

Challenges Related to Rituals and Law Facing Saudi Students in the UK

Tareq Albhlal¹ & Hajed A. Alotaibi²

¹ Department of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Faculty of Science and Humanities at Rumah, Majmaa University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

² Department of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Faculty of Science and Humanities at Hawtat Sudair, Majmaa University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Correspondence: Hajed A. Alotaibi, Department of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Faculty of Science and Humanities at Hawtat Sudair, Majmaa University, 11952, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Tel: 966-5-8002-8990. E-mail: h.alotaibi@mu.edu.sa

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Abstract

Saudi students studying abroad encounter some challenges as regards the climate and culture of the UK. These challenges may not only be observed in the language and academic curriculum. Hence, this study aims to test the rooted religious values and jurisdiction practices among Saudi Muslims concerning their experiences, needs and other challenges while studying in the UK. This study included a sample of 100 Saudi students enrolled in a different academic year in the UK institutes. Findings reveal that the majority of the Middle Eastern students experienced difficulties in offering prayers, displaying Islamic rituals such as funerals, and paying Zakat to people. These students also experienced problems in learning about juristic and judicial regulations and identifying the significance of civil and human rights, intellectual/religious tolerance, and women's rights. Most of the students experienced issues with their wives due to the social environment. Understanding this experience is significant to help ease the students' challenges and make their experience in the UK successful.

Keywords: juristic challenges, cultural issues, UK universities, Saudi students

1. Introduction

Globalization promotes individuals to reflect and respect cultural diversity and cross border relations. This has also encouraged mobilization among Muslim students who move abroad to pursue higher education (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). In the context of the United Kingdom (UK), an increased inflow of international students is observed, which was 4.13 million in 2016 and is expected to increase by 17.2 percent until 2050 (Statista, 2016). Generally, the majority of the Muslim population in these institutes comes from the Arab regions.

The transition to these countries is challenging for the students due to their cultural, religious as well as jurisdictional differences (Yakaboski, Perez-Velez, & Almutairi, 2016). Also, the substantial number of Muslim students in the European countries raises significant concerns about their protection and rights given the fact that sentiments against Islamophobia in these countries have substantially grown. Though efforts are made to reduce the fear related to Islam, similar efforts are combating the immigration of students from Islamic countries (Powell, 2018). Despite the persistence of the negative perception towards it (Gallup, Inc., 2015) and the rise of hate crime in the UK (Statista, 2019), the enrollments of the Muslim students continues to increase throughout the United Kingdom (UK International Students Affair Council, 2018). Recent studies have reasoned that this is due to the increase in government-funded scholarships (Perna et al., 2014; Yakaboski, Perez-Velez, & Almutairi, 2016). Considering the rising population of the UK international students as well as the added benefits of the international education such as better economic status, academic, and social position (Institute of Higher Education, 2017; UNESCO, 2016; NAFSA, 2017), there is an increase in Saudi students who are moving abroad.

This information is further stimulated by the provided government support. For instance, Saudi government funds about 2 billion dollars annually to facilitate the achievement of its set Saudi Vision 2030 objective, which necessitates its academic stance parallel to the international standard (Alshuwaikhat, & Mohammed, 2017). In

addition, the experience of these students helps in understanding the intensity of different social and academic challenges that students have to endure. Although, various researches have explored the transfer of Muslim students to the higher education, these are typically concentrated on the cultural adjustment of a specific gender or both (Dinning et al., 2016; Anderson, Wason, & Southall, 2016) or that of US institutes (Mesidor, & Sly, 2016; Chao, Takeuchi, & Farh, 2017). Very few researches have explored the Muslim students' experience in the UK, specifically during a period of increased Islamophobia, with augmented incidents of hate crimes against the Muslims. This study is centered on the shared religious and cultural ties which impact the Muslims during their effort to meet their academic and social needs and improve their learning experience in the UK.

