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### Effective ways to lower Muslim immigrant students' anxiety in ESL classes: A handbook for educators

Mehrnaz Ayazi  
ayazimehrnaz@yahoo.com

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University of San Francisco

**Effective ways to lower Muslim immigrant students' anxiety in ESL classes:  
A handbook for educators**

A Field Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Teaching English To Speakers of Other Languages

By  
Mehrnaz Ayazi  
May 2020

**Effective ways to lower Muslim immigrant students' anxiety in ESL classes:  
A handbook for educators**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

by

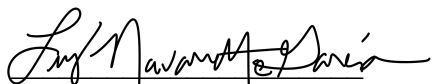
Mehrnaz Ayazi

May 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:



Luz Navarrete García  
Instructor/Chairperson

April 30, 2020

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## ABSTRACT

This field project is a handbook for educators that recommends effective ways of lowering Muslim refugee students' anxiety in ESL classrooms. Schools are challenging for refugee and immigrant students as they have to navigate school systems that do not accommodate their unique needs. As a result, Muslim refugee students are often discriminated against, marginalized, and bullied in schools. They suffer from low self-confidence, high anxiety, and lack of motivation. Research concludes that educational institutions in host countries are ill-equipped in creating an equitable education and school environment for Muslim refugee students due to the lack of educators' training and the flawed association between assimilation and educational success. Among refugee students, anxiety is known to negatively affect learning and to impede academic success.

In this field project, educators are provided with (a) a brief description of Islam; (b) information on pre-settlement experiences of refugees; (c) recommendations on how to create a safe learning environment for these students; (d) a lesson plan designed to bring awareness to non-Muslim students in the classroom and honor Muslim students' culture. I hope this project assists educators in recognizing the impact of pre-settlement experiences on Muslim refugee students' post-settlement academic success and their social mobility. Furthermore, I believe this project can be instrumental in addressing discriminatory practices and curricula in US public schools.

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (2017), millions of people in the Middle East and in other Muslim countries have been forced out of their homes and countries due to war, violence, terrorism and economic factors. The agency reports that by the end of 2017, there were 68.5 million people who were forced to flee their homes for various reasons. The number of refugees arriving in the US and European countries each year is estimated at over 350,000 individuals, many of them children and young adults, and mainly from Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq (U.N. Refugee Agency, 2017). The UN Refugee Agency also reported that 21,292 refugees resettled in the US in 2018, most from war-torn countries, escaping horror and having experienced multiple traumas.

Among these refugees are many children. Post-settlement experiences play a significant role in these children's education. However, the students' journey and stories from before arriving in their host countries are essential in shaping their world view and can affect their self-confidence and sense of identity. The pre-settlement trauma experienced by refugees is mostly overlooked in post-settlement communities and schools (Bal, 2014). For example, Mendenhall (2019) states that refugee students' adjustment to school in the US is stymied by haunting and traumatic displacement experiences, in addition to discrimination and xenophobia in their new host country. Jodeyr (2003) echoes this in their examination of the negative psychological effects on refugees, forced out of their homeland and displaced into a different and unknown society. The negative impact of these pre-settlement experiences is often compounded by negative post-settlement experiences.

Post-settlement, refugees are often made to feel like outsiders (Jodeyr, 2003). Social and cultural differences, magnified by the lack of language skills and educational opportunities, can hold refugees in undesirable jobs, force them to drop out of school, and prohibit successful integration. Among refugee children, a lack of English language skills, coupled with the negative impact of pre-settlement experiences and general culture shock, can cause anxiety and make it very challenging to navigate school. Abu El-Haj (2010) states that Muslim students, in particular, are negatively impacted by the perception that cultural differences are problematic in school. This negative perception can even influence the placement of students in school programs. For example, Muslim refugee students' are overrepresented as having learning disabilities (Bal, 2014). This is compounded by the fact that many educators lack awareness and understanding of the refugee experience; they fail to understand why refugee children experience anxiety and how this anxiety impedes learning (Birman & Tran, 2017).

Despite the unawareness among educators, a growing body of academic research illustrates the specific case of Muslim refugees' resettlement into US communities. This body of research addresses both forced assimilation and Muslim student coping mechanisms and is directly related to the anxiety experienced by Muslim refugee students in US school. For example, according to Jafee-Walker (2017), teachers of Muslim students often attempt to integrate Muslim students by encouraging them to discard their religious requirements such as wearing the hijab, or not eating pork meat. Jafee-Walter notes the adverse effects of this coercive assimilation in European and US schools. The needs of these Muslim students are not recognized and they are not valued for their cultural contributions. Similarly, Schulz (2016) addresses the general failure of US education systems in considering immigrant students'



culture, religion, and personal histories. According to Shulz, it is crucial to understand the role of schools and educational systems as agents of enculturation and assimilation, and on the other hand to acknowledge the relentless efforts of immigrants to preserve their language and culture.

Related to this, Sallee and Stubbs' (2013) study of American university Muslim students concluded that these students felt a responsibility to adapt and adjust to expectations of forced assimilation. The students did not feel they had a right to expect the school to provide them with accommodations to practice their religion, or to provide them with a safe learning environment. According to the authors, this attitude helped the Muslim students to manage their expectations. However, it also allowed the university to shirk its responsibility to Muslim students, who should be encouraged to embrace their Muslim identity as they pursue their academic goals. Thus, Sallee and Stubbs highlight the marginalization of Muslim students and point to the lack of policies that address Muslim students' ability to embrace their culture and to practice their religious beliefs. To remedy this, Mendenhall, Russell, and Buckner (2017) claim that refugee students should be fully integrated and included in national schools, and that civil organizations should support non-formal education programs to address the distinct needs of Muslim refugee students not met by government schools.

This is important because the number of Muslim refugees and immigrants arriving in the US and Europe is on the rise as the political and economic situation in the Middle East and other Muslim countries deteriorates rapidly (UN Refugee Agency, 2018). The children of these refugees continue to arrive in US schools, where teachers are unprepared to meet their specific needs. Prior to arriving in the US, many refugees wait for long periods of time for resettlement in safer environments. While placed in camps they may be subjected to abuse, lack of food and

discrimination (Schorcht, 2017). Pre-settlement, refugees also have limited or no access to formal education (Birman & Tran, 2017). After transitioning from refugee camps and into new communities, Muslim immigrants often must navigate an unfamiliar society and school system while struggling to learn a new language and culture. Muslim students frequently experience marginalization, discrimination, and oppression in their daily lives and in school; due to these factors, Muslim refugee children can experience debilitating anxiety in the classroom (Schorcht, 2017). Teachers often lack the tools, institutional support, and training to address this anxiety (Birman & Tran, 2017).

School systems in the US and Europe lack educators and administrators with sufficient training in identifying and responding to the needs of Muslim refugees (Birman & Tran, 2017; Sharpes & Shou, 2014). According to Shafer and Walsh (2018), educators lack the training that would allow them to identify the needs and limitations of these students. Furthermore, education systems, in general, tend to overlook the social and psychological factors that affect the learning of refugees and immigrants in a new country (Irizarry & Kleyn, 2011; Sharpes & Schou, 2014). Anxiety and difficulty with identity development and self-efficacy are further exacerbated by the implicit negative bias of educators who do not understand or misunderstand the refugee experience and the Muslim faith (Speck, 1997). There is a need to train educators to understand the needs and challenges faced by Muslim refugees and to offer these educators tools for lowering students' anxiety in their schools and classes. This understanding and these tools will help enable educators to provide an equitable education for Muslim refugees. The primary problem this field project is designed to address is the anxiety Muslim immigrant students experience in the school system.

## **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this field project is to provide a handbook for educators that require background knowledge in order to better serve Muslim refugees and immigrants in public schools and universities in the US. This handbook provides educators with tools such as (a) factual descriptions of the reasons Muslim refugees have for fleeing their homes (b) the conditions of refugee camps (c) information on lack of schooling for refugee children (d) the significance of preserving one's original language and culture. This handbook is designed to provide instructions on how to utilize pre-settlement information to inform classroom practices that may reduce anxiety and marginalization among Muslim refugee students.

Education plays an important role in the integration of Muslim refugee students and must be delivered (a) by teachers who cultivate a critical awareness of their students' complex cultural, linguistic, religious, identities and experiences (b) through appropriate content (c) by avoiding implicit bias that marginalizes refugees. In order to achieve the goals of successful integration and providing an equitable education to Muslim refugees, educators must have access to training and tools that provides them with the ability to understand the pre and post-settlement challenges of this group. It is imperative for educators to have cultural awareness, practice self-reflection and examine their own attitudes in relation to integration and assimilation of Muslim immigrants and refugee students (Sharpes & Schou, 2014).

This handbook will provide some of the information and tools necessary to engage in this process. This includes

- An introduction that orients the reader to the handbook content
- A section that describes the basic tenets and practices of Islam

- A section that describes the pre-settlement experiences common to Muslim refugees
- A section with recommendations for lowering the anxiety of students who are Muslim refugees
- A lesson plan sample that can be utilized in ESL classes in order to (a) educate non-Muslim students about Muslim students' heritage and culture (b) debunk misconceptions about Muslim students and address stereotypes.

