

Domesticating Madrasa Education: perception of madrasa education and its influence explored by British Muslim youth

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Abstract

This paper presents findings of a study exploring the attitudes of Muslim youth in relation to their madrasa education and its influence on their lives. It further explores the flexibility of madrasas to adapt and reform against a backdrop of changing socio-political landscape scrutinising and planning for how diverse Muslim faith groups use their educational spaces in absentia of Muslim youth voices. A mixed method approach was used combining data from 40 questionnaires and nine semi-structured small-group interviews collected through an independent measures design involving two groups of participants, current and ex-madrasa pupils, aged 11 – 19. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the data reveals the more recent teaching experiences of current madrasa pupils elicit a more positive response than the ex-pupils. Muslim youth argue that whilst madrasas play an important role in their early socialisation to God, Qur'an and Islam they are only now beginning to contextualise Islamic education to life in Britain. This evidence-based small scale study conducted in Peterborough identifies, through the voices of Muslim youth, that madrasas have the potential, with suggested improvements, to help Muslim youth inscribe their religious identities within a secular pluralistic British society. The findings have great ramifications for madrasa leaders and policy makers.

Key words: Muslim; Britain, madrasa, education, identity, youth, voice

Introduction

Educational spaces occupied by Muslim youth have been placed under intense scrutiny and suspicion as potential breeding grounds for segregation, radicalisation and terrorism post 9/11, 7/7, and the ‘Trojan Horse’ events, linking Islam to terrorism and radicalisation. Policy makers have realised the extent of the powerful guiding practice of religious institutions on the public and private sphere of Muslims’ lives, showing active engagement and interest in finding out and planning for how diverse Muslim faith groups use their education space to inscribe their identities.¹ However, the representation of Muslim youths’ voices is visibly absent. This paper aims to investigate Muslim youths’ response to the following questions: a) What are the attitudes of 11-19 year old young Muslims, in Peterborough, towards their madrasa education? b) How does madrasa education influence the target group’s understanding of Islam and c) Do the target group’s experiences indicate a change in madrasa education provision over a period of a decade?

First a brief description of madrasas in the UK, how they influence the religious identities of young Muslims and the policy response by UK government will be provided. Second, the methodological approach of the study is presented. Third, the findings are discussed by the participants followed by a discussion of their explanations. In conclusion the Muslim youth argue that madrasas play a central role in their early socialisation to Islam, however, madrasa education has further potential, with suggested improvements, to help Muslim youth to inscribe their Islamic identities within Britain by contextualising the teachings of Islam and equipping Muslim youth with the ability and understanding of how Islam could be implemented within the multicultural secular pluralistic British societal framework as increasingly Muslim youth find themselves the *bête noire* of the British society. These findings have important ramifications for madrasa leaders, policy makers and think tanks.

1 Uvanney Maylor (et al.), *Impact of Supplementary Schools On Pupils’ Attainment: An Investigation Into What Factors Contribute to Educational Improvements – Research Report* (London: London Metropolitan University, 2010); Department of Communities and Local Government [DCLG], „The training and development of Muslim faith leaders: Current practice and future possibilities“, <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1895/>, accessed 1 August 2016.

Contextualising British Madrasas

Post-World War II economic migrants from the Indian subcontinent established mosques and madrasas in the 1960s and 70s across Britain.² Madrasas, also known as supplementary schools, were setup, financed and run by Muslim migrant parents and community members as independent organisations with the sole purpose of providing Islamic education to Muslim children: to teach the Qur'an and Islam to preserve the religious, cultural and linguistic identities of the migrating Muslim communities,³ so that Muslim children upon their return 'back home' would feel comfortable. With the realisation of 'the myth of return',⁴ Muslims began to regard Britain as their home and parents accentuated their efforts in providing Islamic education for their children, setting up madrasas in the heart of all Muslim communities. Barton observes 'the beginning of a Muslim child's knowledge of himself and of his faith lies not in his individual identity, nor in his relationship to his family, but in his membership of the household of Islam'⁵).

In Arabic, madrasa simply means 'school',⁶ however, in Britain the term madrasa encompasses two broad categories of religious education institutions offering instructions in Islamic education operating outside the mainstream school system addressing the religious and cultural needs of Muslim communities⁷. Throughout this paper the term madrasa will be used to denote Islamic supplementary schools also known as 'a center of learning',⁸ 'Qur'anic schools',⁹ 'unofficial Islamic schools',¹⁰

2 Jonathan Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

3 Nargis Rashid, Latif R. and Begum S., *Supporting Safe and Effective Education in Madrasahs (Supplementary Schools)* (Birmingham: Birmingham City Council, 2006)

4 Muhammad Anwar, *The Myth of Return* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979)

5 Stephen William Barton, *The Bengali Muslims of Bradford*, Community Relations project (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1986) p.162.

6 Myriam Cherti and Laura Bradley, „Inside Madrasahs: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“, http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2011/11/inside-madrassas_Nov2011_8301.pdf?noredirect=1, accessed 2 August 2016.

7 Yasmin Valli, „From Madrasah to Mainstream – The Role of the Madrasah in Shaping the Core Islamic Values and Practice among Young British Muslims“, in *Islam in the west: Key issues in Multiculturalism*, May Farrar (et al.) (eds.) (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

8 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*

9 Helen N. Boyle, *Contemporary Quranic schooling: Agents of preservation and change* (New York: Routledge Palmer, 2004)

10 Sukhi Hayer, „Call for more checks on madrasahs“, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/8305318.stm>, accessed 20 July 2016.

‘evening and weekend classes’¹¹ and ‘mosque schools’.¹² The variation in terminology not only poses problems in identifying the number of madrasas in existence in Britain but also the number of pupils attending these madrasas. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) report¹³ there are approximately 2000 registered madrasas in Britain where staff have undergone DBS checks;¹⁴ Gilliat-Ray has estimated the existence of 1600 mosque associated madrasas.¹⁵ The number of pupils attending British madrasas also vary from 100,000¹⁶ to 250,000¹⁷ and 500,000¹⁸. The IPPR report discovered that a quarter of madrasas had over 140 pupils attending each week and were often oversubscribed and/or had waiting lists.¹⁹ This is in proportion with the 2011 census data which identifies the disproportionately young Muslim population, placing an increased demand for religious education provisioning.

Muslim youth start attending madrasa from the ages of 4 or 5 until the ages of 14 or 15; attendance after this generally drops due to increased pressures of school work and GCSE exams.²⁰ Madrasas usually start between 4:30 – 5pm, for up to two hours per day, five days a week, evenings and/or weekends²¹ in order to learn about their religion²². The madrasa curriculum generally comprises of core subjects: learning the Arabic alphabet and reading and writing in Arabic, Islamic

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- 11 Denis MacEoin, „Music, Chess and Other Sins: Segregation, Integration, and Muslim Schools in Britain“, <http://civitas.org.uk/content/files/MusicChessAndOtherSins.pdf>, accessed 1 August 2016.
 - 12 Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, „Child Protection in Faith-based Environments: A Guideline Report“, <http://www.muslimparliament.org.uk/Documentation/ChildProtection-Report.pdf>, accessed 3 August 2016.
 - 13 Cherti and Bradley, „Inside Madrassas: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“
 - 14 Hayer, „Call for more checks on madrassas“,
 - 15 Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: An introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)
 - 16 Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, „Child Protection in Faith-based Environments: A Guideline Report“,
 - 17 Fran Abrams, „Child abuse claims at UK madrassas ‘tip of iceberg‘“, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-15256764>, accessed 18 July 2016.
 - 18 Andrey Rosowsky, „Faith, phonics and identity: reading in faith complementary schools“. *Literacy* 47, no. 2: 2012. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-4369.2012.00669.x, p. 67–78.
 - 19 Cherti and Bradley, „Inside Madrassas: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“, p. 4
 - 20 Cherti and Bradley, „Inside Madrassas: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“; Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*
 - 21 Cherti and Bradley, „Inside Madrassas: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“; Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*; Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: An introduction*
 - 22 Open Society Institute [OSI] *Muslims in the UK: Policies for Engaged Citizens*, (Budapest/New York, 2005).

forms of worship such as ritual prayers (*salah*) and recitation of Qur'an (*tajwid*), Islamic beliefs (*aqā'id*), Qur'an and hadith (traditions of Muhammed), memorisation and learning about the life of Muhammad (*sirah*).²³ In this manner young Muslims are introduced to the 'Islamic way of life'.

