



# Education, Gender, and Identity: A Scoping Review of Young Muslim Experiences in Multicultural Contexts

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**Abstract:** This scoping review synthesizes multidisciplinary evidence on young Muslims' experiences across schools, universities, and nonformal learning contexts, focusing on the intersection of education, gender, and identity. Guided by Arksey and O'Malley's framework and reported in line with PRISMA-ScR, the review canvassed Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO, PubMed, and gray literature (2000–2024). Included studies, spanning qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs, involved participants aged 12–25 in Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority settings. Data were organized in a charting matrix and examined through descriptive and thematic analyses. Results highlight fluid and hybrid identities, a strong link between belonging and mental health/academic performance, and the tangible effects of Islamophobia, discrimination, and microaggressions. Gendered dynamics are salient—from heightened visibility for hijab-wearing women to securitized masculinity stereotypes for young men. Additional drivers include intersectional positioning, family/community influence, multiperspectival curricula, culturally responsive teaching, religious accommodations, and the digital ecosystem. Promising practices encompass anti-bias professional development, pluralistic curriculum design, confidential reporting systems, pragmatic accommodations, mentoring, and collaborative co-curricular programs. The review underscores the need to recalibrate identity models around hybridity, safety, and intersectionality; reinforce anti-discrimination governance; build educator capacity; strengthen family–community partnerships; and adopt data-driven monitoring. Future work should emphasize longitudinal and experimental studies, cross-cultural validation, participatory approaches, and context-sensitive digital literacy initiatives, noting the literature's skew toward the Global North.

**Keywords:** Young Muslims, Multicultural Education, Hybrid Identity, Gender, Intersectionality

## Introduction

Accelerating cross-border mobility, urban expansion, and pervasive digital networks have ushered in increasingly heterogeneous societies worldwide. In this evolving social fabric, young Muslims—whether situated in Muslim-majority settings or as minorities across the diaspora—engage in multifaceted identity work. Schools, universities, and nonformal learning spaces function as key arenas where religious, cultural, and civic identities intersect, are negotiated, and reshaped. These processes are driven by interdependent influences, including institutional rules, dominant cultural expectations, peer dynamics, and media or public narratives that (re)frame contemporary “Muslimness.”

In cross-cultural psychology, identity during adolescence and emerging adulthood is conceptualized as dynamic and iterative, formed through continual interaction with social

structures and everyday practices. For young Muslims, this entails aligning Islamic commitments with local cultural norms, re-signifying religious symbols within mainstream frames, and contending with stereotyping and exclusion. Educational environments—spanning curriculum policies, school climate, and the quality of teacher–student relationships—may serve as buffers or stressors. When pedagogy is culturally responsive, it tends to strengthen belonging, bolster academic outcomes, and support mental health. Conversely, institutional blind spots around specific needs—such as prayer accommodation, halal food options, or dress regulations—can diminish identity safety and foster alienation.

Gender adds further nuance and complexity. Hijab-wearing young Muslim women often experience high visibility and the risk of misreading, yet many assert robust agency, framing the hijab as both faith expression and a social negotiation tool. Young Muslim men, meanwhile, are frequently cast through securitized masculinity stereotypes, with implications for interactions with school authorities and law enforcement. An intersectional lens—attending to gender, race or ethnicity, class, migration, language, disability, and religion—clarifies why experiences and opportunities are far from uniform.

Scholarship on young Muslims in multicultural settings spans psychology, education, religious studies, sociology, policy, and public health. Nevertheless, the evidence base remains fragmented, often topic-bound, and geographically skewed toward the Global North, complicating efforts to synthesize patterns across contexts and methods. A scoping review is thus well suited to map the breadth of evidence, surface convergences and divergences, and highlight unresolved questions. This paper offers a scoping review from a cross-cultural psychology standpoint, foregrounding the interrelations among education, gender, and identity in young Muslims' experiences.

#### Aims

1. Synthesize core themes in how young Muslims navigate identity within multicultural educational contexts.
2. Identify protective resources and risk factors at individual, relational, and institutional layers.
3. Examine experiential differences across gender and intersecting identities.
4. Derive conceptual insights and practical guidance for policy and pedagogy.
5. Propose a research agenda that is geographically broader, methodologically diverse, and ethically robust.