Resources such as these are important for making nuanced decisions in the classroom, and for making decisions about the academic placement of Muslim refugee students, such as in language tracks and when considering special education services. Although this handbook is primarily designed to address lowering student anxiety in ESL classes, the strategies recommended can be utilized in all educational contexts that cater to Muslim immigrant and refugee students.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

The theoretical rationale for this project is based on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis which emphasizes the belief that no learning can take place if the learner is under stress; in this model, learning is heavily dependent on the emotional state of the learner (Krashen, 1983). Krashen's second language acquisition theory is based on five main hypotheses. For the purposes of this field project, the researcher's focus is on the Affective Filter hypothesis. Krashen suggests that anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and absence of motivation are factors that affect second language acquisition; a learner's emotional state plays a role in their language acquisition success. This hypothesis suggests that higher levels of anxiety are debilitating and may create mental blocks for learners. This can result in a failure to acquire a

second language and a failure to achieve academic success. It can also cause isolation and alienation among refugee and immigrant students.

In the creation of this field project's handbook the Affective Filter Theory acts as a rationale for educators confronted with the challenges of providing education to refugee students. The Affective Filter Theory can be used by educators because it provides a rationale for cultivating self-awareness related to the implicit bias and discrimination that negatively impacts Muslim refugee students. Educators can use the theory to guide them as they work to reduce the anxiety, tension, and emotional trauma often experienced by Muslim refugee students in their classrooms. The Affective Filter Theory can also be used as a rationale to explain the importance of creating a resource for teachers engaged in this work.

### **Significance of the Project**

This field project, in the form of a handbook for educators, gives educators a window into Muslim students' experiences, perceptions, and history. It also provides recommendations on how to lower the affective filter that can hinder the ability of Muslim refugee students' to acquire a new language, and to master other academic content areas. A handbook that provides awareness and training for teachers of Muslim immigrant and refugee students in public school may be extremely useful in lowering Muslim students' anxiety, and providing them with a safe learning environment. Educators may utilize the information in this handbook to examine their own biases and attitudes toward Muslim students, and to find ways of overcoming this. Further, the lesson plans in this handbook may provide non-Muslim students in the classroom with a cultural awareness and understanding of their Muslim classmates. It may also promote language and other learning among Muslim immigrant and refugee students, and reduce

instances of marginalization and alienation. Finally, it might also benefit instructors and professors who train new teachers by demonstrating the importance of applying the Affective Filter hypothesis to their teaching practice.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this handbook is the compressed timeline for developing and organizing the content. Another limitation of the handbook is that it will exist as a stand-alone resource disconnected from ongoing professional development. In addition, the handbook will be presented in a digital format that limits the audience to those who have access to computers and the internet. The tools provided in the handbook will not solve the core problem of discrimination and lack of information among teachers, it only suggests ways of confronting issues that increase the affective filter in Muslim immigrant students. It is the researcher's hope that this handbook can be elaborated on and developed further by other researchers in the future.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are an estimated 350,000 refugees arriving in the US and Europe each year. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017). Many of these refugees are children and young adults from war-torn countries who are entering an education system that is not equipped with sufficient tools to provide them with an equitable and fair education (Schorcht, 2017). Various studies and research on the subject of immigrant students' education focus on post-settlement experiences - neglecting the trauma, educational background and language barrier which may result in the Muslim refugee/immigrant students' classroom anxiety. Horowitz (1986) defines anxiety as feelings of apprehension, stress, worry, and nervousness. These feelings are believed to contribute to raising the affective filter in language learners (Krashen, 1983). In addition the assimilation efforts, which frequently result in marginalization and alienation of the Muslim refugee students, are viewed to be additional sources of increased anxiety in classrooms (Jaffe-Walter, N. 2017).

The claim for this literature review is that Muslim refugee/immigrant students often experience anxiety because they have limited access to an equitable education that addresses their unique needs due to contemporary political and social circumstances. This includes sections that focus on (a) challenges faced by refugee and immigrant muslim students; (b) cultural differences and behavior; (c) educator bias; (d) assimilation and education. In total, this scholarship demonstrates why host country school systems often fail to provide Muslim immigrant students with an equitable education and a safe learning environment. This chapter reviews these bodies of scholarship and ends with a brief summary. Taken together, these bodies

of literature justify the claim that that Muslim refugee/immigrant students often experience anxiety because they have limited access to an equitable education that addresses their unique needs due to contemporary political and social circumstances.

### **Challenges Faced by Refugee and Immigrant Muslim Students**

Schools in host countries are challenging for refugee and immigrant Muslim students for many reasons. One of these reasons is that the pre-settlement educational experiences of refugee children are limited, and often in a language other than the national language of the host country (Schorcht, 2017). Furthermore, Irizarry and Kleyn (2011) demonstrate that these students have often missed years of education in their home country as a result of war or other disasters. In the pre-settlement years, students often have very limited access to any kind of education and often live a very unsettled and traumatic existence (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017). For these reasons, Muslim refugee students present a challenge to educators who do not have access to appropriate teaching materials, knowledge of the students' educational and cultural backgrounds.

Another challenge is related to the religious neutrality of many host country schools. This problem is addressed by Bender-Szymanski (2012), who explores the difficulties Muslim immigrant/refugee students go through trying to balance family and religious expectations with the reality of the religion-neutral host country school system. For example, according to Sallee and Stubbs (2013), most host country schools do not provide breaks or prayer rooms for Muslim students. Even accounting for the religious diversity among Muslim students, the majority of these students still face religious discrimination, and struggle to navigate a school system that is not equipped to accommodate their needs. Jaffe-Walter (2017) demonstrates that when Muslim



students are respected, and allowed to practice their beliefs and to preserve their cultural identity, they have a better chance of integration into the western society and higher rates of educational success. Unfortunately, most host country schools do not afford these opportunities to Muslim immigrant and refugee students.

A related challenge refugee students face is the impact of displacement on the development of an accurate self-identity. Henry, Stiles, and Biran (2005), examine immigrants feelings of loss and mourning due to immigration. The authors illustrate the negative psychological effects of such loss on the ability of youth to reconcile their need for a connection to their own culture and language, with the necessity of learning a new language and adapting to an unfamiliar way of life in a host country. Related to this, Bender-Syzmanski (2012) critiques the common assumption that Muslim immigrant children are problematic and hold values that contrast with Western values. This assumption can lead to school policies that discourage Muslim students from adhering to their own cultural identities, resulting in even more damage to their self-image. Bal (2014) claims that the resulting self-identity confusion, and a common lack of positive self-image, can result in academic failure. The effect of displacement, being forced out of one's homeland and having to learn a new way of life and language can result in high levels of anxiety among refugee and immigrant students (Jodeyr, 2003). Such anxiety can result in a high affective filter which can hinder educational success (Krashen, 1983).

### **Cultural Differences and Behavior**

Educational systems in Europe and the US lack the tools and effective educator training program necessary to provide an equitable education to Muslim immigrant /refugee students. One of the reasons for these problems is a cultural mismatch between students and teachers. For

example, in his study of Ahiska Turk refugee students, Bal (2014) points out the shortcomings of an education system in which cultural differences are erroneously identified as behavioral or learning problems. To arrive at this conclusion, Bal studied referrals for assessment of learning disabilities among Muslim students. The author found that many teachers were unable to differentiate between true indicators of learning disabilities and challenges related to cultural differences and identity development. Bal(2014) articulated this in the results of his interview with teachers of Ahiska Turk students. In these interviews it was evident that the teachers followed the state's policy of a one year timeline for learning English. Students who failed meeting this deadline were assumed to lack motivation and interest, and many were considered learning disabled.

Birman and Tran (2017) further investigate this misidentification of cultural differences, as behavioral or learning problems. This study, of Muslim Somali Bantu refugee students in a US elementary school in Chicago, concludes that behavior which can be perceived as a problematic is often a result of refugee students' minimal exposure, or lack of exposure to formal education settings. Such behavior can also be the result of unfamiliarity with a new culture, language, and school. The authors note that the teachers' attitudes and biases influence their ability and willingness to promote effective learning in the Somali Bantu students. Birman and Tran find that teachers of these students require institutional support, appropriate teaching materials, and training in order to meet the unique needs of refugee students. Similarly, Shafer and Walsh (2018) argue that educators who serve Muslim immigrants and refugees must acquire the tools and knowledge necessary to meet and overcome challenges such as teaching students with little or no education prior to their arrival in the US.

Related to this, Hossain (2017) claims that a lack of knowledge about the history, values and belief systems of others leads to prejudice and personal biases. The author claims that educators are not immune to this particular type of ignorance. According to Hossain, to be effective in the classroom teachers of refugee students must be able to identify and understand cultural differences between themselves and their students. In order to understand these differences, and the anxiety they produce in students who must navigate school in a host country, educators must also have access to resources that accurately describe the history, values, and belief systems of their refugee/immigrant students. By addressing the anxiety students experiences, educators can work to lower the affective filter that inhibits students from learning (Krashen, 1983).

### **Educator Bias**

In order to be effective with refugee and immigrant children, educators must also develop a critical self-awareness of their own biases. According to Sharpes and Schou (2014), bias among educators can result from incidents that implicate Muslims of violence and acts of aggression, and from the media's negative portrayal of Muslim people and culture. In their study of teachers' attitudes towards Muslim students, conducted in six European countries, the authors find that most teachers believe that Muslim students' will not integrate successfully, and that Muslim students have violent tendencies. The authors emphasize the important role educators play in the successful integration of Muslim immigrant students and point to the negative influence of this kind of anti-Muslim bias.

