

LIFE HISTORIES OF MUSLIM TEACHERS IN BIRMINGHAM PRIMARY SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

The life histories of Muslim teachers in Birmingham schools have been collected in this research. This interpretive research involved a systematic gathering and analysis of data using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Thirteen primary school teachers voluntarily participated for this to happen.

This thesis is about Muslim teachers. It focuses on those Muslims who have, in principle, succeeded in education, and are deemed to be opinion-makers, models and leaders. It explores their conceptions, the meanings and significance which they attach to their decisions, their experiences, and events in their professional and personal lives. It concentrates on their views about the recruitment of teachers from underrepresented communities, and highlights the role of spirituality in their life. It reveals their understanding of what it means to be a Muslim teacher in contemporary Britain, and describes their aspirations and sentiments about the future.

Much of the research on teachers' lives, careers and work has been viewed predominantly from the perspective of class, gender and race. This research concludes that the experiences of teachers are not entirely affected by these configurations. Through the exploration of the life histories of Muslim teachers this thesis suggests that the significance of faith in the lives of teachers should be added to this genre.

DEDICATION

Dad, you departed from us before the completion of this thesis. I dedicate it to your memory. Your respect for the learned and learning continues to inspire me.

Mother, your prayers and reassurances continue to give me the conviction and hope of achieving my goals.

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My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favour which You have bestowed upon me... (Qur'ān, 27:19).

One who is not grateful to people is not grateful to Allah –Muhammad the Messenger.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BCC	Birmingham City Council
BEd	Bachelor of Education
BNP	British National Party
CE	Common Era
CPD	Continued Professional Development
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EMT	Ethnic Minority Teacher/s
FS	Foundation Stage
GTP	Graduate Teacher Programme
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
NAS/UWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
NC	National Curriculum
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
NUT	National Union of Teachers
PPA	Preparation and Assessment Time
PE	Physical Education
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate of Education
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
RE	Religious Education
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SMT	Senior Management Team
TA	Teaching Assistant
TDA	Teacher Development Agency
TTA	Teacher Training Agency

DEFINITIONS

adhān	a call to prayer
alhamdulillah	all praise/thanks be to Allah
‘Alim	a scholar
ahādith	(sing. hadith) sayings, narrations of Prophet Muhammad
akhirah	life after death, hereafter,
al-salamu ‘alaykum	peace be upon you
‘aqidah	doctrine, creed, belief
‘aqiqah	the ceremonies surrounding the seventh day after birth of child
‘Arafat	a plain in the outskirts of Makkah
ayah	(lit.) ‘a sign’ used for the verse of the Qur’ān
baji	older sister
chappati	flat bread
char farz	four compulsory units of prayer
char sunnat	four recommended units of prayer
choudhry	landlord
daiee	someone who makes dawah, someone who invites others
dārul uloom	institute of higher education in Islam, (lit. house of knowledge)
dawah	the invitation to others to follow or return to Islam
deen	religion, way of life
dua	informal prayers of supplication
Fajr	the obligatory prayer before sunrise
gora	white person
hadith	sayings, deeds, or actions approved by Muhammad, a narration
Hanafi	follower of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence
Hazrat	title of respect
Halqa	(lit. circle) study circle, class, gathering, group
‘ibadah	the worship of God
iftari	the light meal with which the fast is broken
ijāzah	(lit. permission) authorisation to transmit <i>hadith</i> ,
ijmā‘	consensus of the community/scholars
imam	the person who leads a prayer in congregation, a guide
inshallah	God willing
Islamiyaat	Islamic studies
Islamophobia	fear or hatred of Islam, fear or dislike of most Muslims
jamaat	congregation, class
Jannah	Paradise
jihād	to struggle for God, establish goodness and remove bad, battle
jilbab	women’s long loose-fitting garment
jumu‘ah	Friday prayer
kab‘ah	(lit. cube) House of God in Makkah
kalimah	declaration of faith
khilāfah	period of the rightly guided successors (<i>circa</i> 632-662 CE)
langar	free kitchen, open serving of food
madrasah	an Islamic school or centre of learning
madāris	(pl. madrasah)
makātib	supplementary mosque school (lit. place of writing)
mamu	maternal uncle
mar gaye	(lit.) died, error, in trouble

mashallah	(lit.) what ever Allah wants, praise be to Allah
masit	mosque, madrasah
masjid	(lit.) place of prostration, a mosque
Masjid nabawi	the Prophet's mosque in Madinah, Saudi Arabia
maulana	(Urdu, Hindi) an expert on Islamic law
mawlid	(lit. birthday) generally refers to birthday of Muhammad
miah	elder, used as surname as well, fondly attached to Allah
Milad un nabi	the festival of the birthday of Muhammad or milood
molvi	an expert in Islamic law, short for Maulana
muhasabah	introspection, taking account of one self
muslimah	a female Muslim
nafl	optional units of prayer or deeds
nafs	soul, inner self, spirit
namaaz	(Persian/Urdu) daily prayers
nanima	maternal grand mother
nasheed	a song in praise of God or Prophet Muhammad
nikah	the marriage ceremony
qaidah	initial text used to teach the Arabic alphabet and Qur'ān
qass	narrator, story teller
qawalian	(Punjabi, Urdu) devotional music
qiyās	analogy
Qu'rān	the book that was revealed to Muhammad
radi allahu anhu	May God be pleased with him
rahat	comfort
rakats	(sing. rakat) units of prayer
Ramadhan	the fasting month in the Muslim calendar
risālah	prophethood
roti	chappati
ruh	soul
sabaq	lesson
sabr	patience
salaaming	(colloq.) greeting
salah	five times a day prayer
ﷻ sallallahu alayhi	wasallam i.e., peace and blessing upon you (Muhammad)
sawab	eternal reward
shalwar kameez	tradition sub-continent dress or kurta(tunic), izar (trouser)
shaykh/shaikh	a male Sufi teacher
Shia	a group among Muslims
Shuhr	pre dawn meal eaten when fasting the next day
Shukr	gratitude
shukran	thank you
shukrana	thanksgiving
Silheti	from Silhet in Bangladesh
sipara	one-thirtieth part of the Qur'ān
Sirah	biography of Muhammad
subhanatala	The Scared and The Mighty
Sufism	tasawwuf, the inner dimension of Islam, mysticism
Sunnah	the way of life of Muhammad
sunnah	a recommend act
Sunni	the largest grouping among Muslims

SWT	Follows Allah (SWT) meaning, The Sacred and The Mighty
ta‘lim	education, teaching
tabligh	(lit.) propagation
Tablighi Jamaat	a revivalist movement originated in India
tafsir	commentary written on the Qur’ān, exegesis
tanga	(Urdu, Hindi) a horse-drawn carriage
Tarawih	the lengthy prayer each night during Ramadhan
tarbiyyah	nurture, upbringing
tarjuma	translation
tasbih	the prayer beads used by Muslims, glorification of God,
tawakkul	reliance
tawhid	the oneness of God
tazkiyah	purification
thappar	slap
topi	hat
Ummah	the world-wide community of Muslims
‘Umrah	the minor pilgrimage to Makkah
ustadh	teacher
wā‘iz	preacher, counsellor, lecturer (pl. wu‘‘āz)
Zakat	purification of wealth by giving 2.5% p.a. of surplus wealth

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

This research seeks to explore the life and career of primary teachers working in state schools in the city of Birmingham in the West Midlands conurbation of England. The purpose of this life history approach is to explore with a sample of Muslim teachers their experiences of what it means to be a Muslim teacher. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated from this inquiry would afford new insights into the life and work of primary teachers from a faith perspective. This research employed an interpretive paradigm to illustrate the phenomenon under examination. The researcher explored the experiences and perceptions of a sample of thirteen Muslims and Muslimahs from a variety of backgrounds.

This chapter begins with an overview of the context and background that frames this research. Following this is the statement of the problem, statement of the purpose, and accompanying research questions. Also included in this chapter is discussion of the research approach and researcher's perspective. Thereafter the chapter outlines the proposed rationale, the significance of this research, how this thesis is organised. Thereafter the relevance of Islam and the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the lives of these interviewees are presented. It concludes with a discussion of understanding Muslim identity in Britain and the significance of recognising intersectionality in research. The honorific ﷺ in Arabic, meaning peace be upon him, is used once in this thesis.

Background and context

As a primary teacher the researcher has observed over the years the recent contentious relationship of religion and education in Britain. Most recently the controversy over the 'bangle girl' after a landmark High Court ruling in favour of a Sikh teenage schoolgirl to wear a *kara* (bangle) at school, makes this relationship plain (Evans and

Mourant, 2008). For some Muslims there is a tension not only between the ideological and philosophical basis upon which the education system rests and their ideas about education, but practically, over the years there have been instances when these tensions have manifested themselves in school. During the fieldwork for this research the controversy over the *niqāb* was one such example (Ameli and Merali, 2006). Previous controversies have centred on the nature of religious education being provided in state schools to Muslim children and the Collective Worship in which they participate (Hull, 1998; Khir, 2000). Other issues have been related to aspects of the curriculum when the requirements of the National Curriculum (NC) and their religious values have been at variance (Mustafa, 1985; Parker-Jenkins, 1993; Hewitt, 1996). Other issues include: language, creating identity, transmission of culture/s, and feelings for 'homeland'. Culture is a 'historically created system of meaning and significance...a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual and collective lives. It is a way of both understanding and organizing human life' (Parekh, 2000:143). Since some Muslims believe Islam to be a way of life, the lack of provisions within schools, which would allow those Muslim children who wish to, to practise their faith in school have been of concern as well. Muslims in Britain are positioned in a plural, secular, multifaith and multicultural society. This makes the provision of education for some religious communities rather complex. Muslims are one among such communities.

The above complexity is understood in various ways by Muslims, including Muslim teachers. Hence, as a teacher, the researcher has had first-hand experience of some of these challenges and opportunities, and wanted to find out the experiences of other Muslim teachers in the city and what effects, if any, their presence was having on some of these issues and how they were approaching them. At the same time, the researcher encountered a teacher in a senior position in a Church of England Voluntary Controlled school in Birmingham. Here again was an intriguing and perplexing situation - to observe the willingness of a Muslim teacher to work in a different faith-based school, and her appointment by the school. What was leading Muslim teachers to do so, and what were their feelings about such situations.

Over the years, the Muslim community in Britain has increasingly come under the scrutiny of a variety of agencies in Britain and the community itself is going through a process of introspection. Questions about loyalty and belonging are raised, and of their place in British society (Seddon, Hussain and Malik, 2004; Abbas, 2005). In this context, the role that schools play in the process of building a nation is well-established. At the heart of a school is the teacher. The pivotal role that teachers play in the formation of ideas, characters and aspirations is equally crucial. This is compounded by the fact that teachers are considered role models. Hence it was pertinent to find out what the aspirations of Muslim teachers would be for their pupils, both Muslim and non-Muslims alike and the type of society they believed they were helping to create.

Since 1997 education in England and Wales has been transformed. The organisation and manner in which schools function, and the working conditions of teachers have changed. Many children are entering secondary schools with a high level of sophistication, confidence and achievement (DCSF, 2009). This is a huge achievement on the part of schools and teachers. However, the results of the Census survey of 2001 painted a gloomy picture of Muslims in general, and of Muslim children in particular. Educational performance showed a huge gulf between themselves and their non-Muslim counterparts (BCC, 2001). The initiatives to improve the achievements of some ethnic minority youngsters, especially among Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys, need to continue.

Similarly, since 1997 the number of teachers in maintained schools in England has increased. Yet, within this situation the under-representation of ethnic minority teachers has been recognised for about thirty years. The Teacher Development Agency (TDA) does not record statistics based on religion: hence it is difficult to determine the number of Muslim teachers in state schools. Considering the demographics and the social composition of Britain, the need to increase the number of Muslim teachers in state schools is obvious. Islam holds teachers in high esteem; yet, statistically it would appear that the Muslim community in Britain has not fully taken heed of this message. Practitioners are in a stronger position to inform and motivate others and hence the researcher was inspired to find out what they had to offer to encourage others to enter the teaching profession.

Religiously, Muslims consider Muhammad, the Messenger, as the supreme model for humankind. They would claim that all aspects of his life have been recorded with relative extensiveness (Muir, 1894; Watt, 1961; Rodinson, 1971; Lings, 1983; Haykal, 1989). This is evident from the volumes of statements reportedly made by him, and by the wide ranging literature available about him (Al-Sijistānī, 1984; Kandhelwi, 1990; Al-Qazwini, 1993). But when the researcher had opportunities of meeting and attending seminars where Muslim teachers trained in the state sector were advocating and promoting educational matters, a limited conception and familiarity about Muhammad as a teacher was discerned. This observation was not confined to these teachers, but a similar observation was made regarding teachers who taught in mosques and supplementary schools which exposed a dichotomy in some of their pedagogical approaches in relation to Muhammad. This led the researcher, as a teacher educator, to design training sessions and to deliver them across the country to Imams and other personnel within the Muslim community in order to enhance the educational provisions in *madāris*. The latter teachers were likely to consider teaching as a practice of Muhammad due to their training and context; however it was less likely that the former teachers would be doing so. The latter required pedagogical awareness, whereas the former required knowledge, attitudinal awareness and re-familiarisation with Muslim educational history. This has been attempted through a synthesis of locating contemporary education theory and pedagogical principles within Muslim traditions with a view to examining critically both approaches in order to revive and adjust matters related to education for Muslims in Britain. Creating such awareness in part depended on finding out the life of Muslim teachers in state schools.

Research about ethnic minority teachers in England has been growing over many years. In the majority of cases a racial and gendered perspective has underpinned these studies. Whilst Muslim teachers have been included among the participants in these studies they have not been studied, with the exception of one investigation (Benn, 1998) which was limited to females and their early career, as a faith group. There is a need to add to this body of knowledge and understanding research studies based on specific faith perspectives. Hence this research explores Muslim teachers beyond the configurations of race and gender identities and length of experience.

As a Muslim teacher in a Birmingham primary school I identified three approaches among the Muslim teachers that I had the opportunity of working with and had known. The first approach seemed to be oblivious to the religious needs of Muslim children in schools. These Muslim teachers took what could be termed as a ‘faith blind’ stance where their only concerns were to deliver the NC and fulfil their duties to the school. A second approach was that of a teacher who was not in favour of what schools were teaching and based on ideological grounds viewed the educational system as inappropriate. A third approach relied ostensibly upon the primary sources of Islam to guide their work in schools. However, all three approaches appear to have insufficiently grasped the need to take into consideration factors of time-place, the historical educational ideas and methods used by Muslims and the fundamental aims of education from the Muslim perspective: *ta’lim* (education) and *tarbiyyah* (upbringing).

To be a Muslim is to have a world view and ways of participating and behaving in a certain way guided by the examples of Muhammad. One of the key things that shaped me as a teacher was that I was aware of the principles of Islam through Muhammad - the teacher. In this sense, this is an aspect about Muslim teachers which I wanted to explore in this study rather than accepting the fact that Muhammad is a teacher and therefore the respondents of this research will treat him as such.

If the teacher aspect of Muhammad is something that all Muslim teachers should know about but it is not transferred into their thinking and practice, possibly because it is a historical phenomenon rather than a contemporary one, it needs to be investigated in a study of this kind. I am aware of this, as demonstrated in Chapter 2 Part 3 Section 1 (p.67), and as a previous teacher and current teacher educator I linked myself with Muhammad - the teacher. I am clear that I can find in Muhammad - the teacher, things which can equip Muslim teachers to be effective Muslim teachers in a secular society. This was important for my practice but I wanted to explore the extent to which this knowledge is actually in play among the interviewees and how they are also living this understanding and consider their position and connection with Muhammad - the teacher. Otherwise by mentioning this knowledge to the respondents I wanted to uncover how it affected the way they saw themselves as teachers. In other words I was interested in finding out whether these interviewees

were imbued by it or actually thought about it. If they were not then it was something that needed considering in relation to Muslim teacher development.

I have used the term 'Muslim' for all the participants. I am cognisant of the fact that Muslims are a heterogeneous group and there are many differences and similarities between and within the groups as discussed below. I also accept that Muslims will perceive their experiences in a variety of ways regardless of their birth place.

The purpose of this life history approach was to explore with thirteen Muslim teachers their experiences and perceptions about their life, career, the self-understanding of being Muslim teachers and aspects of spirituality. This research provides information from a group of primary teachers from a major faith community represented in England to assist in filling a gap of understanding faith perspectives in the lives of teachers. This research records life histories from a diverse group of teachers from a faith background and recognises the role of faith in the life and work of teachers. This research was also searching for a synthesis between Muslim education, especially as reflected in the life of Muhammad, the Messenger and the era of his successors (*circa* 632-662 CE), and contemporary Muslim teachers' educational ideas and practice in Britain. Hence the core aims are:

1. to collect life histories of Muslim teachers from state primary schools in Birmingham.
2. to explore life histories of Muslim teachers from state primary schools in Birmingham.
3. to explore the perceptions of Muslim teachers regarding the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority teachers in Britain generally, and Muslim teachers in particular.
4. to explore the conception of Muslim teachers regarding teachers and teaching, with particular reference to Muslim educational history and the life history of Muhammad, the Messenger.
5. to explore the role of spirituality in the lives and work of Muslim teachers.

Research questions have been formulated to reflect the life history approach of teachers so that they help to achieve the aims of the research. These have also been

informed by the rationale of this research, so that their subjective experiences are captured. Hence the substantive questions underlying this research were:

1. What was your upbringing and early life like?
2. Can you look back and tell me about your school days?
3. What was your route into teaching?
4. Describe your newly qualified teacher (NQT) year.
5. How philosophically do you see teaching?
6. Is there an ideal teacher/educator for you?
7. What is your perception about EMT?
8. What do you understand by a Muslim teacher?
9. What do you understand by spirituality?
10. Where and how do you see yourself in the next five years?

The researcher has studied the life histories of thirteen Muslim teachers after obtaining ethical clearances from the University and the personal approval of the respondents. This research was mainly concerned with gaining qualitative insights, and therefore it falls under the interpretive paradigm of social science research. The data collected using a life history approach was captured by semi-structured in-depth interviews in a form of the biographical method. The interview process began with the researcher conducting three initial life history interviews as pilots. The information gathered through thirteen individual semi-structured interviews subsequently formed the basis for the overall findings of this research. Each respondent is identified by a pseudonym, and all the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

In any research the interviewer is a variable. As a researcher, I have conducted previous research and written on some topics using questionnaires and interviews. As a Muslim undertaking research into the lives and careers of Muslim teachers I am indicating that I consider Muslim teachers' experience and perspectives to be important including that of myself. Accordingly I have offered my personal interests and assumptions in an independent section before the end of this chapter and offer a discussion on reflexivity in Chapter 3 Part 5 (p.123).

Prior to conducting this research, the researcher was employed as a primary teacher in the city of Birmingham, and is currently a senior lecturer in a local university. Thus the researcher brings to the research process practical experience as a primary teacher, and as a teacher-educator having both knowledge and understanding of the context in which these teachers operated and in which the research was located.

The researcher acknowledges that the same experiences which are invaluable in offering insights could become liabilities in biasing judgements regarding the research design and the interpretations of the data. The theoretical orientation has been made explicit at the outset of the research, and the researcher has remained committed to ongoing critical self-reflection by way of maintaining a research journal. Moreover, to address the subjectivity and strengthen the credibility of the research, various procedural safeguards were taken during the fieldwork, i.e., ethical approval was sought, anonymity and confidentiality was promised (pp. 94-96; 99-101).

The rationale for this research emanates from the researcher's desire to collect and uncover the life histories of Muslim teachers to provide them with an opportunity to tell stories about their lives and careers. These may be teachers who have been serving the teaching profession since graduating and continue to do so and there may be others who may be contemplating leaving the profession altogether. Increased understanding of their experiences may not only offer insights into the changing phenomenon of primary schools, but also reveal the status, aspirations and challenges faced by some Muslim teachers. Such a portrayal may not only afford the respondents an opportunity to share their stories and personal gratification, but also has the potential of benefiting others.

This research recognises and celebrates the relative success and contribution of Muslim teachers in Birmingham. The core of the thesis is to establish that faith is part of a teachers' identity and that the role of faith must be considered for a fuller understanding of all teachers.

Relevance and role of Islam

Over the past two decades Islam has become more prominent in the enculturation, transition and re-education process of the Muslim community in Britain. For this research it is important to draw attention to the main principles and teachings of Islam to provide a sharper focus about the role of faith in the life of Muslims. Such an overview will also provide the context for the work and career of Muslim teachers in this study and its influence upon their lives. Finally, the theoretical relevance of Chapter 2 Part 3 - *The concept of the teacher and the significance of teaching in Islam* - will become evident since at the heart of what Muslims are and do, in principle, is the life of Muhammad.

According to recent statistics, there are over 1.6 million Muslims living in Britain (BCC, 2001; Peach, 2005). Although there are many independent Muslim schools and *dārul ulooms* (Institutes of Higher Education in Islam) to cater for a faith based educational approach aspired to by some Muslims, the vast majority of Muslim children continue to receive their education in mainstream state schools. All of the thirteen respondents of this research work in Birmingham primary state schools and have qualified as teachers in Britain.

Muslims regard Islam as a way of life. At the core of its belief and eschatological system are three interrelated concepts: *tawhid* (the oneness of God); *risālah* (prophethood); and *akhirah* (life after death).

Islam means submission and as a consequence of this obedience an individual arrives at peace with one self and with others. This submission, worshipfully, is to God exclusively and the model of Muhammad is used to manifest this obedience. According to most Muslims, the Qu'rān is a Divine scripture which was revealed to Muhammad, as a final messenger, through the agency of angel Gabriel. The *akhirah* is the place for judgement and eternal abode. The respondents have reflected such a world view in their thinking as they live and work in primary schools and at the same time they think and prepare for the *akhirah*.

The Qu'rān instructs Muslims to follow Muhammad and in turn Muhammad informed his followers, at the farewell sermon, that he was leaving behind him two things: the Qu'rān and his example - the Sunnah. He stated that if people were to follow these they would never go astray. It, therefore, follows that Muhammad holds high esteem among Muslims as a guide and a model. It is because of this central role and influence of Muhammad in the lives of Muslims that Chapter 2 Part 3 has been dedicated to consider aspects from his life with particular reference to teachers and teaching. In addition the inclusion of this chapter provides a theoretical position for an empirical study to explore the views from these teachers about Muhammad - the teacher. In other words it provides a basis for distinguishing an empirical position from a faith position.

With the spread of Islam to distant lands the application of Muhammad's model and implementation of the teachings of the Qu'rān led to the codification of laws. The interpretation of these laws developed schools of thought who, in addition to the primary sources, had relied upon two other sources: *ijmā'* (consensus) and *qiyās* (analogy) as dynamic mechanisms which allowed for the application of these primary sources in new places, contexts and situations. The participants of this research are likely to be influenced by such ideas and their understanding of Islam may be predisposed to such interpretations.

In terms of education there are many verses in the Qu'rān which promote learning and establish the significance of knowledge, reflection and understanding (Al-Qu'rān, 3:18; 29:43; 35:28; 39:9). In addition, Prophet Adam was taught the nature of all things (2:31) and Joseph (12:22), Moses (28:14), David and Solomon (27:15) were given knowledge and wisdom. Jesus was taught the Book, Wisdom, Torah and Injil (5:110).

Most Muslims believe that Muhammad was sent as a mercy (Al-Qu'rān, 21:107), to guide people to the service of God (16:36) and they are to follow his excellent example (33:21). They believe that he received revelation from God (53:3-4). Like other Messengers, he was trustworthy (26:107-109) and sincere (19:51). These verses point towards the need to understand the position in which most Muslims hold Muhammad. The interviewees of this research may also have a link with

Muhammad; hence, it was important to explore from them how they, as teachers, see him in relation to his role as a teacher.

Muhammad made the search of knowledge compulsory upon all Muslims (Al-Qazwini, 1993, (1), 126:224). He informed his companions that soon people would come to them to seek knowledge. He taught his companions to greet them saying, ‘welcome, welcome in pursuance of the guidance of the Messenger’ and he told them to instruct them in knowledge (Al-Qazwini, 1993, (1), 141:247). This is an explicit affirmation regarding the significance of learning for all Muslims. The reliability of some statements of this kind have been subjected to criticisms among scholars but their influence upon Muslims in promoting knowledge, teaching and learning cannot be ignored.

Arguably one of the most widespread debates in contemporary Islam is that of the position of women in Islam. There are several topics in this context such as marriage, inheritance and their public role. However, the most controversial topic is about the question of the *niqāb* and *hijāb* and for the purpose of this study, as it is concerned with Muslim women, this complexity needs to be recognised. Scholars, Muslim and others have differed in their understating of the legal status of the instruction related to veiling. Muslim women themselves apply the practice of veiling differently. It must be stressed that there are stipulations applicable to Muslim men as well for ‘veiling’ and ‘modest’ dressing. These have implication for conducting research as discussed in Chapter 6 Part 4.

The rejection of racism is specific in both the Qu’rān and *hadith*. Muslims consider all human beings as the creation of God and as sinless children of Adam and Eve, and the distinction of race and colour are there for recognition. However superiority is based on God-consciousness and is known to God alone. The Messenger, in his final sermon, laid the foundation for a responsible and just community. So ideally the distinction of race, class and power cease to exist as there is unity in faith in God (*tawhid*).

The four of the pillars of Islam have been instituted to bring about a sense of collectivity and minimise individualism. The *hajj* provides an opportunity to manifest

the global community in the form of the *Ummah*. Here, in addition to specific rituals, many Muslims from all corners of the world engage in teaching and learning and return home with renewed perspectives in a range of sciences and issues. Scholars have an opportunity to debate, discuss and share their works. *Ramadhan* is a time for disciplining the senses and the soul in the form of fasting for a month. It is a time for reciting, reflecting and renewing ones relationship with the text - the Qu'rān. *Salat*, as the five daily prayers, provide breaks during the busy schedules of the day so that Muslims are reminded of their goal, to work as a team and to socialise. *Zakat* is a key concept for welfare work especially for the establishment, maintenance and promotion of education.

Migration is seen as a positive movement for exercising the freedom of movement, settlement, economic activity and worship. The earth is considered pure and a place for worship. The implications of this are that Muslims have the facilities and become aware of living their faith wherever they are.

There are comprehensive social and moral teachings to guide their interactions and engagements in various domains of every day life. Obedience to parents, caring for the sick and elderly, respecting the rights of neighbours and maintaining good relations with relatives are some examples. Being patient, grateful, kind, humble and generous are important qualities and characteristics.

Many first generation Muslims have a working class background but there are other issues operating within this community. There are several variables playing their part and each one will impact in a complex manner. But when one looks at the variable of identity which is prominent, the one in the current climate, in contrast to the ones over a decade ago, which some people hold onto today, is the signification that comes from how Muslims present themselves - their visible faith identity.

In short, the thirteen teachers in this research were all born Muslims. Not all of them were raised in Birmingham and in some ways they were different to each other and similar in some ways (Table [1] and Table [2] pages 130 and 131). The paradigm employed for this research is interpretive and it is an empirical study which is theoretically informed. The first element of which is the positioning of this within the

wider use of the life history approach for studying teachers. The second element locates the study in its wider socio-political context for ethnic minority teachers and finally it uses a historical-faith approach to study teachers and teaching in Islam. This multidimensional theoretical perspective provides a framework for and enriches the interpretation of the data gathered. All theories have limitations and strengths and this multidimensional positioning is not an exception. The interpretations of the meanings and of the activities of teachers are affected by the world view that informs a researcher. As a Muslim researcher the selection of this approach reflects my particular ontological and epistemological position. It reflects my beliefs about the nature of knowledge and ways of knowing it. For these reasons the approach taken within this study was deemed to be most appropriate.

I recognise that there will be two issues which will appear frequently through this study and these are: identity and intersectionality. Before presenting the literature review for this research it is paramount that these two aspects are considered first so that the interpretation of the data becomes sharper.

Muslims in Britain and Identity

Until relatively recently the race/ethnicity centred model of research in social science has had significant influence in exploring the immigration and settlement patterns and interactions of Muslims in Britain. The significance of religious values for people's lives within Western technological culture has been clear in many respects (Shilling, 2008:153).

A study, such as this, which explores and understands the meaning that Muslim teachers attach to their beliefs, values, life and work has to consider the issue of identity, as it is at the core of who one is and how one makes sense of oneself. All the interviewees of this research were Muslims and they participated as Muslims in this research and it is to be noted that during the research period, the question about the identity of Muslims in Britain was highly contested in public (Ansari, 2004; Seddon, Hussain, Malik, 2004; Abbas, 2005).

In this section, it is not possible to examine the question of identity fully as the purpose is not to discuss the historical debates and various formulations of Muslim identity in Britain. The focus, instead, is on charting the religious character of Muslims in Britain and point to the need to consider inter-group similarities and intra-group differences in understanding their dynamic identity. Over the years, there have been many perspectives on understanding Muslims, such as studies which suggested that Muslims will gradually assimilate into the wider secular society (Rex, 1991) and other studies which focussed on the purposes of Asian migration (Brah and Minhas, 1985, Ballard, 1994) and the socio-economic status of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis (Anwar, 1994). In addition to studies about Muslim religious organisations (Lewis, 2002; Joly, 1995; Geaves, 2000), there has been research on the role of high profile events in developing a Muslim and British sense of belonging in Bradford (Samad, 1998). To this must be added, Ellis's (1991) study in Coventry which found that ethnic markers give way to identification as British Muslims and family cultures still influence the cultural shaping of young Muslims. Furthermore, Shaw (1994) found that British born young people in Oxford used religious symbols to articulate their identity. Other studies have explored issues related to Muslim women (Afshar, 1989; Haw 1998; Bhatti, 1999) and Jacobson (1998) found in London, among British-Pakistani youth, that her subjects showed the separation of cultural forms of religion from the more genuine form of Islam. Elsewhere, Østberg's (2000) study concluded that the young generations of Pakistani children in her study of nurture in Norway possess integrated plural identities, a term which she chose to express the dual character of children's identity which was both fluid and stable. These studies highlight and acknowledge the nature and complexity involved in understanding Muslim identities and show the multiple ways in which researchers from various disciplines have tried to understand their identity and the political, social, cultural and religious forces at work. These studies also point for the need to delineate the categories of Muslim communities in Britain.

According to the figures of Census 2001 there are over 1.6 million Muslims residing in United Kingdom (BCC, 2001). Muslims in Britain have gained a high profile in the media and in public discourse over the past two decades. It is generally perceived that they have been part of the British social and cultural landscape post World War Two, but Matar (1998) has traced their roots and links as far back as the 16th century.

The heritage of the majority of Muslims in Britain is traced to South Asian countries, mainly to countries such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh although early settlers have included the Yemeni community as well. More recently, Muslims from countries such as Bosnia, Iraq, and Somalia and from West Africa have also settled in the UK. The East African Asian Muslim communities, most of whom settled in the UK in the early 1970's, came mainly from Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Malawi. Among the participants of this research one originated from North Africa and another one from East Africa. For over a century there have been a growing number of convert Muslims. For some of these new Muslims in Britain their ways of belonging has differed from those who have settled as migrants. Some of them tend to associate with the *Ummah* rather than a specific Muslim community (Ansari, 2004:16). None of the interviewees were 'new' Muslims.

These national identities are different internally in terms of their region or ethnic backgrounds. The Muslim population in Britain, therefore, comes from regions such as Azad Kashmir, Sylhet, Punjab and Gujarat. Within these groups, languages and dialects will form an extra layer such as Swahili, Mirpuri and Kutchi. Caste groupings will be another factor which will thread through this fabric coupled with class characteristics which play an important role in their outlook. These differences of class, educational levels, employment skills base and household income lead to 'very different dynamics of community formation and interaction' within the life of these various cities (Hussein, 2004:115).

The sense of an *Ummah*, a global community of believers embracing internal distinctions continues to be influential and this needs to be taken account of in any analysis of the Muslim community in Britain. The focus on sub-groups should not divert attention from some commonalities that exist across and within these categories. Indeed, it is such belonging which allows some groups to call for the rejection of any other identity other than the one that binds Muslims globally (Akhtar, 2005). However, the reality is that whilst Muslims do have a sense of belonging to the *Ummah*, this belonging does not negate or reject affiliations to other socially constructed concepts of nation, gender, or faith groupings. For the participants of this research and for Muslims in Britain, as elsewhere, the important point to record is that Islam is not monolithic in nature and Muslim identity is heterogeneous. Part of this

diversity, although limited, is evident in Table [1] and Table [2] (pp.130-131). Be that as it may, all these Muslims, nationally, face the reality of living in Britain as a minority. Therefore, it is important to recognise the range of perspectives within the Muslim communities in order to limit generalisations of the identity of Muslims and Islam.

Past thinking saw Muslim identity in relatively rigid terms (Østberg, 2000) or as possessing fixed qualities unmediated by time and context (Samad, 1998) and generally subsumed within the ethnic category (Ansari, 2004). There are several factors which influence the construction of identity: gender, nationality, region of origin, language, social strata and religion. Each of these components break down into parts which then overlap or intersect. This allows identity to be flexible so that individuals can choose how and what to present themselves as. This was also evident from the response of Mu‘adh (p. 170). Gender seems to be one such factor that seems to play an important role among young Muslims in Britain in constructing their identity differently. Some females question the traditional male-dominated order within some Muslim communities (Ansari, 2004:22). Among Muslim boys and girls aged 14-15, based on her findings from the north-west of England, Archer (2003:38-39, 48-49) proposed that Muslim male masculine identities can be read as organised around brotherhood and the authenticity of the male voice.

The discussion so far has shown that an exclusive sociological approach to understanding Muslims in Britain is insufficient. It has to consider the theological dimension that needs to be built into the cobweb of identity. Islam, with its overarching characteristics expressed diversely along political, theological, doctrinal and juridical positions, appears to be the anchor for many Muslims in Britain. Hence, it seems pertinent to consider the concept of intersectionality in this context.

Intersectionality and Muslims

Foucault considered identity as something resulting from the interactions of people instead of something being within an individual. Analysts have stressed identities are not given or fixed (Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins, 2002:289; Pilkington, 2003:174). In other words, identity is something impermanent and shifts with changing contexts,

times and places. The notion of the self is related to power which, rather than being acquired is exercised (Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins, 2002). Thus, identities are dynamic, acquired and transformable through a series of social interactions. A person will be a researcher, father, teacher and a male all at once. These identities are foregrounded depending on circumstances of place, time and context. When considering Muslims teachers, multiple layers of identity come into play at times and these may interact with each other as evident in the example of Ummu Salamah below.

Intersectionality is a concept used to denote the examination of the various ways in which race, class, ethnicity and gender interact to shape multiple dimensions of identity (Crenshaw, 1995; Yural-Davis, 2006, Buitelaar, 2006). The experiences of Muslim female teachers in Benn's (1998) study showed that many of their experiences were not subsumed within the race and gender discrimination boundaries, rather their experiences were religiously affected. Hence, the factors affecting Muslim women's lives cannot be captured wholly by looking only at either the race or gender dimensions of their experiences. Religion needs to be included within this continuum. This becomes more significant when it is known that inequality manifests in various forms. Indeed, discrimination experienced by some Muslims on religious grounds is reported to be increasing (Benn, 2002; Allen, 2005; Anwar, 2005; Ameli and Merali, 2006). It is because of the multiple ways in which inequalities exhibit themselves, responses to these inequalities and the exertion of power may well be diverse. A male Muslim with a beard wearing *shalwar kameez* and one without these features may perceive inequalities through three perspectives and hence the responses to this may differ. Below are examples from three Muslim teachers, who are key informants in my study about whom more is said later, in response to the question, what do you understand a Muslim teacher to be, to draw attention to multiple dimensions of identity:

As noted at the beginning of the next chapter (p.22), Ummu Salamah's quote ends with '...I am a Muslim.' Khadijah felt that 'it was up to individuals because at the end of the day they are all just labels, they are more about how much of an emphasis an individual puts on their personality' and Mu'adh thought a Muslim teacher was 'a teacher irrespective of whether they were a Muslim or a non-Muslim.'

It could be argued, for the purpose of this study, that these three teachers were functioning distinctively depending on how they perceived the context during which this research was taking place and its purpose: the political, educational, religious, and social. Ummu Salamah's response appears to be one of positive self-identification in relation to Islam with the displacement of other identity categories. Reading and understanding her life history provided a possible explanation of why this may be so. Khadijah had perhaps hinted at an appeal for human qualities i.e., I am first a human, and possibly rejected implicitly the demonization of Muslims in recent years. Whilst for Mu'adh, there was self-identification which was perhaps appealing for acceptance within the teaching fraternity by his amplification of other identities deliberately. This became evident in one of his responses about how the school perceived his role and his contributions in school (p.170). His response was useful for noting the demonstration of the interplay between gender, religion and ethnicity (Benn, 1998; 2002) and possibly represents the notion of 'triple oppression' (Yural-Davis, 2006:195). In such a perspective of identity one can tentatively perceive the exercise of power and the use of identity for strategic purposes based on multiple identities. Such a positioning is evident in Juwayriyah's account where she uses her linguistic credentials to suggest a change from a generalist to a linguist primary (Spanish and French) teacher whilst organising an Arabic class which according to her helps Muslim children understand the Qur'ān. Such an approach allows difference among Muslims to move beyond the limitations of a single-issue focus as highlighted in the work of Flintoff, Fitzgerald and Scraton (2008:80) on physical education. Flintoff, et al., (2008), however, caution that when centralising difference within groups, the link with inequality must not be lost so that both commonalities of experiences, as well as their difference, are recognised. The issues of bringing particular identities to the fore becomes further complicated because attempts to organise one's identity around a religious character varies on the basis of what is possible within a particular time and place (Shilling, 2008:156).

The impact of the difference in power relations between the researcher and the researched on the conduct and outcome of the research is problematic (Flintoff, et al., (2008:81). These differences mean that same faith interviewing would not necessarily lead to more empowering and emancipatory research. Therefore researchers have

argued for reflexivity on part of the researcher. This concept has been elaborated in Chapter 3 Part 5 (p.123).

Organisation

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. The first chapter gave an overview of the research problem, the aims of the research and the essential questions that have guided this research, and thereby illustrates the framework of this research, and clearly describes the rationale of collecting the life histories of Muslim teachers. The nature of the enquiry is constrained in many ways, and hence it was important to establish the scope of the research, the preferred research paradigm and the data gathering tool employed and the organisation of this thesis. An overview of the main aspects of Islam was mentioned and issues on Muslim identity and intersectionality.

The second chapter consists of three parts. In the first part a literature review is undertaken in relation to the meta-theoretical basis of this research, entitled *Locating Life Histories in Educational Research* in which the nature and some features of the interpretive paradigm are identified, and it locates this research within the biographical method. It also examines the use of life history approach for studying teachers and highlights its strengths and limitations. It ends with a rationale for using this approach for studying Muslim teachers. The next two parts deal with the contextualisation of the general research aims and themes into two relevant bodies of literature i.e., literature on ethnic minority teachers, and on a specific area in the educational history of Islam. The aim of this critical review is to establish significant findings from numerous existing research studies that have explored the experiences of Black and Asian teachers in England, and it is entitled *Ethnic Minority Teachers in British Educational Settings*. This is followed by a brief historical descriptive analysis of the development of Muslim teachers during both the formative period of Islam and among Muslims during subsequent periods in order to establish its features, and is entitled *The Concept of the Teacher and the Significance of Teaching in Islam*. It is hoped that through a critical dialogue with these previous literatures the distinctive characteristic of this research will become evident.

The third chapter focuses on issues related to the design and key constructs of the research. This discussion, in Part 1, is followed by a reflection by the researcher on the research process in Part 2 to make clear the procedures followed in collecting life histories. Part 3 explains how the data were analysed and how they have been presented in subsequent chapters. In Part 4, a brief account of the Muslim population in Birmingham is provided so that the socio-economic, religious, cultural and geographical context can be established and Part 5 makes plain the position of the researcher in relation to the research and the interviewees.

Chapter four is divided into two parts. Part 1 begins to reveal some of the data that have emerged from this research in the form of essential personal characteristics of the storytellers. Part 2 presents a commentary and reflection by the researcher on the life history of Ummu Salamah (pseudonym). The fifth chapter summarises the lives of four Muslim teachers, to establish their collective histories. The sixth chapter is divided into four parts. In Part 1, the views of Muslim teachers on recruitment and retention of teachers is analysed. In Part 2, what it means to be a Muslim teacher is discussed; and in Part 3, the spiritual dimension in their lives is explored. In Part 4 some suggestions on researching Muslims are made. The seventh chapter critiques the methodology and provides the main conclusions of the research.

Summary

As they live and work in Birmingham, the experiences of these Muslims teachers are shaped by multiple identities which include: gender, race, ethnicity, language, regional origin of parents, class, their settlement patterns, educational experiences and religion. In understanding Muslim identity, whilst it is crucial to project a malleable and multilayered identity, it is equally crucial to transcend such boundaries and recognise the overlaps of differences and similarities within these categories which create the spaces for intersectionality.

This chapter has highlighted the need to take into account multiple aspects of individuals when considering how people construct their social world. It has also presented intersectionality as a way of framing the various interactions of race, religion and gender in the context of Muslim teachers. Although socially constructed

the significance of these identities should not be ignored in society. The chapter has explained the context, rationale and aims that have guided this research and has also shown how this thesis has been organised.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

PART 1: LOCATING LIFE HISTORIES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Introduction

No, I'm not. I'm from Lahore. I'm sorry, I'm Urdu speaking. I'm probably erm... the upper class society, but I'm not. I'm a Muslim, you know.

The above quotation has been taken from a respondent, and exemplifies data from a qualitative research agenda. This particular quote was selected to illustrate the complexity involved in understanding teacher identity. The quote indicates the centrality of faith in the life of this particular Muslim teacher. Her identity in relation to the city from which her family originated, her mother tongue and her socio-economic background seem to be given a secondary position. Such data are essential and central to this research and before elaborating how and why they are significant, it is necessary to explain what research is and how it is carried out. In the following section, both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research are discussed briefly.

Research is a process of gaining a better understanding of the complexities of human interactions (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:15). Due to this complexity and the manner in which researchers try to understand the world and the role of humans in it, how best to conduct research is a controversial issue. This paradigmatic debate is well documented in the literature of social science research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). A quantitative approach to research is appropriate where quantifiable measures of variables which one is interested in are possible, where hypotheses can be formulated and tested and inferences drawn from samples to populations (Liebscher, 1998). Qualitative methods, on the other hand, are appropriate when the phenomena under study are complex, social in nature and do not easily lend themselves to quantification. They are embedded in the research process and the issue under study (Flick, 2002:1).

The dualism of paradigms has been criticised by Pring (2000) and others as being a false one. Gorard (2001:6) is of the view that the distinction is in the traditional method of analysis rather than in the philosophical underpinnings, paradigms and data collection methods. Moreover Bryman (1992:75) takes the view that the depiction of quantitative and qualitative research as distinct epistemologies or paradigms that cannot be reconciled is inaccurate. In other words, there was a time when the two paradigms were not considered to be mutual, but exclusive. However, this is no longer the case, as both could well support each other in most social science research. Since this research is essentially qualitative in nature it is significant, before elaborating the chosen technique of 'life history', to consider qualitative research further.

