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International Muslim Students: Challenges and Practical Suggestions to Accommodate Their Needs on Campus

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been an increase in the enrollment of Muslim international students in higher education institutions in China. This research provides a brief overview of the issues that international Muslim students face during their campus life, such as adopting a new culture, lack of understanding from the broader university community, poor cultural or religious-responsive education, lack of accommodation for religious practices, and social isolation. This qualitative study also highlights some information about the unique needs of the Muslim students on campus and identifies areas for improvement. To overcome these issues, specific practical suggestions are given to the university administration, faculty, and staff to meet the needs of Muslim students, not only academically, but also socially and culturally.

Keywords: institutional barriers, international Muslim students, needs, university campus

Given the recent trends of internationalization and globalization, the number of students who cross national borders for education has increased. The intercontinental mobility of students has been viewed as one of the indicators of campus diversity and a prime source to boost the revenue of higher education institutions. The number of international students worldwide has been rising rapidly in the 21st century. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017),

the total number of students registered outside their country of residency increased from 2.1 million in 2000 to 5.1 million in 2016. The enrollment trend of international students has continuously been increasing, with more than five million students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country, and this figure is expected to reach eight million by 2025 (Education at a Glance, 2017; Macionis, Walters, & Kwok, 2018). Students pursue international study to understand a new culture, find out new methods of thinking and behaving, make new friends, and improve cross-cultural knowledge and skills (Andrade, 2006; McClure, 2007). On a personal level, international students may experience an increase in self-esteem and confidence as a result of their independent life experiences in a diverse culture. However, institutions that do not address the unique needs of international students may leave these students feeling disappointed, unfulfilled, and even exploited (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). To avoid these and other negative outcomes, it is imperative that personnel in higher education take into consideration how well the campus community is prepared for interacting with international students (Arthur, 2017).

The US and UK have traditionally attracted a large number of international students (Ding, 2016). In recent years, however, the enrollment of international students in China has increased because of its emerging market in the global economy. Students from other countries come to China for its burgeoning technology and growing economy. This increased mobility of international students has been an essential part of the communication between China and other countries, which reflects China's increasingly positive international status (Chen, 2016). After educational reforms and the opening-up policy, the government of China has given more importance to international students, and the enrollment of international students in higher education institutions of China is increasing day by day (Bebe, 2012; Li, 2015; Wen, Hu, & Hao, 2017)

According to statistics released by the Chinese Ministry of Education, more than 489,200 students enrolled in Chinese institutions in 2017 from across the world, especially along the "Belt and Road Initiative," a massive trade and foreign investment program linking markets along the traditional Silk Road trade routes throughout Asia and Europe (Ministry of Education, 2018; Su, 2017). The Chinese government set the ambitious goal of receiving 500,000 international students by 2020 as pointed out in the medium- and long-term educational reforms and development plan (2010–2020), with the goal of becoming the foremost host country for international students in Asia and a major study destination in the world (Wen et al., 2017).

The growing number of international students has placed China as one of the top 10 host countries for international education in the world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017. Thus, there is a need to know how to best support international students who visit China. Previous research has mainly explored challenges of international students (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007), such as factors affecting their adjustment and psychological well-being (Yeh & Inose, 2010). In China, a lot of work has been done on the problems of international students from the perspectives of social, psychological, and academic issues. Previous studies on international students often focus on cross-cultural adaptation in an academic setting and language problems (Bebe, 2012; Yu, 2010). However, limited studies

