CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Muslim students wearing the hijab in South Korea have particular difficulties navigating their life in academic environments as visible minority. As a kind of clothing or fashion, the hijab conveys an identity that is inseparable with the wearer. The hijab represents various aspects of identity for Muslim women, including religious devotion, cultural expression, modesty, and empowerment, reflecting its complex role in shaping both personal and social identities (Kadir, 2024). By being noticeable minorities through their inseparable identity in academic contexts, they may run against opposing views from their surrounds about Muslims who wear the hijab. Standing out among the majority within the academic community, Muslim students wearing the hijab often face social isolation, as their visible identity creates a boundary that leads others to distance themselves, reinforcing their sense of not belonging (Karaman & Christian, 2020). In other words, due to its religious identification, the hijab sets off prejudices and discrimination that compromise a Muslim student's interactions in social and academic spheres. Particularly when Muslim students adjust to new standards without sacrificing the core of their beliefs,

this difficult situation unavoidably forces Muslim students wearing a hijab to find common ground with their identities.

Furthermore, Muslim students who wear the hijab in South Korea may become the subject of first interactions filled with cultural distance. In an environment of opposition that questions its existence, the hijab is initially perceived as a symbol of political and religious stance (Karaman & Christian, 2022). In classroom settings, students with high visibility of their religious identity, such as those wearing the hijab, are prone to experience social distancing and cultural barriers, which manifested as microaggressions due to their distinct appearance (Uddin et al., 2022). These expressions of curiosity or attention aimed at these students are often a reflection of misconceptions about the identity they represent rather than hatred or suspicion. Social and academic adaptation efforts on university may be complicated by this cultural complexities, especially when homogeneous cultural norms—like South Korea—conflict with identities that are seen as unique, as represented by the hijab. Micro-level interactions and criticism of Muslim students' appearance require them to negotiate their visible identities—like the hijab—to reconcile cultural expectations with their faith and personal identity (Chaudry, 2021). Muslim students who wear the hijab must balance their religious beliefs and cultural integration. This negotiation requires adapting their visible identity to bridge cultures while maintaining their identity and faith.

Figure 1.1. Sabrina Azhar (@jpbrinx) on TikTok discusses the reality of

being a hijabi in a South Korean college.

(Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@jpbrinx)

The difficulties and dilemmas surrounding Muslim identity as represented by the hijab can be major obstacles for students' ability to adapt in a new cultural settings. The efforts of hijabi students to fit in with university social circles provide a straightforward illustration. As seen in Figure 1.1, a student at a prominent South Korean university used her TikTok account, @jpbrinx, to share her experience. In the video, she described how her unique appearance made it hard for her to make friends on campus as a hijabi. Due to her wearing a hijab, Sabrina shared that she was often not invited to student-bonding activities like MT (membership training), a common social event in South Korean universities, making it challenging for her to integrate socially. This indicates how hijab as a visible Muslim identity led students to become isolated, as the hijab and Islam was frequently associated with negative stereotypes for Korean students, such as being outdated and dangerous (Kim & Kang, 2022). As a result, as a Muslim

student wearing the hijab, she found it challenging to connect with friends and establish networks on campus due to the hijab.

Figure 1.2. Comment responses at Sabrina Azhar (@jpbrinx)'s TikTok video about the reality of being a hijabi in a South Korean college.

(Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@jpbrinx)

Additionally, other hijabi Muslims also shared their experiences of discrimination in academic settings in the video's comments section. These remarks from hijabi students, which are shown in Figure 1.2, give specific instances of the difficulties they encounter. On the comment section, some hijabi stated that feeling accepted in social situations on campus can be challenging by wearing the hijab. They acknowledged that they had trouble forming friendships, especially during activities that are essential to university life. This problem stems from the fact that their hijab, which clearly reflects their religious identity, can lead them to have psychological distress and fear of isolation from other students (Uddin et al., 2022). In order to overcome these challenges, negotiating their identity is essentials to balancing their need to fit into the social environment with their commitment to expressing their religious beliefs. Thus, this negotiation may

involve finding alternative ways to participate in social activities or redefining their sense of belonging within the campus community.

Figure 1.3. Anak Kos Korea (@permato) on TikTok discusses the

reality of searching part-time as a hijabi students in South Korea.

(Source: https://www.tiktok.com/@permato)

In another circumstances, hijabi students working part-time jobs to support their studies face challenges regarding their hijab. In South Korea, international students often rely on part-time jobs to support their education, but these roles can become a source of identity-based challenges, as visible cultural differences and language barriers often lead to discrimination, underpayment, and unequal treatment for students (Lama, 2023). However, as a hijabi, their visual representation of their identity, is often seen as incompatible with local norms and perceived as a barrier to performing part-time work for students. As illustrated in Figure 1.3, a hijabi student was questioned about her hijab while simply trying to do part-time to meet her academic needs. This highlights the need for concrete negotiation when these students interact and navigate discussions about their identity and their

choice to wear the hijab. The inseparability of their hijab from their religious identity necessitates a continuous effort to negotiate an ideal way of living as students while maintaining their own identity.

In this context, it is crucial to underline that the hijab is more than just a piece of clothing. The hijab, as both a religious mandate and a symbol of identity, represents specific religious and cultural values, serving not only as a modest practice but also as a powerful reminder of faith and an essential marker for Muslim women (Karaman & Christian, 2022). Unfortunately, in a culturally contrasting contexts, this symbol frequently becomes the object of bias and unfavorable generalizations. In this case, effective intercultural communication becomes difficult as a result of these glancing cultural differences. Especially among South Korean students, the hijab is perceived as a form of gender inequality and oppression. They underline how the Islamic custom, which advocates for women to protect themselves by wearing a hijab, is viewed as an antiquated style, reminiscent of the Confucian patriarchy of the Chosun dynasty, when women were compelled to wear scarves or headdresses as a form of self-defense (Kim & Kang, 2022). This showcase one of the factors why women in hijab are considered prone to racialization due to that kind of outgoing understanding in South Korea, especially on the students point of view. Since the hijab is commonly linked to particular opinions about Muslims, both individually and collectively, the looks, questions, and stereotypes aimed at hijabi Muslims are a reflection of ongoing cultural tensions.