Understanding and applying qualitative research

Qualitative research has been considered to consist of a set of data gathering techniques or methods like observations, interviews and documentary analysis. It is also a philosophical perspective that pushes a research agenda. For others, qualitative research is encompassed in the term ethnography, which consists of both observations and its interpretation in textual form. It is, therefore, difficult to find consensus on a definition of qualitative research. However, for the purpose of this discussion, some general features may be described. Creswell (1998:15) describes it as:

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

One of the purposes of qualitative research is to understand human behaviour and experience, so that such research can inform the processes by which humans construct meaning about their worlds and themselves. Another purpose is that of reporting those meanings.

There are several characteristics that are used most often to describe qualitative research. Researchers using qualitative inquiry typically examine a small number of people over an extended period of time, usually in their own settings. Such an inquiry has an interpretive character. The data are derived from participants' perspectives, and the researcher attempts to understand the world from participants' frames of reference, and the meanings they have constructed of their experiences. The reporting is rich with quotations, narration and detail - what is termed 'thick description'. In addition, researchers are themselves the instruments for data collection and analysis through observing, participating and interviewing. They acknowledge and monitor their own biases and subjectivities, and how these colour interpretation of data (Robson 1993; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Typical qualitative research techniques are observations, field notes, archival records of events or perspectives, interviews and questionnaires (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). The process itself is flexible, and the research design is changeable to match the dynamic needs of the situation. The research problem can typically be related to a lack of previous research: it may be derived from the notion that existing theory may be inaccurate, inappropriate, or biased, or it may be based on the need to describe phenomena (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982).

In a research process, deciding on when and how to use qualitative methods is an important step. As part of this decision, a number of questions were explored by the researcher: What types of problems led themselves to qualitative approaches and what types of qualitative methods existed. Consideration was also given to the limitations and advantages of using qualitative approaches. The researcher concluded that qualitative research was well suited for the purposes of description, exploration and interpretation. The reason for choosing a qualitative methodology revolves primarily around the type of question or problem to be explored (Patton, 1990:13-14). The quantitative research approach maintains that a researcher should remain independent and distant from the research process whereas in the qualitative approach a researcher tries to interact with those who are being studied, a relationship is developed and personal interaction takes place (Coombes, 2001:30-31). Within the qualitative paradigm there are numerous approaches and the biography method is one of them. Before putting teachers' work and life into a historical context, this method is analysed in some detail to demonstrate its relevance and link to this research.

Biography method

Denzin (1989) considered the biographical method as the studied use and collection of life documents and experiences. The documents include autobiographies, biographies, diaries, letters, obituaries, life histories, life stories, personal experiences, stories, oral histories and personal histories. From this it seems that the life history is a variety of the biography method. Hence the biographical method needs further elaboration to open its over-arching principles and characteristics.

The building block of the biography method is the text by the person or others. A biography focuses on the individual and is unique and the notion of time is central to the narrative analysis. Indeed the fact that 'there are different versions of any life' needs acknowledging (Scott and Usher, 1999:118). In addition, a historical life is understood within the current ways of thinking. This thinking is constructed and reconstructed at different moments in different ways by its author (Scott and Usher, 1999:117-118). Perhaps it also assists in understanding shared experiences. Al Zeera (2001:1) maintains that although personal experiences are 'personal', reflecting over and sharing those makes individuals cognisant of the extent to which personal experiences are intermingled and interconnected with the 'other' and with the experiences of society. Through reflection on personal stories individuals are assisted in constructing and reconstructing their previous experiences in the light of changing circumstances and this helps them to enter into a process of dialectical thinking. Although the narrative emphasises the individual, the process of sharing either during the interview itself or after reading the narratives is crucial in broadening one's own and reciprocal perspectives, and in creating the narrative. The biographical method therefore takes accounts of the notions of: individuals, ideologies, time and circumstances and it will therefore be approached through three standpoints.

Three approaches within the biographical perspective have been identified by Miller (2000). These approaches are labelled as: the realist approach, the neo-positive approach and the narrative approach. The realist approach subscribes to the techniques of grounded theory, and is 'based fundamentally in processes of inducing concepts from empirical data'. The neo-positive approach emphasises the 'empirical testing of pre-existing conceptual frameworks', whereas, the narrative approach

centres upon ‘the process of constructing a view of reality that is carried out jointly by the researcher and the interviewee’ (Miller, 2000:ix). Researchers can be eclectic in the techniques that they apply, so that in practice they would use insights from any or all of these approaches. However, each approach has its own unique core of insight which it brings to the biographical perspective and one method should not be considered superior to another (Miller, 2000:74).

Three basic forms of the life history have been distinguished (Denzin, 1989:187-189; Ward, 2003:30). The complete life history tries to deal with the experiences of the participants from birth, covering the whole life. The topical life history ‘shares all the features of the complete form’, but in terms of presentation ‘only one phase or aspect of the participant’s life is presented’. Finally, the edited life history can be either topical or complete. ‘Its key feature is the continual interspersing of explanations, comments, and questions by someone other than the focal participant’ (Ward, 2003:31).

Characteristics of biographical perspectives

The collection of biographies has been a method of research whose popularity has grown over the decades in a variety of social science disciplines. They are distinct methods of research, and at the same time they are seen ‘as embodying a distinct approach to social science - the biographical perspective’ (Miller, 2000:73-75) which is soundly located within the general qualitative paradigm with their own characteristics. One of these characteristics is that it has a holistic concern with placement in time and the interplay between the actor and the social structure, and how this interplay and its perceptions alter over time. Before considering the life history technique in more detail the holistic concern is addressed.

The holistic viewpoint in the biographical perspective is expressed in two ways. Firstly, biographical data range across time. Secondly, the biographical perspective centres itself midway between social structure and the individual as a social actor. The respondent is telling the researcher about his/her life history in the present, but this biography ranges over the past and will cover events up to the present. Therefore, a biographical approach is utilised where the ‘area of interest is either the effects of

change over time, historical events as these events have impinged upon the individual, or his or her movement along their life course' (Miller, 2000:74). The biographical interview facilitates recollection by a process of 'cross-referentiality' as the respondent swings back and forth in life and makes connections with various events and segments in life (Miller, 2000:74). Be that as it may, extensive individual study of life history is not a complete study, and will remain incomplete (Muchmore, 2002), although a fuller view and understanding is gained (Figueroa, 1998:161).

When a respondent narrates the story it means that the person is telling about the 'constraints and opportunities' that were available in the past, and how he/she dealt with these, either by 'removing the barrier or taking advantage of opportunities' (Miller, 2000:75). Therefore, the biographical perspective is about the interplay between the teacher and the social structure. In the case of this research it meant how these Muslim teachers negotiated their paths through the changing societal structures and how these interplays and their perceptions altered over time. Muslim teachers in this research, revealed the extent of this interplay and how they addressed the issues of culture, identity, faith, education and professionalism, and how such perceptions altered, and what triggered such fluctuations.

Practically, however, biographical accounts are presented as incomplete. Most respondents know that the end is yet to be recorded. The biographical perspective is very much appropriate when experience and viewpoints are required that reflect an awareness of 'the context of changing social structure and the passage of time' (Miller, 2000:76). Thus, it has been argued that one of the virtues of the biographical approach is that the story is grounded in real place-time, and deals with specific affairs and issues and 'concrete matters' (Thomas, 1995).

In biographical examinations the strengths of both phenomenological and positivist perspectives are used to understand individual persons or selves so that what becomes relevant is the purpose of the investigation (Erben, 1998:4). In addition, as a research tool the biography method is used to explore, through the analysis of individual lives, the relationship between social forces and personal character. Figueroa (1998) shows through the examination of a single person's autobiography the relationship between colonial exploitation, educational opportunity and the formation of self-hood. The

hermeneutics of autobiography in the study of ethnicised and racialised relations and in developing and promoting a sophisticated understanding of citizenship in a plural society is especially significant (Figueroa, 1998:149). In relation to education, the tension between the two processes makes the research of a single biography significant, as it may reveal the manner in which individuals position themselves in such a society and their relationship with it. So far, the diverse understandings, forms and approaches of the biography method have been demonstrated. The next section is about how teachers have been studied.

Studying the life of teachers

Ball and Goodson (1985) observe that British research on teachers moved through a number of changing phases. In 1960 the key issue in approaching the practice of teaching was that of the role of teachers (Ball and Goodson, 1985:6). This approach changed somewhat in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Schooling began to be examined as a social process by case study researchers, particularly in the manner by which school pupils were 'processed'. '[T]he sympathies of the researchers lay primarily with the pupils, working-class and female pupils'. A further shift was detected by the late 1970s when 'attention began to be directed to the constraints within teachers' work. Teachers were transformed from villains to victims and, 'in some cases, "dupes" of the system within which they were required to operate' (Ball and Goodson, 1985:7). This later characterisation of teachers finally opened up the question of how teachers saw their work and their lives. Consequently, new research methods were required which perhaps allowed Nias (1989a) to present the first detailed study of the personal and professional experience of primary school teachers in Britain.

An international dimension on the work of researchers committed to enhancing the lives and work of teachers and the altering conditions in which they work has been collected (Day, Fernandez, Hauge and Møller, 2000). In presenting some of the developments in the British context, McCulloch (2000) explored the changing political characteristics of the relationship between teachers and the school curriculum, focussing on how teachers' autonomy has been affected by the curriculum. Helsby (2000) argued that the professionalism of teachers is constantly

changing in different ways at different times. She interviewed English secondary school teachers who suggested a lessening of the constraints placed upon teacher autonomy by the National Curriculum and that it acted as a positive prompt for professional development. There are other studies on the life of teachers and their stories and the political and cultural aspects of teaching (Ball and Goodson, 1985; Lawn and Grace, 1987; Smyth, 1987; Acker, 1989; Nias, 1989a; Goodson, 1992a; Sikes, Measor and Woods, 1995; Thomas, 1995; Lawn, 1996, Gordon 2000; Sikes and Everington, 2001). Erben (1998) has edited a range of empirical studies covering diverse areas such as adolescent girls reflecting on their educational choice, lives of lesbian teachers, doctorate students and their learning and learning difficulties, through biography. In any case, the story by a teacher cannot be considered 'as typical or representative'; nevertheless, 'within each individual narrative, there will be episodes, experiences and emotions with which teachers can readily identify' (Thomas, 1995:xiv). The above literature shows that studying teachers is not a new phenomenon, which therefore means that this research has become part of a broader research agenda related to education. This research is unique and therefore studies that have focused on particular characteristics of teachers have also been identified later.

Life history and teachers

The purpose of this life history research was to explore the experiences and perceptions of thirteen Muslim teachers about their life, career, their self-understanding of being Muslim teachers and aspects of their spirituality. It is therefore significant to consider the definitions, distinctions and relationships between life history, life story, oral history and prosopography, as scholars and researchers have understood and applied these differently.

There are several prominent features of a life story. Denzin (1989:185-186) noted that it may take the form of an autobiography, and is 'based on fictions or fictional accounts of what happened' and it 'exists as a story, somewhat independent of its telling'. He further elaborates that the intention of the life story is to 'contain within a single sweep the relevant objective details and subjective experiences of a single person's life'. Denzin (1989:186) provides a clear distinction between a life story and

life history. The former, he states, deals with an entire life or a segment of life while life histories deal with what happened and how it happened.

In addition, Goodson (1995:97) considers a life story to be ‘a personal reconstruction of experience, in this case by the teacher’. Life story givers provide information often in loosely structured interviews. The researcher elicits the teacher’s perceptions and stories, but is generally passive rather than actively interrogative (Goodson, 1995:97). The life history starts with the life story that teachers tell, but seeks to build on the information provided by other sources to develop ‘intertextual and intercontextual mode of analysis’ (Goodson, 1995:97). Al Zeera (2001) has included her personal experience and story in a scholarly work. This approach, she admits, may seem unusual and unacceptable to conventional schools of thought. Nevertheless, she contends that the inclusion of her personal experience contributed to the advancement of an alternative paradigm.

One way of regaining our wholeness and holiness in education is by connecting to our inner selves through our innate experiences. Retelling those experiences, however, allows us to reconstruct them and evaluate them in a different light. Reconstruction of experiences, I believe, facilitates transformation that should be the aim of education (Al Zeera, 2001:xxi).

Regarding the significance of life stories in educational and social research, Goodley, Lawthom, Clough and Moore (2004) believe that life stories indicate a lot about the individual, collective, public, private, structural, agentic, real and fictional world. Hence, one of the aims of the life story research is to investigate the subjective meanings of lives as they are told in the narratives of participants (Plummer, 1995:50), whereas the purpose of life history research is to examine the manner in which social and individual lives intersect. Furthermore, Plummer (2001:19-20) contrasts between long and short life stories: the former would be a full-length book account of a life, and the latter tends to be more focussed, takes less time and is published in parts.

Atkinson (1998) discusses the research use of life stories. In a psychological usage he identifies life story as the most effective means for gaining an understanding of how the self evolves over time. In addition, he maintains that telling a life story is a way

of organising experience and fashioning or verifying identity. He also contends that the most significant use of the life story interview is for the therapeutic effects it can have. Among the sociological uses he identifies its sociolinguistic, mystical-religious and cosmological-philosophical uses (Atkinson, 1998:9-14).

The definition of oral history is contested (Plummer, 2001). According to Denzin (1989:186) an oral history deals with factual accuracy and it is neither a life story nor life history. According to Ritchie (2003:19) oral history, collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. Oral historians concentrate on recording the personal experiences of interviewees and are distinguished from journalistic interviews (Ritchie, 2003:37). Oral history is important for the preservation of information and events, and in an age of digital technologies, it can provide opportunities for communities in many parts of the world to record and preserve their history, customs and traditions.

Life history methodology is one of the broad categories of qualitative research (McEwan and McEwan, 2003:77), and is listed among the studied documents in the biographical method (Denzin, 1989; Miller, 2000), whereas others consider it as a special form of interview associated with qualitative research (Bryman, 2001:316). Nevertheless, specifically, a life history is a portrayal of ‘the important events and experiences in a person’s life’, and is conveyed in a way that catches ‘the person’s own feelings, views, and perspectives’ (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984:143). Life history is also seen as ‘a deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it’ (cf. Marshall and Rossman, 1995:88), and is used in diverse fields such as education, welfare, sociology, psychology and anthropology for its flexibility and adaptability (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:189). It is very useful for providing the researcher an inside view of a culture (Edgerton and Langness, 1974), and would also identify momentous events. Often, the life history is a story of how an ‘outsider’ joins a group and matures to be able to accommodate the traditional expectations of that society to be a person holding similar values and ethics. Indeed, life history studies ‘emphasize the experiences and requirements of the individual - how the person copes with society, rather than how society copes with a stream of individuals’ (Mandelbaum, 1973:177). The individual is significant, but the individual does not exist in a vacuum and hence the study of individual life

histories without reference to the community to which individuals subscribe to would be incomplete. Life history has also been depicted as documenting ‘the inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand, and define the world around them’ (Faraday and Plummer, 1979:776). Looking at individual narratives whilst ignoring the shared history of a community and the wider narrative context ‘is both misleading and pointless’ argues Al Zeera (2001:5). She says:

As Muslims, our personal and separate stories, if shared and shaped by the larger Islamic narrative context, can provide the new generation with a wealth of personal experiences to which they can relate. This encourages them to reflect on their personal experiences and place them in the larger Islamic context (Al Zeera, 2001:5).

In other words, although this research has taken into consideration individual life histories, the history of the *Ummah* – the Muslim community at least in part is indispensable. Life histories support in defining problems and in researching aspects of certain professions. Marshall and Rossman (1995:88) maintain that the value transcends the usefulness of supplying specific information about events and customs of the past ‘by showing how the individual interacts with the culture’. Religion is central in the self-definition of the majority of South Asian people (Modood, Berthoud, Lakey, Nazroo, Smith, Virdee and Beishon, 1997:297). Therefore, these life histories have been important in studying religious and cultural changes that have taken place over the years and in knowing about the integration of these Muslim teachers. They have assisted in acquiring a view of the inside of religion and culture among these Muslim teachers. Life histories have helped in obtaining the outcomes of their interactions and how these were connected to their individual lives, so that people are now able to appreciate the importance of faith and the responses of these individuals to life opportunities. In other words, they enhance ethnography by adding historical and subjective depth (Woods, 1985:13; Measor, 1985:61). In carrying out life histories an important feature is the development of dialogue between the respondent and the researcher, as well as the respondents with themselves (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:188). As a result of the highly collaborative nature of the process, empathy between the respondents and the researcher is an essential ingredient (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:188), and the identification of both with the research is essential as well (Woods, 1985:13).

Originally, life story referred to the account given by an individual about his or her life and when this account was backed up by external sources, the validated life story was called a life history (Miller, 2000:19). More recently, life story still refers to the account provided by an individual, 'only with emphasis upon the ordering into themes or topics that the individual chooses to adopt or omit as s/he tells the story' (Miller, 2000:19). But, now life history refers to 'a series of substantive events arranged in chronological order. Confirmation or validation by external sources is no longer a necessary requirement for a life history' (Miller, 2000:19).

This researcher recognises that there are differences of substance between life story, life history and oral history and has noted the particular distinctions between these as evident in Denzin's typology (1989:188) shown in Appendix 1. At the same time it is also useful to acknowledge that some researchers apply the terms life history and life story interchangeably (Bryman, 2001:316). In fact, Bloom and Munro (1995:100) appear to use the phrase 'life history narratives as a synonym for oral histories, informal narratives, personal narratives, and life stories.'

From the above discussion, the most significant elements in both these methods are that they are about people and their experiences and it is this aspect of Muslim teachers that the researcher aims to capture. Hence in this research, life history is used for being a generic form of the biographical method (Denzin, 1989) and for its flexibility and adaptive nature (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Life history is understood as the sharing by an individual, orally or textually, of selective aspects from their memory about their life and experiences in response to an interested party.

Advantages and limitations

After presenting the discussion regarding the preference for using life history in this research, its advantage and limitations are considered. Marshall and Rossman (1995:88) identify three benefits of life history methodology, and assert that because it captures the entire course of a person's life, 'the reader enters vicariously into the same experience'. In addition, the method gives 'a fertile source of hypotheses that may be tested for further study'. Finally, it points to 'a behavior [sic] processes and

personality types' that may be studied when a considerable number of 'detailed life histories are accumulated for comparative study'. Life history methodology emphasises the value of a person's own story and provides pieces for a total picture of a concept, and the interconnections of apparently unconnected phenomena can be seen. Furthermore, the life history technique offers considerable advantages for school-based research too.

They will also be able to reveal the differing ways in which an individual perceives educational situations, issues and changes. A number of substantive research concerns themselves seem amenable to investigations by means of the life history technique, for example, teachers' careers, teachers' and pupils' values and attitudes, and the ways in which the variables of class, gender and ethnicity can influence the learning process (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:189).

This raises the question of whether to add the religious and faith dimension here too.

As with all techniques, the life history technique has its limitations, the major ones of which include their 'perceived lack of generability', and 'the lack of accepted principles for the selection of participants', and the 'paucity of suitable analytical concepts to establish a coherent frame of reference' (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:88). They can serve as a foundation for confirming or questioning other accounts, and important areas that have previously not been considered by researchers can be highlighted. When the respondent and the researcher enjoy a sympathetic relationship, much information will be gained that would be difficult to gain by any other method. On the contrary, people's memory recall may not be reliable, or they may reflect biased views or opinions (Coombes, 2001:37).

After the researcher is conscious of the potential weaknesses of the research, to reduce these limitations, Marshall and Rossman (1995:89) suggest that '[o]fficial records can be secured and the accounts of subjects checked against written reports'. Also, the 'researcher can corroborate the events presented in the history by interviewing others in the subject's life' (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:89). This, however, was not practical with the participants of this research due to sensitive issues of intrusion and lack of availability of records. However, the researcher explored the possibility of interviewing significant others in the life of these teachers but none were able to offer

such a person. Saukko (2003) stresses that, even if a researcher studies a single aspect of something like Samoan adolescent female sexuality, it is important to recognise that it can be understood from several perspectives, and is part of a larger puzzle. Thus, a life history is: '(1) an expression of lived reality, to be understood dialogically; (2) shot through with social discourses that can be unravelled through deconstructions; and (3) articulates wide local, national, and transnational politics, to be analysed' (Saukko, 2003:33). From the readers' point of view, life histories have a strong appeal, due to 'the subject matter and the narrative form in which they are written' (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:89). In other words, a life history account adds 'flavour' to a qualitative research.

Thus far, the study of teachers' lives has been located within the qualitative paradigm which included a discussion of the nature and characteristics of the biographical method. Distinctions between life story, life history and oral history were detailed for clarification purposes. A review of the advantages and limitations of using the life history technique for gaining insights into the life of teachers has also been considered. One of the incentives for studying life histories of Muslim teachers is that it has made available Muslim prosopographies. The remainder of this chapter provides the rationale for studying life histories of Muslim teachers.

Prosopography of Muslim teachers

From the Muslim community perspective in particular and educational literature in general, one of the purposes of using life histories is that as a biographical and historical method, it has provided Muslims' prosopography or collective biography. Through a prosopography of Muslim teachers, patterns have emerged from various experiences of the home, religion, school, college or the influence of Local Authorities (LA) and the manner in which social structures and personal networks operated for them.

As with other teachers, in the life histories of these Muslim teachers there appeared individuality and collectivity in two respects. Collectively, they are Muslims and they are teachers, but they are also individuals, each with their own unique life history. One way to understand collectivity, as suggested by Butt, Raymond, McCue, and

Yamagishi, (1992:94) is to draw on methods in collective biography, prosopography, whereby an attempt is made 'to identify groups of teachers who, on the basis of criterion variables, related to context and persons, are experiencing similar professional realities'. In prosopography, these criteria determine whether a teacher qualifies as a member of a particular group. According to Butt, et al., (1992:94) membership, facilitates 'comparison and generalisations within the group' and also 'provides for generalisation to other potential members in the teaching force at large'. The biographical research method has given rise to an increased interest in prosopography (Jones, 1998:130). Prosopography has been described as 'collective biography' by modern historians, or 'multiple career-line analysis' by social scientists and 'has been most systematically theorized upon in the work of Lawrence Stone' (Jones, 2001:329).

Prosopography 'serves to gather elusive data on distinct groups of historical actors in the form of collective biography' (Cunningham, 2001:450). Such a study of teachers from a particular faith may allow the gathering of a body of knowledge which may extend our understanding of the transmission of educational ideologies and practices (Cunningham, 2001:451), or perhaps challenge them. The purpose of prosopography, as explained by Stone (1987:45; cf. Jones, 2001:331) is to investigate 'common background characteristics of a group of actors in history by means of a collective study of their lives'. Stone (1987:46) has identified two approaches: the mass and the elite school. The former is concerned with gathering data from large numbers and the latter is concerned with small group dynamics and the gathering of evidence from a wide variety of sources. For this study, fieldnotes and memos were used as additional data were not available from the respondents. The main purpose in both approaches is to focus attention on the group in order to show the extent of cohesiveness in terms of particular social phenomena. For this research these included, for example, early life, schooling, youth, career and routes into teaching.

Prosopography has become an appropriate methodological tool for investigating two fundamental problems of history: the source of political action and social structure and social mobility. In addition, there are other subsidiary problems which Stone cites such as 'the correlation of intellectual or religious movements with social, geographical, occupational and other factors' (Stone, 1987:45-46, cf. Jones, 1998:131;

2001:329-330). In this study, prosopography was used to understand the nature of four Muslim teachers' interaction with social structure and social mobility. These four life histories are presented in a forthcoming chapter (p. 141). The data generated from this research are of interest to researchers who want to learn what sense these teachers have made of the events in their own lives, and the interviews offer better insights into the how and why.

Valued involvement

From the teachers' point of view, though they realised that their participation was mainly for another purpose, they nevertheless embraced such involvement because they wanted to tell people about their life, work and career. When entering the life of teachers, the concerns of a researcher may not necessarily be the concerns of the teachers. This is illustrated by Nias (1989b) in her critique of her research, where her concerns and those of the teachers were different. She expected them to talk about the long-term utility of their professional education, whereas they wanted to share their own experiences of teaching. As a result, she abandoned her original intentions. Encountering Muslim teachers in various contexts has provided the researcher with a similar experience, whereby they wanted to be involved in research, for a plethora of reasons. However, the researcher had to be open-minded when it came to giving priority to their research concerns, and hence their participation was explored.

Impact on personal life

It is because life history interviewees are asked to focus on their memories of significant episodes that their reflections can affect their self-esteem and even their professional development. At the time of writing, when reports of Islamophobia were of concern to many in society, one of the benefits of the life history approach located by Middleton (1992) is instructive. She says, in the context of radical teaching styles, teachers and their students, 'should analyse the relationship between their individual biographies, historical events, and the constraints imposed on their personal choices by broader power relations, such as those of class, race and gender' (Middleton, 1992:19). In telling personal stories new meanings are crafted which makes the multiple identities constructed by teachers evident (Gomez, 1999:85).

The ethical and moral principles of these Muslim teachers emerged around the issues of teaching the National Curriculum, society in general and inter-faith and intra-faith relationships. Teachers are concerned about the welfare of their pupils for a variety of reasons (Holden, 1969:72). The outside world, generally, expects teachers to inculcate decent conduct in their pupils and prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life. This expectation has been strengthened in the curriculum through the teaching of physical, social and health education and citizenship (QCA, 2000). The bombing of Afghanistan and the war on Iraq directly affected some children and teachers in some Birmingham schools. This raised the question about how schools and Muslim teachers responded to these events and what support was offered and how children, who were affected by these attacks, were counselled. Sexual harassment is an issue for females in particular, and the discussion of such episodes can be embarrassing and painful, and hence they remain a difficult subject, and may frequently be expressed secretly or discreetly, as other testimonies show (Rakhit, 1999; Cunningham and Gardner, 2004:220-221). Discussing such a topic is both intrusive and sensitive, but significant in understanding life in a school.

Voices and empowerment

The work of Foucault has been influential in reconstructing and representing marginal voices. The pluralistic stance of postmodernism sponsors 'the idea that all groups have the right to speak for themselves, in their own voice, and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate' (Harvey, 1989:48). Therefore, the notion of the teachers' voice was important in that it carried the tone, the language, the quality and the feelings that were conveyed by the way a teacher spoke. In a political sense, the notion of the teachers' voice addressed the right to speak and be represented. It can represent both the unique individual, and the collective voice; one that is characteristic of teachers as compared to other groups (Butt, et al., 1992:57).

Armstrong (1995) studied the assessment of children who had been referred to the psychological service of a school because of their emotional and behaviour difficulties. He explored the experiences of parents and children of the assessment procedure, and how their understanding of the concept of special educational needs

developed in the assessment process and highlighted children's viewpoints, and examined children's own accounts of the assessment procedure. Atkinson and Walmsley (1999) utilised the autobiographical approach among people with learning difficulties, and reported then that people with learning difficulties were the ultimate 'lost voice' in terms of autobiographical research. The potential of autobiography as a means to change the power relationships in disability research was highlighted. Later, Atkinson (2004) used oral and life history research to show its potential in the field of learning disability to benefit all. She contended that story telling life story research was empowering at the individual, social and practice levels (Atkinson, 2004:698). This happened through the telling of their own stories about their own lives, and by providing a shared account of the history of learning disability. Squirrell (1989:88-89) investigated the experiences of gay and lesbian teachers. She suggests that sexuality and education are often ignored because of the unawareness within educational research of the existence of gay and lesbian teachers and pupils. This means that through this research a contribution has been made for the emergence of the history of Muslim teachers as articulated and understood by themselves. The historical awareness 'of one's own history and the history of others - is an important step towards empowerment and, therefore, towards inclusion' (Atkinson, 2004:700). Furthermore life history interviews provide an opportunity to view the range of factors that come together to influence and shape an individual's life (Blair and Maylor, 1993:58).

Whilst there is a growing literature on the voices of some Black and Asian teachers (Blair and Maylor, 1993; Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1995, Osler, 1997, Benn, 1998) the voice of faith remained uncovered. More recently Benn (2003:133) utilised a process theory of identity, which focuses on dynamic networks of mutually interested and differentially related human beings, as a framework for discovering the ways in which key people influence the professional and personal development of Muslim women. Using a case study approach she found that women were differently affected. Those who wore the *hijāb* faced more barriers. Their experiences were dependent on the view, open or closed, of Islam, held by those who had influence on their career development. Whilst some enjoyed a secure school environment others did not. Coping strategies were also varied among them. Osler (2003) took an agency-structure approach using case studies to concentrate on how life histories of Muslim

women teachers reflect opinions of citizenship and identity. Her conclusions show that stereotypical, negative views of Muslims undermine the identities and citizenship rights of all Muslims, particularly women. She highlights the significant role of education in dismantling the Islamophobic discourse in society, among teachers and other educational professionals (Osler, 2003:167-168). This research provided a voice to Muslim teachers at a crucial moment in the historical and educational development of Britain. At a time when issues such as the value of multiculturalism, loyalty, community cohesion and faith schools are much debated, this raised the question of what perspectives these teachers could offer and what they considered their role to be in such a society. In addition, it identified whether there was a need to study an exclusive male group of Muslims similar to the exclusive female group of Benn (1998).

Socialisation

Literature on teacher socialisation provides a further rationale for studying the life and work of teachers. Learning to be a professional and the development of a teacher identity takes place whilst in school. If a teacher wants a successful career some strategic compliance to both formal and informal rules is significant (Sikes, 1985:36). Research using written reports and personal contacts with new entrants into teaching by Hanson and Herrington (1976:34) discussed that some senior managers apply pressure on younger teachers to conform with and accept the situations in schools. This 'situation adjustment' is relevant, due to the suspicion created about the Muslim community. It raises the question of what roles are being assigned to Muslim teachers, and whether they are aware of the aims behind such actions. Teacher socialisation has been problematised for some Muslim women teachers due to religious prejudice (Benn, 2003:147). Woods (1987:130) illustrates how life histories inform people's 'thinking about personal engagement with the social structure, with implications for some of the most prominent public issues of the day', by illustrating insights from his personal experience of entering an élite grammar school from a lower social class background. In 2008, the question about faith schools and grammar schools was being debated: this raised the question about the nature of the experiences that these Muslim teachers had of schooling, and what their views were on such

educational enterprises, and in what sort of establishments did they have their education.

Professional development

In addition to extracting abstract notions of professionalism, Cunningham and Gardner (2004:123-124), in their study of classroom teachers and teacher training between 1907 and 1950 in Britain used the data to show gender differences in patterns of recruitment. Women tended to join due to early childhood experiences, whereas men tried to achieve the relatively high status of belonging to a profession. They also used the data to establish that the training college experience was less formative in cementing the career identities than the student-teacher year. To substantiate these claims, Cunningham and Gardner (2004) present extensive oral testimonies gathered by interviewing their subjects. The words of former student teachers are presented in their own right. Individual life histories have been intertwined with thematic analysis of historical texts, which is fascinating methodologically.

Nias and Aspinwell (1995) maintain that the professional development of teachers can be fully understood and facilitated only when it is seen in the context of their other lives and concerns. Nias and Aspinwell (1995) describe from an insider and outsider perspective what the experience of talking to researchers meant for the teachers in their study about how and why they perceive and explain their career development. From a researcher viewpoint, they suggest that by mid-career a large number of them redefine the term, career development, 'to mean the extension of personal interest, learning and development rather than vertical mobility'. On the other hand, their exploration about how an insider constructs her life history by sharing it with researchers extends our understanding of 'story' as the individual meaning making and making sense of this experience and presenting it to another (Nias and Aspinwell, 1995:191).

The Fast Track teaching programme was part of the then Department for Education and Science's (DfES) commitment to recruit and retain the best teachers, and is a key element in the Government's drive to modernise the teaching profession and raise its status. It is an accelerated leadership development programme designed for teachers

in the early years of their careers (DfES, 2005). The National College of School Leadership (NCSL) has also provided many initiatives such as the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), and others. The above aims of the DfES raised several questions for this research. For instance what the nature of the career development of Muslim teachers was and how they perceived it. In addition, it raised questions regarding the progress that they had made towards leadership positions: who enrolled and what motivated them to and if not, was there an inhibition. Hanson and Herrington (1976:82) found that school experience was the main single determinant of teachers' educational ideals and classroom behaviour. The researcher was interested to find out whether this would be reflected in the experience of Muslim teachers.

Gender perspectives

The works by feminist writers on the history of women in education by Weiler and Middleton (1999) demonstrates the need to reveal hidden histories and shows how life history narratives can illuminate women's conceptions of themselves as teachers and women. In addition, Middleton (1992) maintained that such studies give 'vital and generative insights' into teaching as a gendered profession. Her lengthy autobiographical account shows how feminist educators have found life history approaches useful in developing radical teaching styles. These Muslim teachers had the opportunity to analyse the relationship between their individual biographies, historical events and the imposition placed upon them based on race, culture, gender or religion. This is also echoed by Margaret Nelson who reconstructed the experiences of women teachers in Vermont and observed that published materials can be limiting. She noted that 'public history often ignores minority views'. But women's lives are further hidden because important information is overlooked, consciously avoided, or distorted (Nelson, 1992:185). Based on this premise, one could well ask, what of the views of Muslim women in particular, especially in relation to the often quoted 'community conservatism' position on women and education. This led the investigation towards the identification of ways and means through which Muslim women had negotiated and paved their path into a profession and whether their perceived lack in advancement in education was a religious or cultural phenomenon.

Hooks (1995:1-7) provides insight into the cultural and psychological barriers faced in presenting an autobiography. She illustrates the distortions of memory in constructing personal histories, and the tension of using the personal pronoun. In the experience of Hooks (1995:4) associations based on the same race provided a 'passion of contact that was hypnotic', enabling her to re-enter her past experiences. Another catalyst for her was the known company and familiar atmosphere which acted as a medium for remembering specific occasions. For some Muslim teachers the interview evoked the particular experience of growing up as a Muslim in the predominantly secular but multi-faith city of Birmingham. It also assisted in recapturing the richness of Muslim culture at home.

Life history interviews help to appreciate how feminist teachers' own consciousness is raised, and how it is applied in their practice in school. The case studies of Middleton (1989:54-64) illustrate that feminist ideologies display both diversity and similarities. She argues that teachers who adopted a feminist analysis of education are not free from the experiences of discrimination, marginalisation and victimisation within the education process. McKellar (1989) included her personal testimony to analyse the impact of gender, class and race on black female teachers. She observed that, '[t]he effects of racism are that some doors open and others remain firmly closed, due to the lower position held by racial minority groups' (McKellar, 1989:80). In addition her early periods of schooling were 'dogged by low expectations' which were 'exacerbated by the absence of black female models' (McKellar, 1989:78). These studies provided incentives to explore the experience of Muslim teachers.

Recently, Smedley (2007) has argued that the emotional investment and paradox in a man's narrative could not be understood without recourse to developing understandings of masculinity and difference. She also suggested that discourses which edit out engagements and relations of male teachers with children in school take no account of the teacher as a complex individual, and flatten the sense teachers can have of their professional identities and work (Smedley, 2007:383). When these teachers talked about themselves as Muslim teachers they did not do so in light of their understanding of the researchers' interpretation of Islam. Their narratives were

not literal accounts of their experiences and beliefs. Hence, insights will be gained into the deeply intimate and personal aspects of identity (Goodson, 1992b:15).

School reforms and restructuring

Cunningham and Gardner (2004), drawing upon national and local government documents and personal testimonies of teachers born between 1898 and 1929, have argued that historians need to take seriously the memories and recollections of former teachers in any consideration of policy and change. Studying the life of teachers provides a valuable insight into new moves to restructure and reform schooling, and into new policy concerns and directives (Goodson, 2000:17). Primary schools have gone through significant changes in the past few years. These included performance management, new pay scales and work force reforms and other initiatives. This research explored the impact of these changes on Muslim teachers. Following relatively recent reforms in primary education there are more opportunities to progress in the career of teaching. However, advancing in hierarchies is not without its complications, especially when the attributes of an individual are dissimilar to those of the dominant group. It takes considerable determination to advance professionally as indicated by the account of McKellar's (1989) black female teachers.

Recruitment and retention

The work of Casey (1992) and others (Osler, 1995; Benn, 1998; Basit and McNamara, 2004) gives a valuable rationale for studying teachers' lives to understand the much discussed question of 'teacher drop-outs'. Her investigation of why progressive women activists leave teaching invites the consideration of the value of women's work, the blame apportioned to the system, relationships with students and administrators. The omission of the antagonism between teachers and administrators in the literature on teacher retention was identified.

A recent report recommended that a continued policy focus on attracting members of the ethnic minorities into teaching would bring many benefits. It would help redress an existing imbalance within the profession (Carrington, Bonnet, Demaine, Hall,

Nayak, Short, Skelton, Smith and Tomlin, 2006:11). This research enquired from Muslim practitioners their perspectives on recruitment and retention and what potential pitfalls they perceived to be in existence. This research took a step towards investigating career changes among ethnic minority teachers with insights from Muslim perspectives. It identified their motivators and possible reasons for leaving the teaching profession. Basit, Roberts, McNamara, Carrington, Maguire and Woodrow (2006) found that the most common causes of withdrawal from the profession were personal and family reasons. The most important issue they highlighted was that withdrawal was a process rather than an event. Participants of this research were in a relatively better position to share what career guidance they were offered, how they continued to remain in the profession and what they suggest could be done to assist in the retention of minority ethnic teachers in particular. Among some parents of Muslim girls there is a lack of knowledge about careers and opportunities (Parker-Jenkins, Hartas, Irving, Barker, 1999:8). In addition to the motivating factors common to other trainees, some ethnic minority teachers feel that they have a particular contribution to make because they understand ethnic minority pupils better. Edmonds, Sharp and Benefield (2002) conducted a systematic literature review aimed to inform the then Teacher Training Agency (TTA) about the findings of recent empirical research into recruitment to, and retention on, initial teacher training. Based on a final sample of 42 articles, one of their conclusions was that although intrinsic factors were central to the motivation of people to become teachers, males were more likely to be influenced by extrinsic factors, such as salary, status, long holidays and the approval of their friends. This raised the question of what the respondents of this research could add to this.

Teacher-centred professional knowledge, isolation and meaning

Goodson (1991) contends that the issue through the study of teachers' lives is to develop a modality of educational research which speaks both of and to the teacher. It is also argued that life histories, because of their special qualities in revealing the self, have a significant role 'to play in the construction of a meaningful, relevant and living teacher knowledge' (Woods, 1987:132). In addition, Sikes and Everington (2001) observe that life histories provide teachers with opportunities for engaging in self-reflection and self-appraisal.

On the other hand, Muchmore (2002:6) notes that teaching can be ‘a solitary profession in which practitioners can have limited opportunity to interact with their colleagues’. In such situations, in his experience, he found it particularly functional to read narrative accounts of other teachers’ experiences. This, he maintains, would have been one way of overcoming the feelings of isolation. In addition, Muchmore (2002:6), based on a five-year life history study of a single teacher, asserts that such narratives serve as tools for self-reflection, and can also be used to build theory. Potential factors of isolation for Muslim teachers could be linked to gender, race, culture and faith, which in turn are linked with personal preferences. Hence, the question of isolation was explored.

Essentially story telling ‘is fundamental to the human search for meaning’ (Nias and Aspinwall, 1995:192). Teachers’ stories assist in exposing the involvement of teachers in schools and local communities. They also provide access to the meaning they attach to their work. The study by Araújo (1999:127) of Portuguese women teachers illuminates the pathway they followed, and the context in which they worked. Her subjects felt the need to maintain a delicate balance between life in rural communities, social expectations and the pressure of maintaining ‘respectability’ as women living without men. The Muslim community in Britain is faced with a range of challenges: unemployment; underachievement; surveillance and extremism. This raises the question of finding out what additional contributions Muslim teachers make in addressing these challenges.

Conclusion

The above literature review has demonstrated that the life history approach is well established in empirical research and is a powerful means of studying teachers. Hence this research, by using such an approach, contributes to the growing investigations about teaching and teachers. By utilising a variety of life histories it has gathered perspectives on life, work and careers of professionals, through a religious and faith dimension. Therefore to research the experiences of Muslim teachers, the life history interview tool has been considered as the most applicable and appropriate method to gather such data. Such interviews have offered insights into

the realities, complexities and contradiction of human experiences. Collectively they represented a prosopography of Muslim teachers, and gave voice to these teachers, and a sense of empowerment. The research also revealed the meaning that they attached, as Muslims, to teaching. Their views on the recruitment and retention of minority ethnic teachers in British schools became evident, and the role of spirituality in their life and career was uncovered.

If a life history approach is adopted for the investigation of the career and life experiences of teachers it raises numerous methodological and ethical issues, and requires a systematic approach. Hence it is imperative to analyse the issues related to the design of this research, in particular to highlight the concerns of validity, reliability, sampling methods, ethical considerations, and the merits of the interview technique and data analysis methods. However, before these aspects are discussed, a literature review needs to be undertaken to contextualise the research. The second part of this chapter focuses on studies that have investigated ethnic minority teachers in Britain, and briefly survey the nature of these studies and their significant findings. As the research is about Muslim teachers it is inevitable that a short historical survey should be undertaken to contextualise the faith dimension of this research, so that the ideas about teachers and teaching among Muslims become apparent. This discussion will form the third part of this chapter and is divided into two sections: the Prophet's era and the era after the Prophet.

PART 2: ETHNIC MINORITY TEACHERS IN BRITISH EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Introduction

The life history approach for investigating Muslim teachers has been positioned in the broader theoretical perspectives of biographical studies within the interpretive paradigm. Life histories used for researching various aspects of teachers' careers, lives and work were exemplified in order to argue for a religious dimension of teachers' lives to be added to this debate and some advantages and limitations of such an approach were considered. It was argued that the life history method was

appropriate for this research as it provides further insights into the realities, complexities and contradictions of human experiences as lived by Muslim teachers in Birmingham.

It is essential, within the background of the diverse concerns and issues associated with ethnic minority teachers (EMT), that the question of contemporary Muslim teachers in state schools is examined briefly. The case for an increased participation by Muslims in state education has been advocated by several Muslims and non-Muslim educationists (Hewer, 1992, Parker-Jenkins, 1993; Sarwar, 1994; Saqeb, 1996; Haw, 1998; Hewer, 2001; Halstead, 2005). Contemporary multi-faith and multi-cultural Britain equally necessitates a religiously and ethnically diverse teaching work force. Cheema (1996:90) argued that the recruitment, training and re-training of Muslim staff in various roles would help enormously in addressing the special needs of Muslim children. A significant initiative, whose impact is yet to be measured in depth, was that of providing Islam as a main subject as part of the Bachelor of Education (BEd.) course which was introduced at Westhill College in 1992. The expectations from such a course were high, as it was recognised as an opportunity for contributing to the educational, moral and spiritual development of all children in schools (Saqeb, 1996:35). In addition, Saqeb (1996) advocated that the Muslim community needed to invest special efforts and resources to train a considerable number of Muslim teachers who would assist in tackling and in helping to understand the various needs of Muslim pupils and their parents. Otherwise, with less than a thousand Muslim teachers, he saw little hope of their concerns being addressed. Statistically, argued Saqeb (1996:36), the large size of the Muslim school population warranted a greater representation of Muslim teachers in schools across Europe. The necessity for Muslim teachers in all types of schools within the state system was also reported as a consensus from Muslim women teachers (Benn, 1998:208-209).