When teachers hold negative biases toward Muslim students, their ability to provide Muslim refugees and immigrants with an equitable education is compromised. For example

Callaway (2010), claims that it is difficult to train teachers to teach Muslim refugees because of the common negative bias toward Muslims, and the difficulty of effectively teaching cultural awareness. Without the proper training, teachers with negative biases toward Muslim students may misunderstand the anxiety experienced by their students. When educators are unable to understand the student behaviors that result from the demands of integration and assimilation, they can misidentify student behavior as problematic, rather than symptomatic of a larger problem. It is important for educators to confront their own bias, in order to understand the experiences of their refugee and other immigrant students who live inside a system that neither acknowledges nor respects their Muslim identity.

The current political atmosphere, that fosters a negative bias towards Muslims, is partially responsible for the anti-Muslim bias of some educators. Abu-El Haj (2006) argues that racial oppression and discrimination against Muslims, in general, results in marginalization and alienation of Muslim students in schools. Echoing this, Bal (2014) documents how Muslim refugee students, subjected to negative attitudes as a result of the contemporary political atmosphere, suffer negative impacts such as limited access to an equitable education. Bal (2014) and Abu-El Haj (2010) both conclude that schools are not equipped to provide an inclusive environment to Muslim immigrant and refugee students. In the absence of an inclusive environment, many students experience anxiety which can have a negative impact on learning both the language of the host country, as well as academic content. Working to remove educator bias is one way to lower Muslim immigrant and refugee anxiety. By lowering the affective filter, these students have a better chance at academic success.

### **Assimilation and Education**

School systems put a heavy emphasis on assimilation and the superiority of Western values (Birman & Tran, 2017). This flawed association between assimilation and educational success has been investigated in several studies. For example, Xie and Greenman (2011) conclude their study about the effects of assimilation on educational and social success, by stating that they did not find any direct relation between assimilation and success and recommended more research and studies to be conducted on this topic. Their findings demonstrate that assimilation has different effects depending on the social context. Xie and Greenman elaborate on this by concluding that immigrant children from middle-class backgrounds benefit from assimilation and show improved educational outcomes, but they also demonstrate tendencies of acquiring behavioral problems as a result of assimilation. In a later study, Sallee and Stubbs (2013) claim that assimilation has minimal relevance to the educational success of Muslim immigrant/refugee students. The authors assert that assimilation, rather than acculturation, may result in marginalization and loss of student motivation.

Jaffe-Walter (2017), explores the contemporary political and social circumstances that lead nations to create assimilation policies. In her research and data collection, she concludes that such assimilation efforts rarely lead to educational success. According to Jaffe-Walter, educational systems are designed to promote forced assimilation. The author describes that the acts and words of schools, such as telling Muslim girls to abandon the hijab or encouraging them to eat pork, that seek to distance Muslim students from their cultural and religious beliefs. According to Jaffe-Walter, these everyday interactions between Muslim youth and their teachers are examples of educators' failure to recognize the students' need and desire to preserve their

Muslim identity. To encourage female Muslim students to discard their traditional hijab, adopt the western ways of life that may contradict their religious and cultural identity and to attempt to assimilate rather than to integrate Muslim immigrant students, further alienates them.

Underscoring this, Bondy, Peguero, and Johnson (2016) claim that gender, ethnic background, and race play a significant role in the association of assimilation and academic self-efficacy. Their findings suggest that assimilation may have a negative effect on educational success. The more immigrant children assimilate to a new culture, the higher the risk of academic failure. These findings suggest that anxiety and lack of self-confidence may be caused by cultural differences between the home and school lives of immigrant students. According to the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1983), anxiety and poor self-esteem can hinder the learners' ability to acquire the English language effectively and to attain academic success.

In addition, Schultz (2016) addresses the historical role schools and teachers have played in the process of acculturation and how the focus of this process has shifted to the Americanization of immigrant/refugee students. Schultz (2016) notes that in spite of this focus and shift to Americanization, ESL/ELL immigrant students manage to push back and maintain their personal identities. Schulz (2016) concludes that educators' cultural awareness is necessary and crucial to supporting immigrant students in their struggles with learning the language and successful integration. It is also crucial to lowering the anxiety, and affective filter, of Muslim immigrant and refugee students in host countries.

### **Summary**

This literature review addressed the reasons why schools are challenging for Muslim refugee and immigrant students. This included sections that focused on (a) challenges faced by

refugee and immigrant muslim students; (b) cultural differences and behavior; (c) educator bias; (d) assimilation and education. This literature justifies the claim that Muslim refugee/immigrant students often experience anxiety because they have limited access to an equitable education that addresses their unique needs due to contemporary political and social circumstances. According to the Affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1983) variables such as motivation, self-confidence and facilitating anxiety play a positive role in second language acquisition. Adversely, debilitating anxiety, low self-confidence and lack of motivation raise what is known as the affective filter. The challenges Muslim immigrant and refugee students face on a daily basis can result in a raised affective filter and cause a mental block that, according to Krashen, will prevent the students to acquire language and attain educational success. In order to lower the affective filter in Muslim immigrant students, it is imperative to assure that the educators have the necessary tools to address the challenges of Muslim immigrant and refugee students.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

#### **Brief Description of the Project**

This field project is a handbook for educators who require background knowledge in order to better serve Muslim refugees and immigrants in public schools, universities, and ESL classes in the United States. I have developed this project intending to provide educators with tools to successfully lower Muslim refugee students' anxiety in classrooms. This handbook provides educators with tools such as (a) factual descriptions of the reasons Muslim refugees have for fleeing their homes; (b) the conditions of refugee camps; (c) information on lack of schooling for refugee children; (d) information on the significance of preserving one's original language and culture. This handbook also provides references for useful resources that can further aid educators.

The handbook is organized into four different sections. The first section includes a brief overview of Islam and useful information on the religion. Islam is a complicated subject and impossible to cover in a project of this scope; as a result, many details and discussions are left out. The primary purpose of this overview is to familiarize non-Muslim educators with the belief system of Muslim refugee students. This section of the handbook starts with a brief description and the meaning of Islam. It is followed by the list of the five pillars of Islam. The five pillars of Islam are fundamental tenets of the religion, and all Muslims, regardless of background,



nationality, or race, follow them to the best of their abilities. The five pillars of Islam are demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
***The Five Pillars of Islam***

Pillar	Description
Shahada	The acknowledgment and declaration that there is no God other than the one God whom the Muslims call Allah. In addition, Shahada is also the act of bearing witness that Mohamed is the messenger of Allah and his prophet.
Salat	It requires all Muslims to perform the prayer ritual at five designated times of the day.
Zakat	Every Muslim is required to give a percentage of his/her income to charity.
Sawm	During the month of Ramadan, all able-bodied Muslims must fast. No food or drinks shall be consumed during the whole day, and the purpose of it is to practice discipline and to acquire empathy for the poor and hungry.
Haj	The pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim must aspire to take part in at least once in a lifetime.

This section will assist educators in being aware of Muslim students' religious obligations and their unique needs. Some of these needs, such as praying five times a day or fasting during the month of Ramadan, require special accommodations. School systems in the US rarely provide these special accommodations. Next, in section one, the hijab, which is the head covering that some Muslim women wear, is defined. It is also noted that although some Muslim women wear the hijab voluntarily, others wear it out of government mandates and political agenda of their country's ruling parties. Having the knowledge of the significance of hijab for Muslim women and understanding the fact that it can be either a source of comfort or

an obligation of conformity, gives the educator the knowledge that hijab is not always a sign of oppression. Section one concludes with a definition of the term Jihad. In Arabic, Jihad means struggle, and in Islam, this term was originally meant to signify the struggle between good and evil within a person. Jihad was not meant to be interpreted as waging wars and shedding blood. Both the Muslim fundamentalists and non-Muslims misuse it. The misunderstanding of this term results in fear and violence.

In the second section of the handbook, I have attempted to describe the plight of Muslim refugees and immigrants. This section begins with an insight into the factors that force refugees to leave their countries, endure hardship, and risk their lives to arrive in a safe place. Prior to fleeing their home, these people often lived healthy lives as doctors, engineers, educators, and skilled workers. They are now forced to travel thousands of miles in search of a safe place. The majority of the Muslim refugees are from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Many of the refugees cross the borders to neighboring countries such as Iran and Iraq. For most, this journey continues and takes them closer to Europe, where they wait for a long time to be granted passage to European countries or the US. Throughout their journey, refugees face challenges of traveling under perilous circumstances only to arrive at the borders of unwelcoming countries, then being placed in refugee camps. The condition of these camps, as cited by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees website and other reliable sources, are extremely unfavorable and in some instances inhumane. Muslim refugees are sometimes forced to wait in these camps for decades before they are settled in a permanent host country either in Europe or North America. Schools in Europe and the US are not equipped to meet the unique needs of the Muslim refugee students who, after such a harrowing journey, are finally able to settle. Most educators have very

little knowledge of the pre-settlement challenges of Muslim refugee students and are not trained to identify trauma, culture shock, and the impact of the education gap. This section gives educators an understanding of the pre-settlement experiences of Muslim refugee students. These experiences can result in anxiety, behavioral issues, and low self-confidence.

The third section of the project addresses the issue of anxiety, low self-confidence, and lack of motivation in Muslim refugee students and the effects of such feelings on their ability to learn English and to achieve academic success. The section initially discusses the definition of anxiety and cites Krashen's (1985) affective filter hypothesis in arguing that anxiety results in a mental block and negatively affects learning. Furthermore, in section three, educators are offered tools and recommendations in lowering the affective filter among Muslim refugee students. Through these recommendations, educators are encouraged to learn about and honor Muslim refugee culture and identity, to recognize and stop bullying, and to use lesson plans to eradicate stereotypes and to create an inclusive classroom climate.