have focused on international Muslim students and the challenges that they face, such as cultural adjustment, language communication problems, lack of accommodation for religious practices, social integration, academic issues, problems in daily life, homesickness, etc. All of these problems can be manifested in an inability to sleep, depression and anxiety, and loss of self-esteem and homesickness (Rajab, Rahman, Panatik, & Mansor, 2014; Zhai, 2002). To address these issues, this qualitative study was conducted in hopes of identifying international Muslim students' adjustment issues and help-seeking behaviors while attending higher education institutions in China. This study also provides practical suggestions for effective support services to assist Muslim students in making better transitions to life and education in China. Conclusions, discussions, and implications for practitioners are also provided.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1950, China opened its doors to international students for the first time and received 33 students from Eastern Europe. The People's Republic of China espoused then the issued reforms and opening policies from 1978, when they facilitating the education of 128,000 international students for higher education, most of whom came from socialist and developing countries. Since then, international enrollment in China has steadily increased (Lei, 2014). China's quick economic growth and rising global influence have drawn a large number of international students, with a steady increase since the 1990s. In Chinese universities 195,503 international students' enrollments were reported in 2007. According to the official statistics of the Ministry of Education (MOE) of China in 2018, 492,185 international students from more than 203 countries around the world were studying in China. Recently, China has openly publicized its goal to further increase the number of international students. The State Council of China published *The National Medium- and Long-Term Educational Reforms and Development Plans* (2010) for 2010–2020 and noted that the number of international students should be further augmented. Later in 2010, the MOE (2010) adopted the Project of Studying in China, with the primary goal of bolstering China as the leading host country in Asia and bringing up the total number of arriving international students to half a million by 2020. According to MOE data, there was a 10% rise in 2017 as compared with 2016, and there has been a 299% increase since 2004 (Parr, 2019). Though international student enrollments is a priority for the Chinese government and researchers have done work on the improvement of the international students' education in China, policy makers should also consider the adjustment needs of Muslim students in a cultural and academic environment in China (Ding, 2016). It is true that China has a substantial Muslim population, but according to their religious beliefs and values, they are not well settled (Wang, 2017). Before describing Muslim students' issues in detail, below is a brief introduction to what Islam requires of Muslim students.

Introduction to Islam

Islam is the second fastest and largest rising organized religion in the world (Albrecht, 2012). Approximately 1.6 billion Muslims are scattered across the vast

geography where they live as the absolute majority in 45 countries, and the rest live in 149 countries as substantial religious minorities (Yucel, 2015). The expected rise of the world population between 2010 and 2050 is 9.3 billion, or 35%. Over the same period, the Muslim community is expected to rise 73% to reach 2.8 billion, or 30% of the world's total population (A. Ali, Xiaoling, Sherwani, & Ali, 2017).

Islam is a religion that believes that there is only God (Allah). "Surrender" is the meaning of Islam and "a person who submits to the will of Allah" is stated as a Muslim. The word Allah as used by Muslims refers to the God of all humanity (S. R. Ali, Liu, & Humedian, 2004). The Quran is the sacred book for Muslims and considered to be the ultimate foundation of Islamic ideologies and beliefs. Five articles, or pillars, of faith form the foundation of Islam: (1) Eman, or faith in One God; (2) Salat, which is prayer five times a day; (3) Zakat, or charity; (4) Swam, or fasting in the holy months of Ramadan from sunrise to sunset; and (5) one Haj, or holy pilgrimage, during one's life. Even though the fundamental pillars are the same for all Muslims, there are a wide variety of nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and different sects epitomized within Islam. There are also many dissimilarities regarding the traditions and customs that are followed (S. R. Ali & Bagheri, 2009). However, ultimately, Islam is not just a religion for Muslims; it is a complete way of life (Fatima, 2013).

International Muslim Students' Experiences in Higher Education

The campus is known to be a diverse environment and a fundamental place for students from various backgrounds to interrelate with one another on a day-to-day basis (Bennett, Volet, & Fozdar, 2013). Since the beginning of the new century all over the world universities have started to study the dynamics and societal effects of differing religious and sociocultural backgrounds (Gilliat-Ray, 2007; Hopkins, 2011; Possamai et al., 2016). Universities are being forced to contemplate the necessities and inferences of a new generation of students from a diversity of different religious customs (Gilliat-Ray, 2007). Studies on campus climate have shown that campus life affects academic achievements, especially at the higher education level. A supportive atmosphere improves the quality of teaching and learning and encourages all participants to take advantage of the unique experiences and opportunities offered at universities (Seggie & Sanford, 2010). Such an environment also stimulates greater interfaith understanding and development of cooperative attitudes toward religiously diverse peers (A. B. Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014).