Three issues of significance emerge from the above. Clearly, the most important concern relates to the need to increase the number of Muslim teachers in state schools, and to address their under-representation. In addition, the value and contribution from Muslim teachers for both Muslim pupils and their peers and the wider community has been recognised (Carrington and Tomlin, 2000), and the Westhill course was specifically designed to attract Muslim teachers. Taking these factors into

consideration, it would be interesting to find out what Muslim teachers have to reveal about these expectations and what they have to say about such issues. Before the concept of the teacher and the significance of teaching in Islam and the views of Muslim teachers are analysed it is imperative to discuss a critical aspect regarding the manner in which teachers have been understood in the UK. Generally, Muslim teachers are demographically considered under the ethnic and racial category. Hence, it is first relevant to analyse and review the literature on EMT which is the subject matter of this part of the literature review.

The aim is to survey briefly some of the major research studies about EMT in the UK to provide a contemporary context for this research by paying particular attention to their methodological features, so that the range of ways in which studies of Asian and Black teachers have been conducted becomes explicit. These studies will also assist the researcher to learn and draw implications for the current research. Furthermore, since this research is about whether faith is a determinant factor about what a teacher could and should be in a contemporary society, this review will therefore assist in reinforcing the need for researching the life experiences of teachers from a faith perspective, and to discover what these studies have to say about faith and its role. It will also facilitate finding the similarities and differences among Muslim teachers and their colleagues from the minority and majority communities in the UK in terms of their experiences in the British educational landscape.

A chronological approach has been chosen as it has enabled the researcher to place these studies within a time frame and has facilitated the recognition of relationships between different studies. It has also provided the researcher with a framework to make sense of previous studies and such an understanding has been helpful for making judgements on these studies and drawing conclusions for EMT in Britain. A chronological presentation makes these studies relevant and meaningful historically. Therefore only some studies have been selected randomly to achieve the above stated aims. Selected recommendations have been chosen either to highlight the commonality of a particular theme, or to demonstrate the relevance it has for the current research, and it does not make claims to be an extensive and comprehensive coverage of the studies related to EMT.

1959 – 1980

Braithwaite's (1959) biography *To Sir, With Love* has been an inspiration for many teachers regarding their relationship with their students. The book reveals the struggles of a Guyanese teacher engaging with teenagers in a poor neighbourhood in London. The racial tensions, his unsuccessful applications for a job, and how he deals with prejudice and behaviour problems, is a valuable record and significant contribution to the life of Black teachers in Britain. Gilroy's (1976) autobiographical memoir, *Black Teacher*, is a very early account about the experiences of being a black teacher. Arriving from Guyana in 1952, she experienced considerable difficulties and prejudice to gain a first appointment before she became the first black head teacher of an infant school in North London. Menial jobs being taken by teachers have also been reported by later teachers (Pole, 1999; Rakhit, 1999). Being a good Anglican and an ex-Sunday school teacher were insufficient credentials to be accepted by some parents to teach in her church. In school she dealt with issues of class, disability, race and religion, and was prohibited to take Religious Instruction but accompanied her class several times in a week to church. Gilroy (1976) shares a fascinating account of a Pakistani Muslim teacher who arrived in her school one day. In the staffroom some teachers raised questions about his pedagogy, attitude to children and vented their racist remarks after he left the staffroom. Some children asked him about stereotypical topics of dress, food and multiple wives. He, in turn, lamented the lack of respect among the children, and the poverty of their heart and spirit. Methodologically her story is relevant, as it provides personal feelings and valuable insights into the workings of schools and the attitudes of teachers and parents during the sixties towards a black teacher. She uses stories, conversations and observations to bring her autobiography to life, which gives a sense of her experiences.

For the current research, this means that the researcher has to be alert to the factors of time and place, and to enquire about the experiences that the research respondents have witnessed about other Muslim teachers. Finally, Gilroy's (1976) narrative is not a story from a faith perspective, but at its heart is racism and racial discrimination.

Gibbes' (1980:21) study, *West Indian Teachers Speak Out*, offers insights from four personal stories regarding their experiences, contributions and difficulties which they encounter in their career. She identified the vulnerability of Black teachers being employed, their frustration with poor promotion prospects, and feelings of isolation. She called for a single Black teachers' organisation for future growth, and advocated a review of policies by Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Again the absence to recommend further recruitment is notable.

1980-1990

Nevertheless, from the early 1980s the recruitment of teachers from minority ethnic groups had been a frequent theme in government and research reports. The under-representation of EMT was identified over twenty years ago by *The Swann Report: Education for All* (DES, 1985). This report has been monumental in several areas, such as highlighting issues related to multicultural education, experiences of racism by EMT, their disproportional under representation and the need for research into the recruitment of EMT. It stated that the most important pool for future teachers was the minority ethnic pupils currently in schools (DES, 1985:600-606). Furthermore, it called the then DES to record and publish statistics on ethnicity (DES, 1985:601) and argued that more teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds would be a valuable asset to any school in the country, whether multiracial or 'all-white' (DES, 1985:604). Significantly it highlighted the attitudes of ethnic minority youngsters towards teaching. The Report revealed comparatively few of them actually aspired 'to a career in teaching, as they had experienced racism and negative stereotyping of ethnic minority groups while at school and had no desire therefore to rejoin such an institution' (DES, 1985:609). Such perceptions continued into the next decades (Singh, 1988; Osler 1997). In addition, the disenchantment with the profession was caused by the limited role assigned to such teachers, and teaching was not seen as offering good career prospects (DES, 1985:610).

Later, the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) conducted a survey in 1984-1985, *Ethnic Minority School Teachers*. The Commission distributed questionnaires to headteachers and interviewed White teachers and EMT. The survey was conducted in two stages. They selected LEAs which had above average ethnic minority pupils and

those LEAs wherein certain locations within them had a high ethnic minority population. A balance was ensured between Caribbean, African and Asian teachers, and a broad geographical spread of eight LEAs was achieved. Birmingham, however, was not part of the sample. The survey reinforced the under-representation of EMT, and the fact that where they were appointed they were disproportionately on the lowest scale (Ranger, 1988:7). This was the case even when the starting scale and length of service were similar to their White counterparts. EMT were more likely to teach the shortage subjects of mathematics and science, and a higher percentage of EMT than White teachers taught in schools which had no religious affiliation. There were no Black teachers in the 55 Jewish schools and they were more likely to be in larger schools. There were no school governors from the Bangladeshi community in 1158 out of 1189 schools i.e., this is in 97% of the schools. A much larger proportion of EMT taught in single sex schools. Data from stage two showed that Black teachers took the longest time on average to find a post and male teachers, irrespective of their ethnic origin, were more likely than female teachers to have had some sort of special responsibility. There was little likelihood of a significant increase in the number of EMT mainly due to negative experiences within the profession, and the CRE noted their under-representation in certain subjects. Significantly, they observed that change had to come from within the profession itself. This survey is clearly a study which has not attempted to explore the life experiences of teachers. Instead, it focuses on the number of EMT and how their careers compare with those of White teachers (Ranger, 1988:9). Conclusions from this survey led to the exploration of the perceptions of Muslim teachers about the increase in the number of EMT, their subject specialism and their qualifications.

In the late eighties another valuable study about the teaching profession and EMT appeared (Singh, 1988). The report *Asian and White Perceptions of the Teaching Profession* investigated the perceptions of students, parents and teachers about the teaching profession compared to other professions, and the factors affecting recruitment of ethnic minority young people in Bradford. Of all the Asians who intended to go into teaching the majority favoured primary education, and for all categories job satisfaction was the most important consideration in career choice. In the entire sample, the social status of the profession was a relatively unimportant consideration. However, Asians attached more importance to the social status of an

occupation than the Whites. The Pakistani respondents, all seven, ranked social status as the most important consideration. Value structures which deter young Asian people from entering teaching were also identified by Blair and Maylor (1993:57-58) and Ghuman (1995:113). Generally, the most attractive features of the teaching profession were: holidays, job satisfaction and working hours. The unattractive features were a low salary, poor discipline, poor promotion opportunities, and negative personal experience of schooling, and lack of respect from pupils. Class control was of particular concern to young female students. It would be relevant to discover the attitudes of Muslim teachers in relation to recommending the profession to their friends and family members. The views presented by these teachers are relevant as they add a practitioner's dimension to the views already held by some Asian communities in terms of the social status and the benefits derived from teaching.

1990-2000

The need for training institutions to assimilate and incorporate Black perspectives was emphasised by Siraj-Blatchford (1991), who also noted that other factors such as accommodation, courses and school placements as well as interactions between people influenced students' perceptions. The impact of the Education Reform Act 1988 on the recruitment and selection practices in the London Borough of Ealing was explored by Brar (1991) who concluded that *ad hoc* practices in recruitment were open to abuse, and recommended more Black people in governing bodies. After qualification more Black teachers were supply teaching. The thirty case studies of Henry (1991) offer Black perspectives on the British educational system at various levels. ***Thirty Blacks in British Education*** represents views spanning more than fifty years. The constraints of age were removed in these accounts. According to Henry (1991:254) his study was heuristic in the sense that it sought to locate significant general issues through the logic of discovery in the respondents' testimonies. He utilised open-ended unstructured interviews and relied to a great extent on historical and descriptive reportage. Rather than using a questionnaire he employed a check list with points posed in everyday language. All of his interviewees were of 'African descent' (p.3) except a White wife of one participant. The study took place between 1983 and 1986. The youngest participant was a teenager, and the eldest was eighty

years old. The book, according to the author, was to be read as an oral history presenting verbatim accounts as recorded. He achieved this by rigorously selecting rich and huge amounts of data by focussing on themes ‘considered to be primarily of interest to educationists and teachers’ (Henry, 1991:3). In addition, it is a valuable account of narratives for all sections of the community who have had some sort of experience in the British educational system. These case studies demonstrate original and personal expressions which convey the dilemmas of ‘involvement and alienation; of endeavour and failure; of resolute engagement with all the tasks and difficulties’ and in some cases ‘achievement and recognition’ after years of ‘rejection or indifference’ (Henry, 1991:4). These case studies unequivocally fall within the interpretive approach. Henry did not aim to measure attitudes or to develop theories. Hence, the open-ended unstructured interviews are a possibility for the collection of life histories of Muslim teachers and the use of the network technique for recruiting participants. Finally the manner in which Henry has presented his data is beneficial. He has first presented thirty case histories which are followed by brief comments. Thereafter he has identified six significant themes and a section on the overall findings. One of these themes is on religion, in particular Christianity and its role and response in relation to the condition of these Black people. Therefore Henry’s study (1991) is based on the ethnic heritage of his participants although they came from various backgrounds.

Siraj-Blatchford (1993:5) edited a valuable text, *‘Race’, Gender and the Education of Teachers*, which was motivated by noting the failure of teacher education to respond effectively to race and gender issues. From it, of particular interest to this research are the recorded life history interviews of eighteen women of African-Caribbean and South Asian descent (Blair and Maylor, 1993:55-73). The experiences of Black students are not restricted to racism and are rather complex, and the use of life-history amplifies the voices of participants. For example, a Muslim woman, Yasmin, felt that it was the weight of patriarchy that restricted some Muslim women’s choices. Hence, it is useful to explore from Muslim teachers their views about what Islam says regarding the teaching profession.

The mid 1990s saw the emergence of studies as sub-groups within EMT by focussing on various characteristics of their participants. Ghuman’s (1995) study of two

generations of *Asian Teachers in British Schools* described their professional hopes, fears and sentiments, aspirations and frustrations using face-to-face in-depth interviews with sixty four voluntary participants. His non-random sample consisted of fifty Asian teachers, twenty five from each group of the first and second generation. There were ten White participants representing various positions in schools. In addition, four Afro-Caribbean participants were used to make comparisons. Furthermore, there were four first generation Asian university lecturers and a White lecturer. Ghuman (1995) found considerably diverse opinions on multicultural issues among the Asian teachers, and it was also evident between the Asian and White teachers. Interestingly, he discovered that of the second generation, fewer saw racial discrimination as a major influence which adversely affected their progress. Of the five important factors emerging from his data in relation to the lack of uptake of teaching as a career, he found that there were certain elements related to value structures within the Asian community which discouraged entry into teaching as found by Singh (1988). These elements included (i) the low status of teaching (ii) the inadequate finance it provides, and (iii) the poor chances of advancing careers. It is also significant to note, for the purpose of this study, that the second generation teachers did not find relationships with Whites in schools a problem and in getting first appointments. Ghuman's (1995) study is about Asian teachers, he uses faith descriptors such as the experiences of Sikh, Muslim and Hindu teachers and parents on educational matters and notes some challenges for teachers on practical issues of fasting, dress and value systems. He offers insights about their perceptions and attitudes towards teaching and learning in contrast to the British system. Interestingly a White head master [sic] makes specific reference to Muslim teachers (Ghuman, 1995:87), which indicates that teachers are seen in terms of their faith by some people. But, whilst Ghuman recognises the faith position of his subjects he does not approach them from that perspective. Methodologically there is a distinction between Ghuman (1995) and Henry (1991). The former used semi-structured interviews whereas the latter used open-ended unstructured interviews.

The aim of Osler's (1997) study, *The Education and Careers of Black Teachers*, focussed on the meanings which Black teachers, i.e., people of African, African Caribbean or Asian descent, at different stages in their careers attached to their actions and choices in life and work. She wanted to establish the rationale for the choices

made by Black and ethnic minority communities and their motivation to remain or leave the profession. In one set of interviews, she explored the subjective experiences of those who achieved senior positions, and those who faced barriers to promotion. Her other sample involved students who were on the PGCE and BEd undergraduate course. Furthermore, Osler (1997) examined the attitudes of young Black and ethnic minority people in sixth forms who had not chosen teaching as a career. Methodologically, she used a check list to conduct unstructured interviews with her participants as did Henry (1991). In relation to teachers, she examined their life histories and analysed their data as narratives by presenting six case studies and identified broad themes that emerged from the data. With a few exceptions, all her interviewees lived and worked in the West Midlands and all were non-White. Certain names and her descriptions suggest that some of her participants were from a range of faith backgrounds. Although she had initially conceived the study to generate hypotheses and theories from the data collected, her research was very much influenced by her own experiences, and by the stories told to her by Black colleagues. Moreover, she has attempted to use her own lived experience in a contextual way. Osler (1997) has considered racism, inequality, racial justice and policy frameworks as a wider context for her research, and explored the life histories of Black people exclusively with an assumption of a shared experience of racism. Within the accounts of her Black participants she provides additional information about her participants by referring to their religious backgrounds, although she does not attribute or refer to faith or religion in the section where she discusses her sample (Osler, 1997:57-59). Hence, although Osler (1997) provides narratives from some Muslim teachers, within the agenda set out by her, it would appear that they have relayed their experiences based on their gender, ethnic heritage, racial identity and religion. This would be akin to the study of Ghuman (1995). Later, Osler (2003) explored life histories of Muslim women teachers and students to highlight issues of citizenship and identity from her study of 1997. The extent to which some of her participants especially Muslims and Christians drew on their faith for support surprised her (Osler, 2003:154). Hence the significance of faith in the life of some teachers is evident. Her citations from the narratives of Muslim teachers lead her to conclude that Islamophobia, as experienced by British Muslim women, may be interwoven and linked to other exclusionary forces and raised the question of how Muslim women can claim their citizenship rights on the basis of equality (Osler, 2003:167).

In the context of this research Benn's significant study (1998:1), *Exploring experiences of a group of British Muslim women in initial teacher training and their early teaching careers*, is of particular relevance. Over a four year period she investigated how Muslim women, mostly of Asian origin, experienced and negotiated their cultural distinctiveness in a secular state education system as students and teachers. Methodologically it is defined as a case study which utilised interviews, observations, diaries, and questionnaires. The incidents of religious discrimination were common on teaching practice (Benn, 1998:383). Class teachers were the most influential people with regards to perceptions of success, and as 'black Muslim teachers many experienced problems of being accepted as teachers' especially in their early days (Benn, 1998:387). Her research also echoed previous educational racism and added that 'endemic religious prejudice can be potentially damaging to Muslim women entering the teaching profession' (Benn, 1998:392). Muslim women shared many experiences with other teachers, but their religious 'visibility' compounded the prejudice and discrimination against them (Benn, 2003:131). Although this was an original study it is limited by gender and time-place constraints. The current research is distinct by exploring Muslims, male and female, using a life history approach.

Towards the end of the nineties two other studies emerged based on life histories. Pole (1999) examined the motivation and experiences of teaching in Britain using twenty life histories. He concluded that racism of various types existed at structural and interactional level in schools. It was therefore integral to the lives and careers of Black teachers. Pole (1999:314) describes his research design as a 'historical and quasi-longitudinal dimension'. This was provided by 'the careful selection of research participants to reflect different generations of black teachers'. This study was therefore based on two main criteria: experience rather than age and race. His other criteria included gender, ethnicity, location, subject specialism and significantly, religion. Due to this variable Pole (1999:317-323) was able to present views from his participants with reference to their religious affiliations such as Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. The second study was a thesis *The Career Experiences of Asian Women Teachers: A Life History Approach* by Rakhit (1999) exploring the career perceptions of a heterogeneous group of twenty experienced South Asian women. She selected ten from each of the first and second generations and shared Ghuman's (1995) definition of these terms. Her main question centred on addressing what it

meant to be a Black teacher in British schools. A series of life history interviews based on autobiographical and biographical approaches as a means of discovery were conducted over a period of five years, starting from 1989 to 1994. Her results showed that the experiences of these teachers were racially affected and some were subjected to sexual harassment. They also experienced barriers in seeking employment and promotion at all stages of the careers. In addition, they were perceived to be inferior by their White colleagues, and the data suggested that racism and sexism have both structural and ideological roots, and unless there is genuine social change little can be done to eradicate these (Rakhit, 1999).

2000-2007

Another dimension within the careers of Black teachers was offered by Pole (2001) drawing from his life history generational study to chart their changing experiences over a thirty year period. Some had over twenty years of experience and others had just started their PGCE course. One of his articles, *Black teachers: curriculum and career* (Pole, 2001), focused on one successful teacher who had taught for fourteen years in various capacities. It investigated the influence of both the formal and hidden curriculum, and how they were instrumental in shaping a Black identity and a positive sense of self. In other words, it was an examination of the relationship between curriculum and career. Pole's (2001:362) approach is useful as it crossed over the chronological account of a life history to illustrate 'the complexities of career, curriculum and individual agency against a broader canvas of race and ethnicity' (Pole, 2001:362). Therefore, in so doing, he brought to light the manner in which different forms of racism manifest themselves through the curriculum, pedagogy and school organisation. This has assisted the current researcher to find out how Muslim teachers construct their professional and subject identity and their views about the National Curriculum (NC) since some aspects of the NC have come under scrutiny, and flexibility has been recommended (Parker-Jenkins, 1993; Sarwar, 1994; Cheema, 1996; Benn, 1998). Other EMT are deterred from entering the teaching profession due to the Euro-centric nature of the curriculum (Ghuman, 1995:125; Osler, 1997:195) and by the fact that the NC encourages a narrow definition of national identity (Blair, 1994).

For this research agenda an insightful and perhaps most significant paper is *Towards a Representative Profession: Teachers from Ethnic Minorities*. This is a survey by Ross (2002) examining the position of EMT with a particular focus on questioning whether it mattered or not to have a teaching profession that represents the ethnic diversity of British society. The data for this were gathered from a survey of 22 LEAs. Ross (2002) presents several arguments for the significance of a diverse teaching work force, the majority of which relate to the particular characteristics of the nature of education and to the manner in which learning is organised in schools. His other arguments are: (i) learning ‘is a formative activity conducted through a variety of processes and who conducts this process is an important part of the process’; (ii) learning ‘is a social process and it takes place in the interactions between teacher and learner, and learner and learner. The people who take on the role of teacher play a critical part in determining the social relationships under which learning occurs’; (iii) learning ‘is undertaken by all children/young people. Many other social provisions are episodic and accidental such as the use of health services’; and (iv) learning ‘is conducted over a long period of time. Disregarding notions of life-long learning, learning is a process that all young people are required to undergo for a period of at least eleven years’ (Ross, 2002:1-3). Having presented his arguments based on the nature of education and organisation of learning, he identified three specific reasons for more teachers from ethnic minorities (Appendix 2). Furthermore, Ross (2002:14) observed that: there is

a tendency for those from ethnic minority backgrounds not to move out of their local communities, where they often feel a higher level of community support, have a greater sense of security and safety, and may have more supportive family networks that they might have in a different area, with a lower proportion of ethnic minority inhabitants.

From the perspective of such teachers this is understandable. However, the long term impact and implication raises the issue of segregation for all teachers based on their racial identities, the geographical location of the schools they choose to work in, and race based teaching. A distinct study was conducted by Carrington and Tomlin (2000:155) in the form of a national empirical study based on a questionnaire survey and interviews with PGCE staff and students. They emphasised students’ motivations for choosing teaching, and their images of the profession. They also explored the

factors influencing their choice of courses and institutions. Their research suggested that when attracting ethnic minorities to the PGCE course, closer targeting should happen, with additional attention being given to the specific needs of mature entrants including those that change their career. Furthermore, strategies to boost ethnic minority recruitment need to give particular attention to local and regional factors.

Basit and McNamara (2004:112) interviewed 20 NQTs in three LEAs in the North West of England and concluded in *Equal opportunities or affirmative action? The induction of minority ethnic teachers* that the Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) were being provided with equal opportunities by their employers, and a few employers had taken affirmative action during recruitment. More importantly, the majority of the NQTs found their schools and LEAs supportive and the induction process valuable. The flexible nature of the individual mentoring process was welcomed by them. On the other hand, professional isolation and negative attitudes of colleagues for instance to the headscarf, as reported by Benn (1998), were disadvantages reported by some NQTs.

In all the studies that have been considered above there appears to be a common concern: the need to further recruit EMT. It, therefore, means that this issue has been identified for about thirty years. It is in this context, that, the work of Arora (2005), *Race and Ethnicity in Education*, is critical as it offers insights into the gap within the various studies undertaken in relation to EMT. She draws attention to the underachievement of ITTs, and explores the hypocrisy of policies and practices that claim to be non-discriminatory (Arora, 2005). She specifically explores the questions about why despite quality assurances certain institutions do not meet the needs of ethnic minority students, why well qualified EMT are unable to find employment, and why training institutions fail to recruit ethnic minority staff. In addition, she offers a critical examination of recent developments and new initiatives related to the training and recruitment of EMT after examining the causes of their under-representations. Furthermore, she provides a critique of the non-standard routes introduced to obtain QTS, and their implications for the recruitment and training of minority ethnic teachers (Arora, 2005:103-127). To address these, she suggests that reliance should not be placed totally on career conventions but consideration ought to be given to local and national networks of community organisations which may serve better in

publicising routes into Higher Education and to increase an awareness of the possible options within the teaching profession.

An increase in the upward mobility of Black teachers was detected by Ross (2002). It was unsurprising that a study linked to the senior positions occupied by EMT should appear. *Becoming a Black Manager* is an exploration of the professional experiences of a cohort of thirty African Caribbean managers in the British educational system (Daley and Maguire, 2006). It is set alongside the shifts in political and social circumstance and against the educational policy and practices over the past thirty years. The study was conducted during 1998-2001 involving in-depth interviews of an equal number of male and female primary and secondary teachers who had an aspect of management in their job description. The study showed that in making career choices they were influenced by context and structure. In addition, over time, three distinct cohorts of Black managers could be identified: pioneers i.e., those who arrived prior to 1950; settlers i.e., students of the pioneers and inheritors i.e., those taking their roles post 1988. Daley and Maguire (2006) concluded that to understand professional identities, in addition to gendered and racialised identity construction, it is crucial to read in Black teachers' accounts the ways in which policy plays a role in this process. In her study, Osler (1997:145) found all senior managers to be conscious of institutional racism. However, an investigation remained regarding those leaving the profession either by being driven away or by being less fortunate and less resilient in responding to marginalisation and exclusion. The current researcher hopes that the sampling method may provide examples of Muslims in senior positions. Their journey will be of particular interest for identifying successful features in their career and to explore some of the issues raised above.

The reasons for withdrawing from ITT were examined in a research project funded by the then TTA (Basit, et al., 2006). Fifty Higher Education Institute programme leaders with the highest minority ethnic enrolments were requested to provide data on ethnic and gender differences in their course completion rates during the three last years prior to the study. They received thirty four responses as reflected in their article, *Did they jump or were they pushed? Reasons why minority ethnic trainees withdraw from initial teacher training courses*. The most significant issue identified by the authors was that withdrawal was a process not an event. The most common

causes for withdrawal were personal and family related. These interacted with placements and ITT institutions. Basit, et al., (2006) suggest that ITTs should provide both academic and moral support in the form of feedback, encouragement and information on personal progress to trainees. The institutions and schools should become more 'ethnic friendly'. In addition, it is important that when they face problems ITTs intervene effectively. Furthermore, ITTs should ensure that a regular dialogue is maintained with schools to identify potential problems early such as childcare issues and significantly they recommended that trainees should be encouraged to return. As part of this larger study, Basit, McNamara, Roberts, Carrington, Maguire and Woodrow (2007) also reported in, *'The bar is slightly higher': the perception of racism in teacher education*, about an in-depth investigation using semi-structured interviews of a group of 24 stratified minority ethnic teacher trainees who withdrew from ITT courses in England, and five trainees who completed these courses. They focused on trainees' perceptions of the manifestation of racism during their training. Some respondents mentioned instances of covert and overt racism. Others noted the subtle forms of discriminatory obstacles to successful completion of the course, which they are reluctant to label as racism (Basit et al., 2007). However, none of the minority ethnic withdrawers perceived racism as the determining factor for their withdrawal. Critically, Basit et al., (2007:283) found that withdrawal is not a one-off event: it is a process. In the cohort of this study there are several Muslim respondents who share their experiences from a faith position.

Conclusion

This part has focussed on locating some major studies related to EMT in the British educational system. It has revealed a range of characteristics. It is evident that the studies of Black and Asian teachers have been undertaken through a range of methodological approaches using a variety of samples and assorted data gathering techniques. At least four studies have been identified in which the life history approach has been utilised which provides considerable confidence in replicating such a method with Muslim teachers. Among those who have preferred the life history approach both structured and unstructured interviews have been used, and a range of sampling methods has been selected. Networking or snowballing method appears to

have been more effective. Furthermore, the manner in which data have been analysed has also taken a range of forms. Some provide lengthy narratives from the interviews and others have combined narratives and themes. Hence all these features have implications for designing the current research and to provide precedents.

Although there are various starting points and aims for the above studies the role of personal experiences of racism and discrimination has generated an incentive for some of these researchers to design a study which allows them to explore the experiences of others on similar lines. It has also led them to adopt anti-racist standpoints and practice for teacher education which they advocate. For Osler (1997) and Rakhit (1999) these experiences took place during their schooling and professional lives. Hence the research agenda for them has been influenced by socio-political structures and personal motives.

An array of topics have been researched, such as personal memoirs, perceptions about the teaching profession, analysis of statistical data from LEAs and other agencies, pedagogy, teacher identity, feminist standpoints from sociological reflections and generational studies. In addition, some studies have been specialised such as the examination of the influence of the curriculum on a single teacher. Others have investigated specific issues such as the investigation of the factors of withdrawals and the changing roles, identities and professionalism of EMT. Then there were studies which took a generational approach for tracking experiences over time. In other words researchers have been selective in setting their own agenda and variables for their investigations. Nevertheless, there are certain themes and other similarities within these studies and have been significant for this research.

It is evident from the brief survey that there are a number of studies conducted by researchers from a range of backgrounds on Asian, Black and White teachers in the UK. Hence, not all participants in all these studies have been from ethnic minority communities, and both genders are represented as researchers. In every decade there appears at least one study by either a Black or Asian researcher. This observation conveys two essential points: the relevance of this topic to Black and Asian researchers, and their role in constructing and contributing to creating the social

history of education in general, and of the teaching profession in particular. This research has also contributed to this growing literature.

The literature review has assisted in exploring the presence of EMT in the teaching profession. The *Swann Report* (DES, 1985) acted as a catalyst for the debate about the under-representation of EMT, and subsequent studies reiterated this concern and identified this pattern (Ranger, 1988; Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997, Ross, 2002; Basit et al., 2007). Hence this issue of under-representation has prevailed for a long time although overall there is evidence that progress has been made in recruitment (Butler, 2008). The possible causes for the under-representation have also been highlighted, and the necessity for more teachers from such backgrounds is based on an educational and socio-political basis, and not simply for providing role models. In the context of increasing the representation of minority ethnic teachers the need to increase Muslim teachers has also been identified. This need has been expressed by both Muslims and others. Hence it is important to find out what existing Muslims teachers have to say about this issue.

It appears that there are issues that need to be addressed at various levels of teacher education. At the first stage there is a lack of career guidance and the challenge of meeting the entry requirements for H.E. as demonstrated by Siraj-Blatchford (1991) and Basit et al., (2007). Once EMT are on the road into their career their experience at ITT is not without difficulties, both in schools and at university. Some of these difficulties are personal in nature. Thereafter their NQT year raises its own peculiar challenges, and once they are established as professionals some of them face a range of challenges, and it is uneasy for some who aspire for vertical mobility. It would be incorrect to suggest that racism whether overt or covert, institutional or personal is at work exclusively. On the contrary these studies have demonstrated that racism is not a simple phenomenon (Basit, et al., 2007) and that there are other factors that interplay with it. Nevertheless racism has featured in all these studies as a phenomenon of British education experienced by some of the participants. However, this phenomenon has not been constant over time. Initially the Black teacher was a subject of curiosity. Then, 'first' generations lived the consequences of physical and verbal racist abuse. Thereafter Ghuman (1995) detected a change in the experiences of some 'second' generation Black and Asian teachers. Therefore whilst confirming

its existence, most recently, Basit et al., (2007:296) argued that 'it is highly complex to categorize phenomena as racism'. Racism does exist and it may take different forms. This therefore leads one to question the appropriateness of applying the term 'racism' for Muslims who experience prejudice, hatred and abuse due to their faith. Perhaps it would be appropriate if Muslims were a race. Hence the use of 'racism' is insufficient for this purpose.

The significance of cultural influence is another theme appearing in these discussions in relation to the image of the teaching profession and how it motivates Black and Asian people to become teachers. The role of the media and of society in general in creating various images of teaching is recognised as well as other socio-economic and cultural factors. Asian and White perceptions of the teaching profession were specifically researched by Singh (1988) and others (Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997; Benn, 1998; Carrington and Tomlin, 2000). However, it is the assertion of the current researcher, based on these observations, that a specific study is warranted along the lines of the study conducted by Singh (1988). These studies are almost all over ten years old. During this period there have been many social and political changes which may have influenced negatively or positively the perception of teaching held by various communities. In addition, the teaching profession itself has undergone considerable restructuring and reformation, it was therefore considered relevant to explore the impact, if any, that this may have had. Finally, statistically there has been an overall increase in the number of teaching assistants in schools, and also an increase from the Black and Asian population taking up these posts (Butler, 2008). This increased participation and the resultant impact that it may be having on the attitudes and perceptions in their respective communities leads this researcher to suggest that attitudes and perceptions may have changed.

Whilst these studies substantiate the growth in research related to EMT and reflect a range of relevant topics investigated, the need to investigate the views of children and the perspectives of lecturers who are training teachers in H.E. has been identified. For instance, it would be useful to explore their views about the issues of under-representation, recruitment, retention, progression, racism, and their experiences of working with ethnic minority trainees. Children's opinion on race and faith-based

teaching need eliciting to explore their views of the types of teachers they would want to be teaching in schools of modern day Britain.

Cumulatively, therefore, the review of these studies on EMT in British educational settings has helped to establish methodologically that (i) various approaches have been utilised, life histories being one of them (ii) structured and unstructured interview techniques have been used (iii) a range of sampling methods have been implemented. Similarly a range of topics have been investigated. Theoretically they have been underpinned by a range of perspectives such as race, gender and faith. Muslim teachers have been participants in these studies, but they have been subsumed within racial and gendered configurations. Therefore it would appear that Muslims are being understood predominantly from such perspectives. In other words there is a need to complement these important studies with a research that places the faith of teachers at the forefront.

Finally, this section has provided a useful context for researching the experiences of teachers from a faith perspective. Muslims, as a faith community, are a major constituent part of the minority communities represented within the UK. Hence, the above survey has paved the way to study a group of teachers who remain under-researched. The study of the life and experiences of Muslim teachers in the educational settings of Britain will be a noteworthy addition to the knowledge and understanding of teacher identity and professionalism. It will help to explore the centrality of faith in the life of a Muslim teacher, and ask whether there is a necessary transference of being a Muslim and having a faith position to being a teacher.

But, if a researcher is interested in the investigation of a particular kind of people and the fundamental role that faith plays within their lives and in order to engage with what it means to be a teacher having that faith in contemporary educational settings, the researcher has to look historically at the ideas about teachers and teaching in the context of that faith. Therefore, the next section explores the ideal teacher in Islam, and subsequent developments of teachers and teaching in Muslim history.

PART 3: THE CONCEPT OF THE TEACHER AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHING IN ISLAM

Section 1: The Prophet's Era

Introduction

In some western societies the position of teachers is fundamentally dissimilar to the status that Islam and some Muslims have accorded to them. Nevertheless, essentially teachers are dedicated and committed persons motivated by a range of purposes. Many invest their time and personal efforts beyond what is expected of them, and make significant contributions within their communities. It would be relevant to ascertain whether such a commitment would alter if it comes from a faith perspective.

The previous literature review clearly demonstrated that the race and gender centred research model in educational research has been highly influential in studying Black and Asian teachers. Perhaps mainly due to the secular character of such research frameworks, the religious dimension of these teachers has not been fully explored, although the participation of Muslims has not been absent in some of the studies surveyed. Whilst the previous chapter has provided a useful context for studying the experiences of teachers from a mainly racial and gendered perspective, nevertheless it is argued, that a race or gendered perspective is insufficient for exploring the life histories of Muslim teachers. Muslims are not a racial group. Muslims living in Britain have a diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and racial background. Indeed some of them are happy to use hybrid identities, and refer to themselves as British-Muslims. As the largest faith community after Christianity, and in view of its heightened publicity, it has been studied in a variety of ways for a range of purposes.

There is a world view that informs Muslim ideology. Any researcher interested in investigating a particular kind of people and the critical role that faith plays within their lives has to engage with some of the essential elements of that ideology. In the educational context of this study, in order to engage with what it means to be a Muslim teacher believing in Islam in contemporary educational settings, a researcher has to consider historical ideas about teachers and teaching in the context of Islam and

Muslims. Furthermore, the conduct and motivations of some Muslim teachers do not arise through mere chance. In order to pinpoint the driving force behind such teachers, it is necessary to examine contemporary Muslim teachers' role models, their historical and religious backgrounds, and the primary vehicles of knowledge that have impacted upon them.

Hence, the first section of this part shows an appreciation of Prophet Muhammad as a promoter of teaching and learning. In addition, some of his pronouncements regarding his being a teacher, and the theoretical foundations and practical measures that he undertook to eliminate widespread illiteracy from his immediate community and in distant cities are highlighted. This chapter draws on some pertinent elements chosen from the Qur'ān and the *Sirah* (biographical literature on the life of Muhammad) to highlight and assist in understanding the conduct and motivations of contemporary Muslim teachers.

It is argued through an analysis of specific verses of the Qur'ān related to Muhammad and his role as an educator, that the Qur'ānic imperative of spreading knowledge was the real impetus and, secondly, the exemplary model of Muhammad as a teacher, that led the activities of teaching and learning to reach the heights that they reached, within a very short period, in a society known for its ignorance. Before proceeding into the details of these discussions, a brief biographical sketch is considered first. This discussion on the life history of Muhammad reflects an insiders' perspective i.e., a faith position has been taken when considering aspects of his history. Criticisms against Muhammad and his message are not a new phenomenon and these have been directed from various perspectives. Some members of his community rejected his message very early. Later, others called him a magician and a liar (Al-Qur'ān, 38:4). In contemporary writings such vilification includes the accusation of Muhammad being an imposter and treacherous (Watt, 1961:232-233) and others warn against his inconsistent characteristics (Muir, 1894:506). The monotheistic message that he propagated has been pronounced as a fabrication and a borrowing from others and some scholars have directed their condemnations to his practice of polygamy and branded him power hungry. This demonization is documented in various writings (Muir, 1894; Watt, 1961; Rodinson, 1971). The approach taken to understand Muhammad and his message has been varied too. Rodinson (1971), for example,

wrote as a secularist paying particular attention to the political and military aspect of Muhammad's life. On the other hand, Amstrong (1991) focused on the nature of his spiritual experience and approaches the subject matter sensitively. Lings (1983), writing as an insider, provided detailed information based on the writings of early biographers.

The *Sirah*: life history of Muhammad

The *Sirah* shows that Muhammad belonged to the honourable clan of Quraysh and was born in Makkah in the year 571 CE. To Muslims he is the last among the many messengers of God and to whom the Qur'ān was revealed at different times, places and in different contexts. After being driven out from his native town he settled in Madinah where the *Ummah*, Muslim community, was fully established. He died, and was buried there in 632 CE. After emerging as a messenger in the twenty three years that followed he fulfilled numerous roles and responsibilities. Muhammad 'exercised a greater variety of functions than any other man known to us has been able to fulfil' (Jawad, 1990:115). In other words, he was an orphan, shepherd, business person, prophet, father, leader, politician and educator. Meticulous details about him have been preserved for later generations (Rodinson, 1971:53; Kandhelwi, 1990:369-370) to follow in his footsteps, since he was designated a model for Muslims, and according to the Qu'rān (68:4), he possessed most sublime morals and hence he is an incomparable model for some Muslims who aspire to live their lives accordingly. It is anticipated that the respondents of this research will recognise and acknowledge Muhammad as a model in a general sense; however, it will be interesting to find out the extent to which they recognise him specifically as a model for teachers and teaching and recognise teaching as a *sunnah*.

The eminence of teachers

In order to understand the epistemology and ontology of Muslim education one has to recognise the sources of knowledge for Muslims. Essentially, the Qu'rān is the fountainhead of all knowledge - the source being God. However, the full details of matters affecting a Muslim are in traditions of the Messenger. Classical works discussing Muslim education begin by tracing its roots to these sources (Tibawi,

1972:23). Hence, it is essential to take note of this deep-rooted conception of the origins and characters of teachers and teaching in these traditions. In line with most religions of the world, Islam places great emphasis on teaching, and elevates the status of teachers. Teachers are duty-bound to cater for the welfare of individuals and of communities. For Muslim teachers, the primary motive for engaging in teaching ought to be reflecting a sense of seeking the pleasure of God as they are emulating one of His actions and fulfilling His orders. In addition, Muslim teachers are teachers for all sections of the community, and they are seen as noble and respected persons. Furthermore, teachers can also be appointed to high posts of administration. Moreover, the worth of the teacher is judged by the fact that God has made reference about teaching to Himself (Al-Qu'rān, 55:1-3). Therefore, arguably, in terms of virtue, no other profession can compete with the teaching profession (Appendix 3). The eminence of teachers is also evident in relation to the role of messengers. Fundamentally, they were teachers to their communities (Al-Qu'rān, 13:7). Messengers channel knowledge both revealed and unrevealed as a personification of the Divine message. It is therefore clear that teachers perform the role of such great people. This, in turn, places a responsibility on teachers in that knowledge and practice is to be combined (Sarwar, 1996:16). This suggests that teachers need to be conscious of the impact of their actions upon their students, and also points to the importance of consistency in the behaviour of teachers.

The first teachers

As discussed above, the traditions in Islam place teachers and people of learning in a high position. The message of the Qu'rān puts high status on learning, and associates wisdom with it. The educational role of these personalities is described as follows:

We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to them... (Al-Qu'rān, 14:4).

Explaining the function of messengers, Saqeb (1996:29-30), contends that they were deputed by God 'throughout history and to all nations and tribes to raise peoples' gaze from narrow, immediate and selfish pursuits to universal ideals.' Hence, Muslims would look for inspiration and guidance from all these honourable persons. However,

as regards to Muhammad, he becomes ‘the channel of the revelation of the book which is considered by all Muslims to be the *quintessential* sum of all knowledge, both human and divine’ (Nasr, 1987:65). The first revelation began with the Divine command ‘read’. This instruction was taken as an established practice by the Messenger, his immediate companions and all his later followers to substantiate the priority of education, as reading necessitated teaching.

Muhammad the teacher: an overview from the Qur’ān and Sunnah

Muslim educators in contemporary times who attempt to appreciate the status of teachers and the significance of teaching and those who endeavour to understand such teachers may find it useful, first of all, to reflect on the fact that the Qu’rān designates Muhammad to be a teacher, and that as a teacher he had multifaceted roles ascribed to him. Several verses affirm and specifically afford the accolade of being a teacher to him, as illustrated by the following:

It is He Who sent amongst the unlettered a messenger from amongst themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in The Book and wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error (Al-Qu’rān, 62:2).

In other words, one of the main objectives of sending the Messenger to humankind was for the transmission of wisdom and knowledge, and to teach the Book. In addition, the Messenger was the refiner of the characters and purifier of the souls of his first students. Hence, the Muslim teacher assumes the role of the intellectual developer of students as well as a provider of nourishment for their souls, and he/she moulds their personality. Practically, this meant that as soon as the Messenger received any revelation he would gather his few followers and teach them the revelation. At the same time, he trained them as teachers. These first Muslims taught others to recite and to understand these verses in different localities and tribes in and around Makkah. Saqeb (1996:30) points out that there were only 17 literate Muslims in Makkah at that time, and most of the teaching took place orally. This figure dramatically had changed by the time of Muhammad’s death in 632 CE (Azami, 1992:13-15).

In addition to the Qu'rān, the second source of Islam demonstrates that Muhammad referred to himself as a teacher. Appendix 3 contains a selection of numerous traditions emphasising teaching and learning. Whilst commending worshippers and readers of the Qu'rān he joined the teaching and learning group, saying: 'I have been sent as a teacher' (Al-Qazwini, 1993, (1):130). This tradition depicts the organisation of teaching and learning taking place in the form of a circle and in a place of worship. Whilst both activities were commendable, Muhammad orally emphasised his role as a teacher and physically demonstrated this by his preference to sit with teachers and learners.

