CHAPTER 2

THE PHENOMENON OF WEARING HIJAB IN SOUTH

KOREAN ACADEMIC SETTINGS

The second chapter will primarily demonstrate the identity negotiation and cultural adaptation of Muslim students wearing hijab in South Korea by detailing significant objects related to the central issue of this research, accompanied by further analysis of the observed phenomenon. Additionally, it will provide a comprehensive examination of the significance of hijab as a visible identity and its implications within the global academic context, particularly in a non-Muslim majority country such as South Korea.

2.1 Intercultural Interpretation of The Hijab

The notion of hijab extends beyond the mere physical act of concealing the body. It is an all-encompassing system or connected representation of Islamic culture and principles. Historically, the term indicated both a "veil" representing the status of Muhammad's wives and a "curtain" employed for seclusion and separation, embodying dignity and respect (Ahmed & Ali, 2021). The hijab's complex character shows itself in many ways across cultural contexts, reflecting both its religious underpinnings and its function as a symbol of Muslim identity. From its historical roots in Islamic scripture to its current interpretations, the hijab's use remains complex as it combines

with specific cultural norms and societal expectations while symbolizing the beliefs and customs of its wearers (Slininger, 2014). An essential framework for comprehending how Muslim women navigate their religious identities in various social contexts is provided by the intricate relationship between religious obligation and cultural adaptation.

From the point of view of intercultural communication, the hijab can be examined as a mode of nonverbal communication, serving as a medium that expresses the wearer's identity, values, and beliefs to their surroundings. Clothing choices, as a component of physical appearance within nonverbal communication, convey aspects of an individual's personality and association with a specific social group, while also reflecting religious affiliation and the expression of religious identity (Martin & Nakayama, 2017). This is illustrated by women who wear the hijab, which serves as a symbol of identification for Muslim society and also the Islamic values attached within the community. The hijab, much to any other garment, functions as a medium through which values and beliefs are engraved, reflecting scripture teachings that demonstrate the significance of respect and devotion (Samovar et al., 2016). In this perspective, the hijab surpasses simple fabric. It signifies one's dignity and trust that genuine honor is attained only when each robe worn illustrates moral purity and every clothing reflects faith.

Furthermore, within the lenses of Islamic historical culture, it can be understood that the hijab symbolize as a woman's moral dignity, where the

dignity of women is linked to the garments they choose, revealing the identity and cultural values. The hijab for women, as emphasized in Islamic teachings, is not intended to oppress or isolate women from the community; instead, it acts as a symbol of modesty and a safeguard against harm, promoting their safety and well-being within the social environment (Slininger, 2014). This viewpoint highlights the significant value representation that shaping the idea of woman who wears the hijab, demonstrating the hijab's crucial role in conveying an intercultural message inherent in the attire of a Muslim woman. Thus, the dynamic intercultural meanings surrounding the hijab demonstrates how its significance is determined by cultural viewpoints and personal choices, showcasing the complicated manner of identity negotiation within diverse settings.

Figure 2.1.1 Wolha Jeongin painting by Yunbok Shin that illustrates a

woman wearing *seugaechima* in Chosun Dynasty

(Source: Cho, 2017)

Nonetheless, given that culture is a multifaceted and varied concept across different societies, the interpretations surrounding the hijab can indeed shift when we consider it within another cultural framework, particularly in South Korea. During the Chosun Dynasty, Confucian-influenced South Korean society mandated women to wear *nae-oe seugae* (headdresses similar to hijabs that covered their heads and upper bodies illustrated by Figure 2.1.1), restricting them from showing their faces to men in public, a practice reflecting the ruling class's use of dress codes to control women's rights and social activities in pursuit of an ideal Confucian society (Cho, 2017). Certainly, this 'head covering' differs significantly from the use of hijab within Islamic values that lean towards the positive aspects of life, particularly in how Muslim women embrace hijab as a symbol of identity and a means of protecting oneself. Throughout the history of the Chosun dynasty, Koreans interpret the use of hijab or head coverings as a continuation of patriarchy during the Confucian era, viewing the choice to wear hijab as a reflection of dismissive tolerance for inequality (Kim & Kang, 2022). The conflict between beliefs tied to cultural identity lead to a situation where a Muslim individual wearing a hijab must develop their own negotiation strategy in order to survive life in South Korea.

