations, but not all teachers were involving themselves with this.

In secondary school he even noticed that teachers were less kind to students who were not White Dutch, but he also had a teacher that really took interest in him and took the time to talk to Imran about things like religion or Iraq. The headmaster of the school was a very religious Christian man, who acted mean towards Imran and seemed to have no hope for him, which was really demotivating. Imran feels that many teachers were hired because they knew a lot of their subject, but he feels that it is also important for a teacher to be open minded and not have prejudice.

Growing up, Imran noticed that there were quite some differences between the Arabic, Islamic and Dutch culture. At school he also encountered Christian culture, but that never bothered him. Living between all these cultures did make him question his faith, but as he got older, he did his own research and consciously chose the Islam. The main reason he was questioning his faith come from all the negative stereotypes he encountered about Muslims, like terrorism. He felt that people had prejudice against him for this reason. Right now, he feels like being a Muslim makes his life structured and organized.

Milana Lukic

Milana is a 28-year-old female who lives in Den Bosch with her husband, she is currently expecting her first child. Her parents are from Bosnia and came here as refugees, but Milana was born here. She is a practicing Muslim. Milana is working as a pharmacy assistant in a hospital. Her primary and secondary schools were Catholic schools, Milana was doing HAVO, but was not a teenager who took school very

seriously, so she had to continue her exams on VAVO (adult education). After HAVO she completed an MBO training and did not have the ambition to continue studying.

Because her parents come from a socialist country, Milana feels like she is also raised with enormous awareness of accepting people from different religions. In Bosnia there are different religions which are all widespread, so for her parents it was not a big shock to move to the Netherlands, because they were not the dominant group in Bosnia as well. This also taught her to just mind your own business and not forcing your beliefs on others. She noticed that her parents expected school to be the main educator and that home support was not necessary, her parents did not see that as their task.

Milana has always been part of the minority group as a Muslim on all schools she went to, but she feels that she never really stood out, because of her appearance until she started wearing the Hijab, but she also thinks it is just natural behaviour of teenagers to put each other in certain boxes. She once had a discussion with a classmate about Islamophobia, when she later spoke to him after they both finished schools he told her that her openness in the discussion helped him change his views, which was a meaningful experience for her.

Milana really appreciated that certain teachers in secondary school put the effort in organizing class discussions about culturally diverse topics and not being afraid to trigger certain reactions. She did notice once that a teacher was a bit indignant with her when there was a class discussion on homosexuality. Milana felt that if you were good at a subject, the teacher will like you regardless of your background. Milana had

mostly positive experiences with the teacher who were really motivating her and giving her recognition, which she really needed as a somewhat unmotivated teenager. She was annoyed by teachers who tried too hard to be cool. In primary school she had a teacher who not only helped her but was also a great support for her mother in getting to know the Dutch education system, because her parents did not really understand that.

Although Milana never had feelings of discrimination, she did feel that she had to defend herself when there were situations on the news like terrorism by so-called Muslims.

She also thinks that Islamic parents sometimes make the mistake of not really researching which school is the best match for their beliefs and views, but just choose the most nearby schools which could potentially be a mismatch.

Rauf Al-Hashim

Rauf is a 25-year-old male from Gorinchem. He is in the final phase of his Optometry training study. He is working at an optician. He was born in Iraq and came to the Netherlands as a refugee in 1999. He describes himself as half-Iraqi, half-Palestinian, but he also feels very much Dutch. He is a practicing Muslim. He first went to school when he was still living in an AZC, which was a special school for refugees. In Gorinchem he went to a real primary school, where there were mostly Islamic students. He later went to a Christian primary school, because that school had a better reputation, which was the first time he was part of a minority group. At his secondary school he graduated from VMBO first and later also from HAVO. He then started an

HBO study that he did not like, he was not so much interested in the subject. Rauf then switched to his current study.

His mother has supported Rauf a lot during his school career, that is also why she decided to place him on another primary school. She also motivated him to obtain a HAVO diploma. During his school career Rauf noticed that he and other Islamic students had way more trouble finding an internship, but never got any real support from the school on this.

During his school career, Rauf always made friends from different ethnicities, also non-Muslim. He experienced that these friends and classmates were always really interested in his religion and asked him many questions. They also acted very respectfully towards him, like not eating in front of him during Ramadan. He did notice that there were students who were Islamophobic, but he was always able to keep a respectful conversation with these classmates.

Rauf had a teacher who himself was a Christian, but he was openly supportive of the multi-cultural society. Rauf appreciated this attitude in class a lot. This teacher was also a man who treated everyone with respect and helped students with personal problems as well. For Rauf he was not only a teacher, but also the person he could always rely on for support. Rauf also noticed some prejudice with certain teachers, like not saying hello to students with a migration background in the hallway or not replying to e-mails as fast as to White Dutch students.