International students have become an important group of the population on university campuses around the world (Kruid, 2017). It has been found that international students from different countries face more adjustments problems than their local peers (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011). Studies have shown that minority students face different challenges when they enter a new environment; it may be related to their academic setting and can also occur in their social context. Usually, these challenges are institutional discrimination, social isolation, depression, language problems, adjustment problems to the new culture, and homesickness, etc. (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). International students face unique issues, such as an unfamiliar

educational system, unacquainted food and customs, and isolation from family and friends (Akhtar, 2011).

In addition to facing challenges common to all international students, Muslim students deal with a set of entirely different challenges. Although they come from a variety of countries with distinctive cultural and linguistic customs, they share a common religious practice of Islam. Many Muslim students experience a deficiency of respect or familiarity with their religious practices and face internal and external problems in their adherence to Islam (Nasir & Al-amin, 2010). Some practicing Muslims are identifiable by their culture, language, and dress. This can lead to direct and indirect discrimination from organizations, including educational institutions (Gillbborn, 1996). Muslim students have reported uneasiness and discomfort in carrying out their publicly visible Islamic duties, such as prayer, fasting, modest dress, and non-consumption of alcohol. Some studies have shown that Muslim students continuously encounter false assumptions held by students, staff, and teachers that affect their integration in co-curricular activities and social spaces on campus (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003; Nasir & Al-amin, 2010; A. N. Rockenbach, Mayhew, Bowman, Morin, & Riggers-Piehl, 2017). In addition, the afteraffects of Anti-Muslim persuasion on campuses after 9/11 and the London bombing on 7/7 cause Muslim students to suffer from Islamophobia (Bhatti, 2011). Previous studies on the experiences of Muslim students show that Muslim children and young people have been deeply affected by negative media portrayals and are often less comfortable talking about religious matters relative to their non-Muslim peers (A. B. Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2014; Al Wekhian, 2016).

Cultural Adjustment

Thousands of miles away from home, it is not easy to acquire a sense of belonging. The demands of the host culture might be entirely different in many aspects from one's own culture, and the new lifestyle may be entirely at odds with one's experience in their native country. Getting familiar with new surroundings, customs, and social norms all become essential tasks for international students (Ozabay, 1993; Telbis, Helgeson, & Kingsbury, 2014). Previous studies on cultural adjustment have shown that adjusting to a new culture affects the educational performance of students. It has been found that students from different countries face more adjustments difficulties (Pratyusha Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013). When entering into a new culture, they need to deal with different value systems and cultural traditions, communication problems, interpersonal relationships, and different sign and symbols of social contact (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The language barrier can affect cultural adjustment and has also been associated with challenges related to psychological well-being.

International Muslim students face some additional problems while adjusting to new cultures because they also encounter a lack of familiarity with their religious practices, as well as anti-Muslim sentiments on campus (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). Research on practicing Muslims in the United States has shown that religious coping (e.g., looking for support from religious institutions and frontrunners, and engaging

in practices such as Salat) might be a method to address the challenges of cultural adjustment (Abu-Ras & Abu-Bader, 2008; Asmar, 2005; Ribeiro & Saleem, 2010).

Social Isolation

When students cross national boundaries, they face lots of challenges, and social isolation is one of them. International students, especially Muslim students, tend to feel very lonely when entering a new environment. Such isolation comprises deficiency of familiar friends, the absence of a social network, an unfamiliar culture, and homesickness (McClure, 2007; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). Like other minority students, social support, social connectedness, and positive peer group relationships are significant to the success of Muslims in a new environment. It helps them to maintain their Muslim identity and acts as a means of reinforcing Islamic values and codes of behavior (Zine, 2001). A welcoming community and university environment and having a number of friends also serve as critical factors for the mental health of international students. Student's interaction with their peers in academic-related activities increased understanding of diversity, critical thinking skills and other learning outcomes reported that the non-classroom interaction with peers has a net positive impact on the academic learning of students (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Most universities pay attention only to the educational requirements of students and do not consider other critical factors that may also determine the possible achievement or failure of students in a changed environment (Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007).