Furthermore, this complex situation represents a challenging concern for Muslim hijabis and their Islamic identity. In an academic context, the hijab serves as a significant marker of identity, highlighting how Muslim hijabis prioritize Islamic values, which often conflict with the cultural norms and values adhered to by universities in South Korea. For example, a Muslim student from Kazakhstan, was surprised to learn that Yonsei University required her to take Christianity courses and attend chapel for two years, a challenge shared by many international students at South Korean universities with Christian foundations, where such mandatory programs frequently conflict with Muslim hijabi students' religious obligations (Joo, 2022). Since the hijab and Muslim identity are inseparable, these conflicts often force students to negotiate between their personal faith and the expectations of their academic environment. The visibility of Muslim hijabis in academic settings can, therefore, generate the feelings of exclusion or misunderstanding, as they are often seen as embodying values that differ from those promoted by the institution.

In the context of studying or staying abroad, particularly within diverse cultural environments, this conflicting situation creates a sense of "in-betweenness," where hijabi Muslim students must navigate between two extremes: full acceptance and total rejection. Muslim women who wear the hijab frequently express a stronger sense of religious centrality, which may worsen their sense of isolation in environments where their identity is not widely understood or accepted (Hashem & Awad, 2024). This feeling is

doubled and even more intense for a Muslim woman wearing the hijab. It can be seen that the hijab has political and social implications in addition to religious ones, and its visual requirement serves as a barrier that tells students that women wearing the hijab are the most misunderstood, uncomfortable, and feared individuals (Karaman & Christian, 2020). The existence of differences that are clearly visible actually makes women who wear the hijab become isolated figures from the social circle.

Additionally, The challenges faced by Muslim hijabi students in South Korea are not unique to this country. In the era of globalization, diversity within educational institutions has become a growing concern worldwide. International students from different cultural and religious backgrounds often encounter similar obstacles, especially when their visual identities, such as the hijab, conflict with the cultural norms of the majority. For comparison, France demonstrates how strict policies on visible religious symbols can impact Muslim students. Since banning headscarves in public schools in 2004, followed by a 2010 ban on full-face veils and a 2023 prohibition of abayas, these measures highlight systemic challenges for visibly Muslim students in environments prioritizing secularism over religious expression (Al Jazeera, 2023). This emphasizes how the importance for hijab-wearing students to negotiate their identities and create cultural adaptation strategies in order to live in such restrictive settings.

Besides, South Korea is not a predominantly Muslim country, with only a small percentage of its population identifying as Muslim. The Korea

Muslim Federation estimates that Muslims make up less than 200,000 people, or 0.4% of South Korea's 52 million residents, of which 150,000 are students and workers from nations like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan (Lee, 2022). Despite this, the country has branded itself as a "Muslim-friendly" destination, attracting a growing number of Muslim students who come to pursue their studies. This appeal extends particularly to Muslim hijabi women, as South Korea has increasingly seen the presence of visibly Muslim individuals. However, the reality does not always align with the country's branding. In terms of regulations, The 2023 Republic of Korea International Religious Freedom Report states that the constitution guarantees religious freedom, prohibits discrimination based on religion, and upholds the separation of religion and state (U.S. Department of State, 2023). While South Korea does not impose specific legal restrictions on religious identities expressed through appearance, hijabi Muslim students still face significant challenges. These include inadequate facilities to accommodate their religious practices, persistent stereotypes, and prejudice. Such barriers make it difficult for hijabi Muslim students to live and study comfortably in South Korea.

All of this stems from the events of 9/11, when the American media contributed to propaganda that connected the hijab, niqab, and burqa to the notion of women's oppression (Hasan, 2023). This led to the growth of stereotypes, stigmatisation, and islamophobia, all of which were important factors in the discrimination against hijabi women in South Korea. As

evidenced by their association of ISIS with Islam and their conviction that all Muslims, even those who oppose terrorism, are somehow connected to violence, even South Korean students continue to believe that Islam is essentially violent, equating Muslims with terrorism and assuming that Islamic societies are essentially aggressive (Kim & Kang, 2022). Thus, the existence of conflicts of cultural differences and their own stereotypes trigger differences of opinion, perception, and judgment from the outside audience which tend to be more negative. With that, complex cultural adjustment and adaptation requires a separate approach for individuals with visible cultural identities to adjust to different environments where they are categorized as minorities. It is understandable that some individuals experience a sense of powerlessness and lack of freedom about the wearing of their hijab, resulting in a disassociation from it and a feeling similar to imprisonment (Syahrivar, 2021). Different cultures and lifestyles require deeper adjustments related to identity negotiation strategies and adapting and integrating with society in Muslim minority countries.

Furthermore, this phenomenon is significant on a global scale because it addresses basic concerns in cross-cultural communication, including prejudice, stereotypes, and diversity acceptance. Therefore, this study adds to the worldwide discussion about how educational institutions can better support students from diverse cultural backgrounds in addition to being crucial for understanding the unique experiences of Muslim hijabi students in South Korea. This study offers important insights to deepen

understanding of the difficulties faced by people with prominent visual identities by examining identity negotiation dynamics through the lens of intercultural communication. In order to promote diversity as a fundamental value within the international academic community, the findings may provide suggestions for educational institutions to create more inclusive policies and practices.