Most Muslim children spend a substantial amount of their 'free' time attending the madrasas and learning about their religion and classical Arabic, Scourfield et al. remark that this kind of sustained religious activity involving significant amount of mental discipline over an extended period of time is very significant in acquiring a secure Muslim identity.²⁴ Valli²⁵ suggests that madrasa teaching during the formative years of a Muslim child's life inculcates the principles and values of Islam in the child which has a lasting and positive impact throughout their life by developing a strong Muslim identity and ability to connect with Islam as a 'way of life', helping to shape the identity of Muslim youth by promoting the religious, cultural and linguistic aspects of the Islamic life.²⁶

Islamic education provided by religious organizations coupled with the informal interaction with the Muslim congregation plays an important role in the socialization of the child to Islam, reinforcing the idea that the child belongs to the community of believers, a global *Ummah*.^{27,28} Thus the educational experience becomes a 'total social phenomenon'.²⁹ The discipline of madrasa environment supports appropriate behaviour and attitudes of Muslim children to learning in schools.³⁰ Conversely, Hart-Dyke³¹ argues that madrasas can lead to Muslims distancing themselves from a British identity due to differing curriculum and pedagogic styles. It is argued that madrasas' contribution to individuals and societies exceeds the educational aspect by providing activities and space for young people to steer them away from unhealthy youth culture.³² Religious nurture in the madrasa environment provides a moral 'compass' to orient the child in their

23 Cherti and Bradley, „Inside Madrasahs: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“; Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*; Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: An introduction*

24 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*, p. 105.

25 Yasmin Valli, „From Madrasah to Mainstream – The Role of the Madrasah in Shaping the Core Islamic Values and Practice among Young British Muslims“

26 Cherti and Bradley, „Inside Madrasahs: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“

27 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*

28 Yasmin Valli, „From Madrasah to Mainstream – The Role of the Madrasah in Shaping the Core Islamic Values and Practice among Young British Muslims“

29 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*, p. 112.

30 Ann Williams and Eve Gregory, „Siblings bridging literacies in multilingual contexts“, *Journal of Research in Reading*, 24:3 (2001), 248-65.

31 Any Hart-Dyke, *Mosques Made in Britain* (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2009)

32 Imran Mogra, „Moral education in the Makatib of Britain: a review of curriculum materials“ *Journal of Moral Education*, 36:3 (2007), pp. 387-98.

relation with God, family and the wider Muslim community, reciting and learning the Qur'an helps develop basic literacy skills; rote learning allows the words of the Qur'an to be engraved on the mind of the child which could be 'retrieved, uncovered and rediscovered' overtime, providing an insight 'on how to live'³³ hence the madrasas not only preserve but transform social, educational and religious practices of the individuals and the communities. Cherti et al's.³⁴ study demonstrates that madrasas can strengthen the religious identity of young Muslims and help make sense of their lives as Muslims and as members of the wider society, giving Muslim youth the narrative to explain their lifestyle choices in a non-Muslim environment inculcating confidence and self-esteem.

Islamic education, for most young Muslims growing up in Britain, is gained by attending madrasa.³⁵ However, in recent years, madrasas' pedagogic goals and education provision has widened to include homework clubs, home-schooling, and leisure activities such as Muslim Scouts and Beavers. Madrasas have also identified the need for the practical enactment of Islamic education in the lives of young Muslims by ensuring young Muslims understand what they are learning through the development of Islamic Studies classes which focus on belief, practice and Islamic history.³⁶ Some madrasas offer youth clubs, providing structured activities for Muslim children to promote their self-esteem and confidence, to develop the ability to think and work on initiatives as well as to form friendship groups.³⁷ Madrasas are seen to have widened their provisioning since the 1970s when they were just concerned with inculcating religious and cultural education.

Muslim youth desire to be recognised as both British and Muslim³⁸, as British Muslims³⁹ with Islam at the heart of their identity-makeup.⁴⁰ As the dynamics of the migrating Muslim population are changing over time so is the notion of religious identity which is at a shifting point of intersection with nationality or

33 Boyle, *Contemporary Quranic schooling: Agents of preservation and change*, p. 92.

34 Cherti and Bradley, „Inside Madrassas: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“

35 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*; Tariq Modood (et al.), *Ethnic minorities in Britain: Diversity and disadvantage - the fourth national survey of ethnic minorities*, (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997)

36 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*

37 Bristol Muslim Cultural Society, <http://www.bmcs.org.uk/youngpeople.php>, accessed 21 July 2016.

38 McLaughlin, M.W. & Heath, S.B. "Casting the self: Frames for identity and dilemmas for policy" in S.B Heath, & M.W. McLaughlin, (Eds.). *Identity and Inncercity Youth: Beyond Ethnicity and Gender* (New York: Teachers School Press, 1997), p. 210- 239

39 Jean Ellis, *Meeting Community Needs: A Study of Muslim Communities in Coventry, Monograph in Ethnic Relations No.2* (Coventry: Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, 1991)

40 Abdullah Sahin, *New directions in Islamic education: Pedagogy and identity formation* (London: Kube Publishing, 2013)

ethnicity⁴¹ (Gilliat-Ray, 2014). Muslims now require new reference points to anchor their meaning of life in the contextual realities that surround them. In order to develop these reference points Muslims need to create a better understanding of their identity, the mutual inclusion of being British and Muslim and making the distinction between what is consistent with the Islamic values and teachings and what is not, hence making informed choices about their actions based on their religious beliefs and citizenship values.⁴² Islamic education has the potential to encourage the development of an integrated Muslim personality by helping young Muslims understand Islam and its values and providing opportunities for critical reflection and internalisation of knowledge within their contextual realities.⁴³

Whilst Muslim educators are realising the need to improve madrasa provision, the government, realising the importance of the religious spaces Muslim youth inhabited, commissioned several reports to improve understanding of supplementary education.⁴⁴ One study shows how Kirklees Council has worked with developing working relationships with madrasas as well as between madrasas and mainstream schools, seen as a welcome move by the local Muslim community and the madrasas. However, the rise in terrorist incidents around the world has led the British government's drive to 'regulate' and 'safeguard' Muslim youth within their religious settings, such as mosques and madrasas, by developing the provisional 'Out-of-school education settings: registration and inspection' policy⁴⁵ proposing to monitor madrasa spaces which Muslim learners occupy on the premise that these spaces are potential breeding grounds segregating Muslims from the wider British society.⁴⁶ This monitoring strategy has been widely opposed by faith communities.⁴⁷

41 Sophie Gilliat-Ray, *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

42 Gilliat-Ray, *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*

43 Sahin, *New directions in Islamic education: Pedagogy and identity formation*

44 Maylor (et al.), *Impact of Supplementary Schools On Pupils' Attainment: An Investigation Into What Factors Contribute to Educational Improvements – Research Report*; Department of Communities and Local Government [DCLG], „The training and development of Muslim faith leaders: Current practice and future possibilities“

45 Department for Education (DfE), „Out-of-school education settings: Registration and inspection“, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/out-of-school-education-settings-registration-and-inspection>, accessed 27 July 2016.