Religious Practices and Institutional Barriers

Lack of Accommodation

A dominant concern of Muslim students is their need for specific accommodations that can enable the exercise of their belief on university campuses. S. R. Ali and Bagheri (2009) reported that the lack of nutritional necessities and prayer spaces, and the ignorance of Islamic holidays can be challenging for Muslim students. Muslims have to pray five times a day at a specific time in separate spaces for men and women. Students continuously have to search out a suitable place to offer their prayer. When private spaces on campus are not accessible, Muslim students have described uneasiness and nervousness (Nasir & Al-amin, 2010). Research on Muslim Americans shows that an inability to perform religious practices causes stress and trouble. Another barrier for Muslim students in offering their prayers is when academic obligations such as class or meeting times overlap with prayer times (Speck, 1997). Other students on campus and faculty generally do not understand the religious practices of Muslim students, so they experience discrimination and prejudice. Research shows that bias based on religious practices and cultural differences negatively affect the educational performance of Muslim students (Cole & Ahmadi, 2003).

Dietary Restrictions

There are some kinds of restrictions on food choice in prominent religions of the world like Islam, Hinduism, Jewish, Judaism, and Buddhism. It can be difficult to follow the religious instructions for the followers of the religion especially when they travel to other countries that have different religion and culture (A. Ali, Xiaoling, Sherwani, & Ali, 2017). Islam requires its followers to adhere to specific dietary rules known as halal laws, which are practices dictated by the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him [PBUH]). Basic tenets of halal laws include: consuming only halal meat, which is slaughtered in the name of Allah, and ensuring that any processed or wrapped food is certified that prohibited substances have not contaminated the food. Ingestion of pork or pork byproducts, including gelatin, is forbidden, and the use of alcohol in food preparation is not permitted, including extracts such as vanilla (Henry, Hayley, Rachel, & Earl, 2014). Sometimes adequate food facilities are not available on the university campus, so students must search for places with halal food near the campus. Limited dining options also severely inconvenience Muslim students during the holy month of Ramadan, when they fast from sunrise to sunset and need to eat before or after regular dining hours.

Alcohol Consumption

Consumption of alcohol is prohibited in Islam. Believers of Islam are not allowed to consume alcohol and foods in which alcohol is used. Muslims often feel uncomfortable in an environment where alcohol is served. In university settings, the source of entertainment during gatherings often involves alcohol. Therefore, in this way, Muslim students often feel socially lonely from their peers because they have insufficient options for entertainment and social outlets (S. R. Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

Religious Conduct and Clothing

The requirement for Muslims is to cover the body parts. Typically Muslim men cover their body from shoulders down to the knee, and women cover their entire body except for face and hands. Previous research shows that Muslim students face issues related to their religious dressing because government policy in China only allows religious expression in religious institutions. Legally religious symbols are not permitted in public spaces, especially in educational institutions. When female Muslim students wear hijabs, they experience discrimination (Wang, 2017).

Religious Holidays

Beyond acquiring a place to pray, Muslim students follow specific religious holidays. Two major festivals are observed with much dedication in the Muslim world. These are the celebrations of the two Eids: Eid-ul-Fitr, which is celebrated after Ramadan, and Eid-ul Azha, which is celebrated after the Hajj (Anwar, 2001). Universities in non-Islamic countries do not recognize Islamic holidays. Since religious practices and values are mandatory for Muslims, when students have to

choose between accomplishing their educational tasks and celebrating religious holidays, this can cause a great amount of stress.

Religious and Educational Discrimination

Various factors affect the educational performance of Muslim students, such as race, gender, institution type, study time, and educational aspirations. Factors such as ethnicity have also been linked to the academic success of the students (Cole & Ahmadi, 2017). Some researchers have examined the effect of negative attitudes toward the Muslim students on their educational achievements. As a researcher, Watt (2011) considered Islamaphobia a barrier to educational success.