In the modern era, the significance and understanding of the hijab naturally evolve in accordance with the passage of time. From a cultural standpoint, it is a vibrant aspect that can evolve alongside the progress of civilisation. In contemporary cultures, instead of limiting a woman's choice,

the hijab signifies a form of covering for a woman's body, specifically emphasising the hair, and is shaped by familial, cultural, religious, personal, or political factors (Sheth, 2022). This indicates that the significance and cultural understanding of the hijab as a representation of religious identity have evolved in diverse manners within social and cultural contexts. Some individuals continue to view the hijab as a form of oppression; however, within contemporary Islam, there has been a movement towards a more simplified expression of it as well. The diverse interpretations and contrasting cultural foundations surrounding the hijab offer a fascinating perspective when viewed through various cultural landscapes. The complicated dynamics of intercultural communication foster a distinctive approach to identity negotiation, particularly for individual Muslim women who wear the hijab. This practice serves as a reflection of their religious identity, allowing them to navigate the balance between their cultural self-identity and the broader multicultural society.

2.2 Hijab as a Visible Identity Across Cultures

Through the global perspective in the diverse cultural and social spheres, the hijab as a visible symbol of Islamic identity certainly has a significant point of view. It is intrinsically linked to the identity of the Islamic faith. The hijab serves as a mode of expression that conveys one's identity; it goes beyond mere fabric to embody a "integrated meaning," where this symbolizes a commitment to Islamic teachings, reinforcing the Islamic and

ethnic identity of Muslim women while also representing a rejection of Western culture (Cho, 2017). Thus, the hijab effectively communicates identity and acts as a profound visual medium for displaying religious beliefs. Consequently, due to the diverse interpretations associated with the hijab as a visible identity, it serves as a point of inquiry for the general public within the worldwide community. Women who wear the hijab, representing their Muslim identity, experience significant racialization and discrimination, where this often leads to racism that deepens their feelings of otherness and alienation within a global society (Karaman & Christian, 2020). The emergence of stigmatization, discrimination, and stereotypes concerning the hijab on the global stage has prompted many individuals to express contentious viewpoints over its use, which is deemed problematic because to the diverse interpretations associated with the clothing.

Figure 2.2.1 September 11, 2001 attack from Islamic extremists in USA

which marks as the rise of Islamophobia in the world

(Source: Google.com)

In fact, the hijab is inherently linked to the symbolism of the Islamic religion. However, across the culture within the global space, society often associates the hijab with stigmatization tied to Islamophobia. The 9/11 attack from Islamic extremists in the United States of America, as portrayed by Figure 2.2.1, marked a significant rise in Islamophobia, leading to women wearing the hijab being viewed as taboo, questionable, and often associated with negative and coercive connotations, where this shift resulted in intensified hysteria and harmful perceptions among the non-Muslim majority group (Slininger, 2014). This shows that the global lens chooses to follow a negative path in forming perspectives regarding women who wear the hijab. In a westernized environment, the hijab is not defined or shaped by fashion trends or liberal cultural assumptions; rather, it is seen as contradicting modern ideas of freedom or aesthetics that prevail in secular societies (Sheth, 2022). They view the hijab as a 'threat,' reflecting their fears and phobias regarding the Islamic religion and its contrast to the ideology of liberalism, which tends to priorities freedom.

Besides Western contexts, East Asian nations such as South Korea demonstrate distinctive examples of hijab stigmatization that result from a complex interaction of cultural, social, and historical influences. Shaped by global media and Western viewpoints, numerous Koreans misconstrue Islam with fanaticism, violence, and primitiveness, frequently viewing the Muslim hijab as a representation of gender subjugation and occasionally associating it with terrorism, despite typically exhibiting minimal concern

for it in their daily lives (Eum, 2017). Islamophobia affects these beliefs, while South Korea's distinct cultural context further complicates the stigmatization of women who wear hijab. This issue is fundamentally entrenched in Korea's predominantly homogeneous society, where the convergence of Confucian principles, contemporary beauty ideals, and restricted exposure to Islamic customs influences popular perceptions of the hijab. Despite Korea's historical record of women's head coverings as a necessity for modesty during the Chosun Dynasty, this tradition started disappearing from the late 19th to early 20th century due to the association of the practice with gender inequity (Cho, 2017). This also indirectly established a distinct perspective among Koreans towards the hijab, which symbolizes Muslim identity. Compelling Koreans to categorize it as a primitive phenomenon that is inapplicable to contemporary circumstances.