46 David Cameron, „Radicalisation and Islamic Extremism‘, conference message to Munich Security Conference“, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference>, accessed 29 July 2016.

47 Barnabas Fund, „Proposal by the UK Government to require registration and inspection of all Islamic supplementary schools and Christian Sunday schools with power to close those deemed to be promoting ‘Extremism‘“, https://barnabasfund.org/downloads/resources/papers/Regulation_of_institutions_teaching_young_people_BF_Response.pdf, accessed 1 August 2016.

Scourfield et al.⁴⁸ conclude that madrasas play a central role in the lives of Muslim children and young people, it is thus very important to understand to what extent this education impacts their lives and how it permeates other spaces occupied by Muslim youth. Empirical studies recognising and promoting the voices of young Muslims are very limited; understanding their experiences at the madrasas and how they impact on their emerging identities, through the learners' voices, have yet to be explored. Most of the research produced post 9/11 and 7/7 has focused largely on exploring the political, historical and socio-economic dimensions of the 'extremism, fundamentalism and radicalisation' discourse.⁴⁹ There is now a growing demand for academic studies which examine the daily lived experiences and interactions of young British Muslims within madrasas and the impact of Islamic education on British Muslims' identity.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, very little of what features in public debates about madrasas has been generated through rigorous research. The main source of public information stems from the media, which is dominated by negative representations of madrasas, often portrayed as perpetrators of extremism and violence.⁵¹

Furthermore, researchers are increasingly recognising the importance of young people having a voice in matters that affect them, which is often taken for granted⁵²; there is a growing need to listen to the voices of young people being researched about in order to prevent reinforcing stereotypes.⁵³ However, despite the inclusion of, and space for, young people to voice their views, the authorship of the studies lies with the researcher, Fielding⁵⁴ argues that the researcher cannot avoid speaking 'about' young people whilst at the same time refraining from creating the prospect of the 'other' as the object of the study. By 'speaking with' through the researcher and participants' joint engagement in the research enquiry

48 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*

49 Sahin, *New directions in Islamic education: Pedagogy and identity formation*; Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*

50 Bill Gent, „Muslim Education and the Hifz Process: Some images and issues“ in *Religion in education: Innovation in international research*, Joyce Miller, Ursula McKenna and Kevin O'Grady (eds), (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013); Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*; Mogra, „Moral education in the Makatib of Britain: a review of curriculum materials“

51 Cherti and Bradley, „Inside Madrassas: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“

52 Lewis, C. 'Peer group power', (Community Care, 2001) 4, 22–23.

53 Ghazala Bhatti, „A journey into the unknown: an ethnographic study of Asian children“ in *Culture and Social Justice in Education*, Morwenna Griffiths and Barry Troyna (eds.) (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books Limited, 1995); Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*

54 Michael Fielding, „Transformative approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities“, *British Educational Research Journal*, 30:2 (2004), pp. 295–311.

can deeper understanding be achieved.⁵⁵ The aim of this study is to explore the religious education life-world of Muslim youth by providing them a platform to voice their opinions. Using language as a tool these life world experiences could empower people by transforming their experiences into knowledge.⁵⁶

Methodology

This study was conducted in July-August 2016 in Peterborough, a rapidly growing small inner city with a population of 190,000 with 25% below the age of 19⁵⁷. Muslims first arrived in Peterborough in 1958 and were employed in unskilled, low paid, noisy and demanding jobs, working unsociable hours and residing in Peterborough's most deprived areas due to affordable housing.⁵⁸ Although relatively poor, between 1967 and more recently 2014, they have funded four purpose built mosques each with a purpose built madrasa representing different denominations within the Sunni sect: two mosques belong to the Sunni-Barelvi sect, one Sunni-Deobandi and one Sunni-Wahhabi. A Shia mosque with a purpose built madrasa caters for the Shia pupils. There are also several large registered private madrasas and an unknown number of small home-based madrasas. The total number of pupils attending these madrasas is currently not known. This study includes participants from both the mosque affiliated madrasas and private home madrasas, it however, excludes participants attending Islamic seminaries or colleges offering full-time structured courses with a sophisticated Islamic syllabi because the focus of this study is to explore the Islamic educational experiences of the majority of Muslim youth in Britain who, research has indicated, attend the part-time madrasas⁵⁹, designed to supplement Muslim youth with Islamic teachings alongside attending mainstream schools.

This study was prompted against the backdrop of the frustration felt by the Peterborough Muslim community in the wake of the introduction of the provi-

55 Fielding, „Transformative approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities“, pp. 295-311.

56 Anshuman A. Mondal, *Young British Muslim voices* (New York: Greenwood World Publishing, 2008)

57 Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census: Digitised Boundary Data (England and Wales) [computer file]. UK Data Service Census Support. Downloaded from: <https://census.ukdataservice.ac.uk/use-data/censuses/census-communities.aspx>. Accessed [7th August 2016].

58 Raja T. Masood, *The heritage of (Newminister) British-Pakistani community* (Karachi: Printing Press, 2011)

59 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*; Tariq Modood (et al.), *Ethnic minorities in Britain: Diversity and disadvantage - the fourth national survey of ethnic minorities*, (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1997)

sional ‘Out-of-school education settings: registration and inspection’ policy in November 2015, seeking consultation for registering and inspecting education settings providing intensive tuition, training or instructions to children outside of schools, especially in supplementary schools.⁶⁰ As a researcher I was curious to understand whether the government’s stance was justified in suggesting madrasa pupils to be susceptible to radicalisation and segregation from the mainstream British society.⁶¹ The madrasa pupils were identified as the best primary source to gain this information.

I chose to conduct this study in Peterborough not only due to convenience and ease of access to both madrasas and participants but also to focus attention to research in smaller cities. Existing research has focused on madrasas which are well established in the UK, such as Leicester, Bradford, London, Birmingham⁶², however, understanding the contribution madrasas make to the lives of Muslim youth in smaller towns and cities would, in my opinion, greatly supplement and enrich the understanding of the impact of madrasas on the lives of British Muslim youth.

The research design of this mixed-method case study is grounded in the phenomenological approach to social and educational research as its theoretical framework, seeking to understand the experiences of the human consciousness, how the experience “is experienced by the experiencer”⁶³. The mixed method approach is accommodated within the static and genetic phenomenological inquiry as complementary observation procedures despite having different ontological and epistemological assumptions⁶⁴ and offers a more holistic approach to understanding different levels of a given life-world and diverse aspects of human nature.

The researcher’s self-reflexivity plays a crucial role in the clarification and authentication of the research as the researcher is the primary instrument to enter the ‘other’s’ life-world through the process of ‘bracketing’ or ‘put[ting] the world in brackets’,⁶⁵ requiring a temporal suspension of all previously held judgments.⁶⁶

60 Department for Education (DfE), „Out-of-school education settings: Registration and inspection“

61 Cameron, „Radicalisation and Islamic Extremism’, conference message to Munich Security Conference“

62 Myriam Cherti and Laura Bradley, „Inside Madrassas: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“, http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2011/11/inside-madrassas_Nov2011_8301.pdf?noredirect=1, accessed 2 August 2016.