In conclusion, overcoming intercultural communication barriers demands a thorough comprehension of communication tactics that promote minority communities' acceptance in dominant societies, such as Muslim hijabis who are easily identifiable. Identity negotiation theory states that during interactions, people try to preserve a positive sense of both their personal and collective identities (Littlejohn et al., 2016). Through this process of overcoming cultural differences, people can communicate more meaningfully and cooperatively. Building positive intergroup relationships is especially facilitated by strategies like empathetic inclusion, open communication, and active listening (Littlejohn et al., 2016). In order to navigate cultural norms, gain social acceptance, and uphold their Islamic values, Muslim students in South Korea must negotiate their identity. These students use a variety of strategies to prevent discrimination and promote mutual understanding in their communities. Examining their cultural adaptation and identity negotiation offers important insights into the communication styles that support respect and integration in a multicultural setting.

1.2 Problem Statement

A Muslim woman's hijab has long been a key component of her religious identity. The use of hijab goes beyond simply being a piece of clothing, it has deep meanings that relate to how people communicate and how others perceive them. However, because of its visible nature, the hijab frequently serves as a focal point for misconceptions, biases, and stereotypes, especially in societies where Islamic customs and cultural values contradict greatly. Due to this unusual appearance, hijabi students seeking higher education in South Korea, a condition where a hijabi is consider as minority, encounter difficulties.

Since the hijab is an integral part of their Muslim identity, it can lead to prejudice and criticism that can lead to discrimination in their social and academic circles. These situations blocked cross-cultural communication and place hijabi students in a state of "in-betweenness," where they must negotiate their identity by balancing acceptance and rejection in accordance with South Korean university cultural norms. These students are under more pressure to negotiate their identities and adjust to a new culture because of the hijab's visible status as a religious symbol, which makes communication more difficult. As a result, this study raises a question: how is the identity negotiation and cultural adaptation process of Muslim students with hijab in South Korea?

1.3 Research Objective

This research aims to understand the identity negotiation and cultural adaptation of Muslim students with hijab who pursue their study in South Korea.

1.4 Research Significant

1.4.1 Theoretical

Theoretically, this research will contribute to the development of identity negotiation theory. This theory proposes that identity negotiation is the process by which an individual from one culture adjusts and negotiates their identity in order to be accepted in another culture. Besides, the findings of this research have the potential to improve the quality of future studies that investigate the experiences of Muslim students with hijab as a visible minority in a different cultural settings.

1.4.2 Practical

In a practical way, this research seeks to provide meaningful insights and assistance to students who wear the hijab while studying abroad, especially in terms of negotiating and expressing their identity as a visible minority. By educating about the value of diversity and tolerance, the findings of this study may increase the opportunities for Muslim students with hijab in Muslim minority

countries to express who they are as a person. There is an aspiration that this initiative will help promote a societal mindset that is more inclusive and accepting towards students who wear the hijab and those with visible identities in nations that are not particularly welcoming to minorities.

1.4.3 Social

Socially, this research aims to provide relevant insights for an entire country and institution, particularly within the academic sector, assisting as a reference for implementing an inclusive approach to support minority students, especially Muslim students who wear hijabs and demonstrate a visible identity.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

1.5.1 State of The Art

In the process of conducting this research, it is essential to refer to a number of previous research studies in order to acquire reference guidance. The first reference is from the study conducted by Marco Rizzo, Anna Miglietta, Silvia Gatino, and Angela Vidi (2020), entitled "**I feel Moroccan, I feel Italian, and I feel Muslim: Second generation Moroccans and identity negotiation between religion and community belonging**," where it analyses the complexities of young Moroccan Muslims in Italy–as a minority–to negotiate and adjust their ethnic, national, and religious identities

amid social pressures through the lens of ecological contexts, including family and community. The study's uniqueness lies in its application of identity negotiation theory to delve deeply into a more diverse context that goes beyond family and community. Understanding how a Muslim woman wearing the hijab navigates a predominantly non-Muslim environment is essential to revealing what it's like to be an unwelcome minority in an academic setting, in addition to the idea of identity.

Secondly, the next previous study that is used as a reference for this research is titled "**Chinese Ethnicity and American Culture: An Exploration of Bicultural Identity Negotiation and Co-Cultural Communication of Adopted Chinese American Women**" by Maya Blair and Meina Liu (2020). This study used the interpretive paradigm and co-cultural communication theory to investigate the bicultural identities of 10 adopted Chinese American women during their transition to adulthood, in hopes of achieving a deeper comprehension of the stories they tell about themselves. The findings show these women used a variety of communication methods to negotiate their multiple identities across their life stages, highlighting how each woman reflects on balancing fitting in and staying authentic, while also facing difficulties finding their place or role within a co-cultural group. Since the previous study focus more within the aspect of familial and personal history as a Chinese

American adoptees, this current study will give highlights in the context of Muslim students with visible identity, concentrate on how they must reconcile their religious identities with South Korean cultural standards in educational institution that are significantly in contrast from the beliefs of Muslim women who wear the hijab. Therefore, Muslim students who wear those visible symbols and their interactions with non-Muslim communities need to be further discussed to upfolds other new findings in the academic sphere of identity negotiation theory.

The third research reference is entitled "**"I am maybe half-and-half Swedish. 50-50." – Young adolescents' national identity negotiation in a diverse school setting**" developed by Eva Medin, Ylva Svensson, and Göran Jutengren (2024). This research examines the ways in which young adolescents negotiate their national identity within an ethnically multicultural Swedish school, employing thematic analysis to demonstrate that students consider their national identity as identifiable and mutually exclusive, separating themselves with labels as either "Swedish" or "non-Swedish." Besides, the present research will unfold the struggle to negotiate cultural and religious identity within non-multicultural academic conditions, where it focuses also on cultural adaptation, emphasizing how hijab-wearing Muslim students navigate and balance their cultural identity while integrating into a new and

different cultural setting in academic settings. Essentially, this research distinctively integrates cultural adaptation and religious identity within an international and intercultural academic framework, whereas both studies investigate identity negotiation.