Despite the hijab being a prominent symbol of Muslim identity across various cultures, the identity obstacles encountered by hijabi women show both aspects of sameness and differences in visible identity experience across these cultural contexts. Regarding identity negotiation, individuals often experience acceptance when their identity is regarded positively by groups with sameness within their beliefs, and feel marginalized when their identity is dismissed by groups that are hostile or different (Bennett, 2015). This landscape of sameness may also pertain to the experiences of hijabi women across cultures, who encounter same forms of racialization, stereotyping, and exclusion in diverse non-Muslim majority nations. The

hijab is frequently perceived as a foreign or 'other' identity, influenced by existing socio-political narratives and widespread Islamophobia. In numerous Western nations, the hijab is linked to oppression, religious fundamentalism, or extremism, hence reinforcing oversimplified and misleading portrayals of Muslim identity (Karaman & Christian, 2020). The presence of similarities in religious identity and hijab as a conspicuous religious symbol generate a same perception, which is often associated with a negative viewpoint from external view points across cultures towards the Muslim women who wear hijab.

However, regional differences significantly shape the living experiences of women with a visible hijab identity, reflecting the contextual variations among cultures. The experiences of women who wear the hijab in Western countries will differ from those in East Asian or Southeast Asian countries, where there is a higher population of Muslims. In France, the hijab is banned in schools as a result of the nation's secularism policy (Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2023). In South Korea, despite the absence of legal restrictions on the hijab, women who wear it frequently encounter social marginalization due to the existing homogeneous societal standards and a limited comprehension of Islam (Eum, 2017). In Muslim majority country like Indonesia or Malaysia, with the domination of Muslim citizens, it will be much more easier for hijabis to adjust well within the environment. Subsequently, various differences can be identified in the identity experiences of women who wear the hijab. This variance demonstrates that

the negotiation of hijab identity is not a singular experience but is significantly shaped by global attitudes and local socio-cultural factors.

Undoubtedly, the negative perceptions associated with a global perspective constrict the expressive freedom of a hijab-wearing Muslim women who poses no threat in her surroundings. The hijab has been generalized and negatively labelled, restricting the freedom for expression for women who wear it and wish to maintain their Islamic identity as Muslims. The complicated process of negotiating a compromise about one's identity poses a considerable challenge, particularly when a hijab-wearing Muslim moves through a culture that has no relation to her worth as a hijab-wearing Muslim.

2.3 Hijab Regulations in Educational Realm

The use of the hijab in educational settings has emerged as a widely debated topic around the world, especially in countries where Muslims are not the majority. This issue touches on larger discussions regarding religious expression, secularism, and institutional regulations. Also, the increase in Islamophobia has resulted in a negative perception of religious identity markers such as the hijab, prompting formal regulations regarding their use in educational environments. Due to this complex dynamics which generate misunderstanding, Muslim women who experienced discrimination were more likely have the urgency to hide their Muslim identity in a non-Muslims environment to lessen hate crimes, prejudices,

and social exclusion (Steele et al., 2023). Thus, numerous countries with non-Muslim majorities have implemented limitations on the hijab, illustrating societal perspectives that frequently view religious clothing as unsuitable for secular educational settings. The policies pose considerable difficulties for Muslim students who wear the hijab, as they perform through academic environments and face institutional obstacles that could compromise their right to religious expression and their feeling of belonging.

For instance, France is renowned for its prohibition of hijab at educational institutions, imposing limits on students' use of the religious identity. The 2004 Law on *Laïcité*, which prohibits the visible display of religious symbols in public schools, highlights the tension between France's secularism and the integration of religious diversity, particularly Islam, where the law has been criticized for limiting religious freedom and disproportionately affecting Muslim communities, particularly women who wear the hijab (Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2023). This is, undoubtedly, a direct assault on the freedom of hijab-wearing women to manifest their religious identity. Although the 2004 regulation was intended to prohibit any "conspicuous" religious symbols, including Christian crosses, it has predominantly targeted Islam, fueling Islamophobia over the last two decades, with a particular emphasis on the physical hijab attributes of Muslim women and girls (Diallo, 2024). Undoubtedly, this goes against France's main ideology, which acknowledges that it supports social and democratic ideas.