63 Giorgi A. The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press; 2009, p. 40.

64 Martyn Hammersley, „Deconstructing the Qualitative-Quantitative Divide“, in *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, Julia Brannen (ed.) (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995)

65 Edmund Husserl, *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970)

66 Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, *Research methods in Education* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2011)

The phenomenological based empirical research framework allowed the researcher to listen to the experiences of Muslim youth empathetically as they grappled with trying to understand Islam and Islamic education at the same time make sense and come to terms with the realities of being a Muslim in a multicultural secular pluralistic British society.

Working with young people and trying to see the world through their eyes is a very sensitive task, as a researcher, my many years of experience as a school teacher and a mother of three adult children equipped me with the knowledge of working with young people. I was known to some participants but not as a madrasa teacher, therefore this was an asset for this study as it allowed participants to talk more openly during the group interviews. Although, they addressed me with the status of a teacher, referring to me as 'Miss' rather than 'Baji' (a term used for an older sister) which they used for their female madrasa teachers. They regarded me as 'one of them', an 'insider', a Muslim, but at the same time I was a 'Miss' - an 'outsider' to their madrasa environment⁶⁷. I perceived my role as an 'insider' and a 'teacher', as a valuable means to give voice to Muslim youth and understand their perspectives within the madrasa context allowing me to capture participants' perspectives and present them with as little 'interpretation' as possible, making their collective interpretations and their voices the focus of this study. This relationship proved to be effective as it became clear that the participants were more open in their responses reducing social desirability and demand characteristic biases. It should, however, be understood that the researcher may not be able to completely eliminate or permanently suspend her judgment as everyone is a product of understanding reality within their socio-cultural settings, as long as the researcher suspends judgment whilst understanding and describing the phenomenon under study, it allows for the development of an understanding and description of the life-worlds of study participants from their perspective.⁶⁸

This study employed a mixed-method approach, exploring young Muslims subjective madrasa educational experiences. Twenty-two participants took part in nine semi-structured small group interviews, each group consisting of between two to five participants. The interviews were conducted in a centre frequently visited by madrasa pupils from the diverse Sunni sect background. The semi-structured interview schedule was developed by the researcher to investigate the understanding of, engagement with and reflection of various facet of madrasa experience and its implementation and influence in the participants' lives. The questions developed were guided by the research questions and the existing literature. Before beginning the

67 Mehreen Mirza, „Same voices, same lives?': revisiting black feminist standpoint epistemology“ in *Researching racism in education: Politics, theory, and practice*, Paul Connolly and Barry Troyna (eds.) (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1998)

68 Cohen (et al.), *Research methods in Education*

interviews the researcher met the participants twice, first to explain the research and provide a consent forms, the second time to collect the forms and to answer any queries. This contact developed rapport between the researcher and the participants, facilitating a 'spontaneous natural conversation'⁶⁹ during the interview rather than a question and answer session, eliciting deeper and richer understanding into their life-worlds.

The quantitative approach enabled the researcher to answer RQ 3, the questionnaire was designed by the researcher, consisting of 23 items not clustered under the five factor headings under exploration, namely, pupils' attitudes towards their: a) madrasa, b) madrasa education, c) the Qur'an, d) perceived outcome of the Qur'an and e) teachers. The items on the questionnaire were alternated and included both positive and negative items to force respondents to consider the question and provide a more meaningful response and reduce Extreme Response Bias. Each item was assessed on a five-point scale coded from Strongly Agreed (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). To increase concurrent validity of the subjective meanings of individuals' life-worlds,⁷⁰ the mixed method design allowed for triangulation to strengthen the results; the quantitative and qualitative data collected reciprocated each other ultimately providing a holistic insight into the madrasa education life-world-view of Muslim youth. To eliminate subject knowledge bias this study focussed on the experiences of participants in learning the Qur'an in the questionnaires as well as interviews, hence the term 'madrasa education' was used instead of 'Islamic education'. Many participants refer to madrasa as 'mosque' which is presented in their quotes without contextualisation.

Opportunity sampling technique was employed, participants were recruited through researcher's contact within the community and various mosque and private madrasas.

The sample was selected based on the criteria aged between 11-19, still attending or once attended a madrasa to gain Islamic education. The sample was categorised into two age groups: 11–15 year old (younger) group, 75% of whom were still attending madrasa at the time of data collection and 16–19 year old (older) group, all had left madrasa. These two groups were further subdivided into males and females to identify common patterns and differences that may emerge (see Table 1). The sample consisted of participants belonging to all denominations of the Sunni sect. 40 participants completed the questionnaires but only 22 participated in the small group semi-structured interviews. The aim of

69 Anna Madill, „Interaction in the Semi-Structured interview: A comparative analysis of the use of and response to indirect complaints“, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 8:4 (2011), 333-53.

70 Jonathan A. Smith and Mike Osborn, *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2003)

the study was not to critique different madrasas but to assess participants' madrasa experiences, this was made clear to the participants at the onset, allowing for more open and focussed discussions. Informed consent was gained from all participants, parental consent, where participants were below the age of 16 years, assuring confidentiality and anonymity of data collected, pseudonyms were used when participants were quoted.

Table 1: Participant makeup by gender & age

Gender (age range)	Frequency	Percent
Males (11 - 15)	13	32.5
Females (11 - 15)	12	30.0
Males (16 - 19)	3	7.5
Females (16 - 19)	12	30.0
Total	40	100.0

The sample comprised of 60% females and 40% males.

There are several limitations in this study which must be acknowledged. First, only three 16-19 year old males participated in the study, this was not intentional but simply as a result of problems of accessibility in recruiting this category, with a larger number of participants the data collected may have presented a different picture. Second, the purpose of this study was to gain an insight into the attitudes and perceptions young Muslims hold regarding their madrasa experiences, the findings, whilst providing an insight into the attitudes and experiences of these young Muslims, are specific to this group with respect to time, place and educational institutions, therefore the findings should be considered as tentative. Third, the qualitative data analysis required the researcher to collect and thematise the findings according to subjective judgement; every effort has been made to ensure the data presented represents the meaning that was intended by providing space for young people to voice their views; the quotes selected have been checked with the participants to safeguard from any subjective bias.

Analysis procedure

Using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) technique, the qualitative data was transcribed with accuracy and coded twice,⁷¹ key emerging themes were identified. Care was taken that, whilst the reading and rereading was undertaken, the researcher suspended her critical judgement and succumbed to a temporary refusal to engage in researcher's own presuppositions and experiences,⁷² thus undertaking the process of 'bracketing'⁷³. The resulting sub-themes were clustered creating a hierarchy of themes which were then organised into a coherent account.

Fifty questionnaires were distributed; forty participants completed the questionnaires, a response rate of 80%. The questionnaires required participants to select a choice for the statement most suited to them from a five-point scale from Strongly-Agreed (5) to Strongly-Disagreed (1), the results were tallied against each question, data coding and numerical values were checked twice. The percentage agreement per item was calculated, finally the mean score for each item and factor was calculated; the data was represented in the form of a line graph.

Listening to British Muslim youth

The Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis technique revealed broad themes underlying Muslim youths' madrasa educational experiences: early nurture and socialisation, connection to God and Islam, character development, madrasa timings, implementation of the learning, emerging implications for identity development and the important role teachers' play in the madrasa experiences of Muslim youth. Participants explored how their madrasa experiences could be improved especially in context of the busy lifestyles and the burgeoning use of social media and technology in the lives of young people.

Data from the questionnaires illustrated the similarities and differences in attitudes of older and younger category participant boys and girls towards their madrasa education under the five factors being investigated, data is presented as a line graph.