Section four consists of a sample lesson plan. This lesson plan is designed to introduce non-Muslim students in the classroom to Muslim women's advocacy for education and freedom. Although the lesson's primary aim is to teach new vocabulary to high intermediate ESL students, it is also designed to build awareness of advocacy efforts of Muslim women. The subject of this lesson is Malala Yousafzai, the young female Muslim advocate for all girls' right to education, who is the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. This lesson plan not only can be motivational for Muslim students but may also help deflate stereotypes about Muslim girls.

Further, in this section, educators are encouraged to scrutinize texts and lessons in order to avoid introducing biased and anti- Muslim materials. In addition to the lesson plan, I have included a list of relevant websites for educators who are interested in learning more about Muslim identity, the Muslim students' challenges in US schools, and additional ways of lowering the affective filter for these students. Resources such as the ones introduced in the handbook are essential for making important decisions such as academic placement of Muslim refugee students, assigning language tracks, and considering special education services. Although this handbook is primarily designed to address lowering student anxiety in ESL classes, the strategies recommended can be utilized in all educational contexts that are relevant to Muslim immigrant and refugee students.

Finally, in this section, specific words and their definitions are listed in the glossary of the handbook. Table 2 illustrates some of these words.

**Table 2**  
***Glossary***

Word	Definition
Haj	The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca that takes place in the last month of the year, and that all Muslims are expected to make at least once during their lifetime
Hijab	A head covering worn in public by some Muslim women
Islam	the religion of the Muslims, a monotheistic faith regarded as revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah
Ramadan	The ninth month of the Muslim year, during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset
Salat	The ritual prayer of Muslims, performed five times daily in a set form
Sawm	Fasting from dawn until dusk during Ramadan, one of the Five Pillars of Islam

Shahada	the Muslim profession of faith. (“There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.”)
Zakat	Obligatory payment made annually under Islamic law on certain kinds of property and used for charitable and religious purposes.

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### **Development of the Project**

In January of 1978, I traveled to the US in order to continue my education to go back to Iran after finishing college. I was neither an immigrant nor a refugee. I was a young student in pursuit of higher education. Even so, as the result of the Islamic revolution in Iran during January of 1979 and the hostage-taking at the US embassy in Tehran in November of 1979, followed by the war between Iran and Iraq in 1980, I lost my home and was never able to move back. These life-changing events put thousands of Iranian students in the US in a peculiar situation. The backlash of the events that unfolded in Iran affected our lives and our studies significantly. Our status changed from the affluent international students to the displaced immigrants from a hostile country in a matter of a short time. Since there was no safe place to go back to, most of us had to overcome our challenges, and continue our education. Luckily, we were privileged immigrants and our families were still able to provide us with enough funds to meet our basic needs.

During the following three years in college, I experienced marginalization, discrimination, and bullying. This situation created much anxiety for me and affected my academic performance. Many of my instructors at the time were compassionate and well-intentioned, but they lacked the necessary training and tools to create a safe learning environment for the Iranian students in a similar situation as mine. At that time, most schools

were not equipped to accommodate the displaced Iranian students' needs, nor did the instructors have the insight to recognize the trauma and hardship these students were experiencing.

As a result of my personal experiences and my studies in the TESOL field, I am now more convinced than ever that lack of training, and cultural awareness amongst educators can have lasting adverse effects on the academic success and social mobility of immigrant and refugee students. Furthermore, my studies in the TESOL field have been instrumental in reinforcing my passion for empowering immigrants and refugees through education. Armed with the knowledge that in order for immigrants and refugees to have social mobility and success, they must learn English; I decided that the next chapter of my life will be dedicated to teaching ESL classes. My introduction to the TESOL program was through the Cross-Cultural Communications course at the University of California Berkeley Extension. Learning about the importance of cultural awareness, empathy versus sympathy, and inclusiveness have provided me with the vocabulary necessary to shape my thoughts and passion into a tangible form. Later on, while enrolled in the MA TESOL program at the University of San Francisco in addition to learning about the sociology of linguistics, teaching methods, creating textbooks and testing and assessments, I also have learned that patience, empathy, and understanding is essential for being a successful educator. In the Second Language Acquisition course, I learned about Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis. This hypothesis resonated with me. As a part of my job for twenty years, I have been in charge of training hundreds of people and have noticed how stress and anxiety make it very difficult for the trainees to process information effectively. As a result, my interest in the correlation of students' emotional state, and their ability to process comprehensive input was peaked.

My academic experiences in the early years of living in the US, my later exposure to many refugees of various backgrounds, and a lifelong struggle of reconciling my Iranian identity with my adopted American culture motivated me to create this project. Furthermore, my encounters with Muslim refugee and immigrant students in ESL classes ignited my curiosity and interest in learning more about this group. They reminded me of the challenges that I had to overcome when I first arrived in the US. The literature I have reviewed on this subject reveals that the pre-settlement trauma experienced by Muslim refugee students is often overlooked, and the focus of educational institutions is mainly on post-settlement experiences. Furthermore, some Muslim refugee students' post-settlement experience makes them feel like outsiders. Cultural differences, lack of language skills, and trauma have resulted in failed integration attempts and educational difficulties for these students. Muslim refugee students face various challenges while navigating school systems and often suffer from anxiety, low self-confidence, and lack of motivation. Educators' lack of training and tools in identifying these challenges results in misdiagnosing the students as learning disabled or as having behavioral issues. In developing this project, I have come to realize that educators must have access to resources in order to become aware of the background of the students. It is essential for educators to know what life has been like for refugees before they were forced to flee their homes, how they arrived at the refugee camps, and what their lives are like at the refugee camps.

I first became aware of the conditions in the refugee camps through friends who volunteered as physicians and nurses and spent many months at a time in the camps. This fact prompted me to do research and learn about the refugees' journey and their lives after settling in host countries. This research made me aware of the need for ESL and EFL instructors not only at

the camps but also in the host countries. While traveling in Iran in 2015, I came across many refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Bangladesh. The social injustices these refugees are subjected to is unconscionable. I met children who had no access to education and were living in extreme poverty. Young university students from Bangladesh, who escaped their countries political turmoil fearing for their lives ,were working as day laborers. In my conversations with these refugees, I became aware of the hardship and trauma they are subjected to while trying to survive. This experience fueled my desire to make a difference. I believe education is the key to empowering refugees and immigrants. Furthermore, academic success is dependent on language skills and a safe learning environment.

In my research for this project, I have come across various studies on the subject of Muslim refugee and immigrant students' education. These studies collectively conclude that educational institutes focus on the post-settlement experiences neglecting the trauma, educational background, and language barrier, which may result in the Muslim refugee/immigrant students' classroom anxiety. Another factor that contributes to schools' lack of tools in providing a safe learning environment for Muslim refugee students is the educators' personal biases. Educators, just like the rest of us, have their unique backgrounds and experiences and, at times, develop subconscious biases. This matter is a significant issue, and unless educators can identify their own biases and work on finding the roots of it, they cannot be able to create a safe learning environment. I have addressed this issue in the handbook, but the scope of this project does not allow for detailed investigation and specific recommendations on how educators can identify and resolve their personal biases. I believe bringing awareness and light to this issue is beneficial to both the educators and students.



While researching the project, I became aware of the extensive discrimination and politicized curriculum in schools due to the current political atmosphere and anti-Muslim sentiments. Furthermore, there have been reports of numerous incidents of Muslim students being targeted by bullies and subjected to ridicule and even violence. In developing the project, it has been important to me to address the issue of bullying. This subject is very personal for me; although I survived bullying during my college years, I know many Iranian students that dropped out of college as a result of being harassed and bullied.

In developing this handbook as I reviewed relevant literature, I became aware that Muslim students usually are not provided with a safe space or authorized break time to pray during school, nor do schools accommodate their needs while they are fasting. Muslim students feel invisible and may experience debilitating anxiety since they face many challenges while navigating schools in the US. This data has reinforced the necessity of a section in the handbook which provides educators information relating to this issue. This information can be passed on to schools in the form of appropriate recommendations.

As a last note, at the time of creating this project, the world is facing a pandemic. COVID-19 has changed our lives, and it is unclear how the world and society will be altered in the aftermath of this disaster. We are sheltered in place in fear for our health and lives. Some of us are at the verge of losing our jobs or are already unemployed. Our cities resemble war zones, and we are isolated and do not know what tomorrow will bring. These are challenging times for all of us, but more so for the marginalized and invisible groups who are facing unusual and more intensified adversaries. This project is born out of my desire to make a difference for a

community that is, at times, invisible. I believe today more than ever, educators must make an effort to help students get through the anxiety and fear that is caused by this unusual circumstance by being insightful, well informed, and inclusive.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Conclusions**

According to U.N. Refugee Agency (2017), the number of refugees arriving in the U.S. and European countries each year has been estimated at over 350,000 individuals, many of them children and young adults and mainly from Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. As a result of various wars in the Middle East and economic factors, this number is on the rise. The U.N. Refugee Agency reports that 21,292 refugees have resettled in the U.S. by 2018. Many of these refugees are from war-torn Middle-Eastern countries who are traumatized by their pre-settlement experiences.