Furthermore, the fourth reference discusses a study entitled "**Negotiating a contested identity: Religious individualism among Muslim youth in a super-diverse city**," authored by Ariadne Driezen, Gert Verschraegen, and Noel Clycq (2021). The study employed a cultural sociology approach to learn more about how young Muslims deal with the conflict between their religious beliefs and more individualistic societal standards in the Western European environment, showcasing that people purposefully use aspects of religious individuality to differentiate themselves from non-Muslims and Muslims altogether. It also shows that girls have more complicated limitations when they negotiate their identities, particularly when it comes to opposing gender norms. Besides, the present study will focus more on the interaction of religious identity through a visible symbol within an international academic context. This research is distinctive in its emphasis on South Korea, the experiences of hijab-wearing women as overseas students, and the dynamics of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation within a non-Western context.

Lastly, the fifth study referenced is titled "**Queer Identity Negotiation in Taiwanese Tongzhi Relationships with Mainland Gay Men in China**" authored by Wei Luo (2024). The study explored queer intercultural communication research, putting emphasis on resolving sexual identity difficulties in relationships with homosexual men from mainland China. The outcomes of the study demonstrated the conflicts are resolved by using identity maintenance, accommodation, and assimilation methods. By appropriating and digesting cultural discourses, Taiwanese tongzhi construct a distinctive tongzhi normativity; this normativity is then extended to homosexual men in mainland China, where it reproduces Western gay standards. While Taiwanese tongzhi centres on sexual identity within a cross-cultural framework, Muslim students wearing hijab emphasize religious identity in South Korean educational institutions. The present study centers on upfolding the difficulties of religious visibility and adaptation within cross-cultural communication, and the tongzhi have tensions related to their sexual identities.

1.5.2 Research Paradigm

In this particular study, the interpretive paradigm served as the research paradigm. Greater emphasis is placed on the broad spectrum of concepts associated with context in interpretivism. As a result, new social realities emerge as a result of the interpretive

paradigm's ability to provide a more nuanced understanding of culture, context, and time (Lim, 2024). This can certainly be of assistance in taking into consideration a variety of factors. By that, this includes behavioural aspects that are based on the experiences of the participants, assisting in the description of reality based on assumptions and beliefs, and enabling the research context and its situation to be treated as unique by taking into consideration the related circumstances and participants involved (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2019). Thus, the interpretive paradigm is significant in understanding how Muslim students who use the hijab negotiate their identities and adapt to being a Muslim minority in South Korean university, a condition where Muslims do not make up the majority of the population.

1.5.3 Theory

1.5.3.1 Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

In conducting this research, it is necessary to have in-depth insights related to the key concepts of intercultural communication. The ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries creates a connection between human intercommunication and the cultural features of everyday life. When it comes to engaging in communication with other people who come from various cultural, racial, and religious backgrounds, cultural communication focuses on how difficult it is for an individual to develop a communication

contact with such persons (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Undoubtedly, developing one's sense of self in a religiously and culturally diverse setting necessitates this intercultural communication competency concept.

Furthermore, within a bigger scope, intercultural communication is fundamentally influenced by culture, which determines individuals' thoughts, behaviours, and interpersonal relationships. Culture affects all facets of life, including our attire, food preferences, perceptions of the real world, and approaches for disagreement resolution. Guo-Ming Chen defines intercultural communication competence as the ability to achieve desired outcomes in intercultural settings (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Chen declares four main dimension within the elements of intercultural communication competence which include:

1. *Personal Attributes*: Mutual trust and understanding are enhanced when people are able to disclose personal information in a responsible and appropriate manner. To effectively interact with cross-cultural contexts, one must be self-aware, or aware of their own feelings, ideas, and actions. With a solid sense of who they are, people are better able to adjust to unfamiliar cultural settings without losing their self-assurance. Also, keeping one's composure in social situations (also known as "social

relaxation") helps with uneasiness and makes conversation go more smoothly.

2. *Communication Skills*: Being able to express oneself precisely guarantees that one's message is understood correctly; this ability is called message skills. Strong interpersonal skills, including the ability to listen attentively and empathise, facilitate the development of respectful relationships across cultural boundaries. A key component in establishing understanding among people of different backgrounds is adaptability, or the readiness to modify one's communication style to fit in with cultural standards. Managing turn-taking and keeping the conversation flowing are also aspects of interaction management that contribute to keeping people engaged and respectful throughout a conversation.

3. *Psychological Adaptation*: Effective stress management skills allow people to remain focused and productive in foreign environments, while strategies to deal with frustrations assist in minimizing negative emotional reactions in difficult situations. The ability to connect with people and discover things people have in common can help to feel more comfortable in an unfamiliar setting. In addition, being open to new experiences and

embracing uncertainty may increase resilience and adaptability, making it easier to handle ambiguity.

4. *Cultural Awareness*: Understanding the fundamental social principles that regulate behavior within a culture supports individuals in successfully complying with societal expectations. Participation in cultural activities can be a powerful tool for understanding and respect when people are well-versed in the norms and practices that govern them. Embracing the unspoken rules of society allows for more peaceful and comfortable interactions. Better understanding of a culture's inner workings and social dynamics is made possible through research into its institutional frameworks, which in turn allows for more deliberate participation.

Furthermore, it can be seen that the fundamental purpose of culture is to facilitate existence by instructing individuals on how to adjust to their surroundings and maintain their communities. Culture has functioned as a conduit for transmitting knowledge, customs, and acquired lessons, preventing subsequent generations from beginning again (Samovar et al., 2016). At the core of this process is the utilisation of symbols, enabling humans to convey messages and retain shared knowledge. Symbols not only link individuals within an entire society but also facilitate comprehension across

diverse cultures (Samovar et al., 2016). In the absence of symbols, society would become stagnant, and societies could be put at risk by an ongoing occurrence of historical errors. Consequently, intercultural communication, supported by both common and distinct symbols, is vital for promoting understanding and cooperation in our progressively interconnected world.