Aligned with scoping review conventions, this review emphasizes coverage and thematic mapping over rigorous methodological quality appraisal typical of systematic reviews, and it orients future lines of inquiry.

## Methodology

This review adopts Arksey and O'Malley's scoping framework as refined by Levac and colleagues, and it is informed by PRISMA-ScR reporting standards. It focuses on young Muslims' experiences in multicultural learning environments across:

1. Formal settings: secondary schools and higher education.
2. Nonformal spaces: youth groups, community organizations, and digital platforms linked to learning and personal development.

### Research questions

1. In what ways do young Muslims negotiate religious and cultural identities within multicultural educational settings?
2. Which factors enhance or undermine psychological well-being, belonging, and learning outcomes?
3. How do gendered symbols, norms, and expectations shape these experiences?
4. Which institutional practices and pedagogical approaches appear promising, and where do evidence gaps persist?

### Inclusion criteria

1. Population: Muslims aged approximately 12–25, including first-, 1.5-, and second-generation youth in both Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts.
2. Context: Multicultural educational environments, formal and nonformal, involving intergroup cultural or religious interaction.
3. Phenomena: Identity processes; gendered experiences; peer and school-community relations; institutional supports and barriers; mental health; academic attainment.
4. Design: Qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, policy analyses, and program evaluations.
5. Time frame: Circa 2000–2024 to capture post-global-event discursive shifts around Muslims.
6. Language: Primarily English and Indonesian, acknowledging limitations in other languages.

### Search strategy

Searches were carried out in Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PsycINFO, and PubMed, supplemented by gray literature and policy sources. Boolean terms included muslim youth, young muslims, identity, acculturation, cross-cultural, multicultural education, gender, hijab, islamophobia, discrimination, belonging, well-being, diaspora, school, university, peer, teacher, curriculum, policy. Backward/forward citation tracking, related-article suggestions, and reference lists from prior reviews were also mined.

### Study selection and data charting

Titles and abstracts were initially screened to exclude out-of-scope items, such as normative theological works lacking an experiential social angle. Eligible full texts were reviewed against the research questions. Extracted data were collated in a charting matrix covering location, sample traits, educational context, methodology, thematic focus,

principal findings, and implications. Descriptive analyses mapped regional and methodological trends, while thematic analysis clustered findings into substantive domains. Ethical considerations and limitations

As a scoping review, this work does not undertake formal risk-of-bias assessment or meta-analysis. It relies on primary studies presumed to have ethical approval. Limitations include publication bias, English-language dominance, and uneven Global North–Global South representation. Causal claims are avoided in favor of pattern mapping and hypothesis generation for future studies.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Field overview**

Since the early 2000s, research on young Muslims in multicultural education has expanded markedly, paralleling heightened attention to security, migration, and diversity governance. Scholarship predominantly originates from Western Europe, North America, and Australia; while contributions from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa are growing, they remain comparatively fewer. Qualitative designs—interviews, focus groups, ethnographies—are prevalent in identity-focused inquiries, while quantitative surveys increasingly assess well-being, belonging, and discrimination. Mixed-methods work and policy/program evaluations are emergent, often centering on anti-bullying initiatives and cultural responsiveness training.

### **Negotiating identity and hybrid belonging**

Evidence consistently depicts identity as fluid and hybrid. Young Muslims braid Islamic commitments with local value systems, language use, and lifestyle preferences. Educational settings act as proving grounds for this integration: choosing peer networks, affiliating with organizations, engaging in religion-related dialogues in class, and organizing prayer routines. Integration is facilitated when institutions provide psychologically safe dialogue spaces, treat difference as an asset for learning, and refrain from enforcing assimilation to dominant norms. Suspicion toward Islamic signifiers or the hyper-visibility of religious markers can, however, prompt defensive strategies—avoidance, compartmentalization, or disengagement.

### **Belonging, well-being, and academic attainment**

Belonging to one's school or campus is a strong predictor of motivation, mental health, and academic persistence. Supportive teacher and peer relations correlate with reduced stress and greater engagement. Mechanisms include recognition of identity, procedural fairness in disciplinary processes, and access to advising and counseling. In contrast, microaggressions, stereotypical humor, and unequal treatment compromise identity safety, heighten anxiety, and can depress performance. Religiosity—ritual practice, faith communities, spiritual meaning—often serves as psychosocial capital for meaning-making, secondary control, and social support, though it can also introduce pressures for those negotiating boundaries between religious norms and mainstream culture.