Schools and communities in Europe and the U.S. focus on post-settlement experiences of Muslim refugee students and overlook the pre-settlement trauma (Bal, 2014). Although post-settlement experiences are significant in students' educational success, the refugees' journeys and stories before arriving in host countries impact their self-confidence, motivation, and sense of identity.

In the review of the relevant literature, it is evident that schools in Europe and the U.S. are not equipped with tools to accommodate the needs of Muslim refugee students. Furthermore, the educators lack training in identifying the Muslim refugee students' challenges and their

difficulties of navigating a school system that, at times, contradicts their religious and cultural identities. As a result, Muslim refugee students are not afforded an equitable education and are often misdiagnosed as learning disabled or having behavioral problems. In addition to educators' lack of training and the schools' failure to acknowledge and accommodate Muslim refugee students' needs, these students are subjected to discrimination due to the current anti-Muslim political atmosphere and biased news media. The pre-settlement trauma compounded by negative post-settlement experiences causes extreme feelings of anxiety in these students and affects their academic success. Studies on pre-settlement experiences of Muslim refugees and immigrants reveal the physical and emotional hardship endured by this group while they try to reach safety. Their journey is one of heartbreak and loss. Countries they leave behind can no longer sustain them, and their lives are in danger. They walk hundreds of miles and deplete what little is left of their resources in hopes of a better life for their families. After reaching neighboring countries, they are trapped in refugee camps with the bare minimum accommodations for decades. While in refugee camps, they are faced with unwelcoming communities who oppose them, discriminate against them, and at times resort to violence to drive them away. For young adults and children, access to consistent education is limited and, in many instances, nonexistent. The more fortunate refugees are allowed passage to resettle in Europe and the U.S. after going through years of endless paperwork.

After resettlement, the plight of Muslim refugees is not over as in post-settlement countries, and they are faced with different kinds of challenges. They are made to feel like outsiders (Jodeyr, 2003) as the cultural differences, lack of language skills, and educational opportunities trap them in undesirable jobs, force them to drop out of school and impedes

successful integration. Educational institutions in host countries are ill-equipped in creating an equitable education and school environment for Muslim refugee students due to the lack of educators' training, and the flawed association between assimilation and educational success is challenging to navigate. Besides, Muslim refugee/immigrant students have limited access to an equitable education that addresses their unique needs due to contemporary political and social circumstances. Furthermore, Schools are challenging for refugee and immigrant students. Due to negative perceptions and lack of cultural awareness, Muslim refugee students are often viewed by educators as problematic in schools (Abu-El-Haj, 2010). These post-settlement experiences, compounded by educators' lack of understanding and awareness of the Muslim refugee students' everyday challenges, results in extreme levels of anxiety in classrooms (Birman & Tran, 2017). Academic research on the subject of Muslim refugee students' resettlement into the U.S. communities and schools concludes that the forced assimilation efforts and Muslim students' coping mechanisms are directly related to the anxiety experienced by these students. For example, Jaffee-Walker (2017) examines educators' attempts to integrate Muslim students by disregarding their identities and encouraging them to discard their religious requirements such as wearing the hijab, dating the opposite sex, and eating pork. These students are even encouraged to give up their names for more western sounding ones in order to fit in. Furthermore, as Muslim students' needs are not recognized, and their culture is not valued, they feel alienated, marginalized, and experience high levels of anxiety. Bondy, Johnson, and Peguero (2017) point out that lack of cultural awareness and accommodation for Muslim refugee/immigrant students and the contemporary social and political atmosphere of negative

attitudes towards them makes it very difficult for Muslim refugee/immigrant students to navigate the school system in host countries.

According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1983), anxiety, lack of motivation, and low self-confidence results in the learner's inability to process comprehensible input and impedes learning. Krashen suggests that anxiety plays a role in learners' second language acquisition as it raises the affective filter and results in a mental block.

Muslim students' academic self-efficacy suffers, and they lose motivation and feel marginalized when faced with a school system that does not recognize and accommodate their needs. For this reason, educators need to be provided with tools and training to serve Muslim refugee students better.

The handbook created for this project aims to assist educators in lowering Muslim refugee students' anxiety in ESL classrooms. In order to successfully provide a safe learning environment for Muslim refugee students, the educator must be culturally aware and sensitive to the students' backgrounds and life experiences. This handbook attempts to provide tools for educators to access information and recommendations that assist them in better understanding the Muslim refugee students. The handbook is divided into four sections, which are designed to provide information, give background knowledge, and examine the challenges Muslim refugee students face daily. The handbook begins with an overview of Islam; in the following section, educators are given a factual account of Muslim refugees' journey and the obstacles they have to overcome and their pre-settlement experiences. These are experiences that have left the Muslim refugees traumatized and vulnerable. Finally, the handbook contains recommendations and tools for educators to further assist them in providing a safe learning environment for the students.

This section includes information on ways of honoring the Muslim students' culture and religion, identifying and stopping bullying, encouraging students' participation, and, most importantly, identifying educators' own unconscious biases. The lesson plan provided is designed to bring awareness to non-Muslim students and deflate stereotypes.

After creating this project I have come to understand the challenges Muslim refugee students face in navigating school in the US, and to appreciate their resiliency and strength of character in the face of discrimination and lack of accommodation.

### **Recommendations**

Educators and schools have a moral obligation to provide equitable education and a safe and inclusive learning environment. Muslim refugee and immigrant students are often invisible and marginalized as a result of educators' lack of training and schools' inability to accommodate their needs. Although there are various studies and research done on Muslim students and Islam, they rarely address the needs of Muslim refugee students in the U.S. educational system.

The literature reviewed for this project asserts educators' lack of knowledge and awareness regarding Muslim refugee students' backgrounds, belief systems, and identities. This lack of knowledge, coupled with schools' failure to accommodate the unique needs of these students, has a negative impact on the academic success of Muslim refugee and immigrant students. The misconceptions and biases towards Muslim refugees can be rooted in the current political atmosphere and the negative images of Muslims in the news media.

The number of Muslim refugee and immigrant students in the U.S. and European countries is on the rise as a result of more people being forced to flee their homes due to wars and dangerous conditions. Now more than ever, it is essential to provide tools to educators and

bring awareness to schools in order to achieve social justice and equitable education for this marginalized and vulnerable group. The handbook designed for this project is a small step in bringing awareness and providing recommendations. This project is born out of my desire to start a dialogue on this subject and the wish for further research and action in finding ways of successful integration of Muslim refugee students.

The first section of the handbook is purposely designed to provide an understanding of Islam and the required religious practices. The Islamophobia resulting from the events of 9/11 has resulted in broad misconceptions and widespread misinterpretation of the religion and the Muslims. Educators must understand their Muslim students' religious obligations. It is also essential for educators to know and acknowledge the hardship and heartbreaking pre-settlement experiences of Muslim refugees in order to identify students' trauma and anxiety accurately. For this reason, the handbook contains a section on pre-settlement experiences. The recommendations offered in the handbook help lower the students' anxiety, deflate stereotypes, and prevent bullying.

Resources such as these are essential for making nuanced decisions in the classroom, and for making any decisions about the academic placement of Muslim refugee students, such as in language tracks and when considering special education services. Although this handbook is primarily designed to address lowering student anxiety in ESL classes, the strategies recommended can be utilized in all educational contexts that cater to Muslim immigrant and refugee students.

By starting a dialogue about Muslim refugee students' challenges in the school systems, their needs, and their unique circumstances in this project, I envision a safe learning environment

for all marginalized groups. The scope of this project does not allow for a more detailed and in-depth study and discussion of this significant subject. There is a need for further research and study of this complex subject. I finish this project at a time that the world is facing COVID-19, a pandemic that has altered our lives significantly. These are trying times for all but more so for the marginalized and vulnerable communities. Educators play a crucial role in shaping the future of the world. Today more than ever, we need informed, impartial, and compassionate educators who have the desire and will to make a difference.



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## APPENDIX

### **Effective ways to lower Muslim immigrant students' anxiety in ESL classes: A handbook for educators**

***Effective ways  
to lower Muslim immigrant students' anxiety in  
ESL classes;  
a handbook for educators.***



*By*  
*Mehrnaz Ayazi*

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## Introduction

I set to develop this handbook with a vision of a more equitable and just world where we can put our differences aside and treat each other as equals and recognize the value of what each of us brings to the table with our unique experiences, belief systems, and diverse cultures.

Education plays a central role in transforming that vision into reality, and educators carry the moral obligation of imparting knowledge with utmost care to all students, but more so to those who are marginalized or feel invisible due to social and political factors.

In a special note to the readers, the author states: “As an Iranian, Muslim immigrant who has firsthand experience with navigating the school system in an era of hostile political and social atmosphere towards Iranian nationals and Muslims, I have come to realize the value and the importance of trained and culturally aware educators. Educators who possess appropriate tools can successfully provide Muslim immigrant students with a safe learning environment that lowers their affective filter and elevates their self- confidence.

As the title suggests, this book aims to assist educators to lower the affective filter and more specifically, the possible anxiety in Muslim immigrant and refugee students. Many studies and research has shown that Muslim refugee/immigrant students are misunderstood, feel invisible, and face numerous challenges in a school system that is not equipped to meet their unique needs.

The goal of this handbook is not only to assist educators in effectively lowering Muslim refugee students' debilitating anxiety in ESL classrooms, but also to start a dialogue about the marginalization and forced assimilation of this group of students.