In contrast to East Asian nations like South Korea, which identifies itself as a democratic state aligned with Western ideals, there are indeed distinct rules in place. In Korea, the constitution mandates that religious freedom is guaranteed to all people and that religious discrimination or compulsion should not exist in social, political, economic, or cultural spheres (U.S. Department of State, 2023). This also includes the fact that there is no restriction on the use of religious attributes by the South Korean government to express one's identity. Nonetheless, regulations may not always align with the actual circumstances. Some universities in South Korea, like Yonsei University, demand that students to complete a Christianity class and attend two years of chapel, which can pose challenges for Muslim students enrolled in there (Joo, 2022). Undoubtedly, for a hijabi woman whose Muslim identity is evident in her appearance, this presents a challenge that must be addressed. Also, the challenges extend beyond violating campus regulations. Students also face difficulties in seeking part-time jobs or special practical work due to the wearing of hijab, where a Muslim student at Kyung Hee University was requested to remove her hijab in order to participate in practical work at the location (Ji-Hyo, 2023). Undoubtedly, this stands in opposition to the democratic principles established in the South Korean constitution.

In practice, it is evident that there is an important opposite relationship to the actual conditions in South Korea, which is certainly relevant to the character of its people. Certainly, despite the establishment of regulations,

if the local community lacks a character that fosters respect for others, challenges will undoubtedly arise. In Korea, where ethnic homogeneity and nationalism are highly regarded, the global media's depiction of Muslim women perpetuates stereotypes linking the hijab to gender oppression, segregation, and even terrorism (Eum, 2017). This portrayal renders visible differences, such as wearing the hijab, not only unwelcome but also sometimes viewed as a challenge to social norms. Indeed, this presents a challenge for Muslim hijabi students in South Korea. The use of hijab and the attributes associated with the Islamic religion remain largely taboo within South Korean academic circles. As a result, individuals must engage in a complex process of identity negotiation to adapt to an environment that is often homogeneous and individualistic.

2.4 Intercultural Conflict for Hijabis in South Korean Academia

In a largely non-Muslim academic setting, the intercultural dynamics of Muslim women wearing the hijab reveal a complicated network of cross-cultural relationships and difficulties. In a cross-cultural settings, cultural value systems shape normative behaviour, and individuals often judge others based on their own cultural criteria, leading to misunderstandings, confusion, and even conflict in intercultural interactions (Samovar et al., 2016). Misunderstandings regarding the hijab frequently emerge through different types of stereotyping, microaggressions, and biases that Muslim students encounter in their daily academic experiences. The challenges

faced may vary from complex enquiries regarding their decision to wear the hijab to more obvious instances of discrimination affecting their educational journey. Especially, in an international settings dominated by non-Muslim majority, students face racialised exclusion at the intersection of nationality, culture, and geography, and religious political expression from hijab further isolates them in class, demonstrating how cross-cultural misunderstandings in academic settings can reinforce social barriers and a sense of not belonging (Karaman & Christian, 2020). This poses a distinct intercultural challenge for Muslim students wearing hijab as they overcome the complexities of their Muslim identity, which is connected with their visible appearance, while adapting to an entirely new cultural environment in a foreign academic setting.

Consequently, various characteristics are related to the potential for conflict or cultural clashes regarding the matter of women wearing the hijab within the South Korean academic setting. A cultural clash arises when individuals impose their own cultural standards on others, whose differing values can result in conflicts between the beliefs of each group (Samovar et al., 2016). In general, characteristics of intercultural conflict include ambiguity, language issues, and conflicting conflict styles (Martin & Nakayama, 2017). Thus, the intercultural conflict revolved around South Korean academia mainly characterized by cultural clashes triggered by social homogeneity, a limited understanding of hijab culture within the Muslim community, and the established cultural barriers present in the

academic environment which indicates mostly on conflicting conflict style of intercultural clashes. The characteristics of potential causes of the conflict for Muslim hijabi students can be described as follows:

1. *Social homogeneity*: Korean perceptions of Islam are shaped by Western orientalist discourse and ethno-nationalism, which promote a homogenous sense of 'Koreanness' that positions Muslims as the 'other' which often associating them with religious fanaticism, backwardness, and gender oppression, particularly through the hijab (Eum, 2017). This emphasis on social homogeneity reflects deeply ingrained Korean cultural values and can lead to significant cultural clashes, as Muslims, especially those with visible religious identities like hijabi women, are perceived as 'foreign.' In the academic sphere, where South Korean institutions are predominantly homogeneous, hijabi women may face social isolation due to their visibly distinct appearance, reinforcing their position as outsiders. This is also based on how South Korean students' perceptions of Islam encompass analogous errors, prejudices, and confusion, mirroring Orientalist notions that characterize the West as logical, democratic, and progressive, in contrast to the East, which is deemed irrational, undemocratic, and backward (Kim & Kang, 2022).