Muslim students studying abroad encounter various difficulties concerning socio-cultural life in the UK. These challenges may not be addressed in the language and academic curriculum. The difference in the cultural background, language, and climate can lead to an abrupt and uncomfortable experience for the students. Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern (2015) support this claim in the context of Saudi international students where challenges include communication barriers, financial stress, religious practices, housing, jurisdiction, and cultural differences. Lack of English-speaking proficiency impedes the social interactions of international students, contributing to their academic difficulties (Alsabatin, 2015).

Smith & Silva's (2011) study indicates ethnic identity as the major difference between the cultures of the two regions, expressed in the form of increased commitment and duty. The inclusion of the Saudi students among the international body of students at UK institutes further becomes intensified considering the language barrier (Alhazmi 2010; Heyn 2013). For example, the Arabic script is one from right to left whereas it is the opposite for English, i.e. left to right (Saigh & Schmitt 2012). Related research by Alqarni (2018) indicates the varying experience of Saudi international students where difficulty related to the acquaintance and friendship have been found. It highlighted that Muslim students find it much easier to develop a friendship with "non-Caucasian" students. Students can have different perceptions of how religion and science associate because there are contradictions in opinions on the natures of religion and science. Students can extend their knowledge and awareness of the concepts of religion and science and also of the conflict involved when striving to distinguish barriers and associations between them (Billingsley et al., 2016).

Ali et al. (2017) illuminate the difficulty of the students related to their balancing of the spiritual and academic needs. For instance, a student may have to appear for an exam, on his religious celebratory event of Eid, while his home country observes a public holiday. Stevenson et al. (2017) describe that the practices related to the pervasiveness related to Islamic phobia remain unchecked. Simbar (2008) also reports that the difference in Islamic law is a major challenge observed across the western states. It exemplifies that secularism segregates religion from societal and state matters concentrating it to the personal sphere and worship places. Contrary to it, Islam provides a guideline that relates to every aspect of life, necessitating the believers to commit to its all teachings. Ali (2008) states that the difference in the law further hinders the Saudi students' acceptance of western practices, which affect their experience at an institute. Considering the difference of cultural, religious, and jurisdiction among the two regions, the study aims to assess the Saudi students' experience concerning their integration challenges, and the ways these can be mitigated or overcome.

The research is significant as it sheds light on the international events, for example, the incident of 7 July 2005 in London and the recent Manchester Arena bombing on May 2017 (McKenna, & Francis, 2018). This presents the experience of the Muslims in the recent events and the challenges they have to endure as international Muslim students. The study focuses on the religious and judicial profile of the students which have been researched by very few studies and mostly in the context of the US (Alsabatin, 2015; Macias, 2016; Powell, 2018). It focusses on religious self-assessment, conversation, and related jurisdiction law. It provides a unique perspective on the experience of Saudi international students and emphasizes the significant concerns and provides a guideline for future research. Additionally, it also contributes by highlighting the efforts which are adopted in Manchester for combating the hateful radicalization. Therefore, the study aims to test the rooted religious values and jurisdiction practices among the Saudi Muslim students' experiences, their needs along with the challenges that they experience while studying in the UK.

The increasing economic growth may result in contradictions between available jobs and worker skills. Disparities between working conditions and salary expectations versus their reality might be a potential source of discontent among international students. This is unlikely that these contradictions will be resolved within the next decade, whereas current education reforms will assist in improving the situation. Generally, the Arabian Gulf region is one of the fastest-growing populations worldwide. By 2020, it is anticipated that this population will increase by one-third to around 53 million individuals. The majority of this population would be young. This presents significant challenges for all Gulf governments, such as Saudi Arabia, even though the increasing

growth and expansion are directed towards the youth population and its major changes. The accessibility to education, new digital/online technologies, and international media influence the social attitudes, norms, and identity of young Saudis. The overseas scholarship program of Saudis could result in students returning with new thoughts, behaviors, and ideas that may contradict current Islamic and cultural practices.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

This study used a correlational study design for assessing religious and juristic challenges facing Saudi Students in the UK. This research design is selected as it helps in numerically assessing the subject matter as well as its effectiveness and efficiency for collecting data (Creswell, 2013). This numerical representation makes it easy for the reader to comprehend the results.