Mass education beyond the confines of the mosque

However, such pronouncements and participation among limited numbers within a locality occurring in a mosque would be insufficient for widespread teaching. Consequently, teaching had to be authorised for it to be undertaken 'by all for all', if the teachings of Islam were to reach the four corners of the world. Hence, in one of his statements, Muhammad permitted all of his followers to convey to the message others, even if it were a single verse. Therefore, through his example and by virtue of such pronouncements successive generations of Muslims became global teachers. The value attached by Muhammad to teaching and the advocacy that he maintained was soon to have a major influence upon his immediate associates. As soon as his followers were embodied by its fervour an unprecedented change took place among them. The Arab community was transformed into a great civilisation in subsequent years (Nicolson, 1907; Watt, 1974; Nadwi, 1987; Haykal, 1989; Nadvi, 1992; Sarwar, 1996, Ernst, 2004). This transformation took place because of the widespread availability of teachers. Such a wide network was possible as a consequence of the fact that wherever any one of his companions settled or travelled to, teaching and learning took place around him. Furthermore, the dispatching of teachers to newly converted clans and areas was a regular feature of the educational system of the Messenger.

In his locality, the enterprise of education was being undertaken in a range of directions and steps. He appointed teachers to teach reading and writing in nine mosques around Madinah, which simultaneously served as schools (Wan Daud,

1989:36). Home-tutoring and teaching was also part of the teaching programme. Prior to his conversion, 'Umar was a staunch enemy of Muslims, and, was therefore horrified to find that his sister was being taught the Qu'rān in her house. This famous incident explicitly shows the utilisation of homes for education, and the inclusion of women. The mosque served as the hub of instruction at various times of the day, particularly at prayer time. Also, delegations from distant lands were received in the mosque. For example, when representatives from the tribes of 'Aus and Khazraj came they requested a teacher who could teach new Muslims in their own town (Saqeb, 1996:30). In addition, attached to Muhammad's mosque there was a veranda referred to as *al-suffah*. This place was set apart for lodging of outsiders and the poor. This was a regular residential school where reading, writing, Muslim law, memorising of the Qu'rān and methods of reciting the Qu'rān correctly were taught under the direct supervision of the Messenger (Hamidullah, 1939:53).

Muhammad was fully aware of the significance of mass education. He, therefore, took practical measures toward achieving this. For instance, after the battle of Badr (624 CE), he offered to release any prisoner of war who taught ten Muslim children to read and write (Muir, 1894:226). Muhammad's concern for education is obvious as he accepted Muslim children learning and being taught by captives and non-Muslims. Sikand (2006) has noted that through this strategy about 600 children were educated in a short period. In addition, his appointment of Mu'adh as an expert in Qu'rān to Yemen was a significant allocation, on his part of the trust and responsibility to his followers and his determination to reach as many people as possible.

And so, Muslim education was launched by a man who is traditionally celebrated to have been illiterate. Yet, according to Tibawi (1954:418), 'both as a preacher of a new religion and as the head of a state, Muhammad proved to be an effective teacher and an enthusiastic promoter of learning'. Consequently, after his death, with the spread of his close companions in various lands around the Arabian Peninsula, two significant developments had far-reaching consequences. The Qu'rān was now in book form, a text from which teaching could be carried out. Secondly, the students who had learnt it from their teachers were now scattered in large areas ready to receive eager students. These phenomena later led to the establishment of a sophisticated and well-organised Muslim educational system which reached its glory

in classical times 700-1300 CE (Totah, 1926; Shalaby, 1954; Maqdisi, 1981; Stanton, 1990).

Summary

The monotheistic message continued by Muhammad, the teacher, and concluded by him was accompanied by three measures of special educational significance: believers were duty-bound to teach, becoming the first teachers in various disciplines in Islam. As the mosque was the place of worship and the pursuit and teaching of knowledge were acts of worship, they, in turn, took place in the mosque, and hence the mosque became the first school and the Qu'rān was an established text to be taught from. His followers were encouraged to be students, so that any effort they exerted in search of knowledge and understanding was equal to an act of worship.

One of the means through which teaching can be made more popular among the Muslim community in the UK is to approach it in the manner outlined in this section. The educational implications derived from Muhammad as a teacher and the concept of teacher education emanating from him are far reaching. For Muslim teachers working in a multifaith, multicultural and secular community, its understanding and application must be contemplated in light of a specific historical context. Muslim teachers contemplating inferences from this model need to be flexible and realistic rather than idealistic, by giving due consideration to issues of place, time and legislature.

As a teacher, Muhammad tended to the psychological, moral, social, spiritual and faith-related aspects of his students and community. He had a comprehensive and positive attitude to teaching. This resonates with the expectation of teachers in contemporary Britain and therefore, as such, a Muslim teacher should embrace this approach from both perspectives. Islam considers teaching and learning as religious duties, and therefore all members of its community are encouraged to participate in this process. Hence, all sections of the Muslim community and Higher Education Institutes need to take further steps in this direction. An ethnically heterogeneous Muslim teaching workforce can play a significant role in presenting diverse role models to children in a pluralist society such as the United Kingdom.

The above section presented the contributions of Muhammad to the field of teaching with specific reference to his pronouncements regarding the significance of teaching and the practical measures he adopted to promote literacy and train teachers. It drew upon the primary sources of Islam to argue that teaching should also be considered a *sunnah* (practice) of Muhammad. However, for a fuller understanding about teachers and teaching, it would be insufficient to limit the survey to the period of Muhammad and his companions, since Muslims thereafter had reached a much wider geographical area and interacted with various cultures and civilisations. Therefore, the remaining section of this chapter surveys an extensive historical era showing how the concept of the teacher and teaching in Muslim societies evolved.

Section 2: The Teacher and Teaching after Muhammad

In the above section an appreciation of Muhammad as an educator and promoter of teaching and learning was analysed. The discussion drew upon the two main sources of Islam to demonstrate the contribution of Muhammad to teaching and presented a glimpse into the ideal teacher to contextualise the study of Muslim teachers in Britain.

The section below gives a brief descriptive historical analysis of the developments of the concept of the teacher and teaching in Muslim societies following Muhammad to cover the classical period (*circa* 632-1300 CE) and beyond, so that the flexible nature of the concept of a teacher and teaching becomes explicit. This survey mainly covers four periods: *Khilāfah* (632-662 CE), Umayyad (662-750 CE), and Abbasid (750-945 CE) later periods (945-1300 CE) (Watt, 1974), and contains selected salient features to demonstrate the various meanings attached to the concept of the teacher and the range of terms that evolved to reflect the diverse roles that teachers played. Essentially, the primary role of the teacher remained the same: to impart holistic knowledge and to be a model. However, once the educational institutions were formalised, several features were also formalised to enhance their role, organisation and recognise their status and to celebrate their contributions.

After Muhammad

After Muhammad, his deputies followed in his steps to expand teaching and learning. Islam by this time had been accepted beyond the Arabian Peninsula; hence, an organised approach was warranted. Azami (1992:15) notes that ‘Umar (634-644 CE), entrusted his governors with the responsibility of teaching the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*. ‘Umar dispatched teachers for this purpose in large numbers. Whilst in the time of Muhammad it was a matter of dispatching teachers, ‘Umar, well aware of the changing situations and conditions, began to focus on the needs of the people. He, therefore, sent inspector-teachers to various areas to determine and assess the extent of their knowledge (Azami 1992:15). In fact, teaching was not restricted to the Qur’ān only, now qualified persons taught jurisprudence. Scholars lectured in the mosques of major cities such as Kufa, Basra and Damascus, and narrators (*qāss*) recited the Qur’ān and taught the *hadith* (Shushtery, 1976:130; Nasr, 1987:65). Because numerous people attended these lectures on Fridays, it meant that large numbers could hear official announcements and discourses for their personal betterment. Lecturers of this kind were called *wā‘iz* (pl. *wu‘‘āz*). Mosques continued to be places for worship, education and venues to receive weekly guidance and admonitions. They were places to share and update knowledge, and get individual queries answered.

Upholding the dignity of knowledge and of the teaching profession was a duty fulfilled by teachers, and their behaviour was expected to be reserved and distinguished in public. The teachers’ status and prestige was measured by the size of the assembly which gathered, and also by the number of distinguished scholars who attended their circles. Such an influential position would not go unnoticed by the rulers. Hence, some teachers were often appointed as ambassadors and ministers because of their eloquence, scholarship and influence. According to Alavi (1988) their character was pure, and their integrity was absolutely unshakable. ‘They commanded universal respect and confidence, though their emoluments were small. The spiritual force of their character could not be doubted, and the efficiency of their teaching was never called in question’ (Alavi, 1988:88). One of the ways through which such high acclaim was maintained for teachers was through the impressions created by role modelling. In addition, students were provided with detailed

instructions about the attitudes, behaviours and customs in relation to their teachers - a custom which prevails in many of the contemporary Muslim traditional higher learning centres around the world (Al-Zarnuji, 2000:13). But there were other motives too. Muslim teachers were shown such respect because they followed in the footsteps of the ideal teacher, Muhammad (Saqeb, 1996:32). A further observation is that scholars are considered inheritors of Messengers, and hence the respect that is to be afforded to them is obvious. Such respect was to be extended to all teachers, regardless of their faith background.

Types of teachers

As time progressed, the role of teachers diversified, due to the introduction of new subjects, societal demands and introduction of formalities of administration. Hanifi (1964:176-177) identifies three types of teachers under the 'Abbasids (750-945 CE). There were teachers, called *mu'allim*, who mainly taught the Qur'ān to children in the elementary school (*maktab*). Overall, these teachers were held in high esteem. However, in some sections, socially, the *mu'allim* was not considered very laudable in status (Shalaby, 1954). The second type of teachers may be termed as tutors: a *mu`addib*, who engaged in teaching children of the higher strata, as well as those of princes and caliphs. This class of teachers was perceived to be superior to the former (Hanifi, 1964:176-177; Saqeb, 1996:31). Finally, there were teachers of higher learning and professors of advanced scholarship at *madāris*. These were specialist in the teaching of logic, mathematics, rhetoric and jurisprudence. The public held these academics in high respect (Hanifi, 1964:176-177).

Before the institutionalisation of education, teachers were usually appointed by a senior teacher, usually on the basis of their suitability for the occupation, their reputation among students and their successful career as *mu'id* (assistant) (Alavi, 1988:76). Subsequently, after further development of the education system, and with the increase in the number of *madāris* which were founded by philanthropists and princes, the appointment of the teachers was made by the *mutawalli* (manager) or the patron of the *madrasah* (Alavi, 1988:76). Teachers and poor students were supported by the income derived from endowments attached to mosques, shrines, and hospitals and from donations. In addition, the royal treasury provided allowances for some of

them. Teachers lived simple lives, and were for the most part content people, who did not care much for worldly enjoyment (Shushtery, 1976:132). In the state-owned institutions of higher learning teachers were given allowances similar to those given to scholars. Endowments from princes and philanthropists were sometimes used for paying salaries and aid from the public exchequer was also utilized, and grants from privy purses were offered (Alavi, 1988:76).

Teachers' charter

In order to assist teachers to uphold the model of Muhammad, and to maintain the crucial relationship with their students, and to remind them both of their responsibilities to each other, clear guidelines were available as exemplified in the work of Ibn Jama'ah (1241-1333 CE), a judge in Syria and Egypt. Teachers were expected to be observant of God, preserve knowledge, adopt abstinence, purify knowledge from worldly desires, avoid mean professions and be regular in reciting the Qur'ān. They were to adopt good manners, and ward off bad manners, acquire knowledge even from the lower classes, and be engaged in scholarship and composing (Ghifari, 1991:11-22).

Of particular significance, in this famous text, are the pedagogical guidelines offered to teachers. It was necessary for teachers to prepare for their teaching by giving due thought to the fundamental parts and schedules of a lesson. They had to facilitate comprehension, and give due regard to the intellectual ability of the students. Teachers were encouraged to question and test students (Ghifari, 1991:36-40). It was important to maintain fairness. Preferences based on affection, attainment and religiousness were to be avoided since favouritism 'devastates and depopulates the heart' (Ghifari, 1991:42). But, occasionally, the more industrious students received more respect to encourage others to adopt such vigour. However, preferential treatment in their turn of teaching was not to be given unless it was considered appropriate by the teacher on welfare grounds, or for the provision of additional attention. This applied to both the industrious and less industrious students. Teachers were duty-bound to cater for their academic needs, as well as take charge to develop their etiquette and conduct. Teachers were to make an effort for the welfare of the students by enquiring about absentees, and if students were sick they offered care and

prayer where appropriate. They were to deal with them in humility, and present themselves with a cheerful countenance (Ghifari, 1991:44-47). Such texts were widely available, as Nasr (1987:66) observes that many books on ethics and education by Muslims have chapters devoted to the ideal conditions of upbringing and educating young students and on preparing students to undertake further studies.

Teacher autonomy, curriculum and pedagogy

In an age of technology-assisted learning, where learners are able to design and select their programme of study, it is fascinating to ponder over the nature of such flexibility and personalised learning during these previous times. A glimpse of such a scenario is depicted by Hanifi (1964) who notes that a young student after acquiring elementary knowledge usually travelled to the next great town to attend lectures there. It was also common for established scholars to do likewise since '[t]here was no regular curriculum or a fixed syllabus' (Hanifi, 1964:177-178). Although the curriculum was flexible, the appointment of teachers was not always the same. Sometimes founders of schools had the right of appointment and removal of professors, and the state interfered only in cases where religion was in danger (Hanifi, 1964:177-178). Students and scholars travelled to enhance their authentication and links since the worth of teachers and learners also depended on the quality of their chain of transmission going as far back to Muhammad himself.

It was not unusual for masters of a subject and experienced professors to know the text by heart. They would lecture without referring to any book. Unsurprisingly, such teachers were thronged by thousands of students, although smaller classes did exist too. At some venues students were provided with resources to assist them in note-taking. For instance, Shushtery, (1976:135) notes that '[i]n the lecture hall at Nishapur there were five hundred ink-stands kept ready for the use of students.' During the session, teachers taught different subjects, they heard and offered criticisms to students, and answered their queries and satisfied them in all the issues they raised (Shushtery, 1976). Importantly, however, the teacher was not content with delivering the lesson only. The teacher encouraged and considered the participation of the student as paramount, and ensured that students followed and understood the materials. The teacher would present questions to the students, and invite them to

offer a challenge, so that a scenario of a debate ensued. Khuda Bakhsh noted that, 'Many teachers when discussing the subject, left their seats and mixed with the students' (cf. Hanifi, 1964:178). Therefore, to study in higher schools meant intellectual engagement, and not merely listening to lessons, and a thorough drilling in the subjects was expected. Consequently the students, after satisfying their teachers that they had been well grounded in their subjects, could request and obtain certificates. This also indicates the affectionate relationship between teacher and student. Such was the intensity of the academic activity that a classical treatise, written by Al-Zarnuji, *circa* d. 1175 CE, on the instruction of the students on how to study, instructs students to select teachers who were most learned, most pious and most advanced in years (Al-Zarnuji, 2000:9). The teacher was not seen exclusively as an academic: the teacher was a counsellor, as well from whom advice was sought on all matters - personal, spiritual and academic.

Progressively mosques became more complex as places of learning. A vivid portrayal of the activities of teachers within study circles in a mosque is provided by Stanton (1990:18-19), who states that the *halqa* was focussed on a *shaikh* - a learned person, 'who drew listeners to his discussions by the power of his speech and his insights.' Originally the teacher would settle, and the role was 'assumed'. The followers of the *shaikh* and his students accorded the status to him. Eventually, following formal preparations, the head of a study circle would on occasions get appointed to a permanent position among the staff of the mosque. The voluntary participants and students 'could choose to attend any of the discussions and could come and go at will' (Stanton, 1990:19). Stanton (1990:18-19), continues stating that 'unusually popular *shaikhs* drew a devoted following whose members became identified by the instructor's name.' Indeed, it is to be recognised that such practice continues to be in vogue even in modern day Europe, Australia and the Americas.

On the subject of curricular content in these circles, Stanton (1990) notes that its selection was geared to satisfy individual participants' search for a deeper understanding of the Qur'ān. This implies that the teaching was student-orientated. In other words, sometimes students requested an expert to teach them a text in a discipline or a subject, or a student chose a teacher for the subject that they wanted to master. Indeed, another function of the *halqa* was to strengthen the faith of the

believers, and to encourage them to live more religiously-orientated lives. Many Imams in some mosques in the UK continue to do the same through discourses on Qur'ān, *hadith* and subjects of relevance. The other variation of these *halqa* would emphasise spiritual aspects which is another tradition maintained in Britain. In both cases, as rightly pointed out by Stanton (1990:18-19), they were a source of counsel as well, for - since everything in Islamic life centres on the message of the Qur'ān - people brought their problems and questions to the *shaikhs*, and asked them for guidance and resolution. It is to be noted that freed slaves were also part of the teaching force. Also, that the teaching was not exclusive to the Qur'ān and *hadith* because the 'Umayyad caliphs had taken interest in some branches of science known to foreign nations and sent learned slaves to teach in Egypt (Watt, 1974:13). Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 CE), a historian and jurist born in Tunis and buried in Cairo, has discussed the pedagogy for the Qur'ān and other sciences (Dawood, 1989). He acquaints readers with instructional methods of the people from the Maghrib, Spain, North Africa and the people of the East, and with the nature of the curriculum of that time, and demonstrates the diversity of pedagogy and curriculum in these regions.

Assessment and achievement

Teaching, learning and assessment are inseparable. Assessment provides an indication of the quality of teaching and learning. When learning has been successful it is obvious that it has to be recognised and celebrated. These features were evident among the Muslims in the classical period and prior to it. Alavi (1988) notes the absence of formal examination for awarding degrees in the early days. The assessment of the pupils was made by their teachers concerned, and sometimes students had to undergo a public test in the form of a debate or a lecture. At the end of the course the student was given a certificate of permission to teach (*ijāzah*). The students who completed their education were vested with an academic gown and the certificate (Alavi, 1988:77). In turn, qualified teachers established their own schools in villages and enrolled pupils for teaching (Boyle, 2004:13). The role of providing students with *ijāzah* is alive in the UK as well. One of the benefits of this is that it maintains the tradition, and links with previous generations. In institutes of higher learning students usually sit exams, but prominent scholars sometimes grant written or oral permissions. Nasr (1987) observes that even in the most formal type of learning,

oral teaching will accompany the written texts. In addition, the significance of actually hearing teachers and receiving an *ijāzah* from them personally keeps alive a chain of transmission (*isnād*) which is of paramount importance in preserving and perpetuating the Islamic educational tradition (Nasr, 1987:73-74).

The external elements of knowledge were preserved by the above teaching process and the sciences of spirituality were passed on by a close contact between the teacher and the student. Their lengthy companionship and association had ‘much to do with making possible the transmission of the spirit as well as the letter of the various branches of knowledge, which have always been instrumental in the normal functioning of Islamic society’ (Nasr, 1987:73-74). Whilst the issuing of a ‘certificate’ may be a later development, the principle of recognising, celebrating and publicising the talents of individuals is established from the proclamations of Muhammad. There were other ways of recognising the talents of students as well. According to Alavi (1988:75) before the existence of colleges, teachers of great learning taught at their residence, or in a corner of a mosque. However, after the establishment of colleges, with an increased number of students, the teacher was occasionally assisted by an assistant (*mu’īd*). Among the responsibilities of the assistant who were usually appointed from the more intelligent students, was ‘to repeat the lesson before the class for elucidation of difficulties’ (Alavi, 1988:75). Alavi (1988:75) maintains that ‘the teachers were regular in their work and demanded vigorously the same from the pupils.’ Regarding their dress, it has been noted that teachers appeared in a formal dress which was usually a turban and a long flowing garment which was the hallmark of the scholarly class (Alavi, 1988:75).

Some of these features were shared between the diverse Muslim communities. Regarding the teaching personnel of the *madāris*, Nasr (1987) observes that in both Shiite and Sunni schools, the pattern has been more or less the same. The classes are directed by a *mudarris* who is comparable to a professor, who has a *nā’ib* (substitute professor) and also a *mu’īd* who acts as a ‘drill master’, the latter repeating the teachings of the professor, like the *répétiteur* of Western universities (Nasr, 1987:72). Although there were distinctions between the curricula in the Sunni and Shiite schools, the general atmosphere of the *madāris* has been the same throughout the Islamic world (Nasr, 1987:73). A highly personalised aspect characterised the

learning process. Nasr (1987:73) elaborates this relationship stating that the student, instead of searching the institution would search the teacher, and thereafter would wholeheartedly submit to the chosen teacher. A highly intimate relationship would flourish, wherein the student revered the teacher as a father, and obeyed him. This obedience went beyond formal studies to include personal matters too. Nasr (1987:73) continues to depict the environment and learning atmosphere:

The atmosphere of these schools has been very relaxed and informal, without there being any great academic or financial pressure upon the student. All religious education has been free; in fact, the student receives his room and board from the religious endowment of the institution in which he studies. Nor has there been the strong incentive to receive a diploma and then seek to benefit from its social and economic advantages, prevalent in so many modern educational institutions.

Unsurprisingly, often a student would continue to be a student for his/her entire life. The student would perhaps ensure that he or she had taken the opportunity of learning from all the teachers available in the home town, and then travel to other cities. Alternatively, the student would begin to master one subject after another, until an encyclopaedic knowledge had been acquired.

Decline of the teacher and teaching

Three factors have been attributed to the stagnation and decline in this education system (Saqeb, 1996:32-33). Rulers were unresponsive to the duty called upon them for the promotion of learning. Some teachers and scholars lost their zeal for research and innovation in search of knowledge. Their curriculum became characterised by traditionalism rather than originality and innovation. As a result the teacher and the scholar started to seek nominal recognition in place of genuine achievements. Kinnany (1980:145) has also observed the role of the colonial powers in contributing to its decline in more recent times. The colonial governments replaced the existing systems with a Western-style education, and ignored the *madāris* system. Hence in some cases the system of education, instead of being a machinery for the state became narrowly focussed on the religious elements of Islam. With political changes the Muslim leadership was also affected, and hence the scholarly class (*‘Ulama*) diversified in their fields, and thereby the public perception effectively began to

consider 'secular' institutions and professions in a better light. The duality of the education system did not help either. A religious and secular education system became further prominent with colonial rule over Muslim dominated lands.

In order to address the situation of Muslim education in its various dimensions several initiatives are underway. The Islamisation project is one such initiative covering a global movement (Al-Attas, 1979; Husain and Ashraf, 1979). Across Britain, various institutions have been established to meet the specific religious educational needs of Muslims (Gilliat-Ray, 2006); others raise pedagogical concerns (Ramadan, 2004) and some offer the range of frameworks within these initiatives (Panjwani, 2004:2). Panjwani (2004) observes that some Muslim educators restrict the notion of Islamic education to religious education; while others argue for a total educational system derived from within an Islamic perspective; others advocate the wholesale Islamisation of knowledge. The question of reforming the *madāris* and issues related to its curriculum, the education of women, and pedagogy are part of these changes. Thānawī (2000) narrowed his focus and provided a wealth of information about the rights of teachers and students. He criticised the attitude of teachers who pay little attention to the intellectual and academic competence of their students, some of whom offer mere translations of their texts. He offers suggestions to reform such practices which were evident in some *madāris* during his days (Thānawī, 2000:6-7). These reforms have had an impact upon Muslim education in the UK, and in turn they have also contributed towards these changes. Most of the practical issues have been confined to the Muslim faith schools sector.

Finally, before concluding this section, it is imperative that the role of women is given a brief consideration since often the media portray, and some people perceive, women and their education in negative terms.

Women scholars existed in, and emerged both from the household of Muhammad and his close community. These women acquired knowledge in a variety of ways from Muhammad. They learnt from him directly by participating in his circles, listening to his speeches, observing him, by inquiring from him and attending teaching sessions dedicated specifically for women. Some of them sent questions through their acquaintances. They also learnt from various members of kith and kin. When private

audiences became difficult they complained, and subsequently received a fixed day with the Messenger (Darsh, 1996:25). After Muhammad, some of these women became repositories of the knowledge that they had acquired from him. Not only did some of the people who had lived during the time of the Messenger come to some of them for clarifications and queries, but people from various lands who wanted to learn from them first hand came to them. For example, there was a time when no one knew more narrations from ‘Aishah, the wife of Muhammad, than ‘Amrah. The caliph of her time ensured that knowledge from her was recorded so that it was not lost from its custodian (Ibn Sa‘d, 1972:494). From a teachers’ perspective, one could safely say that this is an under-researched area.

Summary

From the above discussion some relevant considerations emerge for Muslim young people as learners and for teachers in general who may be working in faith schools - schools, in law, with a religious character - state or traditional institutions of Britain (*dārul ulooms, madāris, makātib*). One of the major themes linked to Muslim teachers reveals the necessity to rethink some of the current practices prevalent among Muslims teachers in the *madāris* and *makātib* of Britain. Whilst these teachers are not the subject of this study, it is nevertheless reassuring for those Muslim teachers with a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) to reflect over and note the flexible and adaptive nature of the educational theory and pedagogy of Muslims of the past. There is a consistency in attaching high esteem to traditional sciences and scholars, and by extension to students studying them. Young Muslims in Britain have been attracted to these sciences, which are now taught beyond formal *madāris* in a variety of ways. This can be seen as part of the revival of their identity, restoration of their rich history, and enhancement of their knowledge. Indeed for some of them, involving themselves in such learning is part of ensuring that the tradition of *isnād* remains alive.

The current syllabi in most *madāris* of Britain are drawn up for specific purposes. They are relatively successful in achieving their intended aims. However, it would be fair to suggest that some components need to be added to them so that such graduates become more aware and respond more effectively to the growing needs of Muslims in contemporary society. Of particular relevance would be the adoption of pedagogical

principles and teaching strategies as reflected in the Prophet's model, and in some of the classical manuals which were prepared for both students and teachers. The inclusion of such a component would address some concerns and enhance provisions in the *maktab* sector of Britain in which a large number of traditionally trained scholars participate. It is clear through the themes that have been selected for this discussion that there are certain outcomes which the teachings of Islam aim to achieve. At the same time there are diverse ways in which these teachings were understood and applied.

As for Muslim teachers in the state sector there is scope to consider the holistic approach to education for their students. For the personal development of Muslim teachers, both academically and spiritually, there are valuable examples in the stories of classical Muslim teachers to encourage them to participate more in research and scholarship activities.

Conclusion

The first part of this chapter discussed the theoretical framework that informs this research. The life history approach from the biography method has been adopted for this research. The second part reviewed the studies on EMT in Britain and demonstrated that Black and Asian teachers have been studied in a variety of ways, focussing on a range of purposes. It was clear through the studies examined that there was a need to add to this literature and enhance existing knowledge and understanding about teacher identity and professionalism with narratives from a faith perspective. However, before such a study could be undertaken it was imperative to examine and analyse the ideal teacher, Muhammad, and the conception of teaching among earlier Muslims. The third part of this chapter demonstrated that Muhammad, practically and verbally, encouraged his followers to engage in teaching. Such actions had far-reaching implications, and contributed immensely to the development of education in the early days of Islam. This development continued through many centuries and a brief survey of Muslim education during the classical period revealed a complex system of education which influenced many parts of the world. The concept of the teacher evolved over time. Initially they were teachers of the Qur'ān, and later they were specialists in various sciences. With the spread of Islam and the settlement of

Muslims in distant lands, Muslim teachers and their learners became diverse in terms of their culture, geography, heritage and faith. Hence it is concluded that Muslim teachers in the past have functioned in educational settings which have been multifaith and multicultural in nature.

Having placed Muslim teachers within the wider parameters of EMT in Britain and presented briefly the ideal Muslim teacher, and how the concept of the teacher and teaching developed over the centuries, it is significant to uncover the life, career and experiences of Muslim teachers in Britain. Therefore, in the next chapter the focus turns to the presentation of the research design, showing how the life histories of Muslim primary teachers were obtained. It describes the conduct of the research, the reflections on the research process, how the data were analysed and it gives an overview of the city of Birmingham. It also exposes the position of the researcher in relation to this research. Thus, Chapter 3 prepares the ground for the storytellers and the representation of life histories of Muslim teachers collected as a faith group.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

PART 1: THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

In social science, methodology refers to the manner in which research is carried out. It therefore encompasses the methods, procedures, instruments and the broader theoretical framework through which a particular concern is explained. The influence of culture, religion, personal interest and other factors in some activities that some people engage in is a recognised matter. The way in which the methodological framework of the topic under investigation is constructed is also influenced by various factors. In addition, a researcher needs to recognise the sensitivities of the study as being an important influence in shaping the characteristics of the research method, design and data collection.

The previous chapter provided a critical discussion of the wider philosophical issues concerning the methodological orientation of this study. The life history approach studying Muslim teachers was located in the broader theoretical perspectives of biographical method within the interpretive paradigm. The use of life history was exemplified in order to argue for a religious dimension of teachers' lives to be added to this genre. Some of the advantages and limitations of such an approach were highlighted, and this approach was considered to be appropriate as it would offer further insights into the realities, complexities and contradiction of human experiences as lived by Muslim teachers in Birmingham.

The substantive aim of this research is to gain the perceptions of educational practice and experiences of Muslim teachers in primary schools of Birmingham. Life history data can be collected at six different levels. These would include studies of their life *experiences and background, life style, life cycle, career stages, critical incidents* and to 'see the individual in relation to the history of his time' (Goodson, 1992c:243-244). Such a purpose is not apt for quantification, and hence a purely qualitative study was

considered to be most suitable for this research. Qualitative data are not easily converted to numerical values, but they can be represented by categorical data, by perceptual and attitudinal perspectives and by real life events (Yin, 2003:33). Hence a mainly qualitative paradigm has been selected for capturing life histories.

There are four assumptions of the life history that Denzin (1989) has identified. The chief among them is that human conduct is being studied and understood from the perspective of those involved. The researcher using the life history is concerned with relating the perspectives obtained to the definitions and meanings that are fixed in social relationships and social groups. The third is that the researcher's concern is directed towards 'recording the unfolding history of the person'; and finally, since a life history is that person's presentation of his or her experience as defined by them, 'the objectivity of the person's interpretations provides central data for the final report' (Denzin, 1989:183-184).

This chapter is divided into five parts. The first part of this chapter discusses and explains the research design. Then, the reflections of the researcher on the research process are elaborated so that the planned research design and the actual research carried out become apparent. Thereafter, the manner in which the data were actually analysed is explained. In the fourth part, the Muslim profile in Birmingham is presented to provide a situational context for the study and it also consists of essential details about the thirteen Muslim teachers. Finally, the researcher position and reflexivity is presented.

A researcher needs to resolve several issues before data collection can take place in a life history approach or in any other method of research. Among these are questions of definition, sampling procedures, locating and deciding cases, interviewing and ethical issue and analysis. This incorporates the seven broad research processes for the life history approach (Cohen, et al., 2000:166-167; Plummer 2001:122).

Question of definition: Who is a Muslim?

Muslims are not a monolithic group of people belonging to Islam. A Muslim is one who believes in the unity of God and testifies that Muhammad is the Messenger of

God. For the purpose of this study, a Muslim will be any person with a shared experience of Islam, regardless of his or her racial origin, theological persuasion, language, ethnic and cultural background and citizenship.

In terms of selecting participants for a study, Coombes (2001:35-36) is of the view that an articulate interviewee should be selected and those who provide a range of views. Interviewees should also be in easy access and the researcher is advised to avoid 'busy people as they are unlikely to make good informants' (Coombes, 2001:35-36; Plummer, 2001:136). But, if the aim of the research is to understand the 'constructions of selves', Woods (1985:16) argues that 'we have to appreciate that the style of various individuals' perceptions of those constructions will differ'. Hence he concludes, 'it would be wrong to exclude teachers or their accounts purely on the grounds of quality of expression' (Woods, 1985:16). Therefore, the criteria for selecting participants have not been based on the quality of their expression.

The research sample

There is a need to establish some principles upon which Muslim respondents were selected for this research. Ghuman (1995:5) interviewed Asian, White and Afro-Caribbean teachers working in the English Midlands. Teachers from primary and secondary sectors voluntarily participated and claims of randomness or representativeness were not made. Teachers from first and second generations were included with a fair proportion of women. On the other hand, Osler (1997:58-59) studied life histories of headteachers, advisors, teachers, and undergraduate and post-graduate student trainees. Her sample consisted exclusively of Black people i.e., people of African, African Caribbean or Asian descent from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds. She wanted to consider non-White perspectives in education. Most of her sample with some exceptions worked in the West Midlands. Subsequently, Osler (2003) used the experiences of 13 Muslim women to expose challenges in realising a society wherein Muslim women could claim their citizenship rights on the basis of equality.

These studies have taken a socio-cultural perspective which is inclusive of faith and religious affiliations as evident from their interviewees. However, Ghuman

(1995:viii) confined his sample to Asian teachers due to constraints of time and resources. On the other hand, Osler (1997:1) chose to expose the experiences and voices of Black and ethnic minority teachers within an education system which is structured by race, gender and class, and therefore it had a political dimension. In other words, Ghuman (1995) and Osler (1997) did not choose the faith or religion of their participants as a criterion for their sampling method and preferred not to put it at the forefront of their interpretation unlike Benn (1998). This demonstrates a gap in the study of teachers from a religious perspective. In addition, there are other factors to take into consideration, such as the growth and diversity of Muslims, the recent migration patterns and increased number of UK teacher graduates. The census of 2001 showed that 14.3% of the population of Birmingham identified themselves as Muslims which was significantly higher than the average for England and Wales of 3.1% (BCC, 2001). Statistically, it seems that the population of pupils from Muslim backgrounds in Birmingham schools will become more prominent as it increases in the near future. It is therefore important to study Muslim teachers in order to draw implications for the future. The limits imposed on the kinds of individuals to be interviewed derive both from the research interest and efforts to keep the study feasible by limiting it to a single city, as in the case of Nelson (1992:169) who used oral history interviews to reconstruct the life experiences of fifty women teachers based on a non-random sample. This research used a combination of sampling methods to ensure the faith of these teachers was the main principle for their selection.

Sampling procedures

Another step in the design procedure is to provide a rationale for the sampling technique used. Sampling is a process of selecting individuals from a larger population with the purpose of investigating features of that population in greater detail (Coombes, 2001:34). There are numerous ways of sampling which in turn help to control bias in the sampling itself. Muslim teachers working in primary state schools of Birmingham were chosen for this research. In biographical research the usual procedure for locating participants is that of selected sampling (Schatzman and Strauss, (1973) cf. Miller, 2000:76; Plummer, 2001:134). In other words this is a sample upon which a judgment has been made. Selected sampling (non-random) is

different from the techniques of probability sampling (random) commonly employed by survey researchers. The participants used in a selective sample are chosen on a 'conceptual basis'. Each participant is selected because they represent a certain group that is considered or chosen on conceptual grounds to be significant. Hence, primary schools of Birmingham have been studied. As is evident in Table [2], (p.131) all these Muslim teachers were working in primary schools at the time of their interview in various capacities. There are also other probability sampling (random) methods such as systematic, stratified, cluster and multi-stage sampling (Robson, 1993:137-139). The purpose of random sampling is to gain a range of participants that represent all of the types of people that are important for the phenomenon being studied. Due to the particular characteristics of this study these probability sampling methods were not employed.

In quota sampling the strategy is to get 'representatives of the various elements of a population' (Robson, 1993:140). Although this is done in 'the relative proportions in which they occur in the population', for practical reasons this was not strictly applied in this study. In addition, without statistical records based on religion it was not possible to determine how many Muslim teachers there are in relation to the Muslim population of Birmingham, or even of England and Wales as a whole. Furthermore, the representation is in number rather than 'the types of persons actually selected'. Robson (1993:140) cautions that such means of gathering quota sampling are subject to biases. Quota sampling was applied and in this way the researcher got thirteen respondents as shown in Table [1] (p.130).

As the study was concerned with the life and experiences of Muslim teachers at various levels of the primary school structure it was predicted that their narratives would vary with the individuals' levels of role, responsibility and experience. Initially teachers were identified according to their position in the hierarchy of primary schools, but in view of restructuring in schools this plan was abandoned (Appendix 4).

To summarise happenstance, selected and quota sampling methods were applied for various purposes which served the research. Happenstance was used when teachers became available unexpectedly as in the case of Khadijah who I met at a seminar held

in a Muslim school. To ensure and to locate Muslim teachers working in Birmingham primary schools, selected sampling was chosen whilst quota sampling was used to establish the number of respondents. This means that the sample is not entirely random. However, the snowballing and happenstance methods increase the chances of a random sample.

Locating cases

Using the quota sampling method meant that the researcher searched for participants who fell into the category relevant to the study. Locating suitable respondents, it was anticipated, would be reasonably simple because the 'types' being looked for were relatively numerous in primary schools, some of whom are known to the researcher. The location of appropriate cases is not always straight-forward (Miller, 2000:78), and it was anticipated that the willingness of the respondents to be interviewed especially, if more interviews were required, might be a challenge. This only happened with 'Aishah, an interviewee, with her suggestion. Another challenge was the securing of a wide representation because these teachers work in an urban environment that is actually diverse in terms of its spread of population and concentration of schools. Therefore the researcher aimed at getting a representative sample of teachers from different locations and experiences. The ways in which these difficulties were overcome are discussed below. The fieldwork yielded four males and nine females representing various ethnic backgrounds and experience working in several areas in the city (pp. 114-115).

In addition to quota methods, another sampling method was considered to obtain respondents within a category of the variables which may be rare to find due to the constraints of time and geographical location. This involved the composition of a network of contacts called snowball sampling (Brown and Dowling, 1998:30). It was envisaged that first of all, key informants will be identified such as Muslim professionals in the education sector or community leaders who might be requested to establish a contact between the researcher and the respondents in their circles. Once the confidence of the first respondent was gained this should lead to the respondent being requested to approach his or her contacts or networks and securing their participation thereby making use of gatekeepers (Scott and Usher, 1999:71). This

would provide the second layer who in turn would do the same for other contacts to form a third layer and so on. However, the initial list would commence with those Muslim teachers who were acquainted with the researcher, such as colleagues or friends. Furthermore, this method would be followed with increased enthusiasm to yield a more random sample thereby reducing bias as stated earlier. Equally, the happenstance sampling method was retained (Miller, 2000:76). This occurs when researchers through chance circumstances locate individuals for research. Although a researcher cannot leave the availability of respondents solely to chance, in the case of this researcher, this sampling method was applied because it was workable due to his professional duties and community based work. It was anticipated that some supply teachers were likely to be located through this manner but this did not happen nor did the researcher need to approach key informants or community leaders.

Issues and ethics in research

Having established the sample for this study, it is important to address the question of bias because it could be argued that the researcher has chosen Muslim teachers who are sympathetic to the research topic and therefore doubt could be cast upon the findings. In educational research the term bias is significant. Rather than referring to the prejudiced attitude that one may hold, according to Murray and Lawrence (2000:43), 'it is a technical term that suggests influences on an enquiry beyond the control of the researcher.' These can be reduced by following ethical procedures, by declaring known interests and by carefully accounting the subjective features of the enquiry (Murray and Lawrence, 2000:43). However, it is questionable whether any sample can be truly representative, unless the whole population is surveyed of course. Nevertheless, the forthcoming section will attempt to show that the researcher has not introduced a systematic bias through the choice of respondents. If insufficient numbers were found an advert in local newspapers and letters to schools were considered to create random interest in the study. Once the list of prospective interviewees was assembled it was considered in terms of the teacher's gender, ethnicity, age and geographical location, to gain a wider representation and to reduce bias in the selection of participants for the study. These extrinsic factors are easily identifiable, and were therefore sought actively as it would have been difficult to

establish the various intrinsic characteristics and persuasions that these Muslim teachers held prior to the interview.

One of the criticisms levied against life history research is that it is not representative, and puts the reader into a story but no more (Plummer, 2001:153). However, this is a misunderstanding of the study of life history, for the purpose is not the production of facts but rather to provide insights, understanding and appreciations (Plummer, 2001:153). To reduce this, Plummer (1983:100) urges researchers to 'work out and explicitly state the life history's relationship to a wider population'. This may be carried out by way of appraising the subject on a continuum of a representativeness and non representativeness. On one side this can be done by matching the characteristics of a case to the wider sample. Where it is possible to relate the characteristics to a sample confidence in its generalisability is considerably increased. At the other end of the spectrum is to take the single case for what it is and what it tells us about that case (Plummer, 1983:100; Plummer, 2001:153). Hence, respondents have been chosen by virtue of fitting into the category of being Muslims. From a qualitative point of view, the selection of Muslims meets the criteria of being representative although caution has been exercised in generalising from the findings. In other words these respondents are a selection of Muslim teachers but because they are limited in number and the experience of each teacher is subjective, the findings from their life history have provided insufficient grounds for making generalisations on behalf of all Muslim teachers in Birmingham. Research constructs such as validity, reliability and generalisability will be discussed later in this chapter.

A researcher needs to be conscious of ethical considerations in each of the research stages. Cohen, et al., (2000:49) maintain that ethical issues arise from: (i) the nature of the research project itself (ii) the context for the research (iii) the procedures to be adopted (iv) methods of data collection (v) the nature of the participants (vi) the type of data collected and (vii) what is to be done with other data collected. The following measures were taken into consideration for addressing the ethical issues emerging from a life history research: (i) the researcher ensured that the 'closing of the interview relationship' was done with care and the respondents' time and willingness to participate was appreciated; (ii) the interviewees were informed explicitly that should they wish to contact the researcher at a later date and time it would be possible

for them to do so; (iii) the researcher provided them with appropriate details of communication.

It is acknowledged that sensitive topics of discussion demand a certain degree of flexibility on the part of the researcher if the true sense of their opinions and of their observations is to be made. In the experience of Ghuman (1995:26) although he interviewed a personal friend he nevertheless faced some difficulty in recording the conversation on sensitive topics due to the position of power held by the interviewee. It was decided that respect for the privacy of the conversation would be maintained not only with regard to recording but also with regard to disclosure. This is in view of recent legislation (H.M.S.O., 2000). The researcher aimed to avoid being in a position whereby he was relayed some information which was not to be known. The British Educational Research Association adopted a set of ethical guidelines in 1992. The researcher upheld some of those principles (BERA, 2004). Respondents had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, although Miller (2000:82) suggests against this as it would leave the research incomplete. The researcher was mindful of cultural, religious, gendered, and other significant differences within the research population in the planning, conducting, and reporting of the research (BERA, 2004). Furthermore, selections of the *Ethical Principles for Conducting Research with Human Participants* have been taken account of (British Psychological Society, 2004). The researcher explained all other aspects of the research about which the participants enquired. Being in a position of relative authority or influence over participants, the study was not allowed to pressurise the participants to take part in, or remain in the investigation. No payment was offered, and intentional deception of the participants over the purpose and general nature of the investigation was avoided.

The above section has shown how the participants were located and how major ethical issues were addressed. The forthcoming section highlights the significant steps that were followed before conducting the interview.

Informed choice, access and co-operation

Participants were provided with 'informed consent' (Cohen, et al., 2000:50; Miller, 2000:82) whereby they decided whether to participate or not in the study after they

had been informed about the research. The principle of informed consent emerges from the participants' right to freedom by virtue of living in a democracy. Any limitation placed on that freedom must be justified and consented to (Cohen, et al., 2000:51). Since the research is likely to take place in schools and/or homes the question of access is important. Cohen, et al., (2000:53) emphasise that investigators cannot expect access to any institution as a matter of right. Rather, their worth both as human beings and researchers and the provision of facilities needs to be demonstrated. Therefore participants were given the choice to decide where the interview should take place.