2. *Lack of awareness and knowledge*: The approach to multiculturalism in Korean society often seems superficial, with national consciousness remaining deeply embedded in ethno-

nationalist discourse. Although the government advocates for multicultural policies, societal attitudes have not progressed similarly, resulting in an absence of social awareness about minority groups, such as Muslims and hijabi women (Eum, 2017). This restricted familiarity and understanding lead to a certain closed-mindedness regarding foreigners who markedly diverge from the Korean general population, especially individuals with distinct religious identities such as hijabi women. As a result, many Koreans may have prejudices or misunderstandings about Muslim women who wear the hijab. When viewed in the environment related to studying in South Korea, of course, the indicator of lack of awareness regarding Muslims and women who wear the hijab can cause its own conflict in the student realm which will later hinder academic activities. This cultural gap reinforces discriminatory attitudes, creating obstacles for women who wear the hijab to fully integrate into Korean society and also the South Korean academic environment.

3. *Stereotypes, stigmatization, and prejudice*: Being a different figure with the label of "other" certainly makes Muslim women who wear the hijab isolated with negative stereotypes, stigma, and also prejudice that arises from the Korean people's point of view. Specifically, Korean students' perceptions of Islam and Muslims are influenced by their cultural backgrounds and prior education, often

leading to negative views that associate Islam with violence and characterize Muslims as a terrorist group (Kim & Kang, 2022). The presence of generalizations such as this highlights the underlying challenges faced by Muslim women who choose to wear the hijab. The presence of negative stereotypes associated with individuals is undoubtedly harmful, as people often recall information that reinforces these stereotypes while failing to remember information that challenges them (Martin & Nakayama, 2017). For a Muslim woman who wears the hijab and has been labelled in this manner by Koreans, it is quite challenging to escape the established perception. This situation creates a conflict for women who wear the hijab as they overcome their identity in public, serving as the foundation for the ensuing conflict.

4. *Conflicting cultural norms*: In South Korean academia, individuals have to conform to specific sociocultural norms to navigate the unique circumstances present in South Korea. Examples of norms include hierarchical culture, drinking culture, and food culture (Moon, 2016). This can certainly be a source of conflict for a Muslim woman who wears the hijab. The presence of various sociocultural norms leads to conflicting cultural expectations for Muslim women wearing the hijab while studying in South Korea, where they are anticipated to uphold the norms that have been ingrained in them. The presence of these cultural barriers presents a

challenge of inner and cultural conflict, prompting a woman who wears the hijab to question her need for participation.

The intricate relationship between religious identity and the contrasting South Korean academic setting necessitates continuous identity negotiation and adaptation strategies for Muslim women who wear the hijab. This negotiation presents itself in diverse ways across different sociocultural dynamics within academic settings primarily influenced by non-Muslims. This environment, as a whole, does not reflect the shared values of Muslim students who wear hijab. Particularly in situations that involve identity negotiation for a Muslim within an academic setting that is largely non-Muslim, like social integration on campus or adapting to campus policies (Mir, 2014). This may also encompass the ways in which a Muslim woman wearing the hijab navigates her identity while engaging in South Korean academic collaboration with peers of the opposite sex, interacting with lecturers or supervisors, or even communicating with campus staff and other academicians in South Korea.

The creation of these conflicting intercultural barriers as a student in South Korean academia is particularly noticeable in informal academic settings, such as study groups, campus events, and extracurricular activities. This is because these are the settings in which cultural differences in social standards and religious practices are more readily apparent. It is possible that Muslim students will be mistakenly excluded from opportunities for crucial networking and community participation if social events are

scheduled at times that may conflict with Islamic dietary regulations or prayer hours (Moon, 2016). Because of a lack of understanding of the significance of the hijab, there is a possibility that Muslim students would be reluctant to connect with them, which will result in the establishment of unseen obstacles that will have an effect on their academic and social experiences. Sociocultural challenges, whether purposeful or unintentionally done, could adversely affect Muslim students' complete engagement in academic and social spheres, eventually affecting their sense of belonging and overall university experience.