2.2 Population and Sample

Through simple random sampling, the study selected 100 individuals who were enrolled in the UK. This sample was derived from a research population of Saudi students enrolled in different years in their institutes. The population was associated with the Institute for 1 year or more e.g. 4 years.

2.3 Data Collection

This study used a close-ended questionnaire-based survey, which allows the effective and efficient gathering of data. The questionnaire is divided into four sections, where the first section collects demographic details of the participants, and the second section is centered on the religious difficulties, the third section deals with juristic challenges while the fourth section explores social intellectual and cultural aspects. The questionnaire will further be based on a 3-point Likert scale (from 1 agree to 3 disagree).

2.4 Validity and Reliability

Before the distribution of the questionnaire, it was assessed for its reliability and validity. The reliability of questionnaire items was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, whereas for ascertaining the research validity, it was viewed by the experts in the social science curriculum. For ascertaining the research validity for its language, significance, clarity (as it was originally prepared in Arabic), it was sent to professionals in the discipline of instructional design and educational psychology. The items of the questionnaire were amended, edited, and altered as per the experts' feedback.

2.5 Data Analysis

For assessing the collected data, IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used. The demographics of the students were represented in the form of frequencies and percentages. The responses for the other two sections were assessed categorically using Chi-square in the form of the contingency table. The results demonstrate the responses that reach statistical significance value of ($p < 0.05$).

3. Results

The demographic profile of participants including gender, age, stage of the study, marital status, career type, and scholarship status is presented in Table 1. 86.0% of the male participants and 14.0% of the female participants were included in this study. 11.0% and 22.0% of participants were having ages between 22-25 years and 26-29 years, respectively. 8.0% of the students were enrolled in a Bachelor program, followed by a Master's program (41.0%), Ph.D. program (37.0%), and language (11.0%). 81.60% of the students were employed in the government sector, followed by 14% of the students in the private sector. 78.0% of the students were married, while 22.0% of the students were bachelor. 92.0% of the students were sponsored while 2.0% of the students studying in the UK universities were on the grant.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	86	86.0
Female	14	14.0
Age		
18 – 21 years	-	-
22 – 25 years	11	11.0
26 -29 years	22	22.0
More than 30 years	67	67.0
Stage of Study		
Language	11	11.0
Foundation	1	1.0
Bachelor	8	8.0
Masters	41	37.0
PhD	37	37.0
Training	2	2.0
Career Type		
Government	81	81.0
Private Sector	14	14.0
Businessman	3	3.0
Permanent stay	2	2.0
Refugee	-	-
Marital Status		
Married	78	78.0
Bachelor	22	22.0
Scholarship status		
Sponsored	92	92.0
Self-funded	6	6.0
Grant	2	2.0

The following table is designed to show the religious difficulties experienced by Saudi students in the UK. One of the major difficulties experienced by students was to perform prayers as 55.8% of the male students and 42.9% of the female students claimed that it is not easy performing prayers whenever and wherever. 58.1% of male students cannot display Islamic rituals such as funerals and prayers. 54.7% of male students cannot easily fast in the UK despite the weather and long days. 34.9% of the male students and 57.1% of the female students cannot easily pay Zakat to people in the UK (Table 2).