71 Jonathan A. Smith, Maria Jarman and Mike Osborne, „Doing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis“ in *Qualitative Health Psychology: Theories and Methods*, Michael Murray and Kerry Chamberlain (eds.) (London: Sage, 1999)

72 Ernesto Spinelli, *The interpreted world: an introduction to phenomenological psychology 2nd. ed.* (London: Sage, 2005)

73 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian meditations: an introduction to phenomenology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1999)

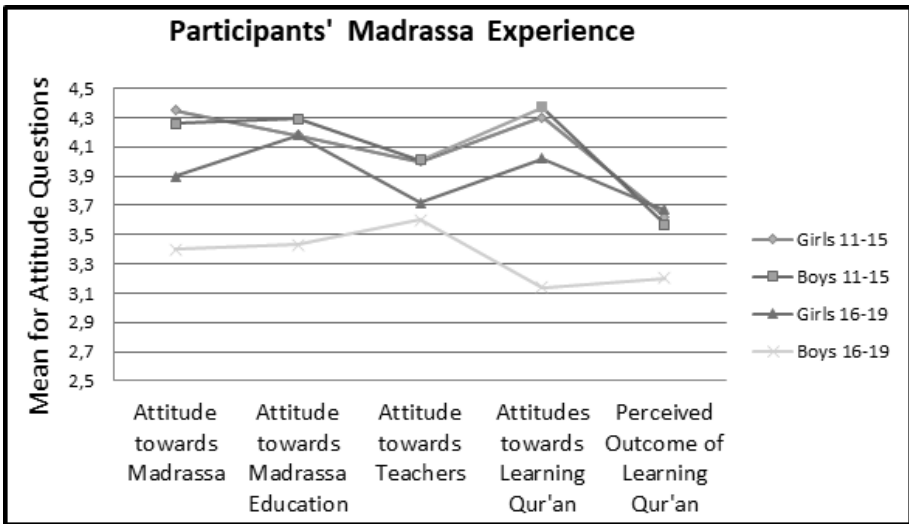


Figure 6: The mean of the sum of the mean for attitude questions per factor per gender and age category.

The quantitative data illustrates the more recent madrasa educational experiences of 11 -15 year old boys and girls elicited a more positive response than 16 - 19 year old boys and girls. Data shows the older boys' madrasa experiences were the lowest of all participants contrasting significantly with the older girls' experiences, however, this gap narrowed for attitude towards madrasa teachers. Attitude towards perceived outcome of the Qur'an, scored the lowest score across all participants. These findings are confirmed and explained by the interview data.

The older participants related the repetitive impersonalised rote learning lessons inculcating little meaningful knowledge, the harshness and punitive nature of their teachers, limited teacher-student communication and discouragement of questioning what was taught, and the rote learning method induced boredom and disengagement from the madrasa. Others report an element of being forced to attend by their parents and how they looked for opportunities to leave the madrasa using the secondary school workload and extra-curricular activities as an excuse to use their time in more meaningful activities. Usama, 17, attended a private madrasa, narrates his experience:

'.....didn't get proper interaction with the teacher, he didn't really ask me any questions, he just taught me to read the Qur'an and sit really, just found it really repetitive.....constantly read the Qur'an.....as soon as you get to the age of secondary school, you become a little more independent, you just make time to yourself and say to your parents that I'm going to do an after school club.

An escape out of attending madrasa....I felt happier as I was doing something I wanted to do, instead of being forced to do.'

However, other older participants narrated a much more positive experience, the madrasa providing an opportunity to socialise with friends and develop 'new knowledge' which they took pride in sharing with family and friends:

'It wasn't a burden, it was enjoyable... I used to come home and tell my cousins stories I had learnt. They would be amazed at what I knew, they'd tell their parents of what I knew ... I used to like doing that' (Qura, 18).

Overall, the younger participants share a much more positive madrasa education experience with teachers being kind, explaining the lessons and contextualising it to the lives of the learners using activity-based learning pedagogic techniques: role-play, presentations, group work and drawings providing a more meaningful experience:

'Yeah, they [teachers] tell us about mosque and Islamic education.....Teachers are kind to us and [they] teach us in different ways, tell us stories....They [teach us the] way we like it not just write it down....There are more activities and [it is] more interactive.....How it [lesson] relates to us.... [The teacher] relates it [lesson] back in the class and relates to it now... ' (Danish, 14).

Almost all participants emphasised the important role teachers played in defining pupils' madrasa experiences; the teacher's subject knowledge and passion for teaching motivating them to understand the lessons taught and to consciously implement the teachings in their lives. The teachers' ability to speak English and understand the contextual realities occupied by Muslim youth was instrumental in creating a sense of belonging to the madrasa and by extension the Muslim community, Shaban's, 12, explanation echoes the experiences of the older participants:

'I think it depends on how like the teacher teaches 'cos some of the teachers are really harsh some of the students, they kind of really get fed up of it and they don't really like comingour teachers are like very relatable to us sowe want to come and have a good time with like, our friends who are basically like our family here.'

Hassan, 19, also agrees:

'Sheikh (teacher) made it quite fun, quite enjoyable to memorise it (Qur'an).....Oh, he was just funny. At the time I was young, so if anyone could make me laugh I'd wanna (sic) go to them again'.

Nevertheless, some participants were critical of the teachers' limited subject knowledge, claiming that this belief hindered their need to further explore the subject and resulted in feelings of '*disappointment*' with their teachers:

‘... sometimes the teachers don’t always understand the meaning themselves, the teachers, if not know it all, should know a bit of it [lesson] to explain stuff’ (Mehreen, 15).

The older participants voiced the need for teachers who would be regarded as role models and have the ability to understand the life-world Muslim youth reside in with the ability to provide contextualised learning, although, some younger participants felt their teachers were fulfilling this need, describing their teachers as ‘relatable, fun and kind’. This is illustrative of a positive shift over the years in the teacher-student relationship.

Participants regard the Qur’an as the unassailable Truth; holding ‘*something of immense importance*’. Participants, younger and older, claimed the Qur’an held value for them, comforted and assured them especially in times of need. They voiced their identification with the messages and stories of the Qur’an, believing it was *still* as relevant today as it was at the time of revelation and showed young people how to deal with their life situations:

‘It [the Qur’an] is relevant today, what is happening today all links back to the Qur’an, some of the topics such as LGBT.... As Muslims how do you deal with it? You look at the story of Prophet Lut [Lot] when you know the story and how the prophets dealt with it then you know how to deal with it’ (Khajarah, 19).

Abida, 13, relates the teachings of the Qur’an to the current events of terrorism and extremism reported by the media; she believes that if people read the Qur’an and understood its message of peace and protection of all lives, Muslims would not be regarded as terrorists:

‘You know there’s stuff (sic) going on in the media, terrorism and stuff but in the Qur’an it says you can’t kill and then if people read the lesson they’ll understand that not all Muslims are terrorists’.

Although participants understand the relevance of the messages of the Qur’an in their lives, they also understand the disparity between the felt reverence and sacred nature of the Qur’an and the perceived outcome of their learning of the Qur’an, noting that at a young age the belief of the sacred and truthful nature of the Qur’an develops their reverence of the Qur’an, however, their lack of understanding inhibits the implementation of the teachings. They associate this with the inability to understand Arabic language, this they state is not taught at the madrasa. Some participants believe that learning the Qur’an should be understood and be meaningful whilst others believe there is still reward in reading the Qur’an without understanding it:

‘No point in reading the Qur’an if you don’t know what it means’ (Danish, 14).

Suhail (14) disagrees:

‘I think we should be required to understand it [Qur’an] but if we don’t understand it, I think we should still read it because I think the first word revealed from the Qur’an was ‘Iqra’ – to read innit (sic) which requires you to basically read the Qur’an’.