2.5 The Use of Hijab in South Korean Academic Context

The Muslim population in South Korea constitutes a modest minority, with current projections indicating that less than 1% of the entire population identifies as Muslim. Approximately 120,000 Muslims, mostly from Uzbekistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Pakistan, make up the Muslim population in Korea, according to the Korea Muslim Federation. Another 30,000 are foreign students and professionals (U.S. Department of State, 2023). This demonstrates how Muslims and Muslim students are both extremely rare in South Korea due to their small demographic. Thus, the minority position substantially impacts the everyday lives of Muslim students at Korean educational institutions, where Islamic customs and practices are frequently distinct to the majority community. The distinction in religious cultural identity is particularly underlined when a Muslim

student wears a hijab, as this physical marker highlights their identity. For Muslim students who wears the hijab, the challenge of being a visible minority due to religious identification significantly complicates the difficulties experienced by Muslim students wearing hijabs in adapting to Korean academic environments.

In South Korean educational environments, Muslim students wearing the hijab encounter distinct challenges in balancing their dual identities, particularly in light of the country's relatively homogenous cultural environment and limited familiarity with Islamic practices. The challenges encountered by Muslim students who wear the hijab in non-Muslim academic settings arise from its visibility as a symbol of religious and political identity, placing them in opposition to predominant non-Muslim norms, where wearing the hijab serves as both a reaction to and a strategy for dealing with the explicit and implicit discrimination they face (Karaman & Christian, 2022). The convergence of religious and academic identities is particularly evident in Korean academic circles, where Confucian values shape the academic culture and influence perspectives on women who wear the hijab. Many South Korean students perceive the hijab as a symbol of outdated gender inequality, associating it with traditional cultural practices where this perspective poses a challenge to the adaptation of Islamic customs within a modern, gender-equal society (Kim & Kang, 2022). Thus, women who wear the hijab face a challenging situation as they navigate

their identities through this symbol, attempting to blend into an academic environment that often perceives them as a minority.

Additionally, the presence of Muslim students wearing the hijab in South Korean universities introduces distinct challenges influenced by contrasting local cultural beliefs. Muslim hijabi students follow cultural beliefs that are fundamentally grounded in Islamic values and religious teachings. In South Korea, students often adhere to cultural values shaped by Confucianism alongside a largely secular perspective. This essential distinction establishes a clear cultural divide between the two groups with contrasting cultural values. Consequently, these differing values are evident in various important aspects, such as:

1. *Contrasting clothing norms*: For Muslim women who wear the hijab, clothing plays a crucial role in reflecting Islamic values and teachings. In the culture of Muslim women who wear the hijab, it functions as both a religious mandate and a symbol of identity, serving as a perpetual reminder of their affiliation with Islam and God, while also fostering harmony through a collective experience that goes beyond various interconnected differences (Karaman & Christian, 2022). Besides, South Korean universities do not have specific attire requirements, reflecting the country's liberal ideology and lack of strict regulations regarding clothing. Nonetheless, although South Korea is fundamentally a democratic nation, its society frequently exhibits a more narrow-minded perspective on

differences, leading to an implicit contradiction in its democratic principles (Eum, 2017). On campus, students often wear casual clothing, often featuring short and revealing outfits that are generally embraced. This creates a contrasting value in dress norms that may cause hijab-wearing students to be seen as "different" or even as an anomaly among their peers.

2. *Social interaction at campus*: Muslim students who wear hijab follow Islamic cultural values, and as a result, certain social restrictions are naturally associated with their religious identity. In Islamic practice, hijabi women maintain specific boundaries in their interactions, particularly concerning physical contact with individuals of the opposite gender (Slininger, 2014). In social settings, it is essential to maintain appropriate boundaries, which stands in contrast to South Korean culture, where interactions between genders are predominantly unrestricted. In South Korean universities, male and female students often participate in academic and social activities together, without any distinction. In South Korean universities, male and female students frequently engage in academic and social activities together without distinction. However, Korean students often socialize mainly with fellow Koreans and exhibit limited interest in intercultural interaction, which can pose additional challenges for hijab-wearing Muslim students seeking integration (Moon, 2016). Their dual identity as both Muslim and

foreign heightens the risk of marginalization, as they may encounter not only cultural barriers but also social exclusion within the university setting due to these restrictive factors. The significant difference from Islamic cultural norms suggests that hijabi students might have to create their own approaches for managing interactions with peers and academic supervisors of the opposite gender.