Table 2. Religious difficulties

		Gender		P-value	
		Male	Female		
It is easy to do prayers whenever and wherever	Always	18 20.9%	2 14.3%	0.272	
	Sometimes	48 55.8%	6 42.9%		
	Not at all	15 17.4%	6 42.9%		
	Only Friday Ceremony	3 3.5%	0 0.0%		
	Not interested	2 2.3%	0 0.0%		
	Always	19 22.1%	1 7.1%		0.592
	Sometimes	50 58.1%	9 64.3%		
Not at all	12 14.0%	3 21.4%			
Not interested	5 5.8%	1 7.1%			
I can easily fast in the UK despite the weather and long days	Always	47 54.7%	2 14.3%	0.005	
	Sometimes	25 29.1%	11 78.6%		
	Not at all	12 14.0%	1 7.1%		
	Not interested	2 2.3%	0 0.0%		
	Always	29 33.7%	0 0.0%		0.022
Sometimes	30 34.9%	8 57.1%			
Not at all	16 18.6%	3 21.4%			
Not interested	11 12.8%	3 21.4%			
I need to learn Sharia rulings	Always	20 23.3%	2 14.3%	0.784	
	Sometimes	38 44.2%	7 50.0%		
	Not at all	18 20.9%	4 28.6%		
	Not interested	10 11.6%	1 7.1%		
	Always	8 9.3%	0 0.0%		0.616
Sometimes	42 48.8%	7 50.0%			
Not at all	22 25.6%	5 35.7%			
Not interested	14 16.3%	2 14.3%			

Table (3) presents the juristic challenges experienced by students in the UK. 47.1% of the male students and 64.3% of the female students faced difficulties in learning about juristic and judicial regulations in the UK. 28.2% of the male students and 21.4% of the female students faced problems in identifying the significance of civil and human rights, intellectual/religious tolerance, and women's rights. While, 54.1% of the male students agreed that academic major has a strong effect on their cultural, social, and political attitudes (Table 3).

Table 3. Juristic challenges

		Male	Female	P-value
I have difficulties in learning about judicial and juristic regulations in the UK:	Agree	40 47.1%	9 64.3%	0.220
	Neutral	31 36.5%	5 35.7%	
	Disagree	14 16.5%	0 0.0%	
I have a problem in knowing the significance of civil and human rights, women's rights, and intellectual/religious tolerance	Agree	23 27.1%	4 28.6%	0.866
	Neutral	24 28.2%	3 21.4%	
	Disagree	38 44.7%	7 50.0%	
Academic major has a strong effect on students' cultural, social and political attitudes	Agree	46 54.1%	8 57.1%	0.159
	Neutral	23 27.1%	6 42.9%	
	Disagree	16 18.8%	0 0.0%	
Individualistic and liberalistic values have a strong effect on students' cultural, social and political attitudes	Agree	46 54.1%	9 64.3%	0.178
	Neutral	22 25.9%	5 35.7%	
	Disagree	17 20.0%	0 0.0%	

Social, intellectual and cultural aspects of the challenges facing students are presented in Table (4). The majority of the neighbors of students are non-Muslims (58.0%). Only 8% of the students faced problems with their neighbors. 18% of the students were concerned with late-night noises coming from their neighbor houses.

Table 4. Social intellectual and cultural aspects of the challenges

My neighbors		
	Frequency	Percent
Both are Muslims	9	9.0
Both are not Muslims	58	58.0
One is Muslim	33	33.0
I face problems with my neighbor		
Agree	8	8.0
Neutral	23	23.0
Disagree	69	69.0
Type of the problems with your neighbor		
Loud Music	12	12.0
Noise Late Nights	18	18.0
Parties	10	10.0
Others	60	60.0
I tried to solve the problem with my neighbor		
Agree	30	30.0
Neutral	55	55.0
Disagree	15	15.0
I'm married to		
Muslim	87	87.0
Non-Muslim	1	1.0
Atheist	2	2.0
I face problems with my wife because of		
The family	30	30.0
Social environment	35	35.0
Being away from family	35	35.0
In light of Sharia rulings, some challenges and problems are happening at schools		
Agree	49	49.0
Neutral	23	23.0
Disagree	28	28.0
The reason for those problems happening at schools is		
The people	32	32.0
The law	10	10.0
All of which	58	58.0
I tried to solve those problems		
Agree	40	40.0
Neutral	37	37.0
Disagree	23	23.0
Total	100	100.0

4. Discussion

One of the most important challenges experienced in the international setting is the students with widely

different experiences of religious practices and backgrounds in the same classroom. Some students are easily identified with different religious practices, while rest completely lack the kind of language and experiences for what it possibly could mean to be part of religious culture. A wide variety of religious and non-religious perspectives have been characterized in some classrooms (Flensner, 2018). Religification has a complicated association with education and schooling based on a dialogic process of identification and proclamation. Schools are important platforms where Muslims may initially experience being identified as Muslims, either by their classmates or teachers. Moreover, curricula are also an essential information source where Muslimness might be portrayed as schools usually formally educate non-Muslims regarding Islam (Panjwani & Moulin-Stožek, 2017).