By whatever means, contact is established with respondents the next task for the researcher is to obtain the co-operation of the respondents. Woods (1987) has alerted researchers to the understandable reluctance that some teachers might initially have. He therefore suggests that life histories 'need to be sensitively introduced, as well as sensitively handled' (Woods, 1987:132). It was anticipated that this might be a lengthy and uneasy process, and was addressed by asking the teachers to consider the question of time and number of sessions for both practical and ethical reasons. Ethically, studying the life history via a face-to-face interview is an 'invasion of privacy' - since the essence is about asking the participants to inform the researcher about significant aspects of their life (Miller, 2000:81). This means that some teachers might not feel secure and open to fulfil the researchers' expectations. Miller (2000:81) draws attention to another misgiving that respondents in a life history study may have about the effects upon their 'own psychological stability' that would emerge if they were to put themselves through the experience. He challenges the naïve presumption that some life history researchers may have that telling one's story must be a therapeutic experience. It may not be the case necessarily, but it was bound to be an exercise in introspection (Miller, 2000:80-81).

The researcher informed the respondents of the choice that they had about what they reveal during the interview based on privacy, respect, ethical, moral and religious reasons. It is therefore crucial to outline further ethical considerations that had been considered. It is possible, due to unavoidable circumstances, that a sensitive dialogue may take place as exemplified by Osler (1997). She was faced with a dilemma when interviewing a Muslim woman. Osler recorded that the young woman graduate was a

victim of an oppressive and violent relationship, and was under pressure to marry the person with whom she had broken her own religious code. She was unemployed and feared for her reputation. In such a predicament and with uncertainties for the future she sought advice from Osler. Osler (1997) acted, in her judgement, ethically and responsibly by not walking away from the dilemma, and respecting the humanness of the research relationship. Thereafter, she concluded that a researcher 'must act in accordance with personal codes of behaviour as much as with any professional conduct' (Osler, 1997:67).

Two further issues need elaborating. The impact, if any, of the researcher's identity on the research outcome is crucial for understanding the analysis and interpretation of the data. At a time of increased political sensitivity, consideration had been given to the extent to which the study would be perceived as an intrusion into a minority community or as an opportunity for self-assertion. Since individual experiences are varied it was not expected that the participants would share the experiences of the researcher or vice versa. There may be a common experience of prejudice, Islamophobia and inequality, but the form may be different. In addition, as discussed earlier, life histories are not complete, hence participants would possibly select and tell experiences which they decided to be significant. Finally, the researcher did not assume that the respondents would share a common understanding of Islam and its teachings.

Intrusion into the affairs of the Muslim community in Britain has increased substantially. The government appears to be sending, particularly to the Muslim community, a dual message. Through events like the *Road Show* initiative in 2006, and the increase in religious rhetoric and activity within government agencies, and through some religion-based services, it seems that religious engagement is openly encouraged. Simultaneously, however, specifically targeting the Muslim community for surveillance in their most sacred space and some of the heavy-handedness in dealing with suspects is a worrying phenomenon (Allen, 2005; Muslim News, 2006). Some of these Muslim teachers accepted to participate with much enthusiasm as soon as they were invited. In fact, informal talks with recent graduates provided confidence for the study. Some of them welcomed the study and suggested that it was important that such a study was conducted and as a result provided their contact

details. It, therefore, seems that although the element of intrusion was real, the relevance of the study provided a frank and open interview.

Reaching agreement

Having successfully gained the confidence and co-operation from willing respondents who would share with the researcher their life history a prior signed arrangement was made with the respondents before the interview commenced. Agreements were reached on the following basic ground rules: (i) that the recording of the interview would be made on an electronic device; (ii) notes would be taken to supplement the interview; (iii) to agree to use the material now and later; (iv) implications of the potential publication of the materials was made explicit for instance that the material may appear in articles, books or conferences; (v) to maintain the right to remain anonymous and maintain confidentiality - respondents were asked explicitly to state how they wanted this to be achieved; (vi) none of the respondents wanted their names to be retained; (vii) respondents were informed about the expectations of the interviews and the researcher ensured that interviewees stayed the course and did not withdraw either completely or at any stage once the interview or a sequence of interviews had started (Miller, 2000:82); (viii) difficult and uncomfortable questions were left for the latter part of the interview after 'sufficient rapport' had been established. Respondents were informed that they should declare their 'discomfort' at any point during the interview; (ix) the degree of control over the final result was also be discussed. Miller (2000:83-84) maintains that this ranges along a continuum from no control to including the respondents as joint authors; (x) gendered language has been used due to the nature of the reporting required, (xi) respondents used English as the main language in addition to their preferred language.

The research relationship was not terminated upon the completion of the interview: the researcher gave respondents the opportunity to read and comment on, delete or correct the accuracy of the transcription of their interviews. This process affords advantages and disadvantages. It increases: the accuracy, missing segments when they are indecipherable from the tape can be filled and expansions of the points emerging in hindsight for additional commentary can be made. A potential downside

is that respondents may request to remove some of the material which may be considered essential to the research.

The life history method involves developing relationships and confidence. It is imperative that a strong relationship is developed at an early stage. The initial task for an interviewer is to establish a rapport with the respondent (Wellington, 1996:28). The life history technique user 'must be able to develop a close, sympathetic and understanding relationship with the subject' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:195). This enables the researcher to penetrate several layers of access (Measor and Sikes, 1992:213). On the other hand, although the initial rapport may be established without problems, Thompson (1978:181) cautions that 'asking questions may become difficult because of common social network or because the answer (often mistakenly) seems obvious'. In addition relationships lead to giving and receiving in various contexts, hence researchers need to note this social behaviour. Measor and Sikes (1992:214) draw attention to the expectations of respondents from the interviewer. This was omitted in their project and raised ethical questions for them. A noteworthy suggestion which is particularly helpful during the initial stages of the enlisting process, which Coombes (2001:36) recommends, is that careful thought needs to be given in terms of what the respondents hope to gain from recounting their life history as it may sometimes be an unpleasant experience. Self-disclosure means that as the respondent narrates his/her life the interviewer gives information about his own views and attitudes to retrieve more information. This may assist the professional self-enhancement of some participants (Measor and Sikes, 1992:217).

Anonymity and confidentiality

The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way be able to reveal their identity (Cohen, et al., 2000:61). Pseudonyms may be insufficient when anonymity is demanded. In a face-to-face interview the confidentiality of the information provided was promised and assurances of non-traceability, so that an individual's response is not identifiable. The principal means involved excluding the respondents' name and precise geographical location of the school and in Juwayriyah's case, her country of origin. The use of numbers and letters was offered but these teachers did not prefer them. Goodley et al., (2004:75)

changed the name, ethnicity, and other details of his subjects to prevent acquaintances of participants discovering their identity. Although one can apply this method, it is arguable whether total anonymity as far as life histories are concerned can be achieved. In addition, if considerable facts are disguised then such a compromise needs careful thought in terms of whether it compromises the research or not (Coombes, 2001:35-36). To enhance confidentiality, teachers were assured that their personal identity will remain unknown as much as possible other than what is in Table [1] (p.130). Lankshear and Knobel (2004:110) are of the view that this is ‘a traditional criterion of ethics, and aims at minimizing negative repercussions for participants in the light of the outcomes of the study’. Achieving goodwill and cooperation is particularly significant where the research extends over a period of time. Hence some goodwill on the part of the teachers was requested. A strong ethical safeguard is that of making use of respondent validation (Measor and Sikes, 1992:219). This was carried out by sending transcriptions to the teachers for their appraisal and approval. The guiding principle for sampling and ethical procedures was given to each teacher and it was their decision that was followed by the researcher except for Juwayriyah (p.156)

Interviews

The interview was chosen as a research instrument for capturing the life history of Muslim primary teachers in Birmingham schools. Simply defined an interview is a conversation with a purpose (Berg, 2004:75). Interviews provide a natural means of gathering information from people. From the point of view of the participants it allows them a relative degree of flexibility. There are three main types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:201). Of these, the semi-structured style was chosen as it is more suitable to explore the motives, philosophies and experiences of the participants, and offers comparisons too. There is considerable opportunity to use prompts and to follow up questions either for clarification or expansion of the responses for the interviewer (Drever, 1995:13). The interview method has been used by several researchers to study a range of aspects related to teachers, their work and their life (Woods, 1985; Goodson, 1992a; Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997, Benn, 1998). Furthermore a good coverage with rich information is achievable.

The three approaches to biographical research presented in the previous chapter, i.e., the realist, the neo-positivist and the narrative approaches, imply different modes of interviewing (Miller, 2000:92-101). In the forthcoming sections these modes will be discussed and the differences between them highlighted and the possibility of whether or not these contrasting interviewing techniques can be used with these teachers. The qualities of an interviewer will also be noted.

The realist approach is characterised as extremely unfocussed. The interviewer speaks little and remains non-directive (Miller, 2000:92). Whereas a deductive mode of interviewing is used by neo-positivists based on pre-existing concepts and theories derived from research literature. It may be a replication of a previous study too. The researcher uses a semi-structured interview schedule organised as a series of topics to be investigated (Miller, 2000:96). The start of a narrative style interview can be similar to either the realist or neo-positivist interview. However, its distinct feature is that it accords primacy to the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Miller, 2000:100).

Interviews provide several advantages and limitations. In the experience of Ghuman (1995:7) semi-structured interviews accommodated digressions from the central themes and provided 'fresh insights into the issues under discussion'. He also observed that on sensitive topics, interviews allow the interviewer to make judgements on the behaviour of the subjects and monitor the questioning accordingly. This is pertinent especially when discussing sensitive topics related to religion, faith and culture. In addition, Ghuman (1995) claimed that 'the interviewer can judge fairly accurately whether the respondents are being honest and are giving reliable information'. More importantly, he found that the relaxed atmosphere allowed participants to reveal new perspectives which the researcher may not have thought of (Ghuman, 1995:7). However, the most commonly cited limitation of the interview tool is that it is time-consuming. The problems of reliability and validity which apply to surveys and questionnaires apply to interviews as well. However, in addition to the depth that an interview provides in relation to the data, it would be unreasonable to ask teachers, who may have various commitments and demands placed upon them, to

write their life history or answer a lengthy questionnaire of this nature. Hence the interview was preferred for this purpose.

Researchers must have an interest and respect for respondents, be flexible in responding to them, be sympathetic to their viewpoints and be willing to listen (Thompson, 1978:165), and be mindful of the ethical and moral issues when asking sensitive questions (Coombes, 2001:35-36). The researcher should be clear about what is being asked of the respondent and, in order to improve the quality of the data, Patton (1990:312) suggests that words that make sense and those that reflect the world view of the respondents ought to be used. The researcher let the respondents use English and any other language they preferred interchangeably. A documentation sheet along the lines of Flick (2002:172) was developed to include the additional contextual information (Appendix 5).

Transcriptions

The first step in the process of analysing the data of this research was transcribing and translating the life history interviews. All interviews were recorded on an MP3 for enhanced quality and WAV file formats which can hold a large amount of data (Lankshear and Knobel, 2004:196). After making two duplicate copies the original copy was stored safely. The original recordings i.e., core files (Plummer 2001:151), were numbered chronologically and dated. Each disc was labelled individually to keep the data intact, complete, organised and accessible (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:109) and secure. On a separate sheet of paper the number of the disc and the teacher's name was recorded along with the pseudonym or name preferred by the participants. This sheet of paper was kept separate from the disc. The duplicate MP3 copies were used for transcription. The whole interview was transcribed. This was stored away safely. The third copy was used for analysis, i.e., analytic files (Plummer 2001:151). These procedures allowed easy identification and increased the confidentiality of the original sources. After the interview, at the first opportunity, the researcher verified ambiguities and sought clarifications over the telephone, especially in those cases where information was not elicited fully. In the experience of Patton (1990:353) such follow-ups, for the participants, were an indication of the seriousness with which their responses were being considered.

Translations

It was anticipated that some of these Muslim teachers would use a language, or some languages other than English in their conversations. This would indicate a sense of trust on their part. In dealing with the transcriptions of such phrases the researcher asked them to provide an interpretation or translation in the first instance where this was possible. Otherwise the phrases were first transliterated, and then translated into English. The issue is much wider than simply translating. Life histories are 'embedded in particular cultures, and the act of translation is an attempt to 'transplant' the language from one culture so that it can make sense in another without losing its original meanings' (Plummer, 2001:151). Literal translation may consist of biases and it is important to note various nuances of a diverse community.

Newmark (1991) discusses political concepts and the role of words and discourse in translation. Baker (1992) provides a course book for training professional translators and Samuelsson-Brown (1993) suggests the range of equipment to use, the process of translation and how to take it to its finished form. As English becomes an increasingly international language, Bassnett and Trivedi (1999) examine the links between post-colonial theory and translation studies. They examine the relationships between language and power across cultural boundaries. With the advances in technology and machine translations, Cronin (2003) argues that the role of translation and translators is a necessary part in safeguarding and promoting linguistic and cultural diversity. In other words translating is not a straight-forward process. It has its own challenges, nuances, and it is a discipline in its own right. In light of this, researchers need to give systematic and appropriate thought when dealing with translations emerging from their data.

Scholars not only recognise the shortcomings of translations, as a tool of language intervention across cultures, but they also suggest that these shortcomings highlight the fact that translating is an impossible task since 'languages are never sufficiently similar to express the same realities' (Baker, 1992:8). Because translation is 'an intangible exercise' it makes quality control subjective in many cases (Samuelsson-Brown, 1993:48). Translators endeavour to understand what the speaker wishes to state and thereafter express that clearly in the target language. Hence there are two

generally accepted principal categories of translators - literary and non-literary (Samuelsson-Brown, 1993:x). Since translations have multifarious purposes they become a product of the time, place and a socio-political and religio-cultural component of research. The researcher reads Urdu and Arabic, speaks Gujarati, and Kutchi and has very limited familiarity with Punjabi. Following the discussions about ethical issues, interviews, translations and transcriptions, the analytical procedures used in this research are presented below.

Nature of data and research constructs

The data which emerge from life histories is characteristically subjective, rich, highly localised and evocative (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:188). In order to establish the trustworthiness of this study both consideration of the presentation, and fundamental issues such as trustworthiness, validity, generalisability and reliability of the data and the study are addressed and discussed below.

According to Robson (1993:66) '[v]alidity is concerned with whether the findings are 'really' about what they appear to be about.' Generalisability refers to 'the extent to which the findings of the enquiry are more generally applicable, for example in other contexts, situations or times, or to persons other than those directly involved' (Robson, 1993:66). Plummer (1983:104-106; Plummer, 2001:158-159) offers the following points for validity checks: (i) the providers of the life history may present an auto-critique of the entire document; (ii) a comparison may be made with similar written sources by identifying major similar and divergent points; (iii) a comparison may be made with official documents to ensure accuracy checks on life history; (iv) comparisons made by interviewing other informants.

Cohen et al., (2000:167) suggest that the validity of life history research relies upon its ability to represent the participant's subjective reality. Validity focuses on the question of whether a similar study carried out by someone else would find similar results (Coombes, 2001:32). A careful description of the method and procedures allows a potential researcher to follow a similar study. On the contrary, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:208) argue that rather than discussing the validity of life history accounts 'one could ask about their authenticity.' Reliability in life history research

hinges upon the identification of sources of bias, and the application of techniques to reduce them. The sources of bias could be both parties and the interaction between the two (Plummer, 1983:102-103). But, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:208) view it to be nonsensical to ask questions about reliability of life history work since ‘detailed personal subjective accounts’ are produced by the life history ‘because that is what it precisely aims to do.’ One could therefore begin to talk about ‘joint productions and exploring the co-production of meaning’ (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:208). Gaining the full confidence of the respondents was considered imperative by Ghuman (1995) to enhance the reliability of the data. For this research, the aims, objectives and outcomes of the findings were made explicit to the participants. Total confidentiality was assured and the principle of *al-majālisu bil amanah* (conversations are a trust) was reiterated, which is a tradition of Muhammad (Al-Sijistānī, 1984). Any question which they wanted to ignore was not pursued, neither was an explanation sought.

Following the above theoretical section on key constructs in research, the next section demonstrates practical measures that were undertaken to address them. In order to have greater confidence in the interview data an effort was made to enhance the validity of the data by providing full transcriptions to respondents. This allowed all interviewees (i) to verify the accuracy of the factual information (ii) to confirm what they said and meant. The researcher sent interviewees the transcriptions of his/her interviews and only one script was returned. The researcher reached the conclusion that they tacitly approved the content otherwise they would have made contact. The script that was received did not have any significant changes. Hence the lack of critical feedback gave the researcher confidence in the validity of the data.

Interviewees were asked if they kept diaries and other documents about themselves which the researcher could have access to, so that data could be corroborated to achieve some form of triangulation. None except one stated that they had such information. Hafsaah offered to send her journal which she kept during her PGCE course, but the researcher did not receive it. The plausibility of the data relies on the fact that these respondents were all Muslims, and they were all teachers in primary schools in Birmingham. Hence they were speaking about themselves and they had the authority to do so. The research was not about highly specialised areas which required the selection of key informants. In addition, the data from the interviews

have been analysed thematically. The researcher has not relied on individual transcriptions as the only genuine source. Respondents have commented on these shared themes, and therefore in referring to them as a group there is more confidence. Furthermore, relying exclusively on data from an individual threatens objectivity (Robson, 1993:74).

The other important issue is that of generalisation. These are narratives of thirteen Muslim teachers in Birmingham. As such they do not demand to be true for all Muslim teachers across Birmingham, let alone in the UK. In addition they are to a degree time specific as well. Other Muslim teachers within Birmingham and beyond may share some similar experiences, but may have their distinct stories to narrate (Benn, 1998). Hence it is problematic to generalise from these few life histories. Furthermore, the selection of the single life history, the four narratives and the various quotations in the thematic analyses is a subjective task. The researcher consciously made an effort to give voice to various perspectives incorporating gender, ethnicity, route into teaching and experiences where appropriate. These thirteen life histories do not exist in isolation. All these life histories have taken place and emerged in one urban environment, and are therefore experiences of thirteen individuals out of many more teachers who are Muslims living and working in Birmingham. Therefore one might be able to extrapolate from their stories to show a trend by looking at similar themes. The second point is that although these are only thirteen life histories they are related to what is already known and found in the literature review. The research by Ghuman (1995), Osler (1995; 1997; 2003), Rakhit (1999), Benn, (1998; 2003) and Basit et al., (2007) did have Muslim participants. They reveal the complexity of understanding Muslims in Britain. Frequently suspicion of Muslims comes from a closed view of their religion. Hence these are not in isolation in that sense. In addition the findings from these studies allows for comparisons to be made with the current study.

Finally, in the analysis the researcher has not assumed that the participants in this research share the researcher's understandings. Whilst listening to and reading their interviews the researcher noted themes within their information. The intention was to allow the respondents the opportunity to bring their own views to the conversations as much as possible. The researcher avoided asking them questions related to their

private life, theological and school of jurisprudence preferences, to allow them to talk freely without fear of being judged or labelled.

Summary

The above part has delineated the processes involved in a life history approach aimed at studying the experiences of Muslim teachers in primary schools in the city of Birmingham. This design stage has attempted to emphasise four main aspects: the sampling method, the interview procedures and the ethical code guiding this study. A variety of sampling methods were applied which include the happenstance, selected and quota sampling methods to serve the various purposes of the study. The semi-structured interview style has been used as it is more suitable for exploring the motives, philosophies and experiences of the respondents. The ethical considerations being followed in this research have been explained which put the interests of the respondents first. The most essential principle that has been applied is that of ensuring the anonymity of these teachers.

PART 2: REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The aim of this part is to analyse and reflect on the research process and fieldwork and accounts for several broad areas. The researcher was becoming a part of these teachers' lives, whilst being detached from them (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982:119). Hence it is also useful to delineate the fieldwork relationships which set the tone for the research.

The researcher maintained two journals and several ring binders for filing various readings about Muslims in Britain and the research topic. In these journals contact details of all teachers and brief notes of the invitation and first conversations were noted. These notes assisted in tracking the questions and concerns expressed by these teachers, and were very helpful in setting the scene for later invitations. The journals also contained tutorial notes and reflections which aided memory and assisted in noting the developing thoughts both about the research process and the interviews. The interviewees' gestures and physical expressions were noted on the questionnaire, and none of them queried these observations being written down.

About twenty areas for the interview were identified, ranging from the interviewees' biographical details to contemporary issues in schools (Appendix 6). Under each area subsidiary questions acted as pointers for the researcher to probe the respondents further when required. In most cases these proved to be essential because on certain occasions a few teachers spoke little about the first question, and these subsidiary questions acted as prompts and were thus useful. Some of the questions were informed by the literature review; others were created as part of the aims of the research, and some flowed from the interview.

The first three interviews were used as pilots in consultation with the supervisor. They were difficult, tiring and occasionally disheartening, mainly due to their length. The researcher felt disassociated from the research, as the concept of life history felt very technical and although it was highly regarded by the teachers the researcher had doubts: were these collections life histories? Did the respondents understand their interviews in this light? These were some questions in the mind of the researcher. Then there were feelings of being uncomfortable and overwhelmed, although not unexpected, according to the diary note of 18-05-2006. In addition, feelings of incompetency about the method of interviewing based on life history approach surfaced. The researcher referred to several texts (Goodson, 1992a; Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997; Miller, 2000) again to overcome these feelings, and felt reassured.

Nevertheless, the experience of the first three interviews was instructive and assisted in many ways. A tick list was incorporated and was used after the interviews to ensure consistency among all participants, and to ensure that the researcher had completed all the requirements of the fieldwork. The usefulness of the tick list became evident after the fourth interview when the researcher forgot to ask Khadijah to suggest another Muslim teacher who worked in her school. In addition, the researcher felt that the questionnaire needed further clarity, avoidance of repetition, and the inclusion of many questions was of concern as it seemed that the respondents were being directed towards the listed questions and very little was emerging from the teachers themselves. However, when teachers were put in charge of the interview, such as Sawdah and Zaid, the data that emerged seemed more insightful. Conducting three hour-long interviews was tiring for both parties especially towards the end.

There was a feeling of getting through the questions rather than being interested in or finding out what the teachers had to say. In addition, it seemed that the concentration level of the teachers was reduced and the relevance of the interview began to diminish. As a result it was decided that the questionnaire should be condensed into main areas with several pointers to alert the researcher with a view to interviewing for one hour as a minimum.

A semi-structured interview was used to get comparable data from each teacher and therefore a limitation of this has been the lack of opportunity to understand how the teachers themselves would have used the chance at hand to structure their own life. Therefore different types of interviews were employed at different stages of this research. Structured questions related mainly to eliciting factual data as represented in Table [1] and Table [2] on pages 130-131. Whilst it is ideal and a significant strategy for the qualitative interviewer to avoid closed questions as much as possible (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982:136) this was not always possible in part due to a lack of experience and their responses.

There are a number of ways of proceeding to get permission from people to participate in a research project (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982:121). Since no two schools are the same, it was not surprising, therefore, that in 'Aishah's school, who was on a secondment at that time, the secretary enquired the purpose of the call. Later when 'Aishah returned to her original school the researcher informed the receptionist that 'Aishah was expecting a call and she did not ask any further questions. A researcher has to balance the need to be compliant and assertive. Health and safety procedures were fully observed whilst on school premises and the visitors' book was signed. It was also useful to ensure that a good rapport was established with all staff. The researcher was particular about this as on more than one occasion, on teaching practice visits; a sense of uncertainty and surprise has been exhibited by a few receptionists. Four teachers, Safiyyah, Khadijah, 'Aishah and Zaynab, were interviewed in schools. Whilst out in schools collecting data the researcher was internalising the research goals and participated with other teachers in various ways (Bogdan and Bilken, 1982:129-130) such as talking with them about the day and other matters. When the researcher felt the need to step out of the researcher role, the physical posture and style of conversation were changed to make it clear that the role

had changed. Occasionally, the recording was continued as a preventative measure to capture the unexpected revelation of information omitted during the interview.

There were some assumptions made by the researcher for requesting Muslim teachers to participate. The diary note of 17-03-2006 shows:

I am relying considerably on my assumption that (i) the snowball sampling method will get me the Muslim teachers I need (ii) that my professional status will create objectivity for attracting their participation (iii) my physical appearance will find a sympathetic space in them as someone interested in teachers as Muslims.

The researcher was direct in responding to their queries during the invitation. With previous teacher colleagues, since they were expecting an invitation, the researcher avoided being too specific, so that they were not bewildered and he avoided detailed elaboration. Lengthy responses to all interviewees were avoided by the researcher due to the possibility that some of these teachers would be busy with their families in the evening. Four teachers were only interested in arranging the venue, date and time and had no questions to ask. To those who asked the purpose of the research, the researcher responded saying: 'I am trying to understand what it means to be a Muslim teacher in Birmingham.' Some of these teachers asked the researcher what was expected of them. In response, the researcher emphasised that it really depended on them and their circumstances. This was important so that the invitation did not seem to be solicitous to the point of being patronising (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982:123).

Telephone calls into schools were only made in the case of Zaynab who is a head teacher and 'Aishah who was an assistant head at the time. Khadijah was approached at a seminar for Muslim teachers. The rest of the teachers were invited by telephone calls at home usually in the early evenings. This allowed the teachers to respond to the request in an independent capacity out of school premises thus reducing possible constraints. When calling at home, researchers need to be aware that among some Muslim families there will be gatekeepers who may ask the purpose and name of the caller before passing on the telephone to the intended person.

In the case of all respondents, apart from 'Aishah who was interviewed on two separate occasions, each respondent's interview was confined to a single day. Since three interviews lasted for about three hours, an interval became necessary for a break, prayer, and breaking fast in Ramadhan.

Teachers are timetabled whilst in school, and the researcher was aware that some of them had families. It was crucial not to place too many demands on their time and to monitor the degree of interference. A convenient place, date, routine and time were negotiated, weekends seemed an ideal time from the outset as they would have fewer commitments. Without careful thought to these factors the invitation to participate in the research had the potential to deter some from participating altogether, which in turn would have jeopardise the anticipated number. In the initial plan, the majority of interviews were scheduled to take place between November 2006 and March 2007. However, with further consideration this period was extended as it coincided with Ramadhan and also the end of term prior to Christmas would be closer when schools would be very busy. From a functional perspective the teachers were informed that an hour was a minimum but if each interviewee wanted to continue it would be of much benefit to the researcher otherwise anything less seemed insufficient for a life history exploration. Stating the minimum time also allayed their fears of the interview lasting for too long. The researcher felt that it was important to maintain the integrity of what was agreed during this invitation. During the interview when an hour was over each interviewee was asked if he/she was happy to continue. Fortunately, none objected and they readily continued even though they seemed to be tired at the end of it all.

Sharing the research outcomes was also used as a technique for encouraging interviewees' participation. This research, as stated previously, was undertaken at a time when there were tensions in the city related to a bomb scare, arrests linked to alleged terrorist activities and some racial tensions. Therefore, the research became more liable to be questioned and participants were apprehensive and queried its purpose and its dissemination. Hence it was important to be open and upfront with all participants at all times. Two teachers specifically enquired about the source of funding. They seemed reassured once they were informed that it was not for any university, nor for an organisation and that it was not funded.

From the outset the researcher had been clear that the material was potentially going to be used in publications and conference papers (Mogra, 2009). Based on these intentions, the expected queries from respondents, Plummer's (2001:138) recommendation and reflections over a tutorial with the supervisor, the researcher decided to take artefacts in the form of books (Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997) to show them the purpose and potential outcome of the research. It also clarified the purpose of the research as they could see other studies that had been undertaken on gender and race. It also justified the need for a faith dimension. Surprisingly, none of them had been aware of these studies, nor had they seen these two books before. Perhaps a more effective use of artefacts would have been to use them as stimuli. The researcher also had the interviewees sign the clearance note and deposit instruction form of the British Library (Appendix 7).

It is to be expected in any type of research that the participants may require an explanation of why they had been chosen for research. Since the researcher had approached a particular group which was specifically identified as Muslims it was important to communicate to them that the research was concerned with particular people in particular organisations. Their selection was justified on the basis of the need to recognise and celebrate the achievements of Muslims in Britain, but with a particular focus on teachers in primary schools of Birmingham. In addition, they were informed of the need to research teachers from a faith perspective, based on the models of other studies on race and gender. In most cases conversations were started by greeting the interviewee with the greeting of Islam, *al-salāmu 'alaykum* (peace be upon you) to establish a rapport, and often *Allah Hāfīz* (Allah is the Protector) was stated at the end, and they in turn reciprocated this as well.

The researcher refrained from making any promises about what interviewees would gain from participating in this research. However, copies of their interview were offered. None of them requested to see the transcriptions prior to the offer. Therefore the confidence in relying on these interviews increased. The researcher did not request nor did interviewees request any services either for themselves or for the school in return for the interviews.

When recruiting potential respondents it is essential to seek multiple teachers at one time rather than waiting for one teacher's confirmation of involvement before locating other interviewees. In one instance, the researcher spent two months waiting for a teacher to confirm. This caused some apprehension about meeting a sufficient number of teachers in the time allocated for the fieldwork. From this experience the researcher changed the recruitment strategy. Instead of inviting one teacher at a time, several were contacted together and whoever confirmed was interviewed as soon as possible. Consequently, in May 2007 alone five teachers were interviewed. For this reason, it is useful to review the planned strategies during the research process and to be flexible with the time allocated for fieldwork.

Exploring life histories entails the sharing of information which is personal and part of the self. It was crucial that the researcher did not give a hint of being evaluative as this had the potential of demeaning them. For instance on one occasion Fatimah declared, 'I know you will not like it but I'm still going to say it.' She was indicating, perhaps, that the researcher, as somebody who had known her before, would not be expecting something like this to be said by her. It may be that the head teacher she was referring to continues to have good relations with the researcher, or it reflected the consciousness of ignoring religious boundaries set within Islam about conversations related to third parties (Al-Sijistānī, 1984). Nevertheless the researcher remained silent, and offered to be non-judgemental, as the purpose was to listen and record interviewees' perspectives on the events in schools and not to judge the opinions they formed. The researcher also made it clear to all that the interviews were not about finding out the extent of the interviewees' adherence to the teachings of Islam.

Relationships are influenced by gender, religion, race and other characteristics which contribute to the establishment of the rapport (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982:138). Therefore the potential impact of the researcher upon the participants needs consideration. Some Muslim women talk freely to researchers while others may not do so as fully as they would otherwise. In the context of Muslim behavioural codes, it was significant to be sensitive about the effects that the researcher's personal characteristics might have had on the interview. Hence when the researcher was asking about the venue, a public forum was suggested to ensure that the interviewee

would be confident about this. For example, on one occasion a glassed cubicle in the library was unavailable and instead a lecture room was utilised. At the end, the following comment was made by the teacher when the researcher asked for suggestions, 'I must say that's why I went for a public place'.

Summary

The above Part 2 discussed the issues and procedures related to the research process. It revealed that the researcher kept a journal and piloted the interviews. Through these some adaptations were made to the length and style of use the questionnaire. It also showed that the researcher sought permission from these teachers sensitively by being truthful about the aims and outcomes of the research.

PART 3: PROCEDURES FOR ANALYSING DATA

Having outlined the overall strategy for this research, the sample selection, ethical considerations, the collection and organisation of the data, and the key constructs in research, this part discusses how the large amount of information was analysed.

After gathering information, a researcher is faced with the decision about how to analyse the data. There are numerous ways of analysing participants' conversations about their experiences (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984; Denzin, 1989; Robson, 1993; Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Miller, 2000).

For this piece of research it was not always possible to analyse the data simultaneously with the interviews because the transcription of some interviews was not completed immediately after the interview, neither was it possible to hear them immediately every time. However, when it was possible to listen to and reflect over the recorded interviews during the subsequent days, the researcher was able to note down particular topics which the interviewees talked about at length. This revealed the significance of that topic to the interviewee and was therefore pursued in subsequent interviews to find out whether it had a similar significance for other teachers. The constraints of time and other commitments prevented this from happening in most of the cases. Hearing a couple of interviews immediately was

useful because fresh questions did emerge. For instance some questions related to working in Christian schools emerged after Safiyyah's interview. As a result, in subsequent interviews where applicable, the following questions were incorporated: being a Muslim in a church school, with everything else happening outside, what has been your experience so far? Are your needs catered for? Do you see any contradiction, being a Muslim and working in a church school? Why do some Muslim parents send their children to church schools? (Appendix 23).

Data analysis is the 'process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data' (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:111). Osler (1997:68) cautions against a potential difficulty in life history research. She observes that pressures of time may cause the process of data collection to be artificially separated from the process of analysis. She suggests, ideally the process of analysis should be taking place simultaneously with the interviewing. In addition, Plummer (2001) insisted that analysis and interviewing should always be carried out simultaneously since accumulated data give insights to fresh problems (Plummer, 2001:122). The data generated through this research were of a considerable amount. According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) researchers have therefore differed in the degree to which they have edited their material. In analysing the data, early users of the life history technique were inclined to impose categories on the data and edit the materials considerably, whereas later researchers, 'especially those influenced by phenomenological and feminist critiques', have sought to reverse this by stressing the need for the voice of the subject to come through (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995:188). Other methods for analysis appear in Goodley, et al., (2004:111-148) who used discourse analysis, voice-relational analysis, and literary analysis to analyse different life stories, which were studies based on different epistemological stances.

First of all, to become familiar with the data the researcher read all the transcriptions more than once. Initially, the intention had been to organise the data by using a software package called NVivo. It is designed for managing and analysing rich data which is not easily reduced to numbers. The researcher purchased the software and attended an introductory course offered by the University. However, insufficient expertise and skills were gained. In addition, it was unknown when the final interview and transcription would take place both of which had implications for

accessing expert advice. Therefore, due to this uncertainty and ineffectiveness, the researcher decided not to use NVivo to organise and analyse the data.

Narratives

There are several ways in which the data from a life history can be presented. The researcher has presented the data of this study in three ways. Taylor and Bogdan (1984 cf. Marshall and Rossman, 1995:117) suggest many different approaches for report writing. One of them is the purely descriptive life history: one person's account of his or her life framed with analytical points about the social, religious or educational significance of that life. This method of presenting data has been applied to one respondent only where a full transcription of her life history is offered (Appendix 12). However, since raw data have no inherent meaning (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:116) an interactive act was necessary to bring meaning to the data and the meaning is displayed to readers through additional commentary. Mandelbaum (1973:180-182) suggests three possibilities to chronological order as a means to organise and present the data: (i) the dimensions or aspects of the person's life; (ii) the principal turnings and the life conditions between the turnings; and (iii) the person's characteristic means of adaptation. The realist approach to interviews appears to be suited for this purpose where the interviewer says little. Hence when presenting a full life history these features have been applied.

A second form of writing took the form of collective biographies - prosopographies. Life histories of Muslim teachers consisted of some similarities. This means that an individual story has the potential of reflecting a particular group and raises the question of how to understand individual teacher's lives to understanding their lives collectively (Butt, et al., 1992:94). The concept of collectivity necessitated an additional form of analysis for the data gathered in this research. Therefore, in addition to the unique life history adopted for Ummu Salamah (Appendix 12), a prosopographical approach for this research was adopted mainly due to its concern with collectivity and groups (pp.35-37; pp.141-143). The distinctive life histories of four participants, excluding the one based on the realist interviewing approach, have been presented. The aim was to consider the various issues that they raised. The narrative approach to interviewing appeared to be most suitable for this purpose. In

the prosopographies, extracts are presented liberally by verbatim quotations, except where difficulty arises in understanding the comments if left uncorrected. Wherever quotations have been used minimum alterations have been made to enhance comprehension, flow and readability. Where interrogatives have been inserted or interjections have been made during the comments of the respondents these have been inserted in brackets or italicised. Ellipsis have been utilised to show pauses longer than normal in the respondents' manner of talk. Memos taken during interviews and field notes have also been incorporated in the analysis. In other words, the second form of data analysis presents data in such a way that the participants' perspectives are presented, their world views forming the structural framework for the report (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984; cf. Marshall and Rossman, 1995:117).

Themes

Finally, the advantage of thematic analysis has been taken. This involved organising the segments of data into broad themes derived from the existing literature to compose chapters. The category generating phase of data analysis is most difficult, complex, ambiguous, creative, and fun (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:114). In order to generate categories, the researcher noted 'regularities in the setting or people chosen for the study' (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:114). In addition, the researcher noted the peculiarities of each interview, respondent and venue in a diary or on the questionnaire. Furthermore, prominent categories of meaning held by participants which would reflect internal consistency but which were distinct from one another were identified (Marshall and Rossman, 1995:114-115). To locate patterns, all the texts that were relevant and pertained to each main area of the research were gathered together. For example, the whole section of the interview on the NC was taken out and placed in another document. Thereafter a word search was conducted to locate anything else mentioned about the NC in other parts of the interview by the respondents. The researcher also looked for negative instances of the patterns and statements and incorporated them into larger constructs where necessary. In addition, other topics were derived independently from the data on an individual basis. The neo-positivist style of interviewing appears to be suitable for this since it was based on a semi-structured interview with areas of investigation identified.

The above section has recognised that researchers who have used the life history approach have not used a uniform method in their data analysis. For this research, three ways of presenting the data derived from the interviews were selected. Each one is further described at its appropriate place in subsequent chapters. The rationale for choosing these three ways of presenting the data is to achieve the presentation of a single person's history, a collective biography and relevant themes from these interviews. The first model provides an opportunity to give an exclusive voice to a respondent. The second provides the projection of two major parts of the life of these teachers: life prior to and life after becoming a teacher. Finally, some of the selected themes relate to the literature review undertaken for this research.

Summary

The above part has recognised that there are numerous ways and different points during the research process for the analysis to be conducted. Researchers may face challenges in relation to analytical procedures due to personal or professional reasons. This therefore means it is useful to have more than one technique for dealing with the data. The steps taken by the researcher in enhancing the degree of validity and reliability were also considered. In all, the guiding principles for analysing the data has been fitness for purpose, and therefore it will have advantages and limitations. It has shown that there are three ways in which data analysis has taken place for this research.

PART 4: MUSLIMS IN BIRMINGHAM

This fourth part provides a synopsis of the socio-economical, religious and ethnic composition of the city of Birmingham with particular reference to its Muslim population. The data are relevant because all these thirteen Muslim teachers live and work in Birmingham. The personal data from these thirteen teachers appears in Table [1] and Table [2] (pp.130-131). In addition it makes the characteristics of the Muslim population and their demographic features in relation to Birmingham apparent. In addition statistical data about teachers will also be presented to indicate the need for recruiting and retaining more Muslims teachers. Furthermore, a brief consideration to

underachievement in schools, in relation to ethnic minority children, has also featured to provide a context for finding out the views about it from the participants.

A city of many faiths and cultures

The city of Birmingham is usually described as multicultural and multifaith in nature. This cosmopolitan city has a long history of hosting people who have settled in it from various parts of the world for a variety of reasons (www.connectinghistories.org.uk). This trend has continued into 2008 where recent arrivals have included people from Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. In addition, with the expansion of the European Union, settlers from some Eastern European countries and elsewhere have increased in numbers. Consequently, people with different backgrounds exist in and around Birmingham. The 2001 Population Census showed that 70% of Birmingham's population indicated that they had a White background, and about 20% were from one of the Asian groups and 6% from the Black groups (BCC, 2001). The majority of Muslims described their ethnicity as either Pakistani (69.6%) or Bangladeshi (13.8%). 54.4% of Muslims were born in the UK, followed by 28% in Pakistan and 7.2% in Bangladesh. The Muslim population across the city has a much younger profile. Almost three quarters (74.6%) of Muslims were aged 34 years or below, compared with 51.6% for all religious groups.

Geographically, some wards of Birmingham are predominantly populated with communities who are described ethnically as non-white, and others remain majority 'white' areas. 45% of Birmingham's population lives in areas classified as multicultural. Multicultural communities are found throughout the city, with the exception of the north, south and eastern periphery. There are four wards in Birmingham where all areas were classified as multicultural. These were Bordesley Green, Lozells and East Handsworth, Soho and Sparkbrook. In contrast, there were only 0.2% (1,786) residents living in areas classified as Countryside (BCC, 2001). Hence some parts of the city are seen by some people in terms of racial and ethnic categories. This should not lead one to believe that these areas are exclusively of one kind, since members of a particular racial category are not always necessarily of the same ethnic and cultural background.

Socio-economically, the demographic distribution shows that the minority ethnic populations are concentrated in the poorer areas of the city. 19% of unemployed residents and 18% of the economically inactive are Muslims (BCC, 2001). However, considering the population distribution, both racial and religious, this does not suggest that all Muslims live in exclusively deprived areas. Politically, in the past, it was often reported that many Muslims in Birmingham predominantly voted for the Labour party but this has changed after the Iraq war. Regardless of their political persuasion, some of them are very much concerned about local politics, whereas others are equally concerned about foreign affairs. Nevertheless, it should not be assumed that all Muslims adhere to the idea of voting for a political party. In fact, some consider it to be inappropriate to vote.

Migration and settlement patterns have not usually been seen in terms of religion but rather in terms of socio-economic conditions, political instability and 'country of origin'. Nevertheless, in terms of the census of UK, Birmingham is one of the major cities of Britain that has a religiously diverse population (BCC, 2001). In Birmingham, only 8.4% (81,959) of people did not answer the question about religion, above the national rate of 7.7%. 59.1%, (577,783) of people said that their religion was Christian, followed by Muslim (14.3%) and those having no religion 12.4% (BCC, 2001). Birmingham appears to be significant when considering the Muslim population nationally. There were only 6 authorities with a higher percentage stating they were Muslim. However, at 140,033, (14.3%) Birmingham had a greater number of Muslims than any other LA. Noteworthy are the figures of combining religion and ethnicity which reveal the fact that Muslims are not a homogenous community. 29.6% Black Africans and 10.8% from the white 'Other' ethnic group said they were Muslim. Over 90% of people in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups said they were Muslim. In addition, 42.6% of people from the 'Other' ethnic group said they were Muslim. It is also useful to highlight that the Muslim population in Birmingham whose origin is the Middle East is not very high at all. Whilst it is the case that some of these areas are perceived as being Black, Asian or Pakistani, it appears that some people may be seeing some of these areas in relation to the faith and religion upheld by the majority of people residing there. Recent comments by Bishop Nazir Ali of Rochester in January 2008 that some parts of England were 'no-go areas for non-Muslims' give that impression (Pidd, 2008). Perhaps this also

indicates that there should be a greater role given to religion, and it should be considered as a positive strength by social scientists.

To cater for their religious, socio-political and cultural needs Muslims in Birmingham have established mosques, community centres and educational institutions in various parts of the city. The data provided by the Policy and Information Officer shows that there are 64 registered mosques in Birmingham, and there is uncertainty about the number of *madāris* (BCC, 2008, Personal communication). A careful look at the list reveals that it is not up-to-date: many mosques are not listed.