Similarly, in a study on Muslim college students, Speck (1997) found that cultural dissimilarities and preconceptions established about Muslim religious practices negatively influenced Muslim students' educational experiences. Many teachers and guidance counselors have a negative perception of Muslims and their religion. In a situation in which a student is perceived by his or her group as inferior, his or her educational performance can suffer (Steele, 1997). This type of prejudice and lack of understanding on the part of teachers and peer groups has been found to affect academic performance more directly (S. R. Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

Communication Barriers

There is agreement that communication problems that international students experience cause various issues that transcend all areas of these students' personal and social lives (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). In this context, language ability is considered as the most important determinant of students' ability to adjust to a new setting (Freeman, Nga, & Mathews, 2017). Language barriers in an academic environment can not only affect the educational performance of international students but also lower their interaction with fellows and teachers (Behl, Laux, Roseman, Tiamiyu, & Spann, 2017). But in universities in China, the language of instruction is Chinese, and very few local people have proficiency in speaking English. Faculty members, concerned staff, and students usually cannot adequately convey their meaning in English. This is alright for students who share the same culture, but for Muslim students, communication barriers are challenging because they need extra help from the university administration to accommodate their religious practices. However, because of the lack in English proficiency, Muslim students have difficulty successfully communicating with the university administration about their needs, because very few people know about the leading practices of Islam in the first place.

METHODS

This study uses qualitative research and explores international Muslim students' challenges on a Chinese university campus. To understand the immanent experiences of individuals, the qualitative approach is considered useful because it accentuates careful listening and respect for individuals' unique thoughts and explanations of life experiences (Ponterotto, 2013). According to Yin (2014), "Qualitative research is

interested in analysing subjective meaning or the social production of issues, events, or practices by collecting non-standardised data and analysing texts and images rather than number and statistics." (p. 60). A case study is the most suitable qualitative research technique for this research due to its concentrations on practical awareness of the case and because it closely considers the impact of societal, political, and other contexts. More specifically, case study is a research strategy and an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context and is used when the purpose of the study is to reach an in-depth and detailed understanding of an issue (Alizai, 2017; K.Yin, 2014).

Participants

For this study participants were selected from a university campus through the direct contact of the researcher and were requested to participate in this study. The final sample for this study included 10 participants—six males, and four females—ranging from 23 to 40 years old. The selection criteria included residence in China not less than 1 year and identification as a Muslim and an international student studying in a graduate program (doctoral program). The countries of origin of the participants were as follows: four from Pakistan, two from Bangladesh, two from Egypt, one from Turkey, and one from Sudan. Having the same religious background helped the researcher to establish a relationship with the informants. A close friendship was developed with the respondents during this research. We met them at different festivals and dinner parties; this association permitted our participants to share their own experiences in China.

Procedure

Data was collected through in-depth face-to-face interviews because it gave participants an opportunity to explain their viewpoints thoroughly. With the help of literature review, the interview protocol was developed and included open-ended questions that explored the participants' campus experiences, their challenges in adjustment, their relationships with peers, and services provided by the university. The interviews were mainly conducted in English. Each meeting lasted about 40–50 min, and the students were all asked the same questions. The interviews were digitally audio-recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Particular care was taken to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Based on the principals of grounded theory, a conventional content analysis was drawn to code the data. Conventional content analysis is a study design that aims to describe a phenomenon and is usually suitable when existing theory or literature on the phenomenon is limited (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). Conventional content analysis avoids the use of earlier or predetermined forms, and as an alternative permits for classes to appear directly from the actual data (e.g., contestants' responses; (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis revealed that Muslim students encountered different challenges. The three central themes presented in the following discussion highlight the participants' challenges on a predominantly nonreligious university campus: (a) new cultural adjustments and accommodations, (b) social isolation, and (c) educational and religious discrimination.