In addition, this study will provide insight into the environment of identity negotiation of Muslim students with Hijab who pursue study in South Korea, underscoring the significance of intercultural communication ability in shaping the concept of identity negotiation. Such a situation involves three crucial elements of intercultural competency, particularly in relation to identity negotiation theory, which entails understanding cultural identity and acknowledging inequality (Littlejohn et al., 2016). These three essential components to reach intercultural communication competency in the realm of identity negotiation involve the following elements:

1. "Identity knowledge" refers to the capacity to comprehend and value various identities beyond an individual's own. In circumstances where cultural, religious, and social identity are important, it is necessary to assist in explaining how people change in intercultural communication settings.

2. "Mindfulness" promotes a flexible and accepting outlook, which aids in recognising and appreciating diverse identities, which in turn contributes in overcoming prejudice and improving communication skills. When interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, it is crucial to be open to changing their points of view, which is something that mindfulness stimulates.

3. "Negotiation skills" refers to how one important result of intercultural relationships is successful negotiation of identities, in which both sides feel understood and appreciated. This showcases how intercultural communication competency is the focus point of identity negotiation. The negotiation skills comprise listening attentively, empathizing with others, being courteous, reframing situations, and working together. Improving communication and establishing harmonious relationships among individuals from varied cultural backgrounds are ways that can be discovered.

1.5.3.2 Identity Negotiation Theory

The main theory that will be conducted for this research will be focusing on Identity Negotiation Theory (INT) developed by

Stella Ting Toomey. The primary concept of this theory of identity negotiation within the intercultural communication setting is the idea that each person must negotiate their own desired identity through their interactions with different cultures (Martin & Nakayama, 2017). This theory aligns with the level of interpersonal communication, highlighting the exchange of information and communication experiences among individuals through negotiation. In INT, the term negotiation itself refers to how people use communication in social interactions to either strengthen or defend their cultural or individual identities (Bennett, 2015). Thus, the significance of negotiation in compromising differences and fostering meaningful relationships among individuals is essential within this theory scope.

Stella Ting Toomey highlights that individuals manage the tension between personal and cultural identities by balancing self-perception with respect for others. In this theory, *value conten*t, or cultural values that dictate our priorities, and *salience*, or the strength of our identification with a group in a given situation, are the two components of identity negotiation (Littlejohn et al., 2016). Also, this process involves establishing intercultural competence through knowledge of identity, awareness, and negotiation skills to foster mutual understanding and respect in diverse cultural contexts,

ultimately aiming for functional biculturalism (Littlejohn et al., 2016).

Furthermore, in INT, Stella Ting Toomey declares that there are five main themes or elements about the identities that people manage to negotiate when interacting across cultures (Bennett, 2015). These involve:

1. *Balance between experiencing security and vulnerability*: In intercultural interactions, individuals frequently struggle with the tension between belief in their identity and fear of rejection or misinterpretation. This theme illustrates how individuals regulate their emotional reactions in order to protect their identity while adjusting to new cultural standards.

2. *Accepting or opposing*: When individuals from minority groups engage with a new culture, they may experience the compulsion to either conform for acceptance or preserve their unique identity, potentially resulting in feelings of being "different." This negotiation includes balancing the desire for belonging with the need of preserving individual and cultural distinction.

3. *Predictable or unpredictable*: Intercultural interactions can produce uncertainty, as individuals encounter circumstances necessitating adaptation to unfamiliar social cues or behaviours. The negotiation entails determining whether to stay true to established behavioral patterns (predictability) or to permit flexibility and spontaneity (unpredictability) in reactions to different cultural contexts.

4. *The needs for connection or independence*: It pertains to the conflict between the desire to create relationships and form connections within a new culture, and the need to preserve personal independence and autonomy. Individuals from minority groups may need to determine the level of their integration with others while maintaining independence over their identity and actions.

5. *Maintaining consistency in one's identity or allowing it to evolve over time*: As individuals encounter an entirely different cultural surroundings, they might have to make the decision to maintain their embedded identity or to adapt and transform it in response to emerging cultural dynamics. The negotiation entails achieving harmony between

preserving one's fundamental identity and permitting it to evolve in response to new occurrences.

In the context of this research, challenges are frequently encountered by individuals, specifically Muslim students who wear the hijab. They possess a visible identity and face complex issues in negotiating that identity within a majority circumstances. Certainly, this corresponds with the context described in Identity Negotiation Theory, which focusses on how minorities adjust their identities when they relocate or live in a new cultural setting (Bennett, 2015). In order to reconcile self-identity with cultural expectations, an identity negotiation process is essential to achieve mutual agreement between both parties.

Therefore, in order to achieve mutual comfort–which is the aim of the identity negotiation process–it is essential to understand self-identity, recognize cultural differences, and develop effective communication skills. The objective is to attain a state of comfort and efficacy in two cultures while maintaining one's identity, particularly for a Muslim students who wears the hijab and resides in a non-Muslim majority context within the academic sphere.

1.5.3.3 Cross-Cultural Adaptation

In social cultural life, when someone from one culture enters a different culture, a process of adaptation to the new culture is necessary. This process has complex aspects that help individuals

from different cultural backgrounds feel integrated with the society in their new culture. Young Yun Kim explains that cultural adaptation is a long-term process of adjustment that ultimately leads to feeling comfortable in a new environment (Martin & Nakayama, 2017). This is particularly relevant to the context of hijab-wearing Muslim students who adhere to Islamic culture when they enter a culture where the majority do not follow Muslim practices, or where Muslims are a small minority. Therefore, this concept relates to how individuals need to adapt to an unfamiliar new environment so they can develop a deeper attachment to the new culture while maintaining their distinct cultural identity.