In addition to the above information, it is relevant for the context of this research to take account of the data available on teacher numbers, nationally and locally, so that implications can be drawn in relation to Muslim teachers. Nationally, since 1997, the number of full-time equivalent regular teachers has increased by 8 per cent, and in January 2008 there were a provisional 434,900 teachers in maintained schools. Over two-thirds of teaching posts are filled by women, and over 2 in 5 of all full-time teachers are aged 45 or over, with 1 in 5 aged under 30.

From 1997 to 2007 in Birmingham the full-time equivalent regular teachers increased by 970 (DCSF, 2008). The personal communication on primary teacher data for Birmingham as at April 2007 shows that in all categories there were more females than males (Appendix 8). This was also the case in all age groups. However, the largest ethnic group is the White-British population, with 2,970 teachers. This is followed by 668 teachers who did not disclose their identity. In third position is the Indian category (151) which is followed by the Pakistani group (124). There was only one Chinese/Other/Arab teacher. In the absence of faith descriptors the Muslim teacher population can only be estimated cautiously to be around 200 (BCC, 2007 personal communication) which is considerably less especially when the school going population of Muslim children is taken into account.

The majority of Muslims in Birmingham are of Pakistani background rather than from the Middle East. A large proportion of the Muslim population is under thirty years of age. However due to the fact the majority of Pakistani and Bangladeshi children are achieving the lowest across the city, one could conclude that a large proportion of

Muslim children are not achieving as much as they should be achieving (Ameli, Azam and Merali, 2005). This phenomenon is of concern to all those engaged in the educational provision of all children in the city. Hence it would be important to find out what the views of Muslim teachers are about underachievement in schools.

Summary

The above part has provided some significant information based on statistical data from the National Census and BCC. It has revealed that Muslims are concentrated in some areas of the city. Racially and linguistically they are a diverse community originating from various parts of the world. Socio-economically, the demographic distribution shows that the minority ethnic populations are concentrated in the poorer areas of the city. They have established a range of institutions to respond to the growing needs of their community. The growing number of mosques across the city had not been fully documented. The need to recruit and retain Muslim teachers has been indicated - a theme which will be discussed later as part of the data from the interviews.

PART 5: RESEARCHER POSITION AND REFLEXIVITY

Scientific research, without the opinions of the researcher, is said to be value-free and objective (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, 2000:372) whereas social researchers are either connected to or are part of their research (Davies, 1999:3). This is because the research depends on the interpretations given by the researcher to the data that have been gathered. Hence, in social research it is particularly important to acknowledge and recognise the influence that the researcher's personal values and ideologies have on the research process, respondents, interpretation and writing. In other words consideration of reflexivity is a significant aspect for social research.

Reflexivity is a 'style of research that makes clear the researcher's own beliefs and objectives' (Gilbert, 2008:512). Reflexivity recognizes that the researcher and the researched can not be the same after their encounters (Nesbitt, 2002:133). It is crucial for researchers to acknowledge that their personal opinions control to some extent how they perceive the social world and that they will have preconceptions about the

group they are studying. Researchers, who want to obtain an insider's view of society and want to understand participants' world view, will produce situated knowledge rather than universals in order to capture the details of social life (Taylor, 2002:3). The distinction between insider and outsider perspectives is concerned with several issues and one of these is the extent to which the findings from research can be objective. The notion of objectivity suggests that researchers are able to obtain knowledge of an external world as it exists independently of the research process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:16; Taylor, 2002:3). But, the notion of objectivity has been challenged by the reflexive turn in social sciences (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:11-22; Jackson, 1997:46-47; McCutcheon, 1999; Mason, 2002; Archer, 2003). It emphasises that the researcher affects and is affected by the respondents and the field (Nesbitt, 2004:150). It also considers the identity of the researcher and the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Researchers have, therefore, been compelled to consider the ethics of conducting studies of communities and to take the dimension of reflexivity seriously (Nesbitt, 2004:6). Reflexive awareness, as emphasised by Nesbitt (2004:6), requires probing reflection on the extent to which one is an insider or an outsider to the community which one is observing. This means that researchers should be alert to the distinct characteristics, similarities and differences that exist between researchers and their respondents. In other words reflexivity helps to control hidden bias (Hufford, 1999:296).

Some other issues concerning reflexivity, which are important to take account of, have been identified by Jackson (1997:46-47). These include: self awareness i.e., to be aware of the impact of gender, academic background, religious views, nationality, race, ethnicity, class and age on the interpretive process. The second issue is about the extent to which it is possible to empathise with another's experiences. The third issue is the personal response to the material that has been interpreted (Jackson, 1997:46-47). In other words, reflexivity implies that the orientation of researchers will be shaped by the socio-historical locations, including values and interests that these locations confer upon them (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:16). In addition, it is also important to recognise that research is an active process in which accounts of the world are produced through selective observation and theoretical interpretation of what is seen (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:18). In short, reflexivity is an

important aspect of social research which cannot be isolated from the field and data of the research.

Religion and research: insider/outsider positions

As part of the academic study of religion, the insider/outsider problem has primarily been concerned with two apparently conflicting positions (Stringer, 2002:2). There are some who propose that there is no hope of understanding a religion unless one belongs to it. Others, on the other hand, argue that researchers, who are from within the religion being studied, could not understand the religion in a truly objective manner. On the face of it, this dichotomy would simplistically fit when the situation is that of a researcher belonging or not belonging to the particular religion being studied. However, it is more complex than this, as it equally applies to situations where a researcher belongs to the religion being studied. An aspect of this complexity, in relation to Muslims is exemplified by Sambur (2002). A further aspect of the complex nature of the Muslim community in Britain, beyond ritual, as is the case with other faith communities, is evident in several works (Ernst, 2004, Ansari, 2004; Abbas, 2005). This raises the question regarding the extent to which a researcher can be considered to belong to a religion or to particular tradition within the religion. In relation to such dilemmas, Stringer (2002:3) notes that there are levels of 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' when addressing such issues. Even within the religion being studied, arguably, a researcher will never be a complete insider or a complete outsider (Nesbitt, 2002:135). In other words, no 'matter how many similarities exist between self and other, there will always be differences' (Collins, 2002:81). In the next section, I have brought to the fore my position as a researcher in relation to my research.

The researcher

As a Muslim who has studied Islam, I was able to recognise and gain several perspectives on many topics that were part of the interview. For example, my knowledge about the various interpretations about spirituality within Islam made me responsive to the interpretations and viewpoints of my respondents. I was able to draw multiple perspectives about the role and meaning of spirituality within Muslim

traditions from the interview data. My familiarity with Muslim spirituality and my preconceptions about it may have affected my analysis in such a way that I was able to draw out the typology that I have explained when discussing *Spirituality in the life of Muslim teachers* (p.225-226).

My faith background and the experience of living with diverse Muslim communities and non-Muslim communities in the UK and in Africa have given me an insight into Muslim traditional values and an awareness of living side by side with members of other faiths in a multi-faith society. This experience, coupled with my awareness of some history of Islam and Muslims, meant that I was driven to explore the issues regarding the nature of society that these Muslims teachers were helping to create.

As a primary school teacher, my experiences also enabled me to interpret their successes, aspirations and frustrations from an educational perspective. Indeed, isolation had been an issue for me during the early years of my career. It is likely that this experience had influenced the inclusion of this question as part of my interview schedule so that when I listened to their responses I was internalising the changes that had/had not taken place in some inner city schools. Working and sending my children to inner city schools has helped me increase my awareness of the lives and realities of some pupils in the schools of my respondents. My work experiences have made it easier for me to converse with people of varied backgrounds, and my community-orientated services has given me the self-belief to approach others with confidence in that they will trust me. In fact, my appearance and dress may have played a role as well (p. 197). Trust is important as it provides the personal qualities needed for creating a degree of integrity in the interviews. As an academic in teacher education, I have conducted empirical research and writings on topics related to Muslims and education using a range of research techniques. I was interested in promoting the recognition of the role of faith in the life of teachers and over the years, I have been fortunate to establish links with a range of individuals and schools who have given me some access to their life and work.

As a male researcher, I was conscious that cultural etiquettes and religious conventions had to be kept at the fore during my interactions prior to, during and after the interview. In other words my interviewees and my field *were* affecting my

behaviours and relationships. In fact, it is possible that our respective genders affected the research when exploring some sensitive issues. Some respondents may have been uncomfortable to speak to someone who was of the opposite sex as them.

I was raised in East Africa by parents who had lived under British rule. A consequence resulting from this experience has been an awareness of similarities and differences in class, race, language, culture and religion. Equally, the current demonisation of Muslims and Islam by certain sections of the media and others may have affected the views of some of my respondents regarding certain issues related to their treatment in schools and in society.

I am able to speak several languages which have assisted me in overcoming some of the barriers of suspicion which sometimes surround people who may not have participated in conversations focussing specifically on their life and experiences. My linguistic skills have eased the communication in relation to terms specifically derived from and rooted in Arabic and the Qur'ān and *hadith* literature which have assisted me in grasping subtleties of meaning.

The above reflection has taken account of local and personal levels of reflections but researchers also need to be alert to the influence of political situations that exist during the period of the research and to national and international events. These events have the potential of influencing the responses that interviewees offer and raise the question about whether similar answers would have been given had the political, national and international situation been different.

Having said this, it means that researchers cannot take into account every eventuality fully. In addition, reflexivity has a limitation because not all differences and similarities can be identified before the research actually begins. Nevertheless, as part of reflexivity, once these are identified in the field, their impact, if any, on the research needs to be recognised and monitored.

Summary

The above part has recognised that once an interaction takes place, in an interview situation, between the researcher and the respondents their relationship and knowledge do not remain the same - each one has entered the life of the other. It has also emphasised that reflexivity challenges the objectification of social science research and provides support for reducing hidden bias. It also showed how the researcher was an insider in some aspects and an outsider in other respects in relation to these thirteen Muslim teachers. Just as gender and race of the researcher and the interviewees may affect the interview, what is said is also affected by whether the researcher comes from the respondents' faith community. In addition it has shown signs of self reflection on researcher's own motives and preconceptions as a researcher and, more importantly, how those motives and preconceptions may be influencing this study. The researcher has recognised unequal power relationships within this research. By explaining the aims of the research openly and gaining informed consent, an attempt has been made to reduce the effect of this.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed and outlined the manner in which the research was originally conceived, and how it was actually completed. The features of the research design, process and fieldwork and data analysis have been revealed. The wider context within which these Muslim teachers are located has also been explained and the position of the researcher in relation to the research and the respondents has been explained. Hence the fundamental constituents of this study have been outlined which has prepared the ground for uncovering the life histories of Muslim teachers.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

PART1: THE STORYTELLERS

In all, thirteen Muslim primary school teachers, four males and nine females representing various backgrounds, were interviewed at several venues in the city. Table [1] below provides the main information about their distinctive features. The conversations with them lasted between one and three hours.

Data in Table [2] demonstrate that these teachers shared a wide range of experiences between them. The youngest participant was a 25-year-old male and the oldest was a 48-year-old female. Geographically most of them work and live in inner city wards (Appendix 9). Of the thirteen, four stated that they were born in England, and the remainder stated that they had been born abroad. All except three, Sawdah, Fatimah, Juwayriyah, had either some or all of their primary education in England. All but two, Fatimah and Juwayriyah, attended a British university to achieve their first degree. Therefore, in view of this diversity, no claims for wide-ranging generalisation are made in this research. Indeed, the samplings method adopted for this study did not yield Muslims teachers, for example, from the Gujarati, Black, White, Kurdish, Yemeni, Somali communities found in Birmingham, which probably reflects a limitation of the sampling method.

Confidentiality and anonymity was promised on religious, moral and ethical grounds (pp. 94-96; pp.99-101). Although not everyone wanted to remain unknown, the researcher decided with some of these teachers the possibility of being easily identified as could have been the case with Juwayriyah (p.156). In addition, to create consistency, all were given pseudonyms. Furthermore because of the uncertainty about the future role of these teachers the researcher jointly decided with some teachers that the avoidance of their original names was a preferred option. Pseudonyms for these thirteen of Muslim teachers have been adopted from the people who lived with the Muhammad. Female names reflect the household of Prophet Muhammad and male names are taken from his companions renowned for their

teaching and learning. In so doing, the names of contemporary Muslim teachers have been replaced by the names of their predecessor Muslim teachers of the prophet's era (571-632 CE) (Appendix 10 and 11).

Regarding their responses all the interviewees spoke confidently without reservations. Only Fatimah used the phrase, jokingly, 'so long as you don't tell...' This was in response to a question about moving schools. Consequently considerable confidence has been gained in terms of the researcher being able to report extensive details and to disclose their life histories without compromising them.

Date	Interviewee	Gender	Ethnicity	Qualification	Birth	Age
16-9-06	Sawdah	Female	Kutchi	BA (QTS)	Malawi	27
23-9-06	Jabir	Male	Pakistan	PGCE	Pakistan	25
30-9-06	Zaid	Male	Pakistan	Bed	Pakistan	36
13-1-07	`Anas	Male	Bangladesh	PGCE	Birmingham	32
11-3-07	Hafsah	Female	Pakistan	PGCE	Pakistan	34
5-5-07	Juwayriyah	Female	North Africa	PGCE/GTP	North Africa	46
13-5-07	Fatimah	Female	Pakistan	PGCE	Pakistan	24
17-5-07	Safiyyah	Female	Pakistan	PGCE	England	24
18-5-07	Ummu Salamah	Female	Pakistan	Bed	Birmingham	34
20-5-07	Mu'adh	Male	Bangladesh	Bed	Bangladesh	36
8-6-07	Khadijah	Female	Bangladesh	PGCE	Dudley	29
13& 20-6-07	`Aishah	Female	Pakistan	PGCE	Birmingham	41
25-6-07	Zaynab	Female	Pakistan	Bed	Pakistan	48

Table [1]: Biographical details

Interviewee	Venue	Experience	Residence	Position
Sawdah	Her house	6	Erdington	teacher
Jabir	university	2	Lozells	teacher
Zaid	His house	10	Mosley	Assistant head
`Anas	Researchers house	2	Sparkhill	teacher
Hafsah	university library	8	Alum Rock	teacher
Juwayriyah	university library	1	Selly Oak	teacher
Fatimah	university library	8	Harborne	Head of Foundation Stage
Safiyyah	Her classroom	3	Handsworth	teacher
Ummu Salamah	university	13	Edgbaston	teacher
Mu`adh	Researchers house	10	Aston	Eng coordinator
Khadijah	Her classroom	5	Handsworth	teacher
`Aishah	Her school	7	Moseley	Deputy
Zaynab	Her school	24	Solihull	Head

Table [2]: Fieldwork details

PART 2: THE LIFE HISTORY OF UMMU SALAMAH

This research set out to speak to and speak about contemporary Muslim teachers to gain a better understanding of the role of faith in their life and work. In Chapter 2 it was argued that life histories provide a voice and empower teachers by giving them the right to speak for themselves and it was also argued that the teachers' stories should be accepted as authentic and legitimate data (Harvey, 1989:48). It was recognised that whilst there were studies which gave voices to Black and Asian teachers (Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997; Benn, 1998; Rakhit, 1999; Benn 2003), the voice of faith in an exclusive study remained to be presented. The life history of Ummu Salamah provides glimpses into her childhood and early life, and shows how she used socialisation as a tool for learning to become a professional and how her teacher identity developed in school. Her professional development becomes exposed and is understood when it is considered in the context of her other life and concerns (Nias and Aspinwell, 1995). Being a life history of a female Muslim it provides vital and generative insights into teaching as a gendered profession (Middleton, 1992). The first part of this chapter discusses the rationale for selecting the life history of Ummu Salamah and shows how it has been presented following its transcription. Thereafter a summative commentary is provided with specific reference to paragraphs from her full story which is in Appendix 12.

Selecting her life history

The purpose of choosing to present an entire life history as revealed in the interview of Ummu Salamah was based on the fact that she was the longest serving teacher out of all the respondents, except for the head teacher. In addition, she was a graduate of the four year BEd course. In the eighties these courses became more wide spread since a degree was necessary for new teachers in the UK as it had replaced the Certificate in Education. In addition, she had started her course before the BEd in Islam had been initiated at Westhill College. This is useful as she had observed the introduction of this course and the changes that had taken place at that college during its formative years and as someone who has been teaching for over ten years, she would relate the role of the course in providing Muslim teachers specifically in relation to Birmingham. In addition, a feature about her is that in all these years she

has not left her school where she has had a teaching role continuously for thirteen years. Currently she is there for three days a week. At the time of the interview, in terms of her career promotion and progress, she was a Phase Leader. In her personal life, she shares with Hafsah, Zaynab, and ‘Aishah, the fact that she is a mother, and has children. Like Juwayriyah, she is a divorcee of several years prior to the interview, and as a result she lives as a single parent with her children.

The life history of a Muslim male teacher, Zaid, had been considered primarily on the basis that there is a low representation of males in primary schools and because Zaid is an assistant head. There were four males in the study, two of whom had completed an undergraduate degree for teaching. Their life history was not chosen mainly because of the considerable quantity of text that had been generated through the lengthy interview. The other two had completed a PGCE course and hence teaching was not their initial degree. The second reason for not preferring their life history was that at the time of the interview these two were in their initial years of their teaching career. They were deemed to have less experience in contrast with everyone else.

Presenting her life history

The method of presenting Ummu Salamah’s life history is that the questions asked by the researcher have been removed from the text as these are available as a full transcription in Appendix 13 in the compact disk attached at the back of this thesis. This has been done to enhance the presentation of the interview as a life history and to create a personal feel to it. In the instances where sentences are completed as part of the question, then, that part of the question has been used to create Ummu Salamah’s response. Subheadings have been retained to allow the identification of the phases in her life as these were the main areas of the investigation. Interruptions and repetitions have also been removed without altering the essence of what she was saying so that the life history remained as close and as true to the meaning conveyed. This was achieved by reading both the question and answer, and the preceding conversation. Where the sentence was not completed it has been left incomplete followed by a forward slash with ellipsis in square brackets i.e., [...]. Her laughter has been shown by {laugh} and her pauses and silence are shown by [...]. A significant insertion has been the provision of the context derived from the question at the beginning of a

paragraph. Without such an insertion it would be difficult for the reader to know what the conversation was about. These insertions are included in round brackets. Having considered the manner of transcribing her interview, the rest of this section consists of her life history and a conclusion.

The life history of Ummu Salamah

The researcher interviewed Ummu Salamah at one of the universities in the city at midday. The conversation was friendly and relaxed. The researcher thanked her for participating, and began by asking her about her childhood. Her edited life history has been included in Appendix (12).

Summary

Ummu Salamah made a conscious decision to train as a teacher and it was not the result of personal circumstances. There are apparent signs of certain cultural conflicts and the need for the formation of a hybrid identity in her early years between elements of being a Pakistani in western culture. Parental attitudes and expectations were inclined towards fitting in with the dominant society. She was not sure what she had to fit into at that age. Growing up in mixed cultures and not fitting well in each can be uncomfortable and alienating. Such experiences and feelings were located in earlier studies as well (Ghuman, 1995; Saqeb 1996; Osler, 1997; Haw, 1998; Rakhit 1999). Nevertheless, in the case of Ummu Salamah, a confident and independent person emerges over the years. This was being crafted in a home environment where the values that were being passed on, as described by her, were more religious as opposed to cultural, and where as a child she observed prayer being offered in the house. As a Muslim female one of the most significant themes that can be recognised from her interview is the characteristic of being independent. ‘Aishah in her life history has identified this as a generational difference. Both, Ummu Salamah and ‘Aishah think that their parents were generally less assertive in their relationships with schools and their parents knew less about their rights and had the colonial mentality of not challenging authority [Paragraph 1-2].

Her independent attitudes and views are apparent in several statements that she makes in relation to many aspects of her life and career. When her family moved out of Small Heath she narrated that some members of her community perceived this to be a brave act. She in turn rationalises this event by referring to her family as always being themselves. In primary school she became conscious about her colour, and stood her ground. Again when she realised she could not be at the top of her class in a grammar school, she exhibited a strong personality and coped well with this new situation. Before enrolling in a university she depicted herself as her own career advisor. As an adult, due to her strong views, personality and forthrightness she is unsympathetic to joining organisations of any persuasion. Here again she reveals much about her self which reflects her independence. She also describes herself as a person who does what she wants to do. In addition, when she was asked about 'being used' for Worship in school she refers to this attitude as a problem of others and not hers. During her interview she also refers to colleagues in her school as being uncertain about her since she was opinionated and confident. Perhaps this characteristic has assisted her in negotiating her preferences and choices. She works as a part time teacher which suits her needs, and has not gone for promotion out of her own choice unless it has been a selectively sought post elsewhere. She has not yet been successful in this endeavour [Paragraphs 4, 8, 9, 12, 46].

Ummu Salamah projects herself as her own career advisor. The role of the Career Services is relevant in encouraging the teaching profession. Career guidance for young people in compulsory education is a statutory right. Osler (1997:202) advocated the need to review when and how students at school receive career guidance. Muslims belong to many ethnic groups and the danger of advising students based upon stereotypical misconceptions is a real possibility (Parker-Jenkins, et al., 1999). In some cases careers advice may deter students from planning a career in teaching (Arora, 2005:91). Hence it is important to seek individual views, as is evident from Ummu Salamah.

Formal *madrrasah* education appears not to have been a regular feature of her life. Her mother taught her the Qur'ān at home. Perhaps this was a continuation of the tradition of teaching girls within the home environment as evident in some Muslim communities abroad. This practice is also a feature among the Muslim community in

Britain as well (Cheema 1996; Saqeb 1996). According to her she studied Islam at home due to inappropriate sanctions being applied at a *madrasah*. Eventually this experience became significant in informing her educational ideas. Although she attended school during the day it was her learning at home from her mother that made her realise that there was somewhere else that learning could take place. This, as a professional, she currently terms as ‘home learning’. At that age a shift had taken place in her understanding regarding traditional forms of learning. Her initial thought was that learning took place at school. She reached such a conclusion since she had not been exposed to a phenomenon which, had she been in Pakistan, she would probably have observed, but since she was born in Birmingham this had to be learnt through her mother. Interestingly as a mother she then applies the philosophy of home learning, and does not send her sons to a formal *madrasah*. This decision may have been compounded by the fact that she was a qualified teacher who specialised in theology [Paragraphs 2, 3, 15].

Ummu Salamah had a positive experience of schooling, and was well supported by her parents. Part of her primary education took place in a Catholic school where she did not feel that her faith was being compromised. She also attended a single sex grammar school, and this experience in part influenced her educational philosophy. An indication of her educational ideas is also exhibited in the nature of schooling that she envisages for her children by wishing them to attend a boys’ school, and had she had a daughter she would have preferred a girls’ school for them. As a teenager, she complied with her parents’ wishes to attend a girls’ school, without knowing why. However, as an adult she then understood that such decisions were based on cultural and religious grounds. As a professional, her personal opinion, on gendered schooling is based on her own experience, better attainment and achievement for girls and the general decline in morals and values in society. Another of her educational thoughts is reflected in her views in advocating a child-centred approach to teaching, rather than one driven by the curriculum. This religious and cultural upbringing was did not inhibit her in any way to participate in sport activities and leisure activities. Ummu Salamah had played for a ladies’ indoor cricket team at county level. The researcher was unable to explore whether she had played outdoor cricket, and why she chose to play indoors [Paragraphs 5, 6, 7, 9, 14].

She considers Muhammad as the best teacher. She arrived at this opinion critically rather than accepting it dogmatically. According to her the single most influential factor for converts is his pedagogy. To her, a Muslim teacher is morally guided by his or her conscience. Even whilst she has this faith dimension she maintains that religion and professionalism are her guiding and driving forces. She does not see any conflict between, on the one hand, the adoption of a religious figure, i.e., Muhammad, as an inspirer to achieve and, on the other hand, meeting the requirement of her profession in a secular institution. She has adopted the holistic approach to life as illustrated in various biographies and literature about Muhammad (Nicolson, 1907; Watt, 1974; Nadwi, 1987; Haykal, 1989; Kandhelwi, 1990; Al-Qazwini, 1993; Ernst, 2004). It seems she is attempting to get the best from Muslim and contemporary educational ideas and has been able to carve an identity where neither her professional duties nor her faith is compromised. Practically, she has derived two core aspects from Muhammad for her teaching: a willingness to listen, and the significance of making children understand. These of course are essential for contemporary classrooms [Paragraph 37, 39].

Ummu Salamah did not struggle to obtain her appointments, unlike the unfortunate stories mention earlier. However, from her narrative there is an indication that some head teachers may sidestep an ideal candidate especially when there may be matters related to religion and faith. In 1993 she was in a school that had 96-97% Muslim children with no mainstream Muslim class teacher. Certain changes within the school would have required a practical and sensible decision to appoint a Muslim teacher to assist in meeting those specific needs. The researcher was unable to establish from Ummu Salamah whether the basis of her appointment was on religious, racial or gender grounds. She, however, stated that the head claimed the non availability of a Muslim teacher at that time only to be informed by a Muslim governor that there was one in the recruitment pool. This led to her appointment. Nevertheless, with this one exception, based on these narratives, these Muslim teachers have apparently not faced difficulties in their first appointments. This corresponds to Ghuman's (1995:36) second generation teachers, unlike Rakhit's (1999:203) six second generation female teachers who had difficulties in being appointed [Paragraph 18].

Ummu Salamah, as a Muslim teacher, was received enthusiastically by the children, and by most of the community. According to her, when she was appointed some parents had doubts based on notions surrounding the competency of Asian teachers in British schools. This attitude has also been depicted in other studies (Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997; Rakhit, 1999). These Muslim children had perhaps for the first time seen a permanent fulltime Muslim class teacher in their school. What was more significant was that she wore a scarf. Immediately her presence had at least a visible impact. Children were now confident in asserting their religious identity through their dress code. Her ambition from the beginning of her career was to work in state schools because of a shortage of Muslim teachers in them, rather than in Muslim schools. This was beginning to prove fruitful. Again such reinforcements and the creation of a sense of pride within children became apparent to her in 2007 too, when she was supply teaching in a school in the outskirts of Birmingham. She made a personal and conscious decision to wear the scarf on religious grounds, which brought her a sense of personal fulfilment and empowerment, a feature not uncommon for other Muslim women teachers in Britain (Benn, 1998:196) [Paragraphs 24, 40, 41, 42, 43].

Over the years she has enjoyed good relationships in her school and has not reported any form of abuse or discrimination. Although she has not moved vertically upwards in terms of her career progression she prides herself on several achievements. Perhaps this is a redefinition of the term career development (Nias and Aspinwall, 1995:191) which includes her personal interest and learning. With a strong personality she has stood her ground and has been assertive where necessary. Another important aspect is that she explained her identity first in terms of her faith and then as a teacher. For her, teaching is a calling. She is suspicious about the reasons for the needs of Muslim teachers being addressed after such a long time in school. When she is allocated a school by her supply agency she is wary about the reason and the strategy being applied to send her to particular schools in the city. Ummu Salamah believes that education has a major role in changing lives and attitudes which is clearly reflected in her notion of being a model for Muslim children, although she is committed to all children. The necessity of providing role models to combat racism was featured in the *Swann Report* (DES, 1985) and was reinforced later (Siraj-Blatchford, 1991; Ghuman, 1995; Ross, 2002; Basit, et al., 2007). Several participants of this study raised the concern about the lack of role

models and therefore saw themselves as role models for Muslim children and for their respective communities in a range of capacities. Personal circumstances led Ummu Salamah to become a part time teacher. She has retained her teaching role within the school in which she started her career. Perhaps the flexible nature of the management team and supportive head has been pivotal in allowing this to happen. She has gone through a period of uncertainty of whether to move or not, and what for. Now that her children are at an age where she feels at ease, recently, after the interview, she applied for a post to head a nursery but was not appointed. With all these successes she remains unsatisfied with her job, but would nevertheless recommend teaching to others. Teaching suits her as a person and she is open to debate and to the exploration of interfaith issues. Recently her school has made provision for a prayer room. This has come as a surprise to her since it was not made available in the past years even though there were more than three Muslim teachers at any one time, in a school with over 95% Muslim children. Here she is sceptical of the motives of such provision [Paragraph 23, 29, 64, 66].

Haw (1998:149) notes the fear among some of her Muslim girls to claim their Muslim identity possibly because of anticipating negative consequences and unfavourable responses. However, there are at least three particular references that Ummu Salamah makes which allude to her understanding of Islam and assertion of her faith identity. It seems that she has a view which advocates an Islam which is universal and emphasises unity. For instance, a unifying attitude is reflected in her view about various Muslim organisations. Her underlying idea is that of unity. She opposes exclusive organisations based on race or religion. She prefers organisations where everyone is able to belong. Her abstention from joining the Muslim Teachers Association was based on her perception that it was divisive. Interestingly she did not view the various teaching unions in this light. Then, when she discusses the question about Muslims and the NC she uses Islam as a yardstick, and suggests that the viewpoint from Islam should be sought. She also cites the Somalian community as a relatively new group which has settled in Birmingham, and admires the fact that they know their religious rights and responsibilities better. Finally, in the context of enquiring from her the perception of teaching in her community she asserted her Muslim identity by rejecting references to geography, language and social class, a trend detectable among some Muslims in Britain, and also among those that are

associated with activist groups (Jacobson, 1998; Archer, 2003; Ansari, 2004; Akhtar, 2005). Such a stance becomes relevant for schools when responding to the challenges of intra-racial tension among Muslims which was an issue in Ummu Salamah's school not mentioned by her, but stated by Juwayriyah. Ummu Salamah describes the cultural flavour of her home as religious, but her parents enrolled her in a Catholic school, possibly due to her parents' attitude to religion in the home. Another possibility is that it may have been the only school in close proximity to their home where they had moved due to her brother getting a place in a grammar school. Ummu Salamah's case exposes only two possible decision making layers although the issue of single-sex schools for Muslim girls in particular has complex socio-cultural dimensions (Haw, 1998:62) [Paragraph 4, 7, 50, 72].

Outside school she has experienced aggression in society, and has observed what she terms anti-Muslim and anti-Islam attitudes. The life history of Ummu Salamah has produced an irony. She considers teaching to be a calling, and perhaps because of this she has served for fourteen years and has achieved considerable success in her own ways, although not in terms of promotion in the hierarchy of schools. Yet she declared that she was not satisfied with her job. From a sociological point of view, this life history has provided an interpretation of her actions from her perspective and of the data on the subjective side of routine institutional experiences (Denzin, 1989:206-207) [Paragraph 27, 62].

In describing the interview schedule in Chapter 2 it was noted that common areas had been explored in the life of these Muslim teachers and hence some of the features that have been analysed and discussed from Ummu Salamah's life will also appear in the forthcoming four life histories. In addition, some of the issues raised by her will be followed through into the conclusion of the study when elements from all the other life histories will be viewed as a whole. Having presented the full life history of Ummu Salamah the next section will present four life histories of Muslim teachers from a range of backgrounds and experiences to offer alternative perspectives.

CHAPTER 5

OUR LIFE HISTORIES

Introduction

One of the aims of this research was to collect and explore life histories of Muslim teachers from state primary schools in Birmingham. The previous chapter presented the life history of Ummu Salamah as captured in her interview. In so doing her individuality was preserved and as such her narrative has allowed her to be given an authentic voice. Her life history is an account of a *Muslimah*, thereby, making a start to act as a foundation for life histories of teachers to be considered from a faith perspective. Being a life history of a female, it has exposed some of the challenges faced by her in the light of teaching as a gendered profession. As a member of a family with a Pakistani heritage her biography as a teacher has become part of the increasing genre available in the field of race and education. She is also a public sector employee engaged in an essential sector and arguably holding an influential position. Therefore, her narrative as a Muslim living in Britain reflects her role in nation building and her contribution to society.

The second type of presentation has taken the form of collective narratives - prosopography. Prosopographies help to capture subtle data on distinct groups of historical actors in the form of collective biographies (Cunningham, 2001). It is acknowledged by the researcher that this is a complex field with its own nuances and it could be argued that they are not technically prosopographies. The benefit of presenting these life histories from Muslim teachers has allowed the gathering of a body of knowledge which may extend the understanding of the transmission of educational ideologies and practices (Cunningham, 2001:451). In addition, in some cases it has also challenged certain social perceptions and will potentially provide avenues for further research. The most important reason for adopting a prosopographical method was the concern it has with the group rather than the individual.

Therefore, in this chapter, the single life history is being supplemented by a collection of life histories because an individual life history does not give a collective feel. In addition, it does not give a wider view of what the life histories of other Muslims would be like. Therefore, there was a need to increase the number of life histories as part of the analysis of the data generated with the aim of finding out whether there were any patterns of relationships and activities which exist in their life histories. It could be argued that such a representation fragments and segregates their histories. This was unavoidable due to limitations of space and hence the desired data were not fully presented as originally envisaged by the researcher. In any case, whatever story a person tells about his or her life remains partial. Hence, even the inclusion of a full interview is but a partial construction of the life story of a person (Miller, 2000). Nevertheless, in order to keep to the preference of not tampering with interviews, advocated by some pure oral historians, all the complete life histories derived through this research are available in the compact disk included with the thesis (Appendix 13-25).

The purpose of this section is to analyse and interpret the life histories of four Muslim teachers as prosopographies to illustrate the distinctions, similarities and differences between them. It is mainly within the works of Stone (1987) and Jones (1998; 2001), that this chapter considers prosopography as an effective tool for addressing particular socio-cultural and historic developments, events, successes and challenges.

This group composed of four Muslim teachers working in schools up until 2007. All four met the following criteria for inclusion: (i) working in Birmingham; and (ii) actively involved in primary education (iii) they were Muslims; and (iv) they qualified in Britain as teachers. Within this framework, the group was, in other respects, diverse such as their gender, ethnicity, length of experience of teaching and biographical details (pp.130-131).

Gender and ethnic diversity were key determinants in the composition of the group. Members of this group were of various ethnicities: Pakistani, East African, North African and Bangladeshi and both male and females were included. The length of experience was also diverse in order to 'complement and enrich each other' (Stone, 1987:69) and they were teaching in multi-faith and multicultural schools. When

selecting these criteria, the determination of the longevity of the period under investigation was problematic as it is an important feature for prosopographies. Nevertheless, the chronological period of their birth to the day of the interview was chosen so that it reflected the requirements for using the prosopographical method which is ‘a limited period of time of not much more than a hundred years’ (Stone, 1987:69). Their biographical details provide additional data to reflect diversity of family life and upbringing.

Selecting four life histories

Much deliberation was undertaken to determine the criteria for selecting these four life histories and their contents. The first decision made was regarding the number of areas that were to be included from their life history. The questionnaire divided itself broadly into several categories. The first category, questions 1 to 5, enquired about their life before becoming teachers. The second category was related to their life after qualifying and linked to their profession in school, contained in questions 6-12. The third and fourth categories i.e., questions 13-18, were about their identity as Muslim teachers and spirituality respectively. Finally, there was a general category which included issues related to teaching, their future and participating in this research (Appendix 6). Through a process of elimination categories three, four and five were excluded as all these are contained in the thematic analysis in the next chapter. In addition, these categories had less to do with schooling and teaching. Therefore the researcher decided that the content of these four life histories would be derived from questions 1-12, as these had more to do with schooling and teaching. Once the decision was taken about the content, the next step was to decide whose stories to include as part of this collection.

Initially the intention was to include six life histories reflecting the nature of four teachers’ experiences and their varied routes into teaching. Consideration had also been given to ensure that there was at least one life history from teachers of Pakistani, Gujarati, North African and Bangladeshi backgrounds represented in the sample. Finally, a mix was envisaged in terms of their gender representation. However, having six life histories was ruled out due to the length of their stories. Therefore, four stories had to be taken. A further question occurred once the researcher decided

that there would be four life histories in response to questions 1-12, i.e., the purpose of doing this when entire transcripts were available as appendices. Consequently, the researcher decided to split the questions among the story tellers. Therefore, two life histories will provide data in relation to questions 1-5, i.e., life before becoming teachers, and the other two will provide data for the remaining questions 6-12, i.e., life after becoming teachers. As a result, questions 1-12 will be covered. Hence, rather than an arbitrary division of numbers the experience, seniority of position, background, gender and route into teaching has been retained as an influencing factor in deciding the grouping of these four teachers in their respective categories of questions.

Presenting four life histories

Ritchie (2003:68) in *Doing Oral History* stressed that editing is unavoidable to make sense of the spoken word once it is transcribed and that oral historians also edit transcriptions, although some historians and linguists regret such practice. In presenting these four life histories editing has been necessary for pragmatic purposes. Nevertheless, such practice raises ethical questions about not giving the respondents the opportunity to say what they want to say. This has been overcome in two ways. The teachers were informed that their recordings will be kept as master copies in their entirety and therefore they are preserved fully. In addition, by providing complete transcriptions as Appendices the full versions of their life histories in textual form are also made available in the compact disk. In turn another benefit is that their biographical details that have shaped their experiences are also retained. The texts have been transcribed in a similar manner to Ummu Salamah's life history. A few significant points from memos and field notes have also been incorporated in the beginning of each story.

The remaining part of this chapter presents four life histories of Muslim teachers in Birmingham.

The life history of ‘Aishah

‘Aishah was interviewed on two occasions at her school in a language support room. She welcomed the opportunity to share her life history, and took the initiative to arrange the date and time. When the researcher initially contacted her she was on a secondment at another school. She had been a teacher for seven years. During the second visit to her, she informed the researcher that she has been appointed as a deputy head (Appendix 14).

Early years

‘Aishah was born and brought up in Birmingham. She described her parents as having come from a working-class background. According to her, they tried their very best for their children to achieve academically. They valued education and thought it to be the key to success. Hence they supported their children from an early age. She recalled that she had a traditional Pakistani upbringing whereby she lived in a community among an extended family, and she was raised in a very family-orientated atmosphere. Being the youngest of six children, with four older brothers and a sister, she was immersed in her mother tongue at home. However, as brothers and sisters, they would speak English with one another. She lived in a very multicultural environment where a Sikh family lived across the road with whom they were very familiar. In addition, they had English neighbours. ‘Aishah described her typical day:

I mean it was a real community feel actually growing up. And in terms of our culture, we had a very strong cultural identity because that was very much what the practice was in the home. In terms of the traditional: go to school, come home, have your tea, go to mosque, come home and play.

She characterised her parents as practising Muslims. They would read their *salah* and practice the festivals of Ramadhan and Eid. However, according to her, there was not as much of an Islamic awareness as there now is. Currently she feels ‘[Muslims] are much more conscious of it perhaps because we are second or third generation.’ Due to this increased consciousness, she believes:

We [Muslims] gain a greater understanding. When I was going to mosque, I was learning to read Arabic. However, I was never taught meaning [although] I was taught to read it proficiently and to actually do my recitations. But, actually, if you asked me then what was the thinking and the meaning behind the words that I was saying, I wouldn't have known. *But* that ethos of Allah and His Oneness was all pervading throughout the home. So that was very much instilled from a family point of view and also from the community that we were being brought up in. There was a shared cultural identity. We had a very close Gujarati family that lived down the road and they were the people that were organising the mosque classes.

Therefore, for her, there were considerable opportunities to tap into the cultural traditions such as dressing traditionally and combining it with elements of western dress. Nevertheless religion continues to be 'absolutely' important to her. 'Aishah speaks English, Urdu and Punjabi proficiently.

Schooling

'Aishah remembers living in a very traditional background, and her parents were not literate. Her father was self-taught, and her mother was completely illiterate. As a child she remembers her father aspiring high for them educationally and working at a factory for many years. He then established his own business from 'very very small beginnings.' Hence, 'it was very much a work ethos within the home, and the roles were very clear: mum was in the home, the primary carer, the home-maker and dad was out there to earn the living and establish the family business and to hopefully get us more successful.' She was aware of the struggles to get families over initially from Pakistan, as well. 'Aishah stated that her family was not wealthy and that:

[I]n terms of a range of wardrobe we didn't have that. We didn't have great means. We weren't going on holidays. Our experiences were very limited in terms of what is accepted today. However, for us our parents did their very utmost. They took us out on day trips. We were very much taught the ethos that we are respectful to our elders, to our host community and also the fact that when we were at school it was a real [officialdom]. I think my parents thought it was a real establishment. They were very fearful. Yes what the school said was right basically. So they very much towed the line. Whereas we are really encouraging open door policies within schools now and we want more parental [and] community involvement. It wasn't quite the case

then. I think there were probably elements of it where schools were trying to get them into schools but maybe it wasn't quite as successful because of the language barrier.

As a teacher in terms of the needs and support for ethnic minority children in schools, she stated:

As a child I remember there were certain things, cultural things that are accepted and the norm for us. However, they might not be the norm for the English community. So for example, the way we dress: it would be unacceptable to wear trousers without something to cover us. So we have a longer dress on. Whereas if you had a uniform you would be expected to wear a skirt [so] we had to almost fight to actually say that we have to wear a trouser in addition to that. I can actually remember my sister, who is significantly older than myself, challenging because she was the literate one in the family. She challenged the school on a number of things and [took] on the role of the parent. I remember there was an issue with regards to school dinners and in actual fact what was happening was that the children, the Muslim children, were not getting a great deal on their plates because of the constraints of the menu. I recall my sister writing into school and saying this is unacceptable and changing it. So she has always been a bit of a pioneer in that respect *mashallah, alhamdulillah* and she has continued to do that. But my parents had to rely on their older child to do that. They weren't confident in their literacy skills and also able to go in terms of their fluency of language, to speak and challenge these. But also I remember that for example P.E. you had to dress in a certain way. My mum didn't think of that [informing the school about] what children should wear.

Currently, the situation has changed in some schools as there is more recognition and provision for the Muslim community, particularly in relation to food, dress and Collective Worship. 'Aishah explained that the change came because:

I think that this is a generation thing. Parents like myself, I *have* gone through it. We *know* and we can empathise and understand with what is going on and also because our community is now much more multicultural. There is an element of people being more respectful and tolerant. Also people are now more confident in their [own] culture [and] to actually push [their views] and [to] say because it is different [it] doesn't mean it is wrong.

She has very fond memories of her schooling, and had a couple of favourite teachers who have remained prominent in her life. They were both very instrumental for

different reasons. One was somebody who ‘nurtured’ her and built her ‘confidence’ and raised her self-esteem to make her realise that she could achieve and ‘it was all about positive body language and high expectation.’ The second teacher ‘actually had faith in’ her. She remembered:

She actually believed that just because I wore a *shalwar kameez*, [it] doesn’t mean that I am going to be an SEN child. She could actually see my creative potential and developed it. And [she] gave me opportunities, *and* real words of encouragement. She actually spoke to me, which was yeah; you don’t often have time to do that within schools [these days].