### **Islamophobia, exclusion, and subtle harms**

Islamophobia surfaces both overtly—symbol bans, hate speech—and subtly, through lowered expectations. In education, this may appear in inconsistent dress-code enforcement, insufficient worship accommodations, or curricular framings that flatten Muslim diversity. Consequences ripple from morale and mental health to participation in school life and long-term aspirations. Clear anti-discrimination policies, confidential reporting mechanisms, and swift, visible institutional responses are critical to deter the normalization of bias.

### **Gendered visibility and youth agency**

Gendered dynamics are pronounced. For many hijab-wearing students, visibility invites scrutiny, stereotyping, or restrictions in certain activities, including specific sports. Yet hijab is also articulated as a deliberate choice and an expression of autonomy, with styles adapted to balance comfort, observance, and social expectations. Young Muslim men are frequently read through “risky” masculinity frames, facing increased surveillance and quicker sanctions under strict disciplinary regimes. Across genders, strong agency is evident: cultivating support networks, participating in Muslim student or youth groups, and mobilizing digital platforms to articulate identity.

### **Intersectionality and patterned diversity**

An intersectional approach clarifies heterogeneity. A hijab-wearing student from a racial minority in a diaspora setting may encounter layered forms of discrimination distinct from a non-hijab-wearing peer in a dominant ethnic group within a Muslim-majority country. Migration histories, language proficiency, socioeconomic positioning, geography, and disability affect access to resources and opportunities. Policy and practice should therefore avoid monolithic “Muslim” categories and engage with real intersections shaping lived experiences.

### **Families, communities, and religious life**

Families and Muslim community networks are central sources of emotional, material, and spiritual support. Parental expectations influence educational goals, adaptation strategies, and interpretations of school norms. Value frictions can arise around cross-gender activities, friendship circles, or career choices. Mosques and youth associations provide safe spaces, mentors, and capacity-building initiatives. Structured school–family–community partnerships—dialogue forums, regular engagement, and co-designed programs—can cultivate trust, belonging, and mutual understanding.

### **Curriculum, culturally responsive teaching, and educator capacity**

Curricula that reflect multiple perspectives—acknowledging Muslim histories, contributions, and internal diversity—promote critical inquiry and disrupt stereotyping. Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes relevance, inclusive narratives, and pedagogies that honor students’ lived realities. Educator literacy around culture and religion is pivotal: facilitating sensitive conversations, de-escalating identity-related tensions, and developing fair assessment strategies. Sustained professional learning anchored in practice and reflection tends to outperform one-off workshops.

### **Infrastructure, policy, and everyday accommodations**

Concrete accommodations—appropriate prayer spaces, halal food, flexible exam schedules during religious holidays—signal recognition and support well-being. Robust anti-bullying, anti-discrimination, and anti-hate-speech policies need safe reporting channels, whistle-blower protections, and consistent follow-through. In higher education, guaranteeing freedom of association for Muslim student organizations, accompanied by clear guidelines for shared-space use, helps balance expressive rights with institutional governance.

### **Digital ecologies and information literacies**

Young Muslims actively engage digital platforms to access religious knowledge, build support systems, and craft counter-narratives. The same environments pose risks of misinformation, polarization, and cyberbullying. Embedding information literacy—source vetting, communication ethics, digital footprint management—into schooling is essential, given the susceptibility of identity and religion to disinformation.

### **Aspirations, transitions, and the importance of role models**

Educational ambitions emerge from structural and psychosocial factors: family backing, school quality, supportive teacher relationships, visible role models, and meaningful representation. Limited access to relatable exemplars in fields like STEM or public leadership can narrow perceived options. Mentorship programs, internships, and cross-identity alumni networks expand access and confidence. Equitable, bias-aware career guidance is crucial to counteract low, stereotype-driven expectations.