Another significant challenge for Saudi students is transitioned from religious to secular practices. A Muslim faces difficulty in sustaining religious practices, i.e. praying multiple times per day on a university campus, concerns related to Halal food, and fasting in the month of Ramadan (Mcdermott-Levy 2011). The lack of institutional support hinders Muslim students' difficulty of accessing Halal food, most of the students primarily consume vegetables or snacks (Mcdermott-Levy 2011; Azhar, & Safdar, 2016).

In the context of female Saudi students, the women face difficulty for wearing a hijab, which is indicated as a discrimination catalyst for outwardly representing religious observance. Most of the students were discriminated based on their veiling practices (Brünig, & Fleischmann, 2015). However, Wagner et al. (2012) have pointed out that the 'veiled women' are resisting the imposition of 'liberation' and 'equality' as per the Western perspective. Instead, it is being used for asserting identity challenging the stereotypical images as well as associated assumptions.

Students contribute to the internalization and diversity of public and academic activities. For instance, these students bring various insights to issues in the classroom, appreciate the differences found in the world, and improve mutual understanding. Therefore, it is essential for accepting international students in UK universities due to their contributions to the student society on many different levels. Cultural exchange, financial income, and academic prestige are included in these levels (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016). An increasingly important and relevant source of diversity on college campuses is comprised of international students. They empower the cultural diversity of campuses with their ethnic experiences and home culture. Furthermore, the faculty and students are helped by international students to develop their cultural sensitivities and skills to collaborate with people from different backgrounds (Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015). General living adjustment, academic difficulties, personal-psychological adjustment, English-language proficiency, and socio-cultural difficulties are considered as the challenges faced by international students (bin Basri, 2015).

Middle Eastern countries are expected to continue making a strong market economy due to the rising affluence in the region, ample natural resources, and robust population growth. In particular, these regions will strive to be an attractive destination for foreign learners. The long-term economic expansion of these regions will consequently rely on successful efforts for educating and employing the increasingly expanding youth population. It is acclaimed that the doors for Muslim women have to be opened for them to join the labor force as it is likely that the number of working women will increase over the coming decade. Likewise, educational institutions will be pressurized for offering and providing a comprehensive curriculum to these women students, who may easily absorb the job environment mostly staffed by men.

5. Conclusion

This research explored the challenges related to rituals and law which Saudi students experience in the UK. Earlier, evidence has only been presented on the judicial and religious profiles of the language problems facing foreign students, specifically in the context of UK higher education institutes. The religious self-assessment, daily conversations, and the effects, thereof, were emphasized based on jurisdiction and law-related rituals. Saudi students with religious practices and backgrounds in the same classroom experienced some major challenges. However, Saudi students contribute to the diversity and internalization of academic and public activities. This study has revealed a variation in education policy challenges by region and cultural problems throughout the Muslim students. There is significant heterogeneity in Islamic practices of Muslims and schooling within and across the UK. The review of Islamic practices in western culture will help educators and school policymakers to consider the issues associated with UK universities. It is recommended that future research should examine the evidence in languages other than English and connect Islamic practices to education outcomes for providing policy recommendations based on the causal analysis. This study also suggests that future studies can be performed on the western countries, where local options for education, training, and professional advancement either in new institutes or within current schools can be explored. Similarly, local options will assist to provide accountability and transparency towards the state.

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Competing Interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

Ethical approval and consent to participate

The Majmaah University for Research Ethics Committee (MUREC) (HA-01-R-008) has reviewed the application referred to in this paper, whose ethical endeavor has been approved under Ethics Number: Oct.29/COM-2019/6

Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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