Rauf feels like a foreigner everywhere he goes. In the Netherlands he is seen as a foreigner, but when he goes to Iraq, they consider him a foreigner as well because of Dutch manners he has. As a child, he did not notice a lot of difference between him and Christian classmates. There was mutual respect on his Christian primary schools, when the Christian children would do their morning prayer it was okay for the Islamic children to not participate. He feels that the school where he follows his HBO study is very inclusive, he notices that there is a strong increase of Muslim students, and they facilitate prayer rooms for them. He also feels that these Muslim students tend to gravitate towards each other. He feels motivated by Islamic culture because it promotes to gain knowledge. He does feel that this is what schools should focus on, teaching knowledge to their students, because he feels that the conservative nature of the Islam might clash with liberalism and that should be avoided in school. Rauf feels that the Netherlands is a country that has a positive attitude towards Muslims.

Rasheed Boulos

Rasheed is a 25-year-old male from Gorinchem, he was born in Afghanistan and has been living in the Netherlands since he was two years old, when he came here as a refugee. He is a practicing Muslim. Afghanistan is a country where different ethnicities live, Rasheed considers himself Tajik. He went to a primary school where about half the class had a migration background, when he went to a Christian secondary school he was in minority as a Muslim and as someone with a migration background. Rasheed graduated at VWO level. He continued to study at university level, the first bachelor programme he attended was something he did not find interesting, so he switched to another bachelor programme. After obtaining his

bachelor's degree he started following a master's degree in cognitive science and artificial intelligence, which he is currently finishing.

Rasheed says that, because of his Islamic background he values his family a lot. His parents put pressure on him to be high educated, because of the situation they had fled from. Rasheed's parents and other family members were always there to help him if he had trouble studying. He also had no distraction from alcohol or drugs he says, because that is something that he was not allowed to do as a Muslim, while his friends did engage in this during secondary school. So, he had more time for school and his family. At school he missed some support in terms of being able to practice his faith. He really missed a prayer room and halal food options in the canteen. He sees this is organized better at university.

In secondary school Rasheed was in an obvious minority, he and a half-Turkish boy were the only non-White Dutch people in class. When he started secondary school, this made him very self-conscious, because classmates also made jokes about Islam on topics like terrorism for example. Rasheed eventually learnt to deal with these people when he noticed that they were attacking his faith and not him as a person. He even noticed that some teachers wanted to act popular and went along with the students who made these jokes. This made him sometimes feel like he was on his own. He noticed that there were also classmates who respected his faith and went out of their way for him, like considering the places to go eat lunch together.

In secondary school the students were taught about different religions, including Islam, but he noticed that the teacher who taught this also filled the lessons with his

own views on Islam. Rasheed felt that teachers at his school had lots of prejudice towards him as a Muslim student, as if they had already had a picture of what a Muslim student was in their mind and that Rasheed needed to try to prove that he is a good guy. He noticed things like being stricter with rules towards him or choosing side of classmates who made 'jokes' when he said something back. For him, these teacher reactions had more impact on him than his classmates. He also was not used to this, because in his primary school these students would have been called off. He did have one teacher who was his mentor, who he had a good relationship with. This teacher was one that wanted a genuine connection with his students. He listened, took the time to give extra instructions when needed, asked questions, and talked to students on their level. Rasheed felt that his secondary school did not raise enough awareness on minority students who are Muslim, while they did raise awareness for the LHBTQ+ community for example.

As a Muslim, Rasheed is a minority within a minority. He is a Shiite Muslim, which is a minority group within Islamic culture. He has always really felt this minority status. In his high school he noticed that many students did not have a clue what Islam is. He noticed that initially he started to adapt to the dominant culture, by for example adjusting his language use, but later he started to research Islam more. He noticed that his classmates respected his beliefs more than before and he felt more at ease as a minority student, but he did feel like he had to prove himself more because of his background.

Samiye Aksoy

Samiye is a 24-year-old female from Eindhoven. Her parents are from Turkey, she is a practicing Muslim, but does not wear the Hijab. All schools she attended, from primary school to the PABO (teacher training school) were Catholic schools, so she has always been a minority group student. After primary school, Samiye went to two consecuting secondary schools. At the first school she graduated at VMBO level and at the second school she graduated at HAVO level. The second secondary school was a VAVO (adult education) school. She obtained an HBO degree at the PABO. She is currently following the university level pre-master educational sciences and when she has the time she works as a substitute teacher in primary education.

Samiye describes herself as a closed person. At school she had both Islamic and Dutch friends. She did not take school very seriously, so she could not do HAVO immediately. When she started PABO there was a situation where she was too shy according to the teacher, her classmates then supported her, but she felt uncomfortable at the PABO at first. She thinks that some Islamic girls do not want to study, because they believe it is the job of the man to work and provide for the family, so women can do whatever they like. She decided that she did want to be educated and took her education more seriously then.

In secondary school she had a teacher that supported her to continue doing HAVO, so that also helped her to continue her educational career. At secondary school she found that the social studies given there was too general. She would have preferred if teachers would have encouraged classmates from different cultures and religions to

learn from each other, perhaps in an integrated way through the different subjects, inviting guest lecturers and celebrating not just Christian festivities.