### **Regional contrasts**

1. Global North minority contexts center on islamophobia, secular governance, and public-space negotiations. Strengths include rich ethnographic accounts and school-based interventions, with constraints around cross-context generalization.
2. Global South majority contexts emphasize tradition–modernity tensions, class stratification, and intracommunity diversity. They offer nuanced local insights but face hurdles in international visibility and longitudinal data.
3. Southeast Asia highlights majority-Muslim contexts in Indonesia and Malaysia with varied practices and policies. Salient challenges include regional disparities, gendered school issues, and digital literacy needs; urban spaces intensify intergroup encounters.

### **Promising practices and evaluation needs**

Encouraging initiatives include:

1. Teacher development in cultural literacy, anti-bias strategies, and interfaith dialogue facilitation.
2. Multiperspectival curricula incorporating diverse Muslim case studies.
3. Safe reporting systems for discrimination combined with culturally competent counseling.
4. Practical accommodations: prayer facilities, halal provision, flexible scheduling around religious observance.

5. Mentorship and peer-support programs that widen social and academic networks.

Collaborative co-curriculars that move beyond symbolic festivities toward shared problem-solving. Yet rigorous, long-term evaluations remain rare. Descriptive reporting dominates, with few quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs. Progress requires culturally validated measures and mixed-methods approaches to capture multi-level impacts.

### Conceptual contributions

Findings suggest updating identity and acculturation models by:

1. Centering hybridity and dynamic integration beyond assimilation–separation binaries.
2. Positioning identity safety as a cornerstone of achievement motivation.
3. Operationalizing intersectionality to systematically capture experiential variation.
4. Recognizing schools and universities as mediating institutions between structure and self.
5. Elevating digital environments as key sites of identity formation and social capital.

### Implications for Policy and Practice

1. Inclusive governance: Institute clear, actionable anti-discrimination policies, ensure thorough socialization, and maintain trusted reporting channels.
2. Supports and services: Provide religious accommodations, culturally competent counseling, and advising attuned to socioeconomic realities.
3. Professional learning: Invest in sustained, practice-based teacher development with supervision and reflective communities.
4. Curriculum and assessment: Infuse multiperspectival content, cultivate dialogic pedagogy, and implement bias-aware evaluation.
5. Partnering with families and communities: Establish collaborative forums and co-created programs to align expectations across home and school.
6. Data, monitoring, and accountability: Use ethically disaggregated data to track participation, discipline, and achievement—and to evaluate interventions.

### Future Directions

1. Broaden geography: Expand studies in the Global South, including Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.
2. Strengthen designs: Employ longitudinal and experimental approaches to test causal pathways and long-term effects.
3. Validate instruments: Develop culturally sensitive measures and examine measurement equivalence across groups.
4. Make intersectionality measurable: Design integrated quant–qual methods that model interactions among gender, race or ethnicity, class, migration, and disability.
5. Engage participants: Use participatory methods with young Muslims, caregivers, and community partners to enhance relevance and ethics.
6. Study digital environments: Assess how online spaces shape identity, engagement, and literacies; evaluate context-specific digital-literacy programs.

7. Advance ethics and safety: Craft guidelines that reduce stigma, protect confidentiality, and deliver tangible benefits to participants.

## Conclusion

Education emerges as a pivotal sphere in which young Muslims cultivate identity, deepen belonging, and pursue academic goals amid diversity. Gender intersects with race or ethnicity, class, migration status, language, and disability to create wide-ranging trajectories. Consistent institutional commitments—culturally responsive teaching, multiperspectival curricula, and practical accommodations—support mental health and inclusive participation. Conversely, Islamophobia, microaggressions, and one-size-fits-all policies jeopardize identity safety, fuel alienation, and hinder achievement.

Accordingly, effective multicultural education is not defined by the mere absence of conflict, but by the creation of safe spaces for identity work, fairness in recognition and access, and equitable chances to thrive. Young Muslims demonstrate substantial agency; the responsibility of educational institutions is to nurture ecosystems that translate that agency into sustained achievement and meaningful contributions within plural societies. Moving forward, future research should prioritize longitudinal and experimental designs to rigorously assess intervention effectiveness, alongside participatory action research that co-constructs solutions with young Muslims. Practically, educational institutions must invest in comprehensive anti-bias training for educators, implement inclusive curriculum audits, and establish robust, confidential reporting mechanisms for discrimination to foster truly equitable and supportive learning environments.

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