Valuable information on why Muslim refugee students and their families are forced out of their homes, the trauma they may experience in refugee camps, their educational backgrounds and their bond with their culture and faith are outlined in this book.

The reader will gain awareness of the rarely acknowledged cultural diversity amongst the Muslim students, the way they balance their home and school identity, and how the political atmosphere of the host countries affects their self –efficacy and educational success. As the educator becomes more equipped with in-depth information about Muslim refugee students, they are encouraged to self-reflect and identify their own presumptions and biases.

This book consists of four sections. In section one, the reader will find a general and brief description of Islam and the fundamental ways Muslims observe their faith. In this section, the author attempts to clear misunderstandings about the faith and to debunk the common stereotypes used to describe Muslims.

Section two of the book examines the pre-settlement experiences that are common to Muslim refugees and briefly describes the refugee camp condition, the education refugees may receive in such camps and the complicated red tape they must go through in order to settle in host countries and how these experiences dramatically impact their post-settlements' lives and schooling. In addition, the author examines the various challenges Muslim immigrant students face in US schools on a daily basis.

Recommendations for lowering students' anxiety in the classroom and creating a safe environment for them is offered in section three of the book.

Finally, in section four, the reader will find an ESL lesson plan designed for intermediate and advanced level students that can be utilized for increasing tcultural sensitivity, intercultural communication and discussing stereotypes aimed mostly at the non-Muslim students in addition to promoting inclusiveness amongst Muslim students.



## SECTION ONE

### ***What is Islam?***

Take a moment and think about what you know about Islam. Chances are most assumptions and knowledge about Islam are rooted in what you have heard on the news, or from overly generalized facts that are mostly out of context. Although you are not required to know everything about the religion in order to teach Muslim students, it is beneficial to know about those you teach to facilitate effective learning.

Islam literally means surrender, and most Muslims are peaceful people who disagree with fundamentalism and disapprove of any form of violence. Just like Christianity and Judaism Islam is a monotheist religion. And similar to other religions, Islam is diverse; it is practiced and observed differently depending on the background, education, nationality, and culture of its followers. You may have Muslim students in your classroom and not be aware since not every Muslim woman wears the hijab, and not every Muslim student prays five times a day.

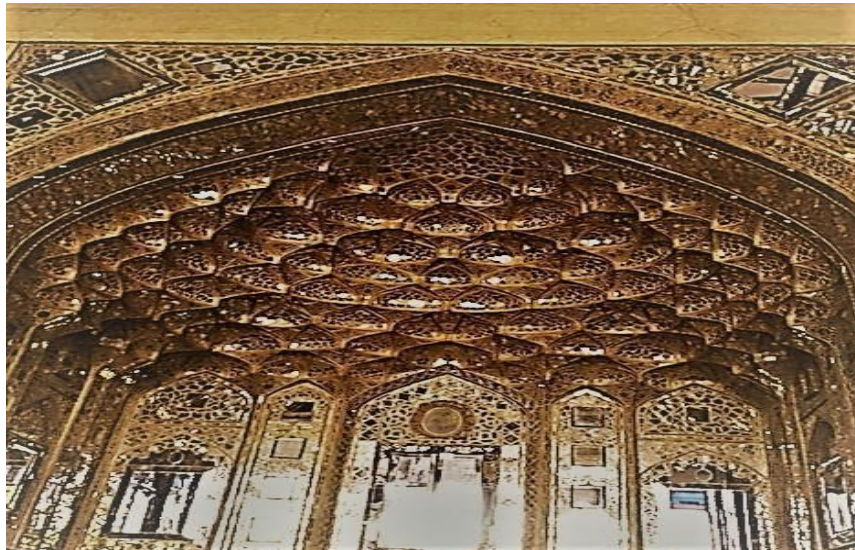


Photo by Mehrnaz Ayazi. Shiraz, Iran

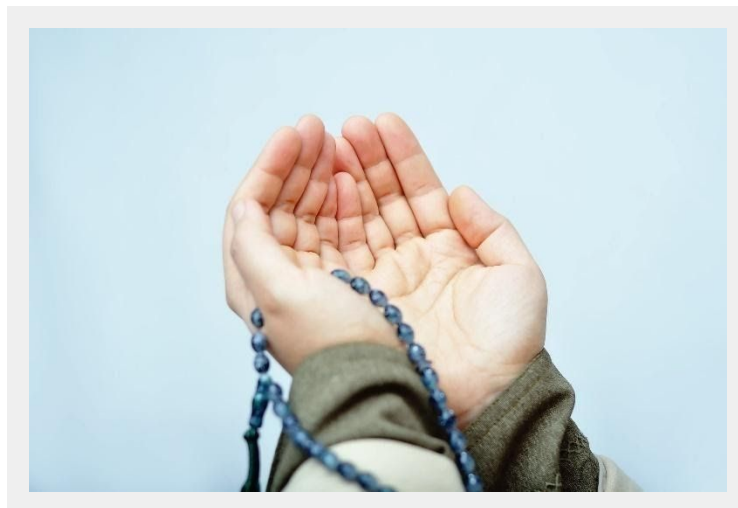
Did you know that there are 1.3 billion Muslims in the world? Muslims are diverse in nationality, ethnicity, and the way they practice Islam, but there seems to be a common thread through Islam that binds all Muslims together.

Islam goes back to 1300 years ago and was originated in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that the words of God were delivered to Mohamed the prophet by the angel Gabriel and he was the messenger of God (Allah). Islam is based on five universal rules, which are called the five pillars of Islam.

### ***THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM***

The five pillars of Islam are considered the basic rules of the religion, and Muslims are mandated to observe these rules according to their abilities and unique circumstances.

- 1) **Shahada** is the acknowledgment and declaration that there is no God other than the one God, whom the Muslims call Allah. Besides, Shahada is also the act of bearing witness that Mohamed is the messenger of Allah and his prophet.
- 2) **Salat** requires all Muslims to perform the prayer ritual at five designated times of the day.
- 3) **Zakat** means every Muslim is required to give a percentage of his/her income to charity.
- 4) **Sawm** during the month of Ramadan is mandatory for all able-bodied Muslims. No food or drinks shall be consumed during the whole day, and the purpose of it is to practice discipline and to acquire empathy for the poor and hungry.
- 5) **Haj** is the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim must aspire to take part in at least once in a lifetime



## ***Hijab***



Photos by Mehrnaz Ayazi, Tehran, Iran 2015

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the definition of the word hijab is: the traditional covering for the hair and neck that is worn by Muslim women. This is quite a literal and simplified interpretation. Hijab symbolizes various things to different people, and depending on who you talk to, it can be considered a sign of modesty or a tool to oppress women. Islam requires both men and women to be modest in their appearances. Muslim women cover their hair as a sign of modesty. Although the majority of Muslim women wear the hijab voluntarily, some Muslim women cover their hair out of societal or governmental pressure. That said, many Muslim women opt out of covering their hair, which doesn't necessarily mean they don't identify with their Muslim culture.

## ***Jihad***

The Arabic word Jihad, often translated as "holy war," comes from the word jahada which literally means "to struggle", "to make an effort" "to strive" (Layton, 2006). Jihad is a universally misused word. The first things that come to mind after hearing this word are

terrorism, holywar, and Islamic fundamentalism. Jihad wasn't meant to be any of these. It originally signified the struggle within or, in other words, the battle within and the fight between right and wrong in every person's heart.



Jihad is a personal struggle against sin

As educators, the more we know about this religion, it helps us confront our own prejudices and biases. Only by having an open mind and a desire to provide an equitable education to all of our students, we can successfully facilitate learning in a safe environment for all.

In the next chapter, you will find a wealth of information about Muslim refugees and the pre-settlement challenges they face throughout their journey to the host countries. The condition of refugee camps is discussed in the next section, and the educational implications of such life will be pointed out.

## SECTION TWO

### ***Muslim refugees and immigrants***

Where do they come from, and how do they get here?

We all have seen the images of thousands of refugees walking in groups, carrying children, and dragging bundles of their belongings alongside them. These pictures have become familiar to the extent that we, for the most part, have become desensitized, and the severity of the condition escapes our imagination. These are images of people forced out of their homes due to wars, famine, and fear of persecution. With the hope of reaching safety, these refugees walk for days and sometimes weeks, fighting the elements having nothing left of the lives they once had built for themselves. We call them refugees, asylum seekers, illegal immigrants without considering or knowing much about their journeys. In this chapter, you will find valuable information about refugee and immigrant post-settlement experiences. This information will assist you in understanding the challenges the Muslim refugee and immigrant students face in the host countries' school system.



A group of Syrian refugees fleeing war



## ***Who are the Muslim refugees?***

The Muslim refugees mostly come from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Somalia. They are diverse in culture and ethnicity, and the thread of Islam binds them together. In addition to the Muslim refugees, the western countries are host to Muslim immigrants from India, Iran, Turkey, and various Middle Eastern countries.

The difference between the refugees and immigrants is subtle as they all leave their homelands in pursuit of safety, better education, and professional and economic success. What makes them apart is the circumstances and the path of their flight. Refugees generally are fleeing immediate life and death situations with limited or no resources. Some have to walk for days or weeks before arriving at borders where they might not be given permission to cross. They end up waiting for months and sometimes years in refugee camps under extreme hardship before they are admitted to a host country. The children and young adults may receive some education in these camps. The gap in education, language barrier, and trauma affect the learning ability of these children.