The older participants reflect the underlying reason causing dissatisfaction with their madrasa experience was their lack of understanding of what they were being taught, they felt the lessons were simply the repetitive regurgitation of information holding little meaning due to their limited understanding of Arabic:

‘We were taught the Qur’an in Arabic but then we were never taught what the words mean for us to understand it really, we were never taught it in English, it was never translated for us’ (Usama, 17).

It is disconcerting to note that recent experiences of the younger participants *still* indicate limited understanding of the lessons taught, madrasas are still very limited in teaching Arabic, the language of the Qur’an:

‘I thought mosque was just about reading the Qur’an. We would learn the meaning of certain surahs (chapters) but didn’t understand what we read. It was just Arabic a foreign language’ (Mehreen, 15).

Participants reflected on the importance of understanding the lessons giving an example of how understanding the meaning of salah (prayer) enabled them to develop a closer relationship with God and to understand why offering prayer was a requirement. Suhail, 14, reflects:

‘In salah, we’re talking to Allah directly so it makes me feel like I know what I am saying, if I’m praying salah and don’t know what I am saying, there’s no point really, there’s no point in doing something if you don’t know the background of it’.

Interestingly madrasa timings emerged as a theme playing an important role in pupils’ madrasa experience. The older participants reported attending madrasa five days a week, some noting how over the years their madrasas had changed the days and timings to allow pupils to participate in after-school extra-curricular activities. Some note of how their madrasa started immediately after school, leaving little time for eating, watching children’s TV programmes or participating in after school clubs. Flexibility in madrasa timings allowing participants to be able to enjoy after school clubs and activities resulted in a more positive madrasa experience:

‘We would get home from school at 3:30 [pm] and 4 [pm] was mosque time, maybe that’s why I felt like, I didn’t feel like going... I felt left out because I

wanted to do [school] clubs my friends were doing....we didn't have time to eat! We'd get ready and go straight to mosque' (Haniya, 18).

Conversely, Qura, 18, remarked 'I felt luckier because ours [madrasa] started later, I used to have time to watch TV, enjoy Horrid Henry'.

It is important to note that the younger category *still* report facing similar experiences as the older category, however, the younger category do not perceive any social loss, the gain in knowledge outweighs any loss due to time spent at the madrasa:

'If you're going to mosque, you're not going to lose anything, you're going to gain more knowledge so it makes you have [develop] a bigger perspective about life and all that 'cos there's plenty of time for TV and that... after mosque, before mosque, Saturday and Sunday, after school you get plenty of time for that though' (Suhail, 14).

More importantly, participants linked understanding of what is taught to the implementation of that which is taught. Many relate that they did not implement their madrasa education learning until they reached an age where they could understand the concepts, thereafter, they started to practice Islam, however, the practice and implementation of Islam was a personal journey and could not be forced. Adeela, 19, explains:

'....with Islam you have to practice it 24/7much as your mum tells you, you need to do this, you need to do that, it goes in one ear and comes out of the other, but as you get older you actually understand it, why you are here, it's not something that someone is telling you to do'.

Another important theme emerged linked madrasa education to developing participants' connection to God and Islam, helping individuals feel part of a larger global Muslim community, the *Ummah*. Attending Madrasa was a pathway for self-discovery, claiming that madrasas did not just teach the basic teachings of Islam but lay the foundation for their independent enquiry into and learning of Islam. Zilley, 18, explains how madrasa education forms the foundation, a schema, for future independent learning:

'...as they [pupils] get older and want to expand their knowledge they have already got some sort of information with them that they can expand on'.

Subsequently, participants believed that early socialisation to madrasa education was ideal for nurturing Islam in the lives of Muslim youth. They noted that the inculcation and repetition of teachings of Islam at an early age ensured the ideas and values were ingrained for life. Shaban's, 12, account typifies most participants' early experience:

‘My sister used to come to the mosque....she used to come home and go (sic) it’s really fun there...the first few months and weeks I was like I don’t really like it but then overtime what I have learnt here will stick with me for the rest of my life, now it’s more relatable, I’m more mature now and understand the situation and life and what’s good and bad and what not to do and what to do’.

The older participants asserted the need for madrasas to cater for the growing need of pupils beyond achieving the set curriculum. Ameena, 19, explains that whilst attending madrasa as a child was part of her daily routine, upon completing the set curriculum it came to a sudden end, subsequently leading to feelings of guilt and disappointment in herself as she stopped practicing Islam:

‘...I completed the course.....classes just stopped for our age. I stopped coming to the mosque, I stopped everything..... I stopped reading the Qur’an ... I felt I had changed ... I was forgetting everything I had learnt... I felt disappointed in myself’.

Thus, participants identified the need for a continuous connection with the madrasa, ‘the House of Allah’ (mosque), and the wider community was imperative to sustain the implementation of Islam in daily lives. The older participants felt as they stopped attending madrasa, a valuable connection to Islam was lost; they noted that there was a continuous need for practicing Islam and reinforcement was very important, madrasas provided the means for maintaining this connection bringing them closer to God:

‘You’ve got to be involved in mosque programmes and mosque events.....to help you practice Islam everyday especially in such a westernised (secularised) country’ (Adeela, 19).

Muslim youth feel the importance of practicing the Islamic faith, especially within their secular surroundings where all forms of faith and religious practice is on the decline⁷⁴.

Moreover, participants were in general agreement that madrasa education prepared them for the life of the Hereafter; developing God consciousness and the notion of the Omnipresence of God observing all actions. This guided Muslims youths’ awareness of conducting their behaviour within the confines set by Islam and played a powerful role in socialising the implementation of their learning. The belief that all good actions led to good consequences and patience was a great virtue helped them to be a ‘good person’ inculcating hope for a better future and the belief that God would support them through hardship. Both

74 NatCen Social Research that works for society, 2017: British Social Attitude: Record number of Brits with no religion. Downloaded from: <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/news-media/press-releases/2017/september/british-social-attitudes-record-number-of-brits-with-no-religion/>. Accessed [15th July 2019].

older and younger groups concurred that madrasas taught them to respect all religions and its followers within the secular pluralistic British societal framework, contrary to media and political rhetoric of madrasas inculcating segregation and separation:⁷⁵

‘[At the madrasa] we get taught characteristics of patience, modesty, being humble, respectful to other religions ... Muslims have the patience and the will to believe that they have something to fall back on...’ (Ali, 17).

Usama, 17, further adds:

‘We were taught about Islam at the madrasa ... taught how to act when you’re out and about.....which I can use...you get taught constantly not to do certain things from a young age, and as you’re taught from a young age, you tend to stick to those rules and boundaries..... Islam teaches you [that] there are certain things you can’t do, e.g. gambling. As a Muslim we are taught not to gamble and you see all the bad things, people get into debt, that makes sense in today’s society as loads of people are gambling doing the things we are taught not to’ (Usama, 17).

Inaam, 15, shares how madrasas teach the importance Islam places on good manners and being a good human being, equating it to gaining the same intrinsic reward as an obligatory prayer:

‘Salah (obligatory prayer) is also important, we pray to Allah but also manners as well, when an old person is walking with their bags, help them with that which is just as important as salah’.

Participants also understood that attending Madrasa was no guarantee that pupils would become ‘good’ Muslims, the internalisation of the message of Islam played a key role in the identification of oneself as a Muslim:

‘Miss you can learn things and not apply it, it doesn’t make you a Muslim’ (Danish, 14).