In the Cross-Cultural Adaptation theory, Young Yun Kim emphasizes the dynamic process through communication, where individuals learn, reexamine cultural patterns, and adjust their ways of thinking, behaving, and acting when interacting with foreign cultures (Bennett, 2015). This process is relevant to the context of interpersonal communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. When facing an unfamiliar cultural environment, where one must adapt to a broader environment, input from the new cultural environment is processed into actions that trigger changes through a series of dynamic processes involving stress and adaptation dynamics, making it part of the evolutionary growth experience of humans (Littlejohn et al., 2016). In this theory,

communication becomes the primary means to understand the new culture and build stable interpersonal relationships within the new cultural environment through effective and competent cultural communication processes.

Furthermore, Cross-Cultural Adaptation encompasses the dynamics of stress, adaptation, and growth (Bennett, 2015). More specifically, this can be observed through the comprehensive process of Cross-Cultural Adaptation. The following explains the elements in the Cross-Cultural Adaptation process:

a. *Stress*: Stepping into a new culture can cause psychological discomfort or identity conflict for individuals. This is based on the conflict or mismatch between adopting the new culture's behaviours and ideas.

b. *Adaptation*: Adaptation acts as a stress reducer. It is based on how individuals actively develop new habits and responses to cope with cultural differences. Of course, this process is not always smooth because there is a repeated "back-and-forth" process where individuals learn from each process. Simply put, this concept involves a learning cycle: challenge → adjustment → new challenge.

c. *Growth*: Through adaptation and stress management, people's ability to handle cultural obstacles improves over time. They improve their ability to navigate various cultural contexts and develop greater mental flexibility. This leads to more internal complexity, adaptive capacity, and a better match between the individual and the environment.

Through the cultural adaptation process, individuals inevitably undergo personal changes as a result of adjusting to conditions in the new culture. In Cross-Cultural Adaptation theory, there are three fundamental elements that underlie intercultural transformation within the adaptation process: functional fitness, psychological health, and intercultural identity (Bennett, 2015). The following explains these elements:

a. *Functional Fitness*: Individuals who successfully adapt will feel more comfortable and effective in interacting with the new cultural environment. This is based on how individuals function well in the host environment, have better relationships, and feel more efficient in daily activities with the existing differences.

b. *Psychological Health*: This adaptation process contributes to the improvement of the individual's

psychological well-being. Individuals feel satisfaction and emotional balance and feel happier and more satisfied with their lives in the new environment.

    c. *Intercultural Identity*: Gradually, individual identities change to become more intercultural. Individuals begin to see themselves and others as unique individuals, not simply as members of a particular cultural group. They also develop a broader understanding of humanity that transcends cultural differences.

Through the lens of Cross-Cultural Adaptation theory, Muslim students who wear the hijab at a South Korean university face a unique adaptation journey. This is based on how their visible religious identity plays a major role. Their hijab serves not only as a religious commitment but also as a marker that distinguishes them in the largely homogenous Korean university environment. The stress-adaptation-growth dynamics in the context of Cross-Cultural Adaptation theory become relevant as these students navigate the intersection of maintaining their Islamic cultural practices and integrating into Korean academic life. There is a need to find a way to manage daily university life while maintaining their religious values, maintaining a mindset by balancing their Islamic identity

with the demands of Korean university culture, and cultivating an intercultural identity that bridges their Muslim identity with their experiences as students at a Korean university. This adaptation process demonstrates how Muslim students maintain their religious and cultural authenticity, as represented through their hijab, while developing meaningful relationships within the Korean university community, ultimately contributing to a more diverse and culturally rich academic environment.

1.5.3.4 Minority Identity Development

In social cultural life, people usually have their own identity. Particularly in terms of cultural conditions, community groupings are classified as minority or majority. Plus, those who come from a heterogeneous society before must enter a homogeneous society different from their former interconnected structure. Certainly, as a minority growing in the shadow of the dominant identity, one develops a sense and impression of inferiority. Undoubtedly, this can set off the corresponding communication process.

Ronald Ferguson highlights about how minority identity development is the process by which minority identities—less unique and inferior identities than majority identities—develop along their path inside a distinct society and rule the minority individuals (Martin & Nakayama, 2017). This relates to how a Muslim students who wear a hijab have the needs to adjust their

minority status in a non-majority Muslim environment such as South Korean university. In other terms, while members of minority racial groups such hijabi Muslims studying in South Korea are aware of their religious identity as it is freely displayed in the dominant society, South Koreans students who are not dominated by Muslim may not think much about their own religious identity even if they may develop a strong non-religious identity. Thus, conflicts including variations in viewpoint, attitude, and particularly religious identification set off complications and challenges in negotiating identity in the course of cultural communication.

Inside the identity development issue especially within minority development issues, there are four crucial stages within this process of the feeling minority (Martin & Nakayama, 2017). Those 4 stages in the minority development issue process include:

1. *Unexamined identity*: Individuals in the early phases have no interest in examining the whole range of identities in a broad context. Initially, as a minority, individuals accept the conditions and customs established by the dominating group, typically the majority group.

2. *Conformity*: During the second stage, minority members internalise the majority group's values and standards. During this stage, the drive to absorb

emerges. Individuals may also experience feelings of inferiority, which cause them to question their own existence.

3. *Resistance and separation*: The third stage marks the beginning of discrimination and exclusion from the majority group to the minority group. This has a negative impact on people who believe they are in the minority. Conflicts and other bad events that affect a minority person begin to occur during this time, which is undoubtedly destructive.