New Cultural Adjustments and Accommodations

As minority students on campus, the Muslim students interviewed experienced significant difficulties during their early adaptation to a new culture. Because of the different beliefs and value systems, they experienced cultural shock. The initial adjustment stage included adjusting to the differences in the educational system, language challenges, and food incompatibilities. A few students expressed feelings of appreciation for the opportunities, while others reported feelings of discomfort in the new culture. All participants said that language was a significant issue that they faced in their adjustment to Chinese culture, because so few people could speak English. Female Muslim students experienced more challenges because values regarding religion were entirely different. Specifically, female students who wear religious dress and hijab face more discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion. They also face more isolation because in the peer group gathering, they follow their religious values like never shaking hands with male fellows, which was some time more unpleasant because they considered them more conservative. All these things decreased their confidence level and active participation in all the learning activities. Virtually all of the participants described experiencing difficulties in following their religious practices. Muslims have to pray five times a day at specific times, but there were no spaces for them to pray. One participant explained,

> As a female to pray on campus is hard because we need a place for wazoo (wash before to pray), but there is no place for us, and during class, it is not possible to go back in the room.

Some students pointed out that students from countries of non-Muslim origin celebrated their traditional activities openly on campus.

> At the time of Christmas, the whole campus celebrates but Muslim festivals are always ignored or even not allowed.

> Participants also described that the learning of the different values and norms in new culture is most significant challenge for them.

> I think the cultural values are much different and people are open-minded so being Muslim it's difficult to adjust.

> Being Muslim and wearing a scarf is hard for me. The students on campus most of the time they ignore me said that she is Muslim. They do not know about my culture and values. They hear things about Muslim from others and the media. I think its big challenge to adjust to the host culture.

Invisibility and Social Isolation

The second broad category is social isolation. Muslim students face difficulties not only in their social life but also in the classrooms. Moving away from their homeland leaves Muslim students far away from family and friends, so they face the challenge of loneliness and making new friends. The participants told me that when they came to China, they sought out students from the same home country or any other Muslims for socialization because when they attended local social events, they had to deal with different ways of communication. Students described missing their family and friends at home due to cultural differences. In the present study, most of the participants were brought up in a collective culture in which people were closer and more friendly with each other. Socializing with peers was challenging for Muslim students because the social activities and religious beliefs of the Muslims and non-Muslims differ from each other.

> Now I am concerned about my family because they are very far from me. When I perceive something dreadful happens to somebody even, I start crying. It's not easy. Here you cannot consistently find somebody to talk to when you feel sad about something.

> I first thought that the people are very cooperative, but actually, they have different feelings. Sometimes they behave like they did not know.

> I was very intensely homesick. I tried to socialize with my fellow students but did not know what to say or how to say things. Felt more profound misery and sat alone most of the time.

Poor Cultural or Religious Responsive Education

The third category is related to Muslim students' educational challenges. Within an educational setting, ethnic minorities face acute disadvantages, particularly from a religious and cultural perspective. Students from minority groups experience conflicts between the host culture and their home culture, and this gap creates some additional difficulties for them.

During the interview, the participants spent a lot of time discussing issues associated with the study. Most of the participants claimed that student–faculty interaction is very low in their classrooms and that they were even often ignored; they stated they never participated in classroom discussions, responses to reading materials, or group activities due to having a Muslim religious background. While the students were in their home country, their professors were very specialized and amicable. However, the students noted troubles in communication with their professors in China due to the language hurdles. They considered language to be a significant hindrance to their academic adjustment. Having limited friends, they experienced isolation in the university setting.

> Professors used group discussion. My classmates usually ignore me to invite in their group discussion.

Proficiency in the Chinese language is not so good. Sometimes really cannot understand the lecture because some teachers did not speak a single word in English. When the professor allotted us in the conversation group, I was left out.

In this research, almost half of the participants experienced public apathy and feelings of distress, and only two participants felt comfortable in their academic setting. One of the female participants described it this way:

I am just one female Muslim student in my class. My classmates always give a quick look that they never know me. When they discussed study-related matters, I still listen they talk about me she is Muslim how she can participate, they ignored me.