In order to understand how important Islam was to the participants they were asked if they would send their future children to the madrasa, all participants without any exception wanted their children to gain Islamic education arguing that it had a positive influence in their lives and were sure their children would benefit from it too, however, they wanted to ensure that the curriculum and pedagogic practices were appropriate for their children. They were also aware that madrasas were not the only institutions to teach about Islam, home and more recently online learning were also popular avenues. Khajarah, 19, shares why she feels the need to send her children to the madrasa to learn about Islam:

75 Cameron, ‘Radicalisation and Islamic Extremism’, conference message to Munich Security Conference“

‘When the children are younger and you instil ‘taqwa’ (fear of Allah) in them and they know that Allah is always watching and when they learn this then Inshahallah (Allah willing) everything will be made easy for them, they won’t worry about what society thinks or what they are doing because they know that Allah is always there.’

It is disconcerting to find participants claiming the current linking of Islam to terrorism and extremism was negatively impacting the identification of young people as Muslims, forcing Muslim youth to question their identification with Islam. The older participants felt their madrasa education had not contextualised their learning to vis-à-vis the rest of British society, they had to find ways of understanding how to implement their madrasa learning within their lives in Britain. On the other hand, some younger participants experienced their teachers relating the lessons to their environment, but others felt an acute need for further improvement. Participants argued that, now more than ever, madrasas and parents should help young Muslims understand Islam and contextualise it to life in Britain so that they understand how to deal with the negative media rhetoric rather than resorting to anger further fuelling the negative image of Islam:

‘Times have changed, I feel in recent times Islam is being smeared, at the time I was at mosque it wasn’t a big deal but now I feel the students at the mosque should be educated on matters how to deal with them [negative representation], it’s easier to let your anger to take over which could harm you and the religion itself so it is better to be educated in Islam’ (Ali, 17).

It is not only the external influences affecting young people’s identification as a Muslim, internal sectarian divides are also causing confusion. Participants discuss the confusion in understanding the differences between Sunnis and Wahhabis, these differences were causing misunderstandings between Muslim friends at school, especially prominent during the celebration of Eid day. By praying in a particular mosque, Muslim youth find themselves being labelled as Sunnis or Wahhabis. Danish, 14, criticises the notion of sectarianism giving the example of the required equality amongst Muslims during Hajj:

‘There are different types of Muslims, Sunnis, Wahhabis ... all I know is Sunnis are good Muslims and I don’t think Shias are bad Muslims There’s no point in saying like you’re a good Muslim if you want to be different like Sunnis and Wahhabis.... We’re all one during Hajj, we unite in one place... there’s equality’ (Danish, 14).

It is interesting to note that the younger participants linked madrasa learning to life at home, parents encouraged their children to practice their madrasa lessons at home and often supported their children during this learning; this reinforcement ensured the establishment of the centrality of Islam in their lives.

Participants candidly discussed their madrasa experiences, understanding and articulating clearly the impact and influence of madrasas in their lives, and providing recommendations for improving madrasa education experiences for future pupils. They have identified madrasas and madrasa education to play a vital role in their understanding of Islam and the influence of this early socialisation on their self-identification as Muslims. The madrasa experiences of the younger participants were more positive than the older group indicating madrasas shift towards catering for the changing needs of their pupils, however, students recognise the need for further improvements especially in the wake of the current socio-political climate.

Discussion

This research study explored Muslim youths' attitudes towards their madrasa education. It further sought to investigate the changes, if any, in the madrasa education experienced by Muslim Youth across a period of a decade.

The Muslim youth in this study have identified madrasas to play a key role in formulating their connection to God and Islam, helping them to define themselves as Muslims, 'at the end of the day we are Muslims' (Ameena, 19); 'Your faith is part of who you are' (Aliya, 14), this is consistent with Lewis⁷⁶ study indicating the significance of faith amongst British Muslims and the role institutions of religious education play in shaping the religious identities of the Muslim communities. They see madrasas as nurturing and socialising their induction into Islam and the *Ummah*⁷⁷ helping to 'instil values' developing them as '*better Muslims*' and hence '*better people*' with the practice and implementation of Islam in their lives. They report that madrasas shape the identity of young Muslims by promoting the religious, cultural and linguistic aspects of the Islamic life,⁷⁸ inculcating the principles and values of Islam as a 'way of life'⁷⁹

The participants note that by becoming better Muslims they become 'better people in general'. This is consistent with Williams and Gregory's⁸⁰ study finding

76 Philip Lewis, *Islamic Britain: Religion, politics, and identity among British Muslims: Bradford in the 1990s* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1994); Philip Lewis, *Young, British and Muslim* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007)

77 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*

78 Cherti and Bradley, „Inside Madrassas: Understanding and engaging with British-Muslim Faith Supplementary Schools“

79 Yasmin Valli, „From Madrassa to Mainstream – The Role of the Madrassa in Shaping the Core Islamic Values and Practice among Young British Muslims“; Boyle, *Contemporary Quranic schooling: Agents of preservation and change*

80 Williams and Gregory, „Siblings bridging literacies in multilingual contexts“

that the discipline of the madrasa environment supports appropriate behaviour and attitudes of Muslim children to learning in schools. This however, counters Hart-Dyke's⁸¹ findings advocating that madrasas can lead to Muslims distancing themselves from a British identity due to the curriculum and pedagogic styles. Conversely, Muslim youth argue that values and good morals and manners repetitively instilled during their madrasa education have a positive impact on their behaviour; in controlling their 'anger' and not 'shouting', they compare this with their peers who have not attended madrasa: '...they swear and get angry for no reason, they don't know any better' (Inaam, 15).

Madrasas have undertaken the role of nurturing God-consciousness, providing a 'moral compass',⁸² to encourage young Muslims to focus on the consequences of their actions. This self-monitoring of behaviour reinforces the Islamic teachings; young Muslims are driven to identify the parameters Islam and the Qur'an define for acceptable behaviour. This in turn motivates them to explore and learn about Islam, to understand and apply the teachings in life, otherwise they report: 'I felt empty...' (Khajarah, 19).

In the last decade, young Muslims' experiences and attitudes have become more positive towards their madrasa institutions and madrasa education, this is consistent with the findings of the Peterborough Racial Equality Council Survey⁸³ which has found that young people locally are now showing greater commitment in attending madrasa. However, this view may be represented by the participant make-up and not shared across all Muslim youth.

The younger participants have suggested that madrasas should cater for 'how young people want to learn', the older participants have suggested the madrasas should adapt themselves in line with how the mainstream schools teach. This demonstrates the felt disparity between the mainstream and madrasa education teaching. By aligning the educational experiences pupils maybe able to make connections between the two education systems, although more research needs to be conducted in this area.

Sahin's⁸⁴ study calls for madrasas to invest in teacher training programmes so that such pedagogy can be delivered. Muslim youth feel they must be taught the meaning of the Qur'an so that they could 'apply it to their lives' for the application only takes place when the message is understood. This echoes Boyle's comments, rote learning allows the words of the Qur'an to be engraved on the mind

81 Hart-Dyke, *Mosques Made in Britain*

82 Boyle, *Contemporary Quranic schooling: Agents of preservation and change*

83 Alison Davies, *Beyond Tolerance: Young British Muslims discuss ways to build community cohesion in their city, and the barriers they experience* (Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of Leeds, 2016)

84 Sahin, *New directions in Islamic education: Pedagogy and identity formation*

of the child which could be 'retrieved, uncovered and rediscovered' overtime, providing an insight 'on how to live'.⁸⁵

Participants have reflected on the changing times ushering in more learning taking place through social media channels, the future generations may not be attending madrasas instead opting for lessons online. This has implications for madrasa leaders who should consider how to cater for these changes as young Muslims feel that, although, madrasas are not the only places to learn about Islam, people can learn at home or online, however, they provide the Muslim youth with a place that allows them to belong 'to the wider nation' (Ummah)⁸⁶ This suggests that Muslim youth require the need for madrasas, claiming that they will make sure their children attend madrasa. This reinforces previous studies' findings that Muslim parents have been successful in transmitting Islam in the future generations.⁸⁷

Conclusion and recommendations

The aim of this study was to explore the madrasa education life-world of Muslim youth (11-19) providing them the opportunity to present their views, identify concerns and offer recommendations by exploring their attitudes towards madrasa education and their perspectives on how madrasa educational experiences influence their understanding of Islam in Britain. Through an independent measures design involving two groups of participants the study further explored if there were any changes in madrasa education experienced by Muslim youth over a period of a decade. The findings of this paper are based on a small-scale study utilising small-group interview and questionnaire methods aiming to capture the voices of Muslim youth in Peterborough. These voices may not be representative of all their peers, they, nevertheless, reveal important messages for madrasa leaders and policy makers.