4. *Integration*: In the end, the discovered identity is the best result of this identity formation process. Individuals begin to accept their individual identities while yet not viewing the majority identity unfavorably. Individuals are aware of the unpleasant emotions they experience, such as racism, but they strive to perceive the situation in a more positive light. This final step demonstrates how individuals gain confidence in their identities and begin to accept things.

1.5.3.5 Nonverbal Communication (Visible Identity)

In the context of negotiating the identification of a Muslim woman who wears a veil, there are several key issues that must be

addressed, particularly nonverbal communication, which includes a Muslim's visible identity. Nonverbal communication constitutes an integrated system wherein the nonverbal messages generated by individuals are interpreted as several messages conveyed simultaneously (Samovar et al., 2016). In other words, nonverbal communication, of course, conveys a sign or message through suggested items. In this situation, the context indicated in a Muslim woman is the hijab, which serves as a type of visual identification that transmits a message nonverbally. Therefore, understanding the relationship between culture and nonverbal behavior will enhance individuals' engagement in intercultural conversations.

Moreover, clothing serves as a significant kind of nonverbal communication within a culture, conveying messages that are context-dependent. Clothing conveys information about one's identity to others, showcasing how it is a visible identity that is attached to someone. The contentious character of attire is most apparent in the diverse scarves, veils, and robes worn by Muslim women, for whom clothing transcends mere bodily coverage and embodies significant religious connotations (Samovar et al., 2016). This pertains to a facet of nonverbal communication associated with a Muslim. This also demonstrates that the hijab holds specific significance for a Muslim woman. The hijab, as a visible marker of

identity, might influence an individual's acceptance of perspectives from those lacking a similar visible identification.

1.5.3.6 Religious Identity

Individuals' cultural identities encompass not only race and ethnicity, but also religious identification, which describes a person's identity. Religion, in any manifestation, serves as a means for individuals to comprehend the cosmos, natural occurrences, aspirational goals, and coexistence with others (Samovar et al., 2016). However, in the context of identity, religion can be one of the factors contributing to intercultural conflict. The concept of religious identity refers to how an individual or group feels attached or belongs to a religious community (Martin & Nakayama, 2017). In this study, the focus will be on someone who identifies as Muslim and then enters a culture with a majority non-Muslim identity. Thus, a comprehensive communication approach is required to acclimatize to a complicated and unfamiliar environment.

1.6 Research Assumptions

It is assumed that Muslim students who wear the hijab in South Korea show the ability or inability to negotiate their identity and adapt to the dominant culture in the country. In this context, the process of identity negotiation occurs intensely in intercultural interactions. This reflects how Muslim students who wear the hijab continuously negotiate and balance

cultural identity and the demands of social norms that apply in South Korean academic culture, especially in an effort to maintain religious identity while meeting social expectations in a new environment.

1.7 Concept Operationalization

Identity negotiation emerges when an individual finds themselves in an environment characterized by a contrasting identity concerns to their own. It also pertains to the positioning of individuals with minority identities within a spectrum where they are subordinated by a more powerful and dominant majority group. Adapting self-identity to align with the surrounding environment requires a series of strategic negotiations to fulfil the expectations imposed by the majority audience.

Therefore, this study undermines the ways in which Muslim students who wear the hijab showcase their visible religious identity and negotiate cultural integration within a non-Muslim majority context, specifically regarding their experience of international study circumstances in educational or academic conditions. This study employs intercultural communication competence, identity negotiation theory, minority identity development, nonverbal communication, and religious identity to examine the experiences of veiled women in South Korea, where their identity diverges from what constitutes the dominant society and is occasionally not fully accepted due to visible distinctions.

Thus, in order to comprehend the negotiation of identity and the cultural adaptation strategies of Muslim students with hijab, various concept elements will be examined, including:

1. Understanding the perspectives of hijabi students on their experiences with the hijab within South Korean universities, focussing on their beliefs, reasons for wearing it, and its importance in both social and academic environments.

2. Understanding the ways in which hijabi students navigate their personal, cultural, and religious identities alongside academic demands and societal expectations within the context of South Korean universities.

3. Understanding the challenges and opportunities that contribute to hijabi students' negotiation of identity and cultural adaptation, such as peer support, institutional policies, and the obstacles they encounter.

4. Understanding the ways in which hijabi students adjustments through cultural differences in both academic and social settings, as well as how they balance their identities within a complicated environment where they serve as a visible minority in a majority surroundings.

5. Understanding how hijabi students manage their religious, cultural, and academic identities and their experiences with

visible religious symbols like the hijab at universities in South Korea.

6. Understanding the ways in which hijabi students navigate South Korean cultural norms while maintaining their religious identity, and examining the impression of external perceptions on their integration into academic and social environments.

1.8 Research Method

1.8.1 Research Type and Design

In order to execute this research, a qualitative method is used. Qualitative research is interpretive in nature, emphasizing the researchers' continuous and immersive interactions with participants where it presents strategic, ethical, and personal considerations within the qualitative research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The method aligns with this research to describe and explore within the experience of how Muslim students with hijab who study in South Korea negotiate their visible identity and adapt within different cultural circumstances. Certainly, by utilizing qualitative methods, it is crucial to obtain a deeper understanding of the perspective of a Muslim hijabi with visible identification in order to capture the complexities of their communication experiences in negotiating cultural and religious dynamics in a non-Muslim majority setting.

In order to dive deeper within the research subjects' complex experience, this study will utilize interpretive phenomenology as its research design approach. The interpretive phenomenology approach accepts that meaning emerges as a result of how people construct and shape meaning based on their unique experiences and the circumstances in which they live, with reality perceived through the lens of individual interpretation and interaction with the world around them (Lim, 2024). In other words, interpretive phenomenology goes beyond simply describing experiences by attempting to analyze them and disclose the deepest meaning hidden in a social occurrence that happens.