Impression of schools

‘Aishah found her primary school very secure. For instance, there was one part of school life that she always remembers: her pride in her reading. She narrated:

I was always an avid reader. Yes, and good at spelling and I think that sometimes these are innate. But if you are exposed to reading you visually pick up clues all the time. But I always used to pride myself on that [reading]. We used to have spelling and reading tests, which are reading tests but at the time I wasn’t sure what was going on. We just used to go up to the front of the class, the teacher would have a sheet and she would go through a list of tick and check of which words you could read. Yes, and she used to go through *all these words* and there was always one word and *I* used to get it wrong every time. Nobody thought to correct me and actually to tell me what the word was. The word was colonel and I used to think what is co-lo-nel? And actually it was colonel. It was as simple as that but no one thought to put me right.

‘Aishah thought there were elements of a conflict between family, culture, religious values and the school. She explained:

When they were having a disco there were certain taboo things which were just out of my parents’ experience and understanding because we didn’t have the cultural bridges that we have within schools now. There wasn’t an opportunity for them to know any different, and also because it was my elder brother and myself that were the only two that really went through primary schooling in this country because the rest were born and brought up in Pakistan. It was very different, so it was a new experience for them. So for example if we had school trips, residential trips or discos, these things were sort of, hang on, why do

you want to do that? what was the educational value of that? What is the significance and purpose of it within the school life?

Currently, when some parents have reservations about sending or letting their children participate in such activities, 'Aishah, has her personal philosophy which 'is about having open communications with parents and carers'. This she hopes has wider implications. According to her:

[It] might extend to the extended family literally because it is not always the case that parents are the ones that are making the decision. There is a community behind them as well. So it is about being completely open with them and making them aware of what the educational value is to whatever we do in school. What is the impact on learning because everything we do at school is going to have an impact on learning, whether that is providing children with an opportunity, a lesson or an experience. It is all about [outcomes], at the end of the day, in terms of the *Every Child Matters* agenda, particularly now, that is what we are focusing on. Our parents might not necessarily know what the *Every Child Matters* agenda is, but, we do and we can impart that information to them in many different ways. Whether that is through having parent workshops, having newsletters go out to them, having face to face meetings with them, having consultations, doing it through home – school link workers. There are lots of different ways you can convey the message.

Being a teenager

With a half laugh, 'Aishah, recalled being a teenager at secondary school as being hard and very conflicting for her. She attended a large local girls' comprehensive school. Her sister had been through that secondary school and so there was a history to follow too. According to 'Aishah, her sister 'was *mashallah* very capable' so there was an expectation of following in her footsteps. But there were also the expectations of the teachers and the cultural implications because:

as a young teenager you are developing your personality, you are growing, you are exposed to a lot of western ideals but then at home it is almost like having a split personality. At school you are one person. You go home, you put your *shalwar kameez* on and you have a different role to assume and that is how much what my schooling was like.

Her friends influenced her:

Well as they say you can judge a person by the company they keep. Yes and obviously it was in my parents' interest to make sure that I kept good company around me but likewise [it was in] my interests, you know. I wanted like-minded people around me and so my peers were very influential in the sense that they were going to help me shape who I was to become. But also because I knew I am not allowed to go out to nightclubs. I'm not going to go out and have a boyfriend. I'm not going to do this, that and the other. I was quite selective as to who *I was* going to mix with.

In a girls' school

Personally, 'Aishah is of the view that there is room for both co-education and single sex schools. She rationalised her position as follows:

I think that our community is particularly from the Islamic Muslim background. They rely on single sex schools to uphold their principles. Yes in the sense that they don't want their daughters or their sons fraternising with the opposite sex. However, I really believe that has to come from home and the right ethos has to be instilled from home. You can make that divide at school and make it a clinical divide, 'there are no boys here and you won't mix', but I think those people who want to mix, will mix.

Careers advisor

She acknowledged that there was a careers advisor whom she thought was not 'particularly wonderful.' The advisor did not guide her into teaching because 'Aishah was not the one that was saying to her that she wanted to go into teaching. She recognised that the role of careers advisors can be challenging. It can be very difficult when the student is asking because there are 'some children that will know what they want to do. They have clear direction or they are given clear direction from the home, yes.'

Route into teaching

Circumstances guided her into teaching through an unconventional route. Teaching was not her first profession. 'Aishah had other careers prior to teaching. Although

she came late into teaching, at the time of the interview, she had been teaching for seven years, having graduated in 2000. Her initial degree was in Media and Communications Studies. She worked in this area for a couple of years. Thereafter she enrolled into a university as a mature student and completed a two year PGCE course called Bilingual Instructors Teacher Training course which was an initiative set up by BCC to recruit EMT because they were ‘seriously under-represented’.

The life history of Sawdah

Sawdah was the first teacher to be interviewed for this research. The researcher visited her on a Saturday morning at her house for a lengthy interview. Although the researcher was known to her and the researcher knew her family the invitation to participate in the research was made through her cousin. The interview took place in two parts, as both had a tea break (Appendix 15).

Early life

Sawdah was born in Malawi, and she came on her own to study in England at the age of twenty and lived with her relatives. Thinking back to those early days she felt the move to the UK was daunting and she experienced a cultural shock and recollected the days when she did not know how to use a washing machine. On another occasion she was trying to catch a bus for the first time and as she stood to take some change out of her purse the bus departed. These were personal shocks for her. Her neighbourhood in Birmingham had a few Asian and Muslim families, and was different because ‘neighbours kept to themselves.’ Therefore there was a sense of loneliness. Arriving in the UK gave her a sense of independence, and this was something unusual for her. It was different because she had ‘no one to answer to.’ However, this freedom came with the feelings of isolation since she had been used to having family and friends around.

Her family has had a huge influence upon her. Whilst their cultural influence continues to be important, it is, specifically, their religious practice such as the five prayers and fasting which remain prominent. Values such as respect and social customs have had a major impact on her way of life. She described the religious

atmosphere in her home as not overly strict though many ceremonies were observed especially during Eid and Ramadhan. Adhering to the duties of her religion has not always been easy, especially after moving to the UK. Here, perhaps, life at university had a role. Nevertheless, as a guiding principle, religion remains strong. Currently, she would like 'to be a bit more religious {laugh}'. I'm not very strict but I try and I try basically'. Sawdah does not belong to any faith organisation.

She had mixed feelings when she returned to Malawi. She felt 'nice' being at home and being in a familiar childhood setting, but it was also difficult staying with her parents once more. She resented being treated like a child again and was mindful of societal inquisitiveness saying:

people's reaction to me was different because I'd moved away and I was going to university. So they used to ask lots of questions and look at you in a different way. Just treat you in a different way.

For Sawdah *madrasah* was part of her life. She knew of the distinctions within *madrasah* settings that operated during her days since she attended a different mosque to the ones that her cousins were attending. Her mother and father followed variations of Sunni Islam and this influenced the setting where she was enrolled. As a result, there were several contradictions between the home and the *madrasah* as she received different messages about certain practices at home and at *madrasah*. She was treated differently at times by the teachers because of her family. *Madrasah* education prepared her very well to live as a Muslim because she learnt all the basic requirements such as the *dua*, etiquettes and *namaaz*. However, in common with several respondents, some elements of the curriculum were not explained in terms of why all these were being learnt.

She explained that her dad runs a family business with his brothers, and her mother is a housewife. In addition there is a big age gap between Sawdah, her younger sister and her older sister and hence things were different, especially for her older sister. Education for her dad was important as he wanted them to be educated but the influences of the community were huge. Their community [in Malawi] expected that:

after a certain age girls shouldn't be going to school and that happened to my sister after GCSEs. When I did my GCSEs my sister was married and so it was a fight to do my A-levels. I had to fight my case and eventually I got my way.

She explained the reason for the existence of such attitudes at that time:

It's just not the thing to do for girls. It is still [a] very conservative view of: girls are at home and they get married and have a family and things like that. And my dad, I think he was caught in the middle because he didn't quite go with that but he had to. My mum was pressuring him and other people.

Her father supported her through her Advanced level paying fees, attending parents' evenings and checking her grades. Otherwise she was confined to her friends and her life, and was content with that. Her suggestions to girls wanting to pursue their education came in the following words:

First of all I think you need to get your priorities right because there were a lot of girls who thought [going to] school was a method of social life and they spoiled it for others. But, yeah, I think just keep talking to your parents and pressurising them really. But I would like to add my mum's support was really far worse than my dad's. My mother was not happy at all. Her view was that there was no need for me to attend school any longer and be at home.

First memory of schooling

Sawdah's first memory in a private primary school in Malawi was of segregation along class and racial lines. Black children were not allowed to attend where she went. Her older cousins attended [name of school] – a public kind of school predominantly attended by Asians. Her father was adamant that she would attend a private school [predominantly attended by children of White expatriates] so she went through a lot of nurseries such as Seventh Day Adventist nurseries and several preschools run by expatriates until eventually she got a place at [name of school]. Attending a Seventh Day Adventist nursery run by Christians left her with these impressions:

Even primary school was a Christian-dominated school and we had a lot of hymn practice. Going to church you had to. It was part of the school and basically if you wanted to [be there you had to do it]. My parents had to make that choice.

Her feelings about those experiences were expressed as follows:

I think because my parents made us aware and at home we had such a stable [religious upbringing], like ‘that is what you do at school’, but if you were confused, there was someone at home you could talk to and explain things. But, yeah, it was a bit hard like, if you were fasting, the school didn’t take that into consideration and you had to do a lot of things that basically you didn’t like.

Nevertheless, she had many favourite teachers with whom she has contacts to this day through letters and Christmas cards. Some of them were her favourite because they gave her the attention which she missed as a result of being in a big family. Teachers demonstrated a caring attitude and she felt this stood out ‘just because they were different, just different to what I was used to.’ As a qualified teacher, reflecting back on these incidents, sometimes she feels shocked about how the school really got ‘away with doing the things that they did. But I suppose because it was a private school and it was not in England. Things like that do still happen there.’ Initially socialising was hard for her since she was the first Asian at that school and later when more Asians joined her, it did not improve as they tended to keep to themselves, whereas Sawdah always had a range of friends, Black and White, which resulted in a barrier being created between her and the other Asian students.

Motivation towards teaching

Sawdah had many friends who were Black and White who had their futures mapped out for them. They were going to complete secondary and would go to America or England. This had a big influence on her. In addition, her older cousins, ‘the boys’, as she referred to them, had moved to England as well for university. She left *madrrasah* at the age of 14 which by that age had become a girls’ *madrrasah*. This created a void in her life. She recalled those days:

I left that [*madrrasah*] so it was all like [only] school and friends because I had so much free time and doing homework and my parents were busy with my older sister because she was engaged and things like that. So I felt very left out. It was hard. I had like school, but then I had to go home and it was a big [change]. I'd be a different person at home to school.

In other words she was living in two worlds. When she was at home, her mother would expect her to be in the kitchen which she used to hate. She dislikes it even to this day as she is 'not a kitchen person.' Her older sister had all her friends whereas Sawdah did not have 'any friends, Asian friends' in her community. Therefore, she would either be at home or have to tag along with her sister to attend weddings. Sawdah resented this life-style and preferred to be with her friends and go out for lunch or coffee with them because they were 'from the outside'.

There were no career advisors available. Her male cousins were in England and they played a role in motivating her. Her fathers' first child was her older sister whereas all her uncles at that time had boys. When Sawdah was born she was the second daughter but soon her mother gave birth to a boy. Sawdah felt that her father used to push her much more because she thought she 'was supposed to be the boy he [her father] never had.' As a result, she looked upon her male cousins as she did not have 'big brothers. It was this thing – we were a bit in awe of them and we were close when we were younger. So it was just one of those things.'

No one in her family has been a teacher. As a young person, she had many hobbies. She took Textiles for GCSE and A-level and loved to sketch, draw and stitch. The turning point into teaching did not come easily. She narrated a series of events:

When I finished my A-levels, the natural process for me would have been to apply for university. At that time I applied for business - I don't know why, don't ask me. I got accepted and everything but then again my sister was expecting and my parents were all busy in that. We came to England on holiday then I had to go back and that was it. They were my parents. I suppose my parents [were reluctant] because nobody had ever done it with a girl before. They were [refusing] even though we had a place to stay and some family here. It was just like 'no', 'you can't, you have to go back home.' So it was quite negative. I felt very lonely and basically it was more like a case of 'think of getting married now.' When I was younger, I was a big, a tomboy and

my dad was a sports man and all his friends [children], you know, we used [to] hang around [and] meet up a lot. All the children, the boys were [of] my age and so I grew up like that. So they were my best friends when I was younger. So when it got to like after A-levels, obviously in Malawi it is quite a small community and I was thinking, 'no, I know too much' and we used to play together kind of thing. So I was not interested in any of that [marriage]. So that was quite hard and then I was at home [in Malawi] and [I discovered that] all my friends [had] left. They all went abroad to study and so all of a sudden there was no one. And all the other girls by this time, the Asian girls were either engaged or married. So I really like stuck out like a sore thumb basically. And that was hard, and then my friend's mum, she was a school teacher. She ran a pre-school from home and I don't know how it happened but I started working for her, unqualified or anything, in [name of area] at [name of school] primary and I started teaching pre-school. It was different. I just got training from her when I was stuck and I did what came naturally I think. I think it was a start and I started teaching every morning. And that was another big thing that people were talking about. It just wasn't the done thing that girls should work, especially because I came from such an influential family. But I enjoyed it, it got me out of the house. I think it was challenging and it was something for me to do and that was it. I started teaching but then at that time I started noticing that a lot more Asian girls were allowed to do A-levels and it became the norm then it wasn't a big issue at all, specially now.

She would like to think that she was the catalyst for this change because her older sister was not allowed to further her education beyond GCSE. Sawdah had to fight for it, whereas for her younger sister it was 'handed to her'. She did not have to think about it. It was accepted that she was going to study further. This made Sawdah feel happy. But, whenever she returns to Malawi and sees young girls being less appreciative of the opportunities they have, she gets somewhat cross.

The life history of Juwayriyah

It took the researcher about two months to finally meet with Juwayriyah on a Saturday morning for the interview at one of the libraries in a local university. Among all the participants she is the only one who took a comparatively longer route into teaching. She is also the only one who had to seek menial alternative employments before teaching in England. Her country of origin in consultation with her is omitted to enhance her anonymity as she was the only one in Birmingham as far as both of us were aware. It would be easier to identify her had her country of origin been retained

so in consultation with her she agreed with the proposal to use North Africa (Appendix 16).

Early life

Juwayriyah was born in a North African country and speaks Arabic, French, English and Spanish. During the interview she was dressed casually and did not wear a head scarf. She has two children and is divorced, like Ummu Salamah. She was brought up as a Muslim by parents who were not very strict and taught her the values, morals, prayers and celebrated all festivals such as sacrificing and *mawlid*. She learnt from her parents that there was only one God, and to believe in God and the Prophet. When her father passed away she was adopted by another family where her step-father was a teacher, step-mother was a head mistress and step-sister was a teacher. The contrasting nature and atmosphere between her home country and the UK is described as follows:

There is no comparison. I can tell you. Like during the month of Ramadhan, I pray, I fast but I just do it because it is my conscience and it is because I want to do it but there is nothing [here]. You get everybody is eating, everybody is half naked. You respect them but it is nice to have Ramadhan where, well back home or in a Muslim [country] because everybody is fasting, everybody is praying, everybody is reminding you of prayers and you hear the call of prayer. It is hard and you can smell the food and all the restaurants are closed and there are no pubs. There is no café. It is hard to be fasting in a country that is not doing it but, *alhamdulillah*, we did it.

Her longing to return is narrated as follows:

I feel at home, that is where I belong that's where I am comfortable. Yes I work here. It is not the same. I do not feel at home here. I don't feel at home because [of] the environment. I know so many people make you feel comfortable. It is different it's a huge difference. I don't feel at home and I would like to retire back home.

In her home country she started teaching English as a second language for three years in a baccalaureate system which is different from the UK system. In other words, she was a teacher for post GCSE level courses and then she got married. Her husband

was a British citizen and as a result she came to live here with him with the hope of pursuing teaching:

Yes, because he explained to me that I can teach here. It was a big shock to me because I couldn't teach. I had to go and do some more training to be able to teach. I was shocked because I thought as soon as I come here I would teach [just as] as I was teaching in [names country of origin] because I had been a qualified teacher for three years. So I didn't think I needed more training to teach. But then I understood because it is [a] different system in school [and] different education. Now I know why, but at that time I did get a shock. I had a degree in English which was a Bachelor of Arts, BA.

Into teaching

Initially Juwayriyah applied unsuccessfully to at least three Universities in the Midlands and one in Oxford, which was closer to home, to do the PGCE course. As a consequence, reluctantly, she found alternative menial jobs with the intention of getting to know the community. Her first job in England since arriving in September 1993 was that of a chamber maid in a hotel. She was conscious of people's response. 'Yes, that was my first job' because I know people will look at [says her own name] and say 'How can you do that? You are a teacher.' But for me I just wanted to get into the community to see what people are like, see what the environment is like, the community and everything, so I did that. However, she loathed the job due to experiencing racism and discrimination. Therefore she then became a waitress in a restaurant for a couple of months. She then moved to a [name] hotel as the general assistant which mainly included responsibilities for cleaning, opening the hotel in the morning, cooking breakfast and being a waitress in the evening. Her family then left Oxford and settled in Wales. In Wales she worked in a guest house as a maid. When she had her son she stopped working for some time. In the meantime her husband moved from Wales to Birmingham. When her son was nine months old she decided she could not carry on with these tedious jobs and said to herself, 'What I want is to work as a teacher or work in schools.'

Her friends suggested that she should first attempt to get into the school system and then pursue her qualifications. Accordingly she began working as an unqualified classroom assistant for two years under Section 11, which was special government

funding available to support ethnic minority children in schools (Verma and Pumfrey, 1994). Whilst in that school, the head teacher was very impressed with her and knew that Juwayriyah had been a teacher before. So when a teacher left in that school, the head teacher approached her, asking her to:

take over, [saying] ‘Look, you speak French, you have got A-levels and part of your degree is in French.’ [Juwayriyah asked to be observed voluntarily, saying] Could you come to my class and see me teach and you tell me if I am doing things right? She [head teacher] was very good. She came and I taught the lesson and she said, ‘That is it. You’ve got the job.’ So I started teaching French and [worked as a] bilingual instructor or classroom assistant.

Thereafter she went on to complete the National Vocational Qualification level 3 to qualify as a classroom integration assistant supporting children with physical disabilities. She then saw an advert in the newspaper inviting undergraduates into further training at the Martineau Centre - a centre with many units of the city’s education department, as well as being a conference and training centre. She ‘applied and *alhamdulillah* I was one of the lucky ones because 120 people applied and I was one of the 12’. The scheme was initiated for foreigners or locals intending to become teachers. She met people who had similar circumstances to hers and found comfort in an Indian lady who shared similar marital experience. The first year involved developing their skills and putting them on track because some of them had been teaching before and others had not. The training required attending lectures three days a week and visiting schools. She went to a school on Stratford Road for three months and then found another one to complete her GTP as she had been unsuccessful in her PGCE application. Juwayriyah was fortunate to find a supportive and good school. She found the first year of her course to be really good because it was not very intensive, especially in view of the fact that some of the students had left education for five years. Getting back on track was their main challenge. For some it was very hard because they had been out of education for longer. Coming into university and completing modules on writing assignments prepared the students for the GTP. As a result of this positive experience, Juwayriyah has been recommending such schemes to her colleagues. She explained:

I would recommend to anyone who is from the ethnic minority who has not been into education and wants to get back on track. GTP was harder because it is like PGCE. It is hard because you are qualified and you have got to do a lot of assignments, a lot of training.

Juwayriyah felt she was lucky because she had worked hard and was punctual. She felt she had all the qualities which a head teacher would look for, and her diligence impressed her deputy and head teacher. When she informed them of successfully passing her first assessment the head teacher approached her and offered her the job. She recalled that historic moment:

I was shocked because you know it was a nice shock, not shocked because I was scared or anything. I was over the moon. I cried and he said, 'You silly girl instead of yes, I do accept, you're crying'. 'Yes I dooo' {laugh}. But (silence) yes it was a nice thing to happen to me. At least I did not have to apply for jobs. And I stayed in my school [where] I was doing my training [and] I knew most of the people there, [so] I felt comfortable you know and I was also over the moon.

Currently, she teaches a reception class and runs an after school club teaching Arabic and supports Worship in the morning. She attributed her success to the choice of the right school and looks positively at the fact that the school has a majority Muslim population. Moreover, speaking four languages is an advantage in a multicultural school. Her QTS qualification added strength to her professionalism. She was proud of the fact that she is the only one in her school who speaks Arabic.

The influences that shape her identity as a teacher are her experiences from her native home and her step-father. Her step-family had included people who were teachers around her. Practically she has a strategy of her own, as explained below, which fuses the two systems of education. She explained:

You know, comparing the educational system from abroad to here, I think it helps me a lot because, at the end of the day, I have got a folder - and not like a grid folder - but in my head, and in that folder I put all my experiences and mixed them together from there, from here, and come out with something in here (points to her head) which makes me. It's me. That's the way I want to teach, that's the way [I teach].

After she had qualified, her head and deputy regarded her as a fully qualified competent teacher who could plan, teach, assess and evaluate. Her linguistic abilities were seen positively as well as her being a Muslim who understood the religion and culture of the children she taught. However, occasionally she did experience ‘the “agro” from other colleagues’ who did not understand her. She gave an example:

If they ask you a question and you do not understand the questions, or you don’t answer the question the way they want you to answer, they get cross. They look down at you. I used to get cross because people do not understand where you are coming from. Being a bilingual or trilingual person sometimes it takes time for your brain to register. If your first language is Arabic and English is a third language. Your brain takes some time to register that question and you come up with some answer and you say, ‘God! Why did I say that?’ But people do not understand. People who can speak just one, language can’t understand that because they have not been [in that situation]. I am not against them. It’s just that it is hard because they can’t understand where you are coming from. Sometimes, because you haven’t lived in that culture, people expect you to understand it. And if they want you to do something and you ask questions, ‘Sorry, how am I going to do that? I don’t know how to do that.’ ‘*Well you are a teacher you should do it.*’ ‘Yeah but I have never lived in that environment. Sorry could you help me? Could you just guide me how?’ But that is just, you know, a couple of colleagues that did that. They do not understand.

Juwayriyah feels that her classroom experience shapes her thinking as a Muslim teacher. Being a Muslim and working with Muslim children she understands where ‘they come from because we have the same religion and the culture is nearly the same although I come from a different country.’ However, Islam, she feels has had an input in both. In other words, Juwayriyah is of the view that when ‘other people talk to the children they talk to them from a different point of view’, whereas she does not because they are Muslim and she talks to them and understands where they are coming from, and this is especially true with regard to their parents. She cited an example in the following words: ‘The parents will come to talk to me and they will greet in the morning *al-salamu ‘alaykum* and *alhamdulillah*. You know they feel comfortable and confident to talk to me rather than other colleagues.’

This has a positive impact as it encourages parents to help their children to achieve and show Juwayriyah as a role model for teaching and a successful career. However, she is fully aware that ‘some parents are scared where their children are going to end

up and they might not push them hard to be teachers because they are scared they might be discriminated against.’ Again she provided an example: ‘They might - I don’t know - but I spoke to one parent and she said, you know, how are you feeling and, you know, you are not from here and you are a Muslim. I said I am happy, you know, and the school is supporting me. I got lots of support from the head teacher and deputy and she [parent] was happy with that.’

Juwayriyah was personally affected following some high profile international events. She shared the following account:

[t] was because people always look at you [and ask] are you a Muslim? [and say] You are one of them. When I say ‘one of them’, I mean people who abuse or use their religion in a bad way because for me that was [wrong] I wouldn’t say. Yes they are Muslim, but I wouldn’t associate myself with them because what they have done it’s no[t] [allowed]. I wouldn’t because Islam has not asked us to kill people, hasn’t asked us to destroy children and destroy families like the way they have done but it still affects me because whenever people know you are a Muslim. [They say] ‘oh you are a Muslim’ and they say it in a way that you can feel in their voice there is doubt and they are like aware of the danger and the danger is coming and even my son suffered from it. Somebody came to him and said, ‘You are Bin Laden and who is going to be next in your family to be Bin Laden throwing a bomb?’ My son came crying home because we have got nothing to do with that.

However, in contrast to the lack of support in her son’s secondary school, the teachers in Juwayriyah’s school talked to their children, put them at ease and comforted them by discussing these events. Children were given the explanation that it was war and what happened is not nice. But ‘it is nice for people to live together in harmony as Islam asks us to do. It doesn’t matter what your faith is, it doesn’t matter what your colour is, it doesn’t matter where you come from, we still have to live in harmony with each other.’ These values and the morals were explained to the children and Juwayriyah felt that they understood. In any case, she feels that ‘the media has got a lot of impact on the children’s understanding.’ Parents were scared because the children were scared due to the uncertainty about what was going to happen, but once they had talks, reassurances and explanations they felt better.

There is a serious concern about the impact of the media upon the impressionable minds of young children. Juwayriyah thinks that when children hear on television continuously the events of 9/11, Iraq and elsewhere being attributed to Muslims, children:

just think of, 'Is that who I am?' Some children might have a second doubt, 'Is that who I am? I am a Muslim. Is that who am I going to be in the future? Am I going to be like those? Am I going to be looked down at?' It was a lot of questioning even my son came to me and he said that 'I don't want to be a Muslim any more because my friends are bullying me. My friends are calling me this and are calling [me] that. [They] are calling me Bin Laden and calling this and that and I don't want to be associated with those people'. So I said 'well you are not, you've just got to ignore them because it doesn't mean, if those people have done [it], every Muslim is going to do that! It's not every Muslims' duty to do that.'

Asked about Islamophobia, sexism and racism, she had the following to say:

I have [experienced it]. When I was working as a classroom assistant, I had a lot of racism, but being a very patient person, I go home and cry. But, I would never stand up to my bullies {laugh}. If somebody calls me something, I used to go home and cry or go to a corner and cry, and then I'll wash my face, and then come with a brave face on. But now I feel more confident. If somebody calls me something or somebody [says] something to me - that I don't like - then I do stand up to it because I know my rights and I know that people are wrong doing or saying those things to me. So they haven't got a chance there {laugh}.

Teaching suits her as a person although it is hard work, but that is what she had aspired to do since she 'was a little girl and it's hard but it's rewarding.' Teaching in the Foundation Stage is important for her personal identity because it lays the foundation for children to 'blossom later on in life', otherwise 'they will crumble.'

There are no issues of isolation in school although she is not part of a network. Juwayriyah has not participated in any activities for her CPD. Significantly she wants to change her career completely. She intends to remain in education, but rather than being a primary teacher, teaching the NC, she wants to be a French teacher. Juwayriyah is ambitious and is aiming for promotion at a later stage. She has been encouraged by her head teacher and she declares her plans in her annual letter of

intent. Teaching is a job for her because she needs the money. However, it is not an ordinary job that she has fallen into. Rather, it is more than that, it is everything, and it is a job that she recognises herself in. She finds herself in it and enjoys it. To her it is everything, and not just a job.

Her school environment allows for free exchange of ideas as the head teacher invites new ideas for various subjects and during training days her ideas are taken into consideration. Being a person with a family the sense of community is important to her, but she longs to be with her family especially during the festivals. Her contribution to broadening the understanding of Islam among the staff, students and community members takes various forms. Whilst she respects parents considerably and regards them as children's first educators, she is not hesitant to correct what the children have been taught as parental influence upon children is strong. She also makes use of books to achieve this. She shared an example:

Like when we do worship in the morning, we tell them [Muslim children] all about the Prophet Muhammad's peace [be] on him. We tell them about the angels. Who was the first person? The important persons, and we talk about Bilal, talk about his endurance and everything.

Being a Muslim from a non-Asian background, she feels that parents in her school respect her. Initially, some parents were surprised to discover that she was a Muslim. She recounted that incident:

I know. They were shocked when they knew I was a Muslim, and I said, 'Yes, yes, I'm not wearing the headscarf but I'm still a Muslim {laugh}. [They replied] No, no, we are not saying that [you are not a Muslim, but] just the colour [that] you are. White, yes, I am White, but I'm still a Muslim.

However, once relationships became established, parents would come to her as a friend or relative. She noted, 'They always come and say, "My daughter has done this. Can you have a word with her?"' In other words, Juwayriyah is seen as an adviser and perhaps this is linked to the manner in which the Prophet-teacher was seen as outlined earlier. Similar accounts were shared by Fatimah as well. Perhaps this is akin to the role of some classical teachers mentioned earlier. In turn this

relationship provided opportunities to invite them and get them involved in their children's education further. When some of the staff did not accord her the right respect she deserved she put it down to ignorance and ignored it.

As a lone speaker of Arabic in the school her head teacher asked her to teach Arabic in an after school club. Although she does not have a whole class there was a huge response, and children enjoy it. The parents have welcomed it as well. She feels that the children are:

happy to learn a language. So that they can read the Qur'ān, because, as you know, the Qur'ān is written in Arabic and it's nice for them to learn the language of their religion and be able to read the Qur'ān without being translated into Urdu or Pushtu or any other language which they speak.

With the introduction of modern foreign languages from September 2008 she sees herself well-suited for a language post. Rather than teach every single subject she aspires to be a subject teacher with the multilingual skills and previous experiences that she has. It would also alleviate the 'frustration' that she currently experiences. She contends that when teaching so many subjects 'you can't be good at everything that you teach.' Nevertheless, she is satisfied with her job, as she feels she has achieved a lot and is happy in her school. Unfortunately due to the divorce and being alone there is a strain on her, but she is coping well. Her main concern is about community cohesion:

I don't like that because where I work [the] community is divided. Somalian children and Asian children are like just [apart]. It is a big gap and it is all hatred which is not nice because they should share the same religion [but it] is just because of this background. It is cultural background - are really divided - just a lot of hatred. [The] Head is doing a lot towards their [reconciliation]. The headteacher is trying very hard to get the two communities together but it needs more than the headteacher, the community itself [needs] to work towards that.

Juwayriyah, like most of the teachers interviewed, has considered relocating abroad. She has thought about it, but because her 'children are small at the moment I don't want to take them away from the family. But yeah I am thinking of maybe when I get

to 55 something like that. I will go back home before retirement. I will be teaching there.'

The life history of Mu'adh

Mu'adh was interviewed two months after he was appointed for his new post at another school. He was known to the researcher in a particular capacity and due to this, prior to his new post, he was not considered as a participant. Mu'adh initially arranged for the interview to take place on Saturday, but due to some reason he requested to come to the researcher's house on a Sunday (Appendix 17).

Early years

Mu'adh was born in Bangladesh and came to England at the age of 9 with very limited knowledge of English. He attended a primary school for a short period before moving onto secondary school. He is keen to recommend teaching to interested people and to those who gain satisfaction from children's success. According to him, there are many negative popular perceptions about teaching. However, for him the positive aspects are seeing children starting from a level and moving onto a different level and the glowing faces of children when they achieve and progress. The enthusiasm and children's happiness are some points that he uses to encourage people into teaching. He considers teaching to be a very stressful profession with excessive amounts of paper work, and finds the daily and annual expectations on teachers to be huge. He thinks that young teachers within their first three years of their career are prone to leave due to the demands of paper work and in some cases it is the behaviour of children in certain schools, in certain areas, that discourages teachers from staying on. With such demands Mu'adh feels he is not maintaining a work-life balance. He feels he works too hard, arriving at school early usually at 7:15 am and returning home for about 6:00 pm. He spends his spare time with his three daughters. Despite such a busy schedule, Mu'adh has no regrets because he 'loved education so much as a child' and it 'was very important to' him. He would '*inshallah* like to try and do as much as possible for the education system'.

He is passionate about sports. As a qualified football coach, for the past ten years he has been running Saturday morning training sessions for young people within the Handsworth ward at a local secondary school, and organises tournaments with other volunteers taking children to different parts of the country. Through such engagements young people can learn from him. Perhaps the main aim is to help them keep away from anti-social behaviour and from negative influences which drag them into wrong-doing. He, therefore, ensures that they are receiving something they enjoy, they like doing and can benefit from. Young people are able to experience good things and realise that they can actually do something with their life and career. Through such interactions and engagements, Mu'adh is able to impress the importance of education upon them. Through sports, he teaches them life-long skills such as effective communication and builds their leadership qualities.

After successfully completing his GCSEs he studied English language at A-level at a local college. He also completed a Recreational Leisure course on sports to maintain his interests in it. He was therefore able to combine these two interests which helped him considerably in the future. Thereafter he enrolled at a College of Higher Education on a BEd course. He lived for four years with his relatives near Brighton. During the weekends and in the holidays he found employment to supplement the support he was receiving from home. He recalled his memorable days in the following words:

But the experience I had during my degree was fantastic. I lived in a place which was predominantly White area. There were a small number of ethnic minority people there. [In] the college out of 344 students, I think there were about 10/12 non-White people and obviously I was one of those people. I suffered no discrimination. I suffered no problems. My teaching experience was in a place called Worthing near Brighton and again it was in a school which probably had out of 700/800 pupils about 10/12 non-White pupils and I loved my teaching experience there. I had a wonderful time. I had no experiences with racism or anything like that. The other teaching practices that I did were similar except my final one. I taught a year 7 class for my final teaching practice because in West Sussex there are a lot of middle schools and they go up to year 7 and the final one was a mixed school. There were lots of Muslim children, lots of Sikh, White, so it was a mixture of all different races and again I suffered no problems as far as racism or problems where staff were concerned, everything was fine.

Supply teaching

After qualifying Mu‘adh travelled to Bangladesh and returned five months after the start of the school year. He, therefore, took on supply teaching in different schools within Birmingham. During this time he was exposed to ‘lots of nice schools and lots of not so nice schools.’ He then applied to a school in Handsworth as a cover teacher for six months. At the end of that academic year he saw an advertisement for a school near his house. He applied and taught there for 9 years, only leaving after gaining promotion in 2007. Whilst on supply teaching the negative experiences that he had encountered were mainly related to behaviour. In a school with a predominantly White working-class population, he found some of the children to be very rude, with many problems within the school. However, he still enjoyed being in that difficult school because the children ‘were sort of respectful and listening’ to him, and he was surprised that the school had phoned him requesting him to return because he ‘had managed to stay the whole day’. On the other side of Birmingham, Mu‘adh was once in a school with predominantly Black children where behaviour issues were related to the use of bad language, not towards him but towards each other. Through these valuable experiences, he came to know some schools within Birmingham and this helped his decisions.

Mu‘adh spoke highly of the school where he taught for nine years. Being a teacher from the local community and knowing the area well was very important. The head teacher played a significant part in his career. According to him, she was ‘a fantastic head teacher, very supportive, very encouraging, a person who was fair to everybody, a person who the children love being with’. He felt the school was more like a home, where ‘the children felt safe and secure, where the staff were encouraged, where the staff felt safe and secure and that was the reason I stayed there for a long time’. He always wanted to work in a school that had predominantly Asian children. This was due to his childhood memories and the experiences that he had had. Therefore he wanted to return into the community and to the children for whom it was challenging. He explained:

For example, if you have children who are having language difficulties or children who are coming into this country later in their life. I wanted to play a significant part in their life. And that is the reason, and to be a good role model because when you look around the country today, or you look around the world today, there [are] lots of negative things that are happening that children see on television, that [are] not giving them positive things about life. I just wanted to support them, to encourage them and hopefully, be a good role model so that they can aspire to be like myself.

Promotion

Mu‘adh took long to change school mainly because he was enjoying it there and was very comfortable. It was in close proximity to his house and his children attended the school as well. However, he attributed his delay in seeking promotion to ‘being a little bit lazy’ and lacking a desire to move. A few months before the interview many changes had taken place at his school: the head retired, a new head was appointed and other changes occurred. Consequently, Mu‘adh ‘felt the school wasn’t going forward in any way’, and hence he decided to move as well.

His choice to teach in the primary sector came as a ‘coincidence’. He selected primary schools due to his love of P.E and sports which were only available on a secondary course with English as a second subject. However, when he arrived at the university he discovered that they had changed the course and were offering physical education on its own without English. He resolved the dilemma as follows:

So what I said to myself was that if I got injured, for example, in playing a sport, or something happened to me, I would not have a back-up subject to do. So I felt that because I loved English and because I loved P.E., if I went into primary schools I could do both of those. Also I could carry on with my interest in religious education, because at secondary school I took GCSE R.E. and, I really enjoyed that and I enjoyed comparing different people’s religions to different people, talking about different views so I thought this is the best thing I could do. I could do my physical education, I could do R.E. and I could do English and primary school would be the ideal situation for me to do, and that’s the reason I went into it.

At the time of the interview, he was a class teacher with responsibilities for literacy and a phase leader for Year 1 and Year 2. These responsibilities entitled him to be

part of the Senior Management Team. Mu‘adh talked about teachers who had influenced his teaching and developed his teaching philosophy and were good role models in his previous school, and he looked up to the head teacher. In addition, children inspired him too, especially when he observed them ‘not doing the right thing’. This compelled him to continue going to school and observe the way the children behave. Another influential aspect was the need for better communications between the schools and parents because ‘clearly in certain areas of the community there are parents who are not setting the right tone, the right messages to their children and that’s having a big impact when they get to school’.

In 1997, when Mu‘adh was first appointed for a full time position, he was considered as a ‘normal class teacher’. His ethnicity, gender and religious background did not have a negative impact. In fact, these characteristics were seen in a positive light:

I was taken on, but obviously having those extra additions, for example, being of Asian background, being of Muslim background, being a male teacher - those three aspects - played a very significant part in the school because there were lots of things I was able to do. Having those skills, those identities that I don’t think any other teacher would have been able to do. So I clearly think that those ideas played a big part. Also by talking to other people they have said that those reasons have played a big impact on my success and also how lots of children have turned out.

His gender and religious identity were appropriately acknowledged by the school, and therefore the school quickly capitalised on his sports skills by appointing him a manager for P.E. According to him ‘the physical education side as a male teacher was very important’ for practical reasons and from the point of view of his personal interest. The religious education dimension was also significant because ‘a lot of Islamic Worship assemblies, a lot of festival assemblies I was encouraged to do’ because ‘some of the teachers were not confident at delivering and they asked if I could do it, or they asked for my support in delivering those areas.’ He regarded these experiences as valuable during the years when he led these subjects, and guided the staff and the school in different areas of religious education. There were many instances when he spoke to parents in Bengali and Urdu which other teachers were not able to do because of their language barriers. Hence during parents’ evenings he

was called for translations as well. He felt that the school appreciated his contributions.

Talking about the events in New York, Afghanistan, Iraq, London and Lebanon, Mu'adh thought that Muslim children were aware of these events. The younger ones might not have understood the reasons as to why they happened or how they have affected the world. These events took place while he was at his previous school. At that school he said that there were no opportunities for these things to be discussed or talked about because 'it was just things that happened and were just left as they were.' He recalled something after the New York event:

I remember after the bombings in the United States. I think it was during one of the days that they were having a minute's silence. One of the ideas that were suggested by the staff was to observe the silence in our school. And I think it was given to senior management, but they just said, 'we'll get back to you on that'. And I think it was just left because they didn't want to upset parents or Muslim people within the community because it may have a sort of difficulties [concerns expressed] from parents because children might go home and say we've had 2 minutes silence because of the people who have died. So clearly that's one of things that [has] happened.

Due to the diverse opinions on the subject, both from Muslims and non-Muslims, Mu'adh felt it was 'one of those issues nobody wants to talk about, nobody wants to discuss.'

Mu'adh did not report any experience of overt racism, sexism, Islamophobia or any other discrimination. However, he acknowledged that there will always be people within the staff or in the community who might have different opinions on different people. In his previous school, although most of the staff were friendly, supportive, encouraging, there were nevertheless a couple of people regarding whom he revealed:

I would say from what I saw, from the way they communicated, from the way they talked that they possibly didn't like me being there because I was of a different colour and I had different beliefs. But on the whole I think most people were supportive and encouraging. And I think those people who didn't want me being there were possibly feeling threatened and those people were the sort of older generation of teachers.

Underachievement

Mu‘adh stated that he had a ‘passion’ for addressing the underachievement of children from the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities and White working-class boys. He loved researching the issue of underachievement and his undergraduate degree was linked to bilingualism and Bangladeshi pupils. He had interviewed children and made home visits to find out the reasons behind underachievement. He summarised his views cautiously and was conscious about stereotyping, but for him that was the best way to talk about it. In his experience the main reasons are related to the home. The lack of parental support and encouragement and the absence of fathers, especially for the boys, who leave all the jobs for mothers to do in relation to education, are significant. However, fathers might be working but they are not being good role models for their sons. In addition, fathers are absent during parents’ evenings and participate less in football tournaments. They are unavailable to discuss matters with teachers because mothers are sent in their place. Furthermore, maybe some of the Asian boys have less respect for their mothers than for their fathers. The other problem for underachievement, according to Mu‘adh, is the lack of right role models for Asian children. In the streets they may see many things which should not be happening. According to Mu‘adh, ‘the anti-social behaviour, the walking, dress codes, which are hidden, all have a pronounced effect upon younger minds.’ He further explained:

little kids, on the streets, see that somebody [has] got a really good mobile phone or that somebody [has] got a nice shirt or trousers on, and that [is] what they want to do. Not, [that] oh somebody [has] gone to university and I want to go to university [too], and that somebody [has] gone to college and they’ve done their A-levels etc, and I think that [plays] a big part [in contributing to underachievement].

Mu‘adh describes himself as ambitious. He has attended courses on a regular basis for his professional development and in 2006 he completed the Leading from the Middle course which assisted him in gaining promotion. These activities have been prompted due to a desire to learn about new initiatives, to further his career prospects, to fulfil his aspirations for further development, to keep up-to-date and to improve his knowledge. His experience with performance management has been successful under

good, supportive and encouraging leaders who have provided him with considerable guidance. At the time of the interview he was undertaking training to become a performance leader himself.

Mu'adh has passion for teaching. He has always loved being in school, and it is something that he enjoys doing. He considers it a job in the sense that he gets paid for it, but his main reason for being involved is the enjoyment that he derives from assemblies, sports clubs, interacting with the children, seeing the children doing many different things and the smiles on their faces. All these play a big part in his teaching. Mu'adh finds teaching to be 'very joyful, satisfying and rewarding.' As to teaching being a challenge he responded by saying:

It is something that is with you all the time. I think, whether you have holidays or whether you have weekends you think about your class. You think about what you are going to do when you go back to school. You think about your assemblies. You think about what topics you are going to do and for most teachers, the teachers that enjoy what they do, they are thinking about it all the time. But it is definitely challenging and rewarding.

Mu'adh has considered locating abroad. As a single person he did look for opportunities in developing countries to teach English language. However, he was not brave enough at that time to go. Currently, with a young family, unfortunately he doubts if he will move abroad. If he were to go it would be to countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. In Africa it would be countries with a lot of needs such as Ethiopia and Sudan. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the sense of community is very important to Mu'adh. It is a paramount concept. A community with a cultural identity having a shared understanding and shared values is very important to him.

His vision of a school in 21st century Birmingham is a school that is willing to attempt new interventions such as ICT initiatives. It would be a place which has an open door policy for parents and the community. It would be a school which is a place not just for education, but also for activities which include people from the community and religious people. A school would also hold conferences. Essentially, according to Mu'adh, it seems that a school would play the role of the community leader. To the

researcher, this appears to have some resonance with the model operated by Prophet Muhammad in his mosque.