For Muslims, religion is significant because they believe that it's not only a religion but also a way of life, so they faced some religion-related challenges. Practicing one's faith in a new environment and navigating symbols of religious identity is difficult. Participants also described a heightened awareness of the value of Islam to their own identity. Female participants indicated that students on campus raised questions about their external religious symbols. One participant said that,

Since I came here, people ask me, "Why do you like this headscarf?" They feel about me that this is hard and sad, but I am like "Don't feel sad for me. I am so happy that I am doing that."

Students also perceived misconceptions about their religious beliefs because some people in China have negative feelings toward Muslims due to the disturbances in Xinjiang.

We have a religious background, but the people of China have no religious experience so that they do not realize the religious formalities.

Sometimes their attitude was unbearable asked me why I was fasting, and she had told me "Do you think God cares if you are hungry or not," and I felt awful.

The findings of the present study expand the existing knowledge and indicate that international Muslim students face unique challenges in a new culture and academic setting. The following section will discuss implications drawn from the study.

Implications and Practical Suggestions for Accommodation

Based on the findings of this research, some recommendations will now be proposed for universities in China on how to facilitate international Muslim students in becoming successful. With the growing number of international students in the universities in China, the higher education authorities and institutional administration should take steps to accommodate these students, especially Muslim students. Muslim students are an integral part of the campus community, and their presence enhances campus diversity. The university administration can help Muslim students

in overcoming hurdles to spiritual exploration and religious faithfulness in many ways. They can also improve the campus environment for Muslim students by directly addressing misunderstanding between Muslim and non-Muslim students. This study provides some strategies for improving the campus climate and accommodating the needs of Muslim students.

Spaces to Pray

First of all, the university administration can provide proper space for Muslim students to offer prayer and hold services. Previous studies on the requirements of Muslim students have shown that for prayers and other religious activities, universities across the US established students' centers and sufficient accessible places to Muslims students (S. R. Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Nasir & Al-amin, 2010; Steele, 1997) Muslim students have found this to be a momentous sign of support on behalf of their college community that leads to an increase in morale for Muslim students and communicates to non-Muslim students' gratefulness for religious diversity. It is also imperative to provide adequate accommodations for students to pray during the required prayer time.

Religious Holidays

Universities can create an atmosphere encouraging religious adherence among Muslim students by including holidays of Islamic events on their academic calendar. While the university may not formally accept the holidays, an alternative schedule with a description of the holidays can edify faculty and other officials on this issue. It is crucial that faculty and university officials demonstrate public support for Muslim students.

Halal Food and Alcohol-Free Climate

Maintaining an alcohol-free social environment is important, because in Islam, the use of alcohol is forbidden, and Muslim students avoid places where the alcohol is consumed. This act is not only beneficial for Muslim students but also helps other students who choose not to drink alcohol. Additionally, the most important thing for Muslim students is the provision of halal food. Campus authorities should consider whether the nutritional requirements of the students are being met and also try to adjust their schedule throughout the month of Ramadan.

Cross-Cultural Awareness

Campuses need to create a safe zone and raise cultural awareness among faculty, staff, and students to ensure a welcoming environment, not just for Muslim students, but for all students. The formation of safe areas has shown to be quite successful in providing Muslim students areas to explore their identities together through hosting cultural and spiritual events (Possamai et al., 2016; Seggie & Sanford, 2010). It also helps to host educational and awareness programs regarding Islam.

Collaboration

Campus authorities and faculty can try to arrange different projects and programs in which students with different cultural and religious backgrounds can participate and exchange their knowledge, customs, and beliefs. Academic faculty members have key roles to play in the teaching, supervision, and mentorship of students to reach their academic and career goals (Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015).There is a great need to provide cross-cultural relationship training programs that encourage cross-cultural sensitivity among students, reduce discrimination and prejudice, and increase respect for foreign cultural values and customs.