Furthermore, this study used interpretative phenomenology to examine the experiences of Muslim students who wear the hijab in South Korea, as these experiences align closely with the interpretive phenomenology approach. In interpretive phenomenology, the researcher's prior knowledge and experience are seen as crucial for a comprehensive understanding and articulation of the meanings embedded in individuals' lived experiences (Lim, 2024). Therefore, significant aspects of the research subject's experience and the researcher's prior knowledge relevant to this issue are deserving further investigation. The principal strength of this research lies in its dedication to comprehending the complex nature of human experience.

1.8.2 Type and Source of Data

There will be two different sources of data that are utilized throughout the course of this research. Initially, this research will make use of primary data. "Primary data" refers to the initial data that was collected at the beginning of the study for the purpose of conducting the research (Hox & Boeije, 2005). The structured interview with Muslim students with hijab who are presently or have previously been studying in South Korea will serve as the primary source of information for this data analysis. The interview will be directed by the needs of the researcher seeking to gather information.

Moreover, this study also makes use of secondary sources to utilize the research, which play essential roles in the process. Secondary data is information that was obtained for specific research but can be applied to other studies (Hox & Boeije, 2005). This type of data is referred to as secondary in nature. In order to supplement the primary data that was utilized for this study, the secondary data that will be used for this research will be derived from journals, literature reviews, and current statistical data.

1.8.3 Data Collection Tools

In conducting data collection, this research will use in-depth interviews to collect information from informants. In qualitative interviews, the researcher performs in-person interviews with participants, telephone interviews, or facilitates focus group

discussions including the required in each group (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, the researcher will conduct systematic interviews with broad and general questions through 1:1 calls using virtual conferences online to connect with research subjects. This will support the researcher's flexibility in collecting data. The responses of informants that have been collected through interviews will be analyzed to understand the process and experiences of Muslim students wear the hijab studying in South Korea in negotiating their identities and adapting to different cultural settings.

1.8.4 Research Subject

The research subjects will specifically include Muslim women who wear the hijab who are currently studying or have studied in South Korea as a student, whether through student exchange programs, summer or winter courses, or as permanent students. Nevertheless, the research subjects must have encountered situations where their identity as women wearing the hijab provokes questions or even rejection, necessitating a process of identity negotiation to adapt and gain acceptance in a cultural context distinct from their own.

1.8.5 Data Technique Analysis

In order to conduct interpretive phenomenology research through systematic interviews, a comprehensive data analysis

technique is needed to comprehend how Muslim students with hijab in South Korea negotiate their identity and adapt within the cultural spectrum of a different atmosphere. Therefore, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research method used to explore and understand how individuals make sense of their lived experiences in the context of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Nizza, 2021). By carefully examining participants' experiences from their own points of view, IPA seeks to gather rich, in-depth descriptions that represent the feelings, ideas, and meanings individuals attach to these experiences. Since participants are regarded as subject matter experts, the interviewees or informants offer invaluable information into their experiences and opinions on a certain subject. By concentrating on the actions, thoughts, and emotions of participants, IPA seeks to uncover the breadth of their comprehension and the ways in which individuals perceive their experienced reality.

In addition, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) contains four key steps in the data analysis process, starting with the exploring or familiarizing the collected data and ending by generating themes (Smith & Nizza, 2021). This crucial steps of the data analysis include:

1. **Data familiarization**: In familiarizing themselves with the data, researchers need to read the entire transcript of

the data extracted through recording while understanding the essence and important points in the data that has been collected. In every word given by the informant, researchers need to make annotations that are associated with the researcher's interpretation. Researchers need to not change the meaning conveyed by the informant, reflect on the results of the transcript, and not be quick to draw conclusions. staying with the participant's words, reflecting on them, and trying not to jump to conclusions

2. **Formulating experiential statements**: From the annotation results, researchers need to capture briefly what has been learned from the meaning of the experience experienced by participants through the text that has been presented. Researchers need to take the essence of what seems important in the annotation notes of the transcript and develop it into an experiential statements.

3. **Connecting the dots by clustering or coding the experiential statements**: By combining related concepts, summarizing, and determining a distinct structure, the third stage of analysis focusses on organizing and improving experience statements. Highlighting the important elements of the participant's

experience and how they interpret it is the goal of this approach.

4. **Generating themes**: Following the completion of the coding or clustering process, the results must be transformed into a table of personal experiencing themes, with identifying information provided for each of the experiential statements that are part of each topic and each cluster designated as a personal experiential theme.

1.9 Goodness Criteria

In terms of the goodness quality or criteria for this research, several criteria are typically employed to guarantee the quality of this research:

1. This research encompasses criteria emphasizing *credibility*, highlighting significant alignment among the theoretical framework, research topic, data collection methods, and analysis. This study can be deemed trustworthy due to its substantial reliability.

2. This research demonstrates the idea of *dependability*, which can be reproduced under analogous settings, indicating the reliability of this study. This research offers a defined methodology that might serve as a reference for future researchers to replicate the procedural steps in investigating the same topic.

3. This research includes *confirmability* criteria that demonstrate the correlation between data and research findings. This is, of course, substantiated by a thorough description that elucidates the relationship between concepts and outcomes.

4. The findings of this research pertain to the *transferability* criteria, indicating that the results can be used to alternative research agendas or contexts for more investigation.

5. Lastly, this study encompasses the criteria of *historical situatedness*, emphasizing the historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political settings pertinent to the subject under investigation. This pertains to the historical setting of South Korea about the notion of the hijab as a symbol of oppression. This study examines the context of communication within intercultural communication from a socio-cultural perspective. This paper examines the relevance of the student system in South Korea on the economic and political relations between nations. By acknowledging this historical context, the study will be more pertinent to contemporary circumstances, specifically how Muslim society interacts with a non-Muslim majority culture, thereby presenting a broader and more intricate depiction of the social issues concerning negotiation and adaptation within diverse environments due to the inherent socio-cultural framework.