## ***Refugee Camps***



A refugee camp in Greece

As the number of refugees and displaced people increases, the refugee camps experience additional shortages of food, sanitation, and medical assistance. Zwartjes (2017) gives a first-hand account of life in a refugee camp in Malakasa, Greece. The majority of the refugees in this camp are Muslims from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. Zwartjes(2017) describes this refugee

camp as a cramped space with hundreds of tents that have no ventilation or heat. The floors of these tents are covered with the same blankets that the refugees use to sleep under. The food, which is usually rice and sometimes chicken is prepared and distributed by the army, and no outside food is allowed due to the fear of poisoning by anti-immigrant groups. Over a thousand refugees share seven showers and eleven toilets.

A large number of these refugees have already gone through the traumatic experience of violence in their homelands. They have traveled through the mountains to cross borders into Iran or Turkey, and have passed the sea in unsafe rafts to reach Greece. They are waiting for their papers to be processed and to be given a safe passage to either European countries or the US. The anti-immigrant political atmosphere of most host countries contributes to the challenges the refugees face in the camps.

After settling in the host countries, Muslim refugee students are faced with a school system that lacks educators trained in identifying and mitigating the challenges they face regularly. Schools are not accommodating their unique needs, and many are made to feel invisible. Schools' efforts of segregation rather than integration results in marginalization and alienation of Muslim refugee students. The majority of these students navigate a dual identity and have a difficult time reconciling their school and home lives. Muslim students are targeted by bullies, and the Muslim girls who wear hijab are stereotyped as oppressed and submissive. The respect and peaceful behavior, mandated by the teachings of Islam and encouraged in Middle Eastern culture, are frequently mistaken with suppression or agreement with biased opinions.

Several studies were done on Muslim refugee and immigrant students' education in the US and Europe. They have concluded that these students frequently suffer from anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and loss of motivation as a result of the factors noted above.

As Krashen (1983) hypothesized, stress and anxiety increase the affective filter, which is a barrier to learning and especially to acquiring a second language. He argues that acquiring a second language is only possible by obtaining comprehensible input, and it requires a low affective filter. Krashen's theory identifies motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-confidence as factors influencing the affective filter. According to Krashen, the affective filter acts as a mental block and prevents comprehensible input to be fully utilized. The affective filter is low when the learner is motivated, is confident, and above all, is not anxious and stressed.



It is important to examine ways of lowering the affective filter in the classrooms.

In the next section of this handbook, we will review some ways of lowering debilitating anxiety in Muslim refugee and immigrant students. From honoring students' culture and Muslim identity to choosing appropriate teaching materials, careful classroom seating arrangement, and lesson plans designed for promoting cultural awareness there are numerous ways of creating a safe learning environment for Muslim refugee students and lowering the affective filter.



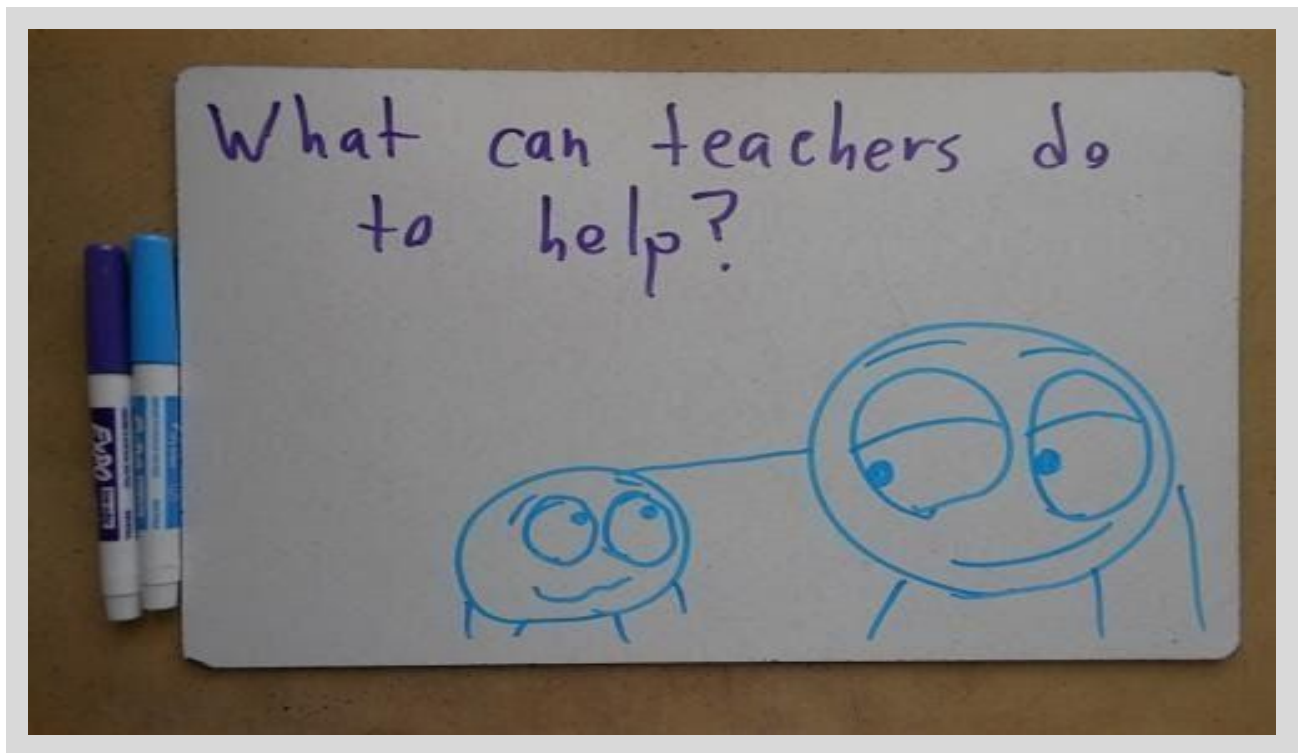
## SECTION THREE

### ***HOW TO LOWER ANXIETY IN MUSLIM REFUGEE STUDENTS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM***

Anxiety is defined as excessive feelings of fear and persistent worry; it is the body's response to undue stress. In a classroom setting, anxiety can be caused by various factors, including fear of failure, perception of being judged, lack of self-confidence, feelings of alienation, and post-traumatic syndrome. The material in the previous sections presented us with an overview of the Muslim refugee students' experiences and outlined how such experiences may cause these students tremendous amounts of anxiety in the classroom. Acquiring a second language and learning, in general, takes place only when the affective filter is low. Our role as educators is to create a safe and stress-free environment for all students.



A safe learning environment is essential to academic success.



### ***Recognize and honor Muslim students' culture***

Educators must respect and honor their students' culture and faith. Muslim students are generally, from Middle Eastern countries with diverse backgrounds and cultures. Try to learn as much as possible about the differences and similarities between these cultures. Syed & Pio have articulated this diversity in the article "Contextualizing Diversity within Islam: Interpretations, understandings, and implications for management and organizations" which can be accessed at:

["Contextualizing Diversity within Islam: Interpretations, understandings and implications for management and organizations"](#)

We often see teachers encouraging their immigrant students to adopt western names or assume a westernized way of dressing and conduct. By doing so, we are invalidating their identities and sending them a message that their culture and traditional clothing are inferior and flawed. It is strongly encouraged that educators do their best to learn and pronounce students' names and do not give them western nicknames. To adhere to Islam, Muslim students

must observe behavior that may seem unfriendly, such as refusing to shake hands with people of a different gender.

Teachers should avoid touching students or their parents or initiate handshakes or hugs as it can be crossing personal and cultural boundaries. Acknowledge Muslim students' religious and national holidays by making special announcements to the class. Ramadan, which is the month of fasting for Muslims can be especially difficult for these students as they must go without food or water from dawn to dusk. It is essential to be mindful of their physical and mental state during this month. Try not to schedule potlucks or arrange field trips that involve overexerting physical activities during this month.

By recognizing and accommodating Muslim refugee students' unique needs and honoring their belief and culture, educators will be able to provide a more relaxed and friendly atmosphere for Muslim refugee students.

### ***Encourage participation and engage Muslim students***

Refugee children's education is disrupted as a result of war and other adversities in their own countries. In refugee camps, these children do not receive an adequate education, and any education they may receive is usually in the host country's language, which eventually creates a state of language confusion.

Keeping students engaged is the ultimate goal of every teacher, and can be a challenge depending on the circumstances. Muslim refugee students may be notably more difficult to engage as sometimes the post-settlement trauma and lack of adequate learning skills have a significant effect on their academic performance.

Teachers can overcome this challenge by showing patience and by encouraging the students to make an effort. Building the students' self-confidence and rewarding them for engagement and participation is essential to reducing Muslim refugee students' anxiety in the classroom.

## ***Bullying***

All students deserve a safe learning environment. Educators are obligated to take anti-Muslim bullying seriously and do all they can to eradicate it in their classrooms. Don't dismiss name calling, ridicule, or inappropriate jokes. Educate non-Muslim students to be culturally sensitive and respectful. Female Muslim students who wear the hijab are mainly in a vulnerable position

when it comes to being harassed. Tugging or pulling their headscarf may seem like a playful and an innocent act, but it is harmful. Do all you can to confront and stop any kind of harassment or bullying in your classroom.

Teachers are responsible for setting the tone in the classroom, make sure you are not subconsciously setting an example of negative behavior towards Muslim refugee students.