3. *Time management and cultural obligation*: The lifestyle of hijabi students exemplifies Islamic culture through its emphasis on structured time management, especially in relation to prayer schedules. In comparison, South Korean universities are not incorporating religious time slots into their academic schedules. This indicate how classes, exams, or practical sessions are often scheduled during Islamic prayer times, presenting a challenge for Muslim students who need to balance their religious obligations with the demands of the academic system. The lack of established flexibility for religious practices can result in scheduling conflicts, creating challenges for hijabi students as they attempt to uphold their religious obligations alongside their academic commitments.

4. *Student bonding culture*: University students in South Korea engage in social bonding activities like Membership Training (MT) and drinking parties, which play a significant role in the campus culture of the country where these events provide a chance to enhance social bonds through shared drinking and barbecues (Moon, 2016). This

practice stands in clear opposition to the values upheld by Muslim hijabi students, who refrain from consuming alcohol and non-halal food. As a result of this cultural imbalance, hijabi students might experience feelings of exclusion or isolation from their peers, as they find it challenging to participate in these social activities. Not being able to engage in these bonding rituals could restrict their capacity to cultivate close friendships and develop networking opportunities within the university setting.

5. *Academic stereotypes and discrimination*: Students who wear hijabs and identify as Muslim frequently encounter stereotyping in academic settings, as their distinct religious identity stands in contrast to the largely secular character of South Korean society. Discrimination or bias may occur, especially from faculty members or academic supervisors who possess preconceived notions regarding religious students. The elder age in South Korean society is recognized for its diminished tolerance towards differences, especially individuals who wear the hijab, often disturbing Muslim women's hijabs and occasionally attempting to remove them (Eum, 2017). This may indicate how older generations in academic settings, such as professors and supervisors, may show doubt regarding the hijab, mirroring wider societal views on religious expression. Considering South Korea's predominantly secular demographic,

religious students, particularly visibly Muslim women, might face differences in their treatment within educational environments.

The inclusion of hijab-wearing students in South Korean university culture encounters specific obstacles stemming from the nation's unique academic customs and societal expectations. University activities frequently encompass cultural practices that might clash with Islamic principles, including after-class social gatherings featuring alcohol or non-halal food (Moon, 2016). Muslim students must exercise caution in preserving their religious identity while engaging in significant academic pursuits. Such practices frequently hinder hijab-wearing Muslims from engaging deeply with the social environments they participate in. The notable divide between foreign students and local students can lead to feelings of marginalisation among foreign students, particularly for hijab-wearing Muslim students who stand out significantly. The presence of a dominant ethnic cultural identity leads students in Korea to perceive that Koreans are so nationalistic that they lack a desire to form relationships with foreigners who are inherently different from themselves (Moon, 2016). The social challenges faced by hijab-wearing women undoubtedly pose a considerable barrier to self-development within the academic setting in South Korea, particularly regarding intercultural peer networks.

The culture of South Korean universities, influenced by Confucian principles and modern social standards, stimulates a distinctive atmosphere for students who wear hijab. Thus, tension in the sociocultural dynamic in

the Korean academic context might create boundaries between them and the whole academic society. The interactions are frequently conditioned by Korea's collective cultural norms and the increasing yet still restricted comprehension of Islamic practices, which may lead to social distances in classroom participation, group work, and campus activities. Therefore, the need to have support networks and adaptation strategies can help the identity negotiation process of Muslim students with hijab in a non-Muslim academic culture. The story of hijab-wearing students from South Korea is becoming more significant in larger conversations about diversity and inclusion in the classroom as these schools get more and more internationalized. Campuses in Korea benefit from their cultural diversity and their presence forces schools to improve their religious and cultural tolerance policies. Successfully integrating these students improves both their academic experience and the ability of Korean universities to engage with the world and embrace cultural diversity.