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Bridging the Gap: The Impact of an Intensive English Program on Female Middle Eastern Muslim Students Social Experiences

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Abstract
This study investigates the impact of intensive English program (IEP) on female Middle Eastern Muslim students’ ability to interact with native English speakers at a Catholic institution. The sample consisted of eight female Middle Eastern Muslim students who already completed IEP, currently enrolled in IEP, or was able to waive IEP requirements through testing. This study explores factors associated with female Middle Eastern Muslim students’ social experiences through a qualitative approach. Findings are presented to understand challenges based on religion, English proficiency, cultural differences, and campus support. Lastly, recommendations are presented for staff members, IEP instructors, and students to assist in improving the social success of female Middle Eastern Muslim students.

Research Questions
1. What influence does IEP involvement have on the social experiences of female Middle Eastern Muslim students as opposed to those who tested out of IEP or students who were able to waive the IEP requirements?
2. What influence does Islam have on female Middle Eastern Muslim students’ social experiences on a college campus?

Methods
Participants
• One-on-one interviews with 8 female Middle Eastern Muslim students who are currently enrolled in IEP, who completed IEP, or was able to waive IEP requirements through testing or permission.
• Participants were selected based off of certain characteristics (purposive sampling) and through referrals (snowball sampling).

Procedures
• Participants answered a short demographic questionnaire prior to being interviewed.
• Next, participants responded to questions regarding IEP, their social experiences, and Islam.

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<th>Age</th>
<th>Home Country</th>
<th>Years veiled or hijab</th>
<th>Class/IEP Level</th>
<th>On/Off Campus</th>
<th>Often Speaks English</th>
<th>Amount of time in the U.S.</th>
<th>Level started IEP classes</th>
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<td>Occasionally/ Sometimes</td>
<td>1yr.</td>
<td>Level 3</td>
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<td>1yr.</td>
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</table>

Themes
Student Diversity Awareness
• Perceptions of Islam
• Understanding American Culture
• Effective discussions on the Muslim culture

Complex Social Environments
• Interactive learning
• Social connectedness
• Staff and faculty encouraging American students

Connecting to the Campus Community
• Activities and events
• Cooperation within student organizations and the campus
• Prior personal experience
• Confidence Level

Implications
This study provided recommendations to higher education intensive English Programs in creating effective complex social environments. Further research regarding this topic would assist in creating programs to improve social experiences and English proficiency amongst female Middle Eastern Muslim students.

Selected References