Counseling

Counseling may assist the students in coping with adjustment issues. International students' intentions, attitudes, and behaviors toward seeking mental health service are well-documented (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Students often need counseling to succeed in their academic learning and to reduce psychological stress, but many students are not aware of many services available to them. To encourage these students to use counseling services, there are different forms of counseling that might be utilized. Mori (2000) suggested that campuses provide counseling services to international students, conducted in unceremonious settings such as hallways, homes, or street corners, using informal methods, such as presentations, consultations, or daily meetings that might not be observed as formal counseling conferring to standardized models. Such counseling services can be preplanned, well-structured and presented at regular times.

Cultural and Religious-Responsive Pedagogy

Higher education classrooms are diverse with regards to student culture, as well as race, gender, nationality, and intersecting identities. Indigenous people and ethnic minorities face particularly acute disadvantage within education (Zhang & Wang, 2016). In multicultural education culture and religious differences among faculty and students can create challenges that affect the quality and productivity of teaching and learning. Studies have revealed that culture affects the process of learning and social adjustment of students, and providing culturally suitable practices is the main concern of the teaching profession (Maasum, Maarof, & Ali, 2014). Culture-related pedagogy is an effective means of meeting the academic and social needs of the students with a different culture (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Gay (2002) stated that culturally relevant pedagogy uses "the cultural knowledge, previous experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective." It is thus important for teachers to be culturally competent in pedagogy to address the diversity in the classroom, and in particular, the various learning styles of students. Teachers need to be able to promote cultural understanding in various ways to enable students to become sensitive to other students from other cultures to be able to live harmoniously in a multicultural community (Derwing & Munro, 2005). China is a multicultural country so we suggest

that the government and the institutions of higher education should encourage culturally responsive teaching practices. For this purpose, they should conduct in-service teacher training, inviting foreign professors to teach, welcoming international students into your classroom, and organizing cultural and religious events celebrations.

CONCLUSION

Using qualitative research methods, this research explored accommodating needs and the challenges of international Muslim students that they faced during their academic, social, and cultural adaption. The study has provided an original contribution because it focused on international Muslim students in higher education in China. A conclusion to be drawn from the study is that Muslim students are an integral part of the campus community and their presence can lead to diversity-enriched campus environments. The findings of this study indicate that Muslim students often face a series of difficulties mainly related to their accommodation, social isolation, adjustment, and educational discrimination. Due to the differences in lifestyle across religion, the participants find it more convenient to become friends with other Muslim students having the same lifestyle.

This study highlights the critical areas for improvement such as a need to provide a proper place to pray on campus for Muslim students. Most of the participants said that they might have an area where they can pray in privacy and feel as if they can be themselves with no further explanation needed. The findings of the study suggest that religious beliefs, practices, and access to faith-based communities in a new cultural context are significant components for the participants. Nurturing a multiracial atmosphere must be primary for universities as their campuses come to be more diverse. Specifically, in the present political and societal environment, multiracial realization surrounding Islam and the experiences of Muslim students has grown up gradually significant. Rising cognizance and growing knowledge is the first step, but campuses can become counselors for Muslim students by taking action in the most effective means. It is an act that will offer an indication that universities are dedicated to forming an atmosphere that not only recognizes and raises the value of the diversity that Muslim students contribute to the university but is similarly devoted to confirming that Muslim students are acknowledged as a valuable member of the campus community. The Chinese government has focused on strategies to quickly increase the enrollment of international students in a short time, such as supplying government scholarships. The government should also take steps to accommodate these students.

Limitations and Future Research

This research should be cautiously considered because it concentrated on a specific group of international Muslim students at a particular institution. The interviews for this study were conducted in English, which may have limited our capability to completely comprehend the emotional experiences of students, particularly those with more limited English proficiency, who feel more comfortable

discussing personal experiences in their native language. Therefore, the generalizability of the results beyond this group of Muslim students is scarce. Despite all these limitations, this study has great importance implications for future research and practice with international Muslim students attending Chinese universities as it highlights the basic accommodation needs of that group of students. Further investigation can explore the behavior of faculty, staff, and students towards intercontinental Muslim students and their consciousness of the problems they face on university campuses.

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