Safiyyah Karim

Safiyyah is a 26-year-old female from Arnhem. Her parents come from Somalia, she is a practicing Muslim. She went to a primary school where all students had a migration background, this was because of the neighborhood the school was in, which was mainly inhabited by people with a migration background. At secondary school, it turned around, because there she only had White Dutch classmates. Safiyyah graduated at HAVO level. After HAVO she went to HBO, but she failed at the first HBO study she attended and had to quit. She was experiencing learning difficulties because she found the step from HAVO to HBO difficult. Her next HBO study she succeeded, right now she is working as an English teacher at a VMBO school and is following the part-time premaster Educational Sciences at university level.

At home, her parents are supportive of Safiyyah's educational career, but they are not pushing her. Safiyyah is the first person in her family to pursue studying at HBO or university level. Safiyyah has been taught to be independent as a woman and not rely on a man, which has been a motivational factor for her.

At her primary school, Safiyyah was very happy. It felt as a protective environment with all children who lived nearby and who all were from the same economic status. Going to a secondary school where there are only White Dutch students was a big step for Safiyyah. She describes herself as an introverted person who is not always comfortable in social situations, which had been hard for her as a teenager but

eventually she had a pleasant time at school. She never had any issues with discrimination from classmates, but the situation did make her think about herself as a person more.

Safiyyah's experiences with teachers really differed for the different phases in her life. In primary and secondary education, she had positive experiences. She had a teacher in primary school who was both gentle and strict and very creative, which was used in the lessons. This teacher saw potential in every student. In secondary education there was a teacher who was quite alike, he was strict but also able to put his passion in his lessons. When Safiyyah went to HBO her experiences were very different. She struggled a lot with the fact that you do not get as much support anymore or that teachers struggle with their role as a coach for students. She felt like she did not get the time to develop herself in a way that was comfortable or helped her with this process. Some teachers came across as judgmental about her introverted character, but she did not experience negative things about her background. Later, she had a teacher who acted as a coach for her and that was something she really needed at the time. According to Safiyyah, who is a teacher herself, a good teacher needs to care about students in a differentiated manner but is also good at teaching the subject in a motivating way.

Samiyyah grew up in the Netherlands with the Somali and Islamic culture, which can also differ from each other. She thinks this enriched her in the way that she speaks different languages, and this has cognitively stimulated her, because she is able to learn fast. In secondary school she also learned to adapt more to Dutch culture, because she had grown up quite protective. She does wish that Dutch schools accommodated and facilitated Muslims better. For instance, by having a prayer room

in the school or not making certain activities that go against Islamic values mandatory.

Yusef Nagi

Yusef is a 24-year-old male from Gorinchem. His parents are from Morocco, he is a practicing Muslim. Yusef grew up and went to primary school in a neighborhood that was mainly inhabited by White Dutch people, so all his life he has had experiences being part of the minority group. After primary school he went to a Christian secondary school where he graduated at VMBO level, he then went to another secondary school where he graduated at HAVO level. He also obtained an HBO degree and is currently studying at university for his master's degree.

Yusef feels that a lot of Dutch people feel that to support Muslim students, non-Muslim students must be educated about Islam and how to act towards Muslim people. He feels that this will not have a positive effect, because other students will feel bombed with all the things they have to consider. He thinks it is better to facilitate Muslim students with a prayer room and to celebrate Islamic events like Iftar with the whole school.

Yusef has always felt at home as a Muslim student, at his studies, where there are also other Muslims people have always been considerate, like for example halal meat in the canteen. On his primary school, with the Sugar Festival, despite him being the only Muslim in class, they still celebrated with him. Yusef has also had multiple occasions where he got into discussions with non-Muslim classmates who had certain prejudice, but he was always able to handle the conversation well. Usually, the

Islamophobic people were not supported by classmates, or the discussion was led by the teacher in a good manner.

Yusef has experienced that class discussions with the teacher about multi-culturalism usually had positive outcomes. His teachers managed to be understanding and respectful in these situations. He had a teacher he is still in contact with, this teacher was a Dutch man but really interested in Islam. He even invited Yusef and other Muslim students over at his house to have dinner and talk. He did have a negative experience with the headmaster of the Christian secondary school, he had the reputation of discriminating against minority group students. When Yusef was treated badly by a teacher, the headmaster chose the side of the teacher. For a young student as Yusef, this was as an important moment where he felt like he did not belong at that school, even though his relationships with classmates were good.

Yusef had a primary school teacher who arranged for him to a higher level of VMBO than he intended to, which turned out good for him. At the HBO Yusef had a Moroccan teacher who really was an example for him.

Yusef's Moroccan Berber and Islamic cultural upbringing went very natural for him. He had mostly Dutch friends as a child, but also went to the Mosque from an early age. He did notice that when he got older, he tended to gravitate more to other Moroccan classmates.

Yusef gets a lot of strength out of his faith, he sees the prophet Mohammed as an example that motivates him to pursue his educational career.