A special note from the author:

In my third year of living in the US, the hostage crisis happened. I was in college and was having a hard time navigating the hostility and negative media coverage of my country and all Iranians. Sadly, some of my classes were anything but a safe learning environment for Iranian students. My accounting class was the worst. The professor was incredibly hostile and not only would make fun of my name but also would taunt me and make unkind remarks. I did quite poorly in that class, and most of my other courses as the stress and anxiety in the classroom were disabling and hard to cope with. A few years later, I found out that the professor's behavior came from deep-seated biases, fear, and anger, which for him as a trained Army Reserve personnel was personal. Unfortunately, he could not separate himself from his obligation to provide all his students with an equitable education in a safe environment. Besides, at that time, I did not have the necessary command of the English language, nor was I aware of my rights to defend myself.

So please take the time to identify your own biases and be objective about your own behavior. Knowing your own biases is helpful if you do something about them. It is crucial to explore your biases and find the origin and roots of them. Educate yourself about the culture, speak to diversity experts, read literature from various sources who offer opinions different than yours,

and above all, get to know your Muslim students. [Council on American-Islamic Relations](#) is a wonderful source of valuable information that can help educators understand Muslim students better.

### ***Lesson plans and teaching materials***

Be sensitive to your Muslim refugee students' background and avoid introducing text or media that would make them uncomfortable or touches on sensitive personal issues. Lessons about the presumed violence of Muslims, showing graphic images of wars or unflattering literature that focuses on the negative puts Muslim students in an awkward and uncomfortable place. When speaking of current events, be careful of the words you choose and make sure your material does not contain bias or discriminatory opinions. Encourage a dialogue about issues related to your Muslim refugee students and seek their view without pressuring them. Remember, they are not spokespersons for their whole community and should not be put in that position.

Lesson plans designed to honor Muslim refugee students' cultures which celebrate successful Muslim individuals can be utilized to debunk stereotypes. Find material that explains the religion, encourages dialogue about diversity, be inclusive, and encourage students' input.

Related material and recommendations can be found at:

[How Schools Can Create a Safe Environment for Muslim Students](#)

Today's political atmosphere and the anti-immigrant sentiments make it much more difficult for immigrants and refugees of any background to feel safe and thrive in schools. Educators have a moral obligation to do all they can to reduce anxiety, facilitate learning, and provide an equitable education to all students.

## SECTION FOUR

### ***Lesson plans and additional resources***

Educators can utilize various lesson plans to celebrate Muslim students' culture and debunk stereotypes. These lesson plans help promote cultural awareness amongst non-Muslim students and boosts Muslim students' self-confidence.

The following vocabulary lesson addresses the challenges of girls in receiving an education in remote villages of Muslim countries due to political and religious constraints. Furthermore, this lesson plan demonstrates the courage and perseverance of Muslim girls trying to fight for their right to an education.

This vocabulary lesson is about Malala Yousafzai, a young Muslim activist whose efforts to promote education for girls angered the Taliban. She was shot in the head and survived. She is the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 17. Malala's story is just one example of how most Muslim women, contrary to the stereotypes are outspoken and brave. She has inspired girls and women all over the world.

The material needed for this lesson are:

- Internet connection
- Laptop
- Projector
- Whiteboard
- Duration: 60 minutes
- Intended audience: High intermediate adult English learners.

The teacher starts the lesson by delivering a PowerPoint presentation of Malala's picture and a brief introduction.

## **VOCABULARY LESSON PLAN**

### *High intermediate level*

<b>Aim</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Interaction</b>	<b>Time</b>
<p>Warm Up</p> <p>Presentation:</p> <p>To introduce/review target vocabulary words</p>	<p>T does a PowerPoint presentation with Malala picture and her story.</p> <p>T asks SS if they know who Malala is, where she is from and what she is known for. SS to share their prior knowledge.</p> <p>T displays target vocabulary in this context.</p>	T-SS	10
<p>Practice/ activate prior knowledge</p>	<p>SS to answer the following questions:</p> <p>How can education change a person's life?</p> <p>Is it difficult for girls and women to get an education in some countries?</p> <p>Why is it important for girls to have an education?</p>	T-SS	10
<p>Controlled Practice:</p> <p>Practicing vocabulary words in partner dialogue</p>	<p>SS to work in pairs and have a dialogue about what schools are like for children where they come from. Do girls get equal education as boys?</p>	S-S	10
<p>Practice:</p> <p>Pronunciation /comprehension</p>	<p>T displays a list of vocabulary relevant to this topic and ask SS to repeat them chorally.</p> <p>T elicits the meaning of the vocabulary and displays the vocabulary list this time with the definitions.</p>	SS	15
<p>Comprehension check:</p>	<p>T will ask SS to share a personal experience or a story they know when being outspoken was necessary with their partner and talk about what it means to be an advocate. T asks for volunteers to share with WC.</p> <p>Hand out T/F statements to be answered by SS to test their comprehension.</p>	T-SS	15

*Some examples of vocabulary to be introduced in this lesson:*

**Remote, advocate, Brave, Optimistic, Tribe, Ban, Outspoken**

*Below you can find a comprehension check exercise hand out sample.*

***Please read each sentence carefully, and then write T (true) or F (false) on the line next to the sentence.***

1. In some places in the world, girls are not allowed to go to school. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Malala is a brave girl from Afghanistan, who faced danger with courage. \_\_\_\_\_
3. To be outspoken means to directly state one's opinion. \_\_\_\_\_
4. A remote place is easy to get to and is close to everything. \_\_\_\_\_
5. The Taliban forced all the schools in the village to close. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Malala publicly supports education for all girls everywhere in the world, which means she is an advocate for girl's education rights. \_\_\_\_\_
7. After Malala was shot in the head, she was afraid and did not speak up again. \_\_\_\_\_
8. A tribe is a group of people who don't know each other. \_\_\_\_\_
9. If an action is banned people can do it anytime and anywhere, they want. \_\_\_\_\_
10. You don't need education to have better opportunities in life. \_\_\_\_\_

**Please note that the PowerPoint presentation is attached separately.**



## ***Additional resources***

The information in this handbook has been prepared by research and study of numerous valuable resources.

Educators may be able to find additional information on the following websites and online articles.

[The Educational Experiences of Refugee Children in Countries of First Asylum](#)

[Council on American-Islamic Relations](#)

[Countering Islamophobia](#)

[“Diversity in Islam: Communities of Interpretation” | И н с т и т у т  
И с л у д о в а н и й И с м а и л и з м а](#)

[Don't feel sorry for refugees -- believe in them](#)

[Islam - Five Pillars, Nation of Islam & Definition](#)

[Muslim Schoolchildren Bullied By Fellow Students And Teachers](#)

## References

- All of the pictures illustrated in this handbook are licensed under [CC BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/) retrieved from <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>
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## ***Glossary***

**Haj:** the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca that takes place in the last month of the year, and that all Muslims are expected to make at least once during their lifetime.

**Hijab:** a head covering worn in public by some Muslim women.

**Islam:** the religion of the Muslims, a monotheistic faith regarded as revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah.

**Jihad:** the spiritual struggle within oneself against sin.

**Ramadan:** the ninth month of the Muslim year, during which strict fasting is observed from sunrise to sunset.

**Salat:** the ritual prayer of Muslims, performed five times daily in a set form. the ritual prayer of Muslims, performed five times daily in a set form.

**Sawm:** fasting from dawn until dusk during Ramadan, one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

**Shahada:** the Muslim profession of faith ("there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah").

**Zakat:** obligatory payment made annually under Islamic law on certain kinds of property and used for charitable and religious purposes.

# FIGHTING FOR GIRLS' RIGHT TO AN EDUCATION.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](#)

# Who Is Malala Yousafzai

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- ❖ Born on July 12, 1997, in Mingora, Pakistan.
- ❖ Her father was a teacher and ran a girl's school in their **remote** village.
- ❖ Everything changed when the Taliban took control of the village and **banned** many things and said girls could no longer go to school.
- ❖ Malala became an **advocate** for girls' education when she herself was still a child, which resulted in the Taliban issuing a death threat against her.
- ❖ On October 9, 2012, a gunman shot Malala when she was traveling home from school.
- ❖ She survived and has continued to be **outspoken** on the importance of education.
- ❖ At the age of 17, she became the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize

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- 
- ❖ She knew she had a choice: She could live a quiet life or she could keep **advocating** girls' right to go to school and get an education.
  - ❖ She kept fighting and today she is helping many girls all over the world to get an education.
  - ❖ Today Malala lives in United Kingdom and goes to Oxford University.

# VOCABULARY

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- ❖ Remote
- ❖ Advocate
- ❖ Brave
- ❖ Optimistic
- ❖ Tribe
- ❖ Ban
- ❖ Outspoken
- ❖ Opportunities
- ❖ Forced
- ❖ Loyal

# Definitions

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- ❖ Remote                      Far away
- ❖ Advocate                      Publicly recommend or support
- ❖ Brave                      Ready to face and endure danger or pain
- ❖ Optimistic                      Hopeful and Confident about future
- ❖ Tribe                      People of same race, language and customs  
living in the same area.
- ❖ Ban                      Officially and legally prohibited ( not allowed)
- ❖ Outspoken                      Direct in stating one's opinion
- ❖ Opportunities                      Chances
- ❖ Forced                      Imposed by force
- ❖ Loyal                      Giving support and friendship at all times.