The study findings reveal attending madrasa helps Muslim youth to internalise Islam as their faith, identifying their most significant identity as a Muslim formed during early socialisation to God, Qur'an and Islam at the madrasas. God consciousness guides Muslim youths' behavioural conduct within the confines set by Islam, any breach of these parameters causes feelings of regret, anxiety and even disappointment within the self. Muslim youth claim these sentiments do not contradict with the notion of being a 'good' British citizen as they respect the

85 Boyle, *Contemporary Quranic schooling: Agents of preservation and change*, p. 92.

86 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*; Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: An introduction*

87 Scourfield (et al.), *Muslim childhood: Religious nurture in a European context*; Gilliat-Ray, *Muslims in Britain: An introduction*

requirements laid down by Islam to respect and obey the law of the land unless it prevents them from the practice of worship. These feelings act as a motivational force to guide thoughts and actions back to God and Islam using the Qur'an and madrasa teachers as a guidance toolkit. Muslim youth argue that it is not enough to just learn about Islam, understanding, implementing and continuous practice of the faith is more important in becoming a 'good' Muslim. Hence, they regard madrasas as the 'development, maintenance, and transformation' of their religious identities through teacher facilitation and learning.

Muslim youths' madrasa experiences demonstrate significant changes in the way madrasas operate and provision for Muslim youth, most recent pupil teaching experiences are more positive than a decade ago. The improved madrasa teacher-student relationship is encouraging young Muslims to turn to their religious institutions to find a sense of comfort and belonging. Along this evolving journey some changes have been due to the changing requirements of the Muslim community and others due to the requirements made by the government.

The British government's decision to regulate and monitor private educational spaces occupied by Muslim youth on the premise that madrasa pupils were vulnerable to radicalisation and susceptible to segregation from the wider society, suggests a *prima facie* increase in support of extremism and rejection of the British culture. However, contrary to this '*speculation*' Muslim youth describe how their madrasa teaching focusses on the value of being a 'good' human being, patience, justice and respect for all humanity and faiths. It is hoped that this study will provide an insider view of madrasas and their teachings which would help counter the 'Islam and extremism' narrative.

On the basis of their madrasa educational experiences, the Muslim youth interviewed propose the following recommendations to cater for the changing needs of young Muslims growing up in Britain:

- Madrasas should develop age-appropriate curriculum with planned lessons inclusive of differentiated tasks with regular assessments; assessments and results reassure pupils of the productive use of their time.
- Arabic language should be taught enabling Muslim youth to understand and implement their learning.
- Teaching should be contextualised to life in Britain; Islam and Britain are *not* mutually exclusive.
- Investment in teacher training programmes to train teachers in Islamic education based on Islamic epistemology using mainstream school pedagogy.

Muslim youths' suggestion that madrasas should 'teach like the schools,' highlights the need for bridging their educational experiences which could be achieved

by developing madrasa-school partnerships. I hope future research would be undertaken to explore this area.

Muslim youth have identified madrasas, in Britain, to have the potential to encourage young Muslims to develop an integrated personality by supporting them to understand Islam and its values and help nurture their critical reflective thinking skills which would aide in defining their identity contextualised within their social environment especially as they find themselves projected as the *bête noire* of British society. Madrasas are ideally placed to support Muslim youth to inscribe their religious identities within a multicultural secular pluralistic British societal framework by equipping them with the intellectual tools to address arising issues without feeling the need to compromise on their faith or choose between being a 'good Muslim' or being a 'good citizen'. For this to happen madrasa education needs not just to be contextualised but to be internalised and supported within the fabric of the British society, hence domesticating and normalising madrasa education to support Muslim youth to feel at home and belong to Britain.

Madrasas form the backbone for socialising Muslim children to Islam in Britain, set-up in the heart of Muslim communities by parents and community leaders. Through this study, madrasas have demonstrated their flexibility to adapt and reform in the face of changing socio-political climate in Britain. This susceptibility and flexibility of madrasas towards adaptability and change should be harnessed by the British government especially in the wake of opposition to the government's monitoring and regulatory programme and the associated costs with the regulatory practices. It would be cost effective to support madrasa 'spaces' and 'institutions' through shared madrasa-school liaison and teacher training programmes creating a more cohesive and inclusive British society. Madrasas have the potential to transform social, educational and religious practices of individuals and communities, providing a moral compass to equip Muslim youth to engage with the self, family and society. Complimenting educational practices would not only develop 'good Muslims' but also 'good citizens'. Conversely, as the participants have indicated, parents are now resorting to online platforms for Islamic education provision for their children, as a matter of 'convenience', however, this could turn into a regulatory nightmare for the government, more research is required in this area. Madrasa institutions should be valued and invested in, by both the Muslim community and the government, to strengthen the identities and sense of belonging of Muslims, not as discrete entities but as a unified whole, a singular construct declaring: 'Be yourself and live in Britain'.

Prilagođavanje obrazovanja u medresama domaćem kontekstu: Percepcija obrazovanja u medresama i njegovog utjecaja na primjeru generacije mladih britanskih muslimana

Sažetak

U ovom radu predstavljeni su nalazi studije u kojoj su istraživani stavovi mladih britanskih muslimana prema obrazovanju u medresama i utjecaju tog obrazovanja na njihov život. U radu je dalje ispitano koliko su medrese fleksibilne da se adaptiraju i reformiraju u kontekstu izmijenjenog društveno-političkog okruženja, razmatranjem kako različite muslimanske vjerske grupe koriste svoj obrazovni prostor bez prisustva glasova mladih, te predviđanjem kako taj prostor mogu koristiti. Primićen je mješoviti metodološki pristup, spajanjem podataka iz 40 upitnika i devet polustrukturiranih intervjua u malim grupama, prikupljenih istraživačkim nacrtom s nezavisnim grupama koji je uključivao dvije grupe ispitanika, sadašnje i bivše učenike medresa u dobi od jedanaest do devetnaest godina. Interpretativna fenomenološka analiza otkriva da novija nastavna praksa u sadašnjim medresama kod učenika podstiče pozitivnije reakcije nego kod bivših učenika. Pripadnici mlade generacije muslimana tvrde da, iako medrese imaju važnu ulogu u socijalizaciji njihovog odnosa prema Bogu, Kur'anu i islamu, oni tek sada počinju kontekstualizirati islamsko obrazovanje na život u Britaniji. Ova, na dokazima utemeljena studija malih razmjera, provedena među ispitanicima vezanim za Peterborough, a glasovima mladih muslimana, pokazala je da medrese imaju potencijal da, uz predložena poboljšanja, pomognu mladim muslimanima da unesu svoje religijske identitete u sekularno pluralističko britansko društvo. Rezultati ovoga istraživanja imaju veliki značaj za rukovodioce medresa i kreatore politike.

Ključne riječi: muslimani, Britanija, medresa, obrazovanje, identitet, mladi, glas