Mu‘adh is open-minded about the next five to ten years, and has left all matters ‘up to Allah, wherever he wants to take me’ although he does have high ambitions and aspirations. He narrated his aim:

Sometimes, I take one step forward and two steps back. Now this being the reason, I know that if I put my mind into it, *inshallah*, I could go wherever I want to go. But sometimes I think [about] the pressures, the responsibilities and I have a young family. Do I want all that headache? Do I want all that responsibility? Do I want to come home 7, 8 o’clock in the evening and still be doing my work at home? I think, *inshallah*, if I can become an assistant head teacher or a deputy head teacher I can be happy. And then I’ll take one step at a time, and I’ll take each position and see what it entails, and if Allah wants me to be in charge of a school one day, then one day I will be. But at the moment, I’ve got a senior position and I’m enjoying that role, and as I said, I want to have the aspirations. I want to. I can see myself running a school, but it’s the case of - thinking is it too much, is it worth, is all that hassle, all that responsibility, all that headache - is it worth being in that position.

Mu‘adh does not feel that he has fully achieved his potential yet. He hopes to do more things in future. He likes to be described as a teacher. The uncertainties in teaching for him are the initiatives that the government introduces which according to him happen every other day. The major theme of his life is his religion which provides him with a focus, having his daily prayers and *duas*. All of these keep him going from day to day.

Summary

The major problem faced in any historical research is that of the representativeness of the data. One has to be cautious about drawing conclusions from individual narratives and generalising from selected persuasive examples. The purpose of these collective life histories has been to draw some meaning from their accounts about their life and careers and to locate patterns therein. An attempt has also been made to show the potential and value of using the prosopographical method in order to understand the complex nature of the intersection between socio-political and religio-cultural aspects

of the lives of Muslim teachers. Indeed this methodology helps to unravel factors that bind a group together. This has been achieved by using a similar sets of questions which 'relate to significant detail' in their lives and focusing on the 'cohesive strength of a particular group of individuals' and by 'engaging in a comparative analysis' of their lives and 'approaching the research from a multi-disciplinary perspective' (Jones, 2001:343).

'Aishah and Mu'adh attended primary state schools in Birmingham, Juwayriyah studied in North Africa and Sawdah went to a Seventh day Adventist school. Generally, they speak about having had a positive and enjoyable experience. None of these Muslim teachers reveal the experiences summarised by Osler (1997:40) of heightened control, low expectations, frustration and resentment and contradictions between policy and practice in relation to equal opportunities. Nor did they relay the extreme forms of racism reported elsewhere (Ghuman, 1995; Benn, 1998; Rakhit, 1999).

Juwayriyah's experience of facing difficulties because of not having her qualification recognised in the UK, despite having the relevant experience, is not an isolated case. Previous studies show the stereotypical views and low expectations of teachers from overseas (Ranger, 1988:56; Brar, 1991:40-43). Much later, Ghuman (1995:18) also found that such teachers faced many difficulties and had to seek menial employment and enrolled on additional courses in the UK. Juwayriyah did not attribute her rejection to any form of discrimination. Nevertheless she was shocked that her three years' experience was discounted. However, her perseverance and determination to gain a QTS reveal both her dedication and the barriers that some people have to overcome. It required friends to tell her to 'get into the system', and then move along. Hence, once she was in school her talents were quickly recognised and the school capitalised on this. At the same time, she was encouraged to gain qualifications through a lengthy route, but nonetheless it was worthwhile for her as she was engaged with what she enjoyed. In other words both parties were negotiating power-relationships in schools i.e., Juwayriyah found a school where she could demonstrate her knowledge and skills and the school in turn found someone that they could employ to fulfil their needs.

Another crucial feature that has emerged from these four life histories is that none were employed principally in any specialist area supporting language provisions in mainstream classes, equal opportunities, multicultural education and citizenship or religious education although Juwayriyah held a Section 11 post. There may have been several contributory factors that led these teachers to become an integral part of the school and not be marginalised. These could have been the removal of Section 11 funding, the assertiveness of these teachers, changes in the routes into promotion in schools, performance management, race equality policies and a general recognition of their wider role and the valuable contribution that they could make in the life of a school.

‘Aishah and Juwayriyah entered the teaching profession through the PGCE course. Mu‘adh and Sawdah complete the BEd. ‘Aishah worked in a media organisation and Juwayriyah had taken up menial jobs. They joined teaching for a variety of reasons. This means that they had chosen to enter teaching with some deliberation and some thought. However two of these teachers entered teaching without giving specific reasons.

None of them have had a career break. Their subject specialism reflects the range of subjects within the NC, and they are not confined to a particular subject area. However, there is some ambivalence towards the teaching of the NC.

The four interviewees were not forthcoming in expressing their Muslim identity in political terms. Some of them placed a greater emphasis on establishing their status and professionalism as teachers first. However, all were proud in expressing their personal identity as Muslims. At the time of the interview, Mu‘adh did not wear the beard and he does not normally wear traditional clothing to school. Among the female participants, none of them wore the veil (*niqāb*). However, during the interview two of the three teachers wore the head scarf (*hijāb*). Juwayriyah did not cover her hair. Although the *niqāb* controversy was heightened in October 2006 when three interviews had been completed, none of the three teachers addressed it as a significant point. The researcher has noted that these female teachers wear the *shalwar kameez* occasionally in school. Hence they are comfortable with their cultural heritage and confidently contribute to the enrichment of the school by

bringing in cultural diversity, but more significantly they raise the self-esteem of children in their respective schools. It would also appear that they draw upon these multiple identities to serve a variety of purposes in school. Unsurprisingly, therefore, none reported that their culture was explicitly challenged. Generally, they believe that education is the key for producing not only successful Muslim children but successful children from all communities, especially those who are underachieving. Hence they are all unreservedly committed to the principles of justice and equality. Practically, they consider themselves role models both for the children in their respective schools and for the wider community in general, but not all of them are satisfied with their job.

All four Muslim teachers had shared their views on the issue of promotion and their CPD. There is considerable diversity between them as some are content and others are discontent with promotion prospects. Both males and females felt that there were a range of factors affecting their promotion and CPD. None, however, reported specifically that they were, as Muslim teachers, experiencing discrimination based on their faith or religion. Indeed, Mu‘adh and ‘Aishah had applied at the time of the interview for promotion. It is acknowledged that Muslim teachers will share many professional experiences with their peers. But, the dynamics of gender, race and faith and the personality of individuals cannot be ignored.

In this researcher’s judgement the scarcity of Islamophobic incidents in this research does not imply that they were unimportant to these teachers, or that they had not experienced them in their careers. It is possible these are not highlighted because other factors overshadowed these experiences, or that the Race Equality policies are being effective, and that legislation against discrimination on religious grounds has been implemented (DTI, 2003). One also wonders whether the political situation during the interviews reduced the reporting of ‘religio-political’ incidents from their life. Furthermore, the sample did not have a White or Black Muslim, so that the variables of race and faith could not be compared. Nevertheless, some individual narratives reveal perceptions of unwitting and deliberate elements of Islamophobia in institutions. In some cases the difficulties experienced were attributed to their faith which was compounded by a perception of racism and in turn these negative experiences were strengthened by the individual teachers’ resolve to move on.

Among the features related to the religious upbringing of these teachers is that of attending a *madrasah* which is a characteristic of the life of many Muslim children in Britain. All of these teachers have attended some form of *madrasah* education either in a formal setting or in an informal setting. They all spoke of its relevance and necessity in providing the essential teachings of Islam. Although, generally, their experiences have been varied, *madrasah* education was valued for its contribution to children's linguistic, moral, social and spiritual development. These professional teachers had constructive comments regarding some of the pedagogy used there. 'Aishah wanted to be taught the meaning as well as reading the texts proficiently.

The researcher is aware that there existed a Muslim Teachers Association (MTA) in Birmingham whose main objective was to provide Muslim teachers, and other Muslim professionals with an interest in education, with a platform to share ideas, information and experiences in an informal setting and a forum for establishing networks. Personal communications show that during the academic year social gatherings were organised in various restaurants and community centres. Members were welcome to bring their spouses and friends as well. Sometimes they organised special Eid celebration dinners. In 2003 over 100 Muslim teachers and professionals attended such an event and evaluations from the event expressed the desire for more regular informal events. Seminars were less popular and costly to arrange hence committee members felt that the dinners should be focussed by having specially invited guests who have a particular expertise. Subsequently a guest speaker addressed the gathering briefly on *The Positive Role played by Muslim Teachers in Education*. In addition, the involvement of Muslim trainee teachers was also envisaged through the Westhill College. The MTA's position regarding non-Muslim teachers was that, although the focus was Muslim teachers, non-Muslim teachers would be welcome to attend. Occasionally the group incurred financial losses as a result of these dinners but the committee felt that such a situation was acceptable considering the impact of the dinner as a networking opportunity.

There were other ways in which the platform of the MTA was used, such as advertising and requesting jobs and publicising city-wide contributions by Muslim

teachers, but the MTA was cautious in endorsing educational activities run by any individual within the community. Although they circulated the information, the nature of MTA's involvement was made clear and enquirers were requested to contact the organisation directly. MTA is now probably defunct as communication through the email list for over two years has ceased. The researcher is also aware that an association was also formed in the early 1990s in Birmingham.

Only one of these four was aware of the MTA. It is surprising to note the lack of this awareness. However, the researcher is also aware that the mailing list consists of over a hundred teaching staff. During the interview both words i.e., 'belong' and 'aware', were used. It is possible that an emphasis was being laid on distancing themselves from belonging to a Muslim association due to some misgivings and negative publicity that some Muslim organisations had been receiving during the period leading to their interviews. Whilst this may raise bigger questions about the rights and perceived threats of affiliating to a Muslim organisation, on a more practical level belonging to a network of professionals or like-minded people has been used for a range of purposes, not least for coping with the stresses and discrimination of the work place (Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997). Such networking is also about sharing success and expertise and seeking advice and support in various aspects of life and career. Although all of these teachers were members of a teaching union, none of them either reported that they were actively involved or participated in the events organised by these main teaching unions. This seems to indicate their lack of involvement in matters to do with the politics of education. On Saturday 14th May 2005 the researcher attended a conference organised by Black teachers: *Conference on Empowerment through Organisation*.

Linked to the above point is the significance of a sense of community to these teachers. Again this was an aspect of their life which they all declared to be important. Yet their networking and belonging to any professional organisation, be it a Muslim or otherwise, appears to be minimal. Such a projection does not rule out their participation and involvement in other groups of their choice. For instance some of them attend study circles to enhance his knowledge and personal development. Some of these events are locally organised by national bodies representing Muslims in Britain. This is comparable with the activities undertaken during classical times

where, in addition to academic work, teachers were concerned about their spiritual and religious development too. The wider role that teachers played during the classical period in the community is not mirrored from these accounts. Their contributions appear to be restricted within schools to the form of after schools clubs and scout groups.

In this chapter the researcher has tried to demonstrate the possibilities of using collective biographies in order to address the need for including the life and work of teachers with a faith background as a part of the history of education and teacher identity. As a researcher, this chapter has also provided evidence which suggests the potential of studying the lives of teachers from other religious groups and those with no religious affiliation. The chapter has also shown that the prosopographical method has facilitated the researcher to focus on specific social, cultural and historical questions. This has been achieved by paying particular attention to those elements which offer strengths of unity and diversity within group. These collective biographies reflect these teachers' contribution to changing social expectations, attitudes and behaviours in developing role models for the Muslim community, in particular, and for the teaching fraternity, in general.

So far the data analysis from this research has consisted of a full life history of Ummu Salamah and four collective stories of 'Aishah, Sawdah, Juwayriyah, and Mu'adh. The emerging data demonstrated how understanding an individual's life and career experience depends significantly on understanding the wider life history within which it is placed. After presenting the life history aspects of the data analysis for this research, the next chapter concentrates on recruitment and retention, Muslim teacher identity and spirituality as an endeavour to provide a thematic analysis of all the interviews and a section on researching Muslims.

CHAPTER 6

SIGNIFICANT THEMES

Introduction

One of the declared aims of this research was to explore the perception of Muslim teachers regarding the recruitment, retention and promotion of EMT. The analysis chapter began by presenting the life history of Ummu Salamah. Her life history covered all aspects of her interview from her early life to her current role in school. Then four life histories were selected to create a prosopography of Muslim teachers to demonstrate the extent of their cohesiveness in terms particular social phenomena. A third approach in dealing with the data from these interviews has been through the use of thematic analysis which has been a common feature in other related studies (Henry, 1991:219; Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997:111, Benn, 1998). Such an approach provides many advantages. For the researcher, it may be relatively easy and a quick method to learn and execute. Generally, the results can be accessible to a wider audience. The results provide a rich and thick description of the data. The information highlights similarities and differences across the interviewees and it allows for a variety of ways for interpretations to be made. In view of these factors the researcher had decided to conduct a thematic analysis.

Selecting the themes

The interview guide provided a framework for the analysis. The life history of Ummu Salamah provided all the areas covered in the interviews. The life histories of ‘Aishah and Sawdah took account of the areas related to their life prior to becoming teachers whereas the stories of Juwayriyah and Mu‘adh offered accounts of their lives after qualifying as teachers. As a result, the areas of the conversations that remain from the interviews need to be analysed. In order to achieve this coverage, three themes were selected which include data from all the interviewees (Appendices 18 to 25).

In selecting each of these three themes several factors have been taken into consideration. In the literature review on EMT in Chapter 2 it was highlighted that the issue of recruiting teachers from these communities has been a concern for academics and official bodies (Ranger, 1988; Hewer, 1992; Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997; Carrington, Bonnet, Nayak, et al., 2000; Ross, 2002; Arora, 2005) and for researchers (Carrington and Tomlin, 2000; Basit, et al., 2006). Therefore, it seemed appropriate to continue the investigation of this issue from the teachers who participated in this research. This is because, in addition to the concern raised by the above mentioned; some members of the Muslim community (Cheema, 1996; Saqeb, 1996) have made specific efforts in advocating, promoting and recruiting Muslim teachers as well. Hence, insiders' views became necessary to identify the challenges and solutions that practitioners have to offer. Also, the statistics of the city of Birmingham suggests that there should be an increase in the proportional representation of Muslim teachers in relation to Muslim pupils. Finally, among the areas of conversation that took place with these teachers, all of them showed a willingness to answer and offered their views on these themes. In other words, it appeared to have some significance for them, and hence it is appropriate to include recruitment and retention as a distinct theme for analysis.

The second theme selected was, in essence, related in part to the central exploration of the research: what it meant to be a Muslim teacher to the participants of this research. Hence, the theme *On Being a Muslim Teacher* was chosen to address this specifically. In general, however, it links to the discussions in Chapter 2 in relation to for example, the role of Muhammad as a teacher in their professional life and the extent to which they were aware of their traditions in relation to education and who they saw as their ideal teacher.

Finally, the theme of *Spirituality in the life of Muslim Teachers* was considered as it is part of the Islamic *weltanschauung*. *Weltanschauung* deals with ultimate questions, and reflects a set of metaphysical beliefs (Wan Daud, 1989:9). The absence of a dedicated topic on this subject in previous studies also provided an impetus for this theme. Furthermore, in Islam, spirituality and intellectualism are related, and according to Al Zeera (2001:9) together they form the unique aspect of the wholeness of Islamic epistemology. Hence, disregarding this aspect of the life of these Muslim

teachers would result in a partial understanding of their life and work.

Presenting the themes

To achieve consistency of approach similar strategies have been applied in creating these three themes. Initially each interview was allocated a colour for their respective text. Thereafter, all the paragraphs that appeared in response to a particular theme were cut and pasted onto a separate Word document. This avoided an anecdotal approach by not focussing on glowing examples. Following this, the entire transcription of the interview was searched, using the Ctrl+F facility, for the main words of these themes and if any comments or views were found they were added to the previous extracts in the Word document. This facilitated the assembling of all relevant extracts which may have been mentioned in other parts of the interviews. Once this was completed for each teacher, each response was then read and clustered together under the subheadings derived from the data. Each discussion was then supported with appropriate quotations.

Summary

The above discussion has provided descriptions for the process of selecting and the methods of presenting the three themes for this research. The first theme continues the exploration of the issues of recruitment and retention of EMT. The other two themes provide specific material hitherto absent from previous research studies on EMT, i.e., the role of faith and spirituality in the lives of Muslim teachers. These three themes are presented below followed by suggestions on researching Muslims.

PART 1: IMPRESSIONS OF MUSLIM TEACHERS ON RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND PROMOTION

Introduction

One of the most common themes identified by researchers investigating teachers from minority ethnic communities in England and Wales is that of recruitment and

retention (Ranger, 1988; Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997; Carrington, et al., 2000; Arora, 2005; Basit, et al., 2006; Basit, et al., 2007). Regarding their withdrawal from the profession, interestingly, Basit, et al., (2006) found that withdrawal was not an event itself but rather it was a process and hence family and personal reasons were some causes as well. One of the aims of this research was to explore the perceptions of Muslim teachers regarding the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority teachers in Britain generally, and Muslim teachers in particular. This part considers the views of Muslim teachers arising from their impressions and experiences of the recruitment and retention of EMT.

Impressions

All respondents agreed that there was a lack of Muslim teachers in state run primary schools and that more were needed. They recognised that the challenges of recruitment and retention are general to teachers, and not specific to Muslim teachers. Their views continue to resonate with the concerns of other prominent researchers and Muslim educators (Hewer, 1992; Parker-Jenkins, 1993; Saqeb, 1996; Cheema, 1996; Halstead, 2005). Safiyyah revealed the paucity of contact with Muslim teachers in her three year career by seeing only one, even though there were some on her PGCE course, but she was unaware which schools they worked in. Sawdah, after five years of teaching, claimed not to know many, while 'Aishah, with seven years' experience, declared that 'we are completely under-represented especially in Birmingham', considering the make-up of the city.

Mu'adh, with nine years of teaching experience, shared his perception about the gender distribution of Muslim teachers, their intentions of joining the profession and the challenges they faced. He thought there were more female Muslim teachers than their male counterparts in primary schools, whereas more male Muslim teachers worked in secondary schools. This impression corroborates other reports and views of children who express the need for more men (TDA, 2007a; Band and Brown, 2007). However, when Fatimah considered Muslim men in teaching she concluded that there were very few possibly because '...they feel there is not enough money.' Entering into teaching for men is also tied with their ambitions and motivations (Ross, 2001:20). Therefore, for some Asian men teaching is seen as regressing (Carrington and Tomlin, 2000);

other factors relate to the organisation and structure of the teaching profession (Ghuman 1995:129). Therefore, according to Safiyyah more Muslim men were needed in primary teaching because ‘children need to see a role model from their own community.’

In his experience, Mu‘adh feels that most Muslim teachers have a pleasurable experience. However, it was usually the first few years of their career that were most difficult. With the exception of Fatimah, most respondents have had a positive experience too. Indeed these early years could turn out to be the worst experiences for initial teachers. Negative experiences could result from the lack of good experiences, the absence of effective mentors, sensitive guidance and appropriate support, and from the perceived lack of encouragement. These may consequently make new teachers leave the profession. Generally, Mu‘adh thought that Muslims entered the profession for the right reasons, such as aspiring to make a difference in the life of children but ‘unfortunately because of how life is, of how society is, some people will encounter difficulties and some people will encounter problems such as racism, such as bullying...’, which contributes to their withdrawal. Their reasons for joining the profession are not too dissimilar to their colleagues as evident in other studies (Ghuman 1995, Osler, 1997). However, the explicit mention of joining the profession based on the motivations derived from the teachings of Islam or in following the footsteps of Muhammad was absent.

Another impression evident was in relation to faith and identity. Khadijah, although not adorning herself with any visible features of Muslimness, regretted that some Muslim teachers were reluctant to assert their identity. She highlighted a possible reason for such behaviour, saying:

Unfortunately a lot of us, because we are at different stages in terms of our faith, a lot of us are coming [into teaching] with perhaps just thinking about it as a profession and as a job and not really thinking about explicitly how our faith relates to the job. I think it’s at different points in [our career] where people [will] acknowledge that it’s [faith] got a lot to do with the job. I don’t think there [are] enough Muslim teachers who make their identities explicit and it’s something, something that needs to happen.

Her justification for the need to assert Muslim identity by Muslim teachers was articulated in the following words:

I think it's because, obviously at the moment you have so many negative stereotypes about Muslims in the media and the last we want is for our children [to] feel powerless and disenfranchised because of these negative images. So we need successful role models in all aspects of life really and teaching is one of them. Teaching is one way we can, you know, get to the children before it's too late really.

A further impression was linked to the distribution of Muslim teachers across the city. Fatimah's experience led her to believe that geographically the picture was different. She concurred with Mu'adh that there were 'quite a lot' of female Muslim teachers in different areas. Their distribution perhaps depended on the areas they were currently employed in. For example, she claimed that if one visited Moseley, Alum Rock and Sparkbrook, one may 'see lots of Muslim teachers whereas if you go to Staffordshire, Warwickshire and, you know, the Shires you wouldn't see any Muslims.' This view reproduces the image of Muslim teachers clustering in inner city areas - a feature observed previously about EMT (Ranger, 1988:18-20). In order to reflect the multi-faith nature of Birmingham it is important that Muslim teachers serve as wide a geographical area as possible so that their presence is a resource for all concerned with education.

In relation to career progression, Safiyyah felt that some Muslim teachers were currently progressing well in terms of their professional development. This would, therefore, suggest that the disparity identified by Ross (2001:17) is changing as ethnic minority teachers are getting more experienced and more qualified. Perhaps the initiatives of the NCSL are having an impact. Hafsa recognised that there was a shortage and insufficient numbers even though the situation had, nevertheless, certainly improved since her days at school. In any case when she views the picture of Birmingham as a whole, she feels that the population of Muslim children in state schools is higher and hence in such an environment there needs to be sufficient Muslim teachers. The more experienced teacher, Ummu Salamah, approached this question differently, and advocated looking at the issue from a proportional representative perspective.

Beyond role models – the need for Muslim teachers

Respondents provided four broad reasons for the need to increase the participation of more Muslim teachers in state schools. These were centred on the needs of the profession, the belief system and self-esteem of children and the wider community. Mu‘adh felt that there should be more Muslim teachers because:

a primary school is the foundation of education for children and it is the base where everything happens... More primary schools should have Muslim school teachers so that children can see that this profession is important and they can see how education is paramount [for] their success in this world.

Hafsah argued that although they had a shared belief in similar things it was not about developing Islam or anything like that. Rather ‘the children see you as a role model. As in they [teachers] have the [same] beliefs that I have and they [teachers] can get to a particular position then I can. So there should be a lot more I think done [to recruit].’ On the other hand, Juwayriyah stated that it was nice to see the presence of Muslim teachers, especially in schools where the children are predominantly Muslims because:

they feel confident being with a Muslim teacher. I am not saying they are not confident with other teachers, but they feel more confident and they can talk to that teacher about their own experiences and the teacher will understand. But the teachers who are not from the same religion don’t understand that much.

If this premise is followed, i.e., Muslim teachers relate better to Muslim children, then, teachers from the Muslim community should be increased further. But this supposition raises a plethora of questions, and it assumes the homogeneity of Muslim children and teachers which is not the case. In addition, professional teachers are trained to meet the needs of all children that they teach. Furthermore the ‘religious’ facet is only one among the many needs of Muslim children.

A wider representation of Muslim teachers in the community would possibly encourage young people to join the profession. Therefore, these successful Muslim teachers were asked about recruitment and retention.

Reassessing recruitment and retention

In the widest sense there are two drivers that emerge from the narratives of these participants in relation to recruitment and retention. The external drivers include BCC, the community and the mosque whereas professionals and educational establishments are the internal drivers. The Council is seen to have an influential role. Some teachers, based on their own experiences, wished to see specific recruitment schemes to continue and perhaps tapping into additional networks. New modes of training to increase collaboration with schools and to recruit teachers from minority ethnic communities have been evaluated by Arora (2005:103-127). Hafsah, who had attended a programme run by the BCC and spoke favourably about it, said:

I think ... the type of scheme that I went through and qualified, when they specifically just recruited er Asian people. I think even if the networks where, you have the Muslim Teachers Association, something like that. If they do certain events or certain things to encourage, you know, not to call just teachers but to go to establishments and universities and try and talk about what role they have had [in recruiting and retaining].

This was also reinforced by Juwayriyah who had attended a GTP course. Nationally, the government was seen as the main provider for more finance and assistance through grants to initiate and sustain such schemes. However, Khadijah considered this to be the responsibility of the LA because this was an issue related to local state schools. She was aware, on the basis of her own experience that BCC liked to recruit teachers from very mixed backgrounds. However, she argued that perhaps the time had come for the Council to say, 'Yes we do actually need more Muslim teachers as well, err... you know, not just ethnic minority teachers.'

When asked if it would be appropriate to target particular faiths, she replied:

That's... that's... that's the tension because ordinarily I would say no because, for example, recently on the news they were talking about targeting Muslims as signing contracts for being good neighbours. I think that's highly wrong because, then, you are targeting Muslims, particular faiths, and basically tagging them with the blame for all the things that go wrong erm... So ordinarily I would say yes, there's a bit of a problem there. But I mean I can't really think of [another way to increase Muslim teachers]... Muslim teachers perhaps do need to advertise themselves as

well you know. Whenever I talk about teaching and how much I love the job, you know, I really do see it as the best job in the world and more Muslim teachers need to talk to other people about the benefits and not just going on about planning and all the bureaucracy and things like that and put people off. Yeah...So Muslim teachers need to go out and do something about it. But I do think it does sometime take, you know, people with more authority as well.

Osler (1997:86) reported that some Asian females choose teaching due to its acceptability to their parents. Ummu Salamah commented on recruitment and retention from a mother's perspective. For female Muslim teachers, she said, one has to get society to understand that:

...women do have their role out of school whether they have a husband or whether they don't, whether they have children or whether they don't. What is the role of a Muslim woman at home? And then what role can she play within society? You know, at the end of the day, she is not superwoman. You know she can't be in... She can't give a 100% to a school and then give a 100% at home. Something will have to give.

This would necessitate a change in the perception of some sections of the community. Traditionally, according to 'Aishah, first generation parents would not value teaching as highly as medicine, accountancy or law. It therefore seems that although teaching is respected either on religious or cultural grounds it is not given the kudos perhaps because it is not seen to be lucrative, or it interferes with family commitments.

Role of the mosque

Those with authority, including departments of education, could target not just Muslims but people of different backgrounds and different faiths as well. Traditionally the mosque was the hub for teachers and teaching. Prophet Muhammad used it as such, and some people during later generations as well (Wan Daud, 1989; Al-Qazwini, 1993). The role of the mosque was identified in this context by several respondents. For example, one teacher suggested that 'maybe our own community needs to sort of move forward and needs to sort of understand the importance. I think the mosque is the best place to sort of promote these kinds of things.' Khadijah reinforced the view of self-examination by the Muslim community:

Oh! Yes, I do think that would help because the Muslims are directly responsible for themselves. I don't think we should get into the culture where we blame other people for the state of affairs of the Muslims. So if we want more successful Muslims, we need to do it for ourselves ...

Some of these teachers thought that partnerships between mosques and schools or ITT providers are useful. In addition, some felt mosques could invite teachers, both Muslims and non Muslims, to promote teaching as a career. Apart from such approaches, `Anas made wide ranging suggestion an approach more in tune with the current times:

Yes, recruitment in the community by making better links with local mosques, especially [to] the progressive mosques who have got many English speakers in now and who are set up internally as a good structural organisation. I would perhaps arrange for workshops in mosques [and] recruitment fairs. A lot of mosques have big spaces where you could have recruitment fair; people to come out and speak to the congregation in a mosque. In a mosque including many mosques now have a congregation of men and women, so you can go and speak to the women and the men. Also the universities have Islamic societies which would be a very good way of approaching Muslims because they are already in Higher Education.

Juwayriyah advocated that the community should make their voice heard by forming a group, and petition Members of Parliament.

Role of educational establishments and professionals

Universities and schools also feature as part of the solution. `Anas wanted universities to do more:

All universities have an Islamic society. I would try and use them as a forum to speak to young Muslims who are in full-time HE education. The mosques perhaps, and ask them to, there are many ways you could consult. It's easier to go directly to people than expect people to come to you. That's what I've found...

He also desired schools to be practical and innovative:

But also some of the things need to change within the schools, because I personally would... I wouldn't recommend a teacher to go into the

teaching profession now, at the moment the *Jumu'ah* [Friday prayer] issue is a big issue for Muslims and hasn't been resolved...

With regards to retention Hafsa hinted on a perceived inequality:

If the school is understanding to your needs then you would, if you are happy there, if you're secure there, as an adult as well, and if you are valued there and if you are considered an equal to a person from another race or religion, err you know, you've got an equal footage then you are likely to stay there.

Gender role in school activities was noted in the context of promoting, retaining and recruiting Muslim teachers in schools. Fatimah recalled:

I should tell you something very err strange. You know, when we set up role play areas in the Foundation Stage, you will see all the girls copying the teacher [but] none of the boys will come and like to take the register. I don't know why I haven't worked that out. They would like to be the doctor. You see them in the corner with stethoscopes. You will see them doing different things but they will never come and try to be a teacher. I have never seen it in the last two [to] three years.

Zaynab, a head teacher approached the issue of recruitment practically, stating that there should be effective teacher training, sincere secondary careers advice, appropriate nurturing and proper induction when they are NQTs. In her experience she had known many teachers experiencing problems in their schools. Therefore, it is crucial that they are made welcome and comfortable and are provided with full support to make their first year unproblematic and enjoyable (Basit and McNamara, 2004).

With regards to the retention of Muslim teachers, Mu'adh encompassed the ideas of several teachers, which concurs with the idea of training for leadership identified by Ross (2002:24). Mu'adh suggested:

You need role models to provide guidance, to provide experience [and] good practitioners to approve their efforts. They need to have promotion where it is necessary. They need to be given opportunities to show their skills so that they can make a big difference. So [these] areas are very important in keeping teachers in the profession.

Zaynab was of the view that Muslim teachers should be asked what is not being done for them, and there should be more visits to secondary schools and more good role models should be made available. Another teacher expressed the need for more publicity aimed at Muslims complementing those identified by Carrington, et al., (2000).

Impact of low representation

Ross (2001; 2002) argued for the teaching profession to be more representative of ethnic minorities in the UK than previously. Similarly, some teachers were anxious about the absence of Muslim teachers within schools. They felt pupils would grow up with negative thoughts and low self-esteem. They may develop, they claimed, difficulties with their religion as they ‘would not see anybody who has been successful in education, standing in front of their classroom and talking to them.’ Children need to see positive role models and people like themselves who are making a difference as Mu‘adh stated:

If you go into any society, any culture, anywhere you go, people who have friends from the same culture, same religion etc, they feel more at ease with those people than any other people. So that [has] a very big significance [in the life of children].

Zaynab felt that children will have nothing to aspire to and they would potentially develop the idea that they cannot be in such jobs and that only White people and other people have that job which would be a very bad situation. As a child, the reality of this had been created in the mind of a respondent. Safiyyah recalled:

Because... I dunno. As a Muslim myself, I know all the teachers were White. They were all White. You just think it's a profession for White teachers. If you hadn't known anything different, or... you wouldn't know it was a profession that you could get into. It's about role models, again.

The existence of role models rather than being conceived narrowly as an issue of economic well-being, Safiyyah saw it in a wider sense. In other words, faith was a contributing factor in being considered a role model. She explained:

I don't know I will not say that children are not going to learn the right things from other teachers because they do. It's just that role model, isn't it? Is the role model the same person from your own religion, same religion as you?

According to some of these teachers non-Muslim children would be affected as well by a shortage of Muslims teachers, 'as they would not benefit from cultural diversity and developing respect and eradicating prejudice.' Therefore, Khadijah saw the situation as unhealthy for the community as a whole:

Well I think non-Muslim teachers will continue to be bombarded with negative images and see those images as being the norm for Muslims. I think Muslims themselves will continue to feel ashamed of their faith and will continue to demean their own faith. [They will] see themselves as lower than other people. [They] will feel disenfranchised and feel you know, the youths who have got issues anyway, maybe they have difficult home lives or something. A trigger that will help, make, maybe mean that they go off on the wrong path, you know, [so we] just need as much positive images and messages as we can [have], I think.

Since anonymity and confidentiality were assured, one teacher was able to reveal a disturbing perception. The teacher claimed:

I personally think as you said it's confidential so I am going to say. I personally think generally, there are very low expectations from not just Muslim teachers [but also] from non White people and I think Muslims are right at the bottom even if they *have* got a little bit of potential they are not stretched. So if we don't have anybody who is there to challenge, who is not there to question these reasons [of underachievement], I think it will go even worse.

When probed to clarify further, i.e., did she think that some Black and Asian non Muslim teachers have low expectation of Muslim children, the teacher claimed:

Yes, because I have heard teachers in the staffroom talking about the children as I mentioned before as if they are not children. Their religion, their culture, their sense of dress, their achievement it's nothing. They are not sort of recognised. So maybe the [non] White teachers perhaps need to have a bit of more training on recognition of other faiths, on respecting other faiths, on equal opportunities and on high expectations.

In other words, in the view of this teacher, Muslim children were seen unsympathetically by most teachers. Does this, therefore, point to the need for re-examining previously held notions that it is White teachers who hold stereotypical views about minority ethnic children and cultures? In contrast, Ummu Salamah, a teacher with fifteen years experience of working in a school with over 90% Muslim children claimed that low representation of Muslim teachers will not impact upon Muslim children because:

As I say it's a calling, I don't think you know that anybody in particular you know influenced me. I mean I didn't have any Muslim teacher along the way. Perhaps I would be doing something else if I had {laugh} you know.

Challenges

Teaching may not be attractive to some people due to the demands it makes. It can be emotionally challenging, stressful and it raises questions about life work balance as well. In addition, racism and discrimination have been consistently reported as reasons for leaving the teaching profession (Ranger, 1988; Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997, Pole, 1999; Carrington and Tomlin, 2000; Arora, 2005). Juwayriyah narrated the following:

Maybe they haven't been treated properly. I say I am lucky but then I am not from Pakistan or you know India. I am not Asian but I know some Asian people have been discriminated against and people look at me as one of them. Though I do get a bit of discrimination but not as much as the Asian ones... I know that one of my colleagues in a school in Birmingham the head teacher offered her a good job. She was an NQT there but then nobody talks to her in school. The head teacher, he offered her a permanent job. Most of the staff were against her because she is Asian. She is brilliant - she was there while they had the Ofsted and she got a 'very good' from the Ofsted and everybody is against her because she got a job and she is there. They just don't like her. But it is hard. How can you not like a person? She has got the same qualification as you. She is capable, she has got a 'very good' from the Ofsted. She is more than a good teacher she is 'very good'.

The negative perceptions of teaching that exist within the Asian community have a role too (Ghuman, 1995:130). A teacher reported that some members within her family did not regard teaching positively. Fatimah noted:

F: Shall I tell you the truth?

I: Yes.

F: Er well my community and they really think people make a mistake going into teaching er it is underpaid, lots of work, very little respect, er longer hours to work, no social life, all the time miserable and basically these are the reasons I have been given by my family.

Individual reasons for entering teaching are varied and complex (Carrington and Tomlin, 2000:144). Within the range provided by these teachers, in addition to altruistic motives, Khadijah noted that the vast majority of Muslim teachers in this country are of South Asian origin, and unfortunately, according to her, many of them are very materialistic. Whilst she considered this to be positive she had reservations as it was more about the wealth and the status that the profession provided. As a result she thinks teaching has lost its status as a highly respected profession where everybody looked up to teachers. Hence other professions are more attractive as mentioned by 'Aishah earlier. Nevertheless, she, like Hafsa, thinks that there are now more Muslim teachers.

Role of universities

Siraj-Blatchford (1991) reported factors such as low expectations of EMT, lack of support from tutors, experiencing racism in schools and within training institutions as contributing to the low uptake of teaching. The role of schools and universities was also highlighted in some conversations. The following quote from Safiyyah illustrates interesting points in relation to recruitment:

S: Well they have to fill a quota, don't they? And there was, like, there was about seven or eight in our school, and there was, like, a hundred and something... nearly two hundred places.

I: What do you think would happen if they didn't have a quota?

S: There probably wouldn't be any {laughs}. Nah, I dunno. I dunno. They should - yeah.

Fatimah claimed, 'Maybe they don't want to see any Muslim teachers' and Ummu Salamah shared the following perspective:

No you see, if you've got somebody who's quite academic, I always say that teaching is a calling. If you're quite an academic, [a] clever sort of

person, are you going to look into the teaching profession? Or are you going to look elsewhere? Which is why I still think it's a calling, you're either made out to be a teacher or you're not.

Zaynab agreed that universities have a low intake. She felt they lacked an understanding of Islam and cultural matters, and that 'the students are made to feel like they are different and...' Feelings of isolation and being stereotyped were concerns expressed by the CRE as they inhibit participation in various aspects of student life (Ghuman, 1995:130). `Anas, a recent male graduate had the following lengthy account to share exposing many issues. Speaking for himself, he thought there was no real effort being made to engage with Muslim graduates, particularly with males, to bring them into teaching. This would apply both during training and after graduating. `Anas felt, especially in Birmingham, heads and the Authority need to be more aware of the needs of Muslim teachers. For him the crux:

is that when I was a student at university, a Muslim man, part of the religion for a Muslim man, and it was easily done in my last profession, as a press officer it wasn't a problem. A Muslim man first of all needs somewhere to pray wherever, in school I mean it's okay. ... And the thing is that a Muslim man is told in like, this is as you become more aware of your religion, as I said my religion is based on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and erm the writings in the Qur'ān which we Muslims believe is the word of Allah, as far as I'm aware a Muslim man is told to basically down tools on a Friday and go to the *masjid* to pray the Friday prayer which is *Jumu'ah*, so you're actually told to down tools, meaning stop your work, to go and pray, you can return back to your work...

To fulfil this requirement `Anas sometimes missed a lecture on Fridays because his 'faith came ahead of the lectures' but on teaching practice the school was flexible. However, after graduating and being employed, he said, '... I'm working in now, even though the mosque is across the road, so literally takes about two minutes to get to the mosque by foot, there's no provision made for Muslim teachers to go to *Jumu'ah*. I was told that 'no, we can't make any provision.' However, in the winter months, there does not seem to be a challenge. `Anas tried to find a practical solution and identified the means for resolving this need:

I've asked for some sort of a negotiation whereby your PPA could be moved, obviously you can use your lunchtime then as your PPA, and your

PPA as your lunch time, and then obviously that lunchtime, you've moved your lunchtime so you can go to the mosque and come back, something simple, it's not, as far as I can see, a difficult obstacle to overcome. The problem is the organisation and the heads and the Authority have not laid down any guidelines, so no head actually knows, if you've got an understanding head you might get something, and if you haven't you won't, and there's no guidance, real firm guidance laid down.

Lower ranks

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are fewer than five Muslim primary head teachers in Birmingham. In the absence of the category of faith it was not possible to find out how many deputy and assistant head teachers there are. 'Aishah suggested that the 'elements of colour never change', and living in a multicultural society there is definite racism and prejudice. Nevertheless, beyond these there are other factors such as conforming to the individual school system, personal preferences, accents, and awareness of the education system as a whole and an element of gender which play a part in the progress and promotion of teachers. According to Ummu Salamah, Muslim teachers are predominantly represented in the lower ranks of the teaching profession because:

Well there could be... could be that management don't want them to go any further, could be they themselves don't want to go any further because there is this balance isn't there, between the home and work place and what is the role of a Muslim woman.

In the current political climate, a visible faith identity adopted by some Muslims would appear as a risk for employing them. 'Aishah shared insights of how this could happen: 'So maybe I am more employable rather than someone like you [i.e., in a traditional dress with a hat and beard]. Hang on; what are this man's beliefs? Is he politically active? There will be a judgement attached to you because of your appearance even though you may be more competent to do the job than I am, but appearance will be dictating a lot [more] perhaps for a woman who wears a full *hijāb* than myself.'

Summary

The concern for the recruitment and retention of EMT has been consistent since the mid 1980s. The reasons for their participation and withdrawal from the profession have been varied and complex. In order to address the situation there has been a range of initiatives at various levels. This section has considered the perceptions of Muslim teachers regarding the retention and recruitment of Muslim teachers in primary schools. They have provided a glimpse into the significance, as they see it, of ensuring that Muslims are sufficiently represented in Birmingham schools. Their narratives show that they are predominantly concerned with the projection of themselves as career role models and laying foundations for success for the next generation rather than as role models of being Muslims. In other words, increasing Muslim teachers in school is apparently not seen as a faith promoting activity within schools or among the children.

In general, most of them felt that having more Muslim teachers in state schools could be beneficial to a wider educational landscape of the city. Hence they share some concerns with their non-Muslim peers about teaching. These include: paucity of men in primary settings, issues to do with working conditions, pay, lack of respect and image within respective communities. Unsurprisingly, they also had some similar suggestions for addressing the situation. On the question of promoting the teaching profession within the Muslim community there has been a noticeable absence of reference to the primary sources of Islam and to the example of Muhammad.

The image, that serving teachers create about their profession, needs reconsideration. Whilst the media may project populist images and some within the Muslim community see teaching as lacking in prestige and finance, teachers need to share more widely the immense changes that have taken place in recent years within schools. The issues of threshold applications, restructuring of pay scales and management structures, PPA time, the availability of support staff and leadership courses are factors that have or should have enhanced the conditions of teachers and teaching.

These Muslim teachers have not explicitly reported any discriminatory practice in the recruitment and retention of Muslim teachers, although there was an explicit mention by a fair-skinned North African teacher that some Muslim Asian teachers do face

discrimination. The response that some educators and the community around the school make to the visible identity of Muslims is a concern for some of these participants. The assertion of a Muslim identity by some of these teachers has been seen as a process for countering the negative portrayal of Muslims in society and to address at least in part some of the issues related to the feeling of disenfranchisement among young Muslims. In close-knit communities, the impact of a Muslim teacher goes beyond individuals in a classroom.

It is surprising to observe that often Muslim communities abroad are projected as patriarchal and men are seen to be actively involved in educational institutions. In addition, the literature on Muslim education gives the impression of the dominance but not exclusivity of men being at the forefront of the teaching fraternity. In view of this, on the whole, it is surprising to note the absence of this phenomenon from the British state primary educational landscape.

PART 2: ON BEING A MUSLIM TEACHER: THE ROLE OF FAITH AND HISTORY IN CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTIONS

Introduction

According to the figures of the Census 2001 there were 140,033 people residing in Birmingham who declared themselves to be Muslims (BCC, 2001). Muslims in Britain have gained a high profile recently in the media, although they have been part of the British socio-cultural and religious landscape for a very long time. Providing a description of this community is beyond the scope of this research and is not its aim either. Needless to say they are diverse in their patterns of migration, doctrinal standpoints, jurisprudential preferences, ethnic roots, linguistic variations, cultural manifestations, geographical locations and socio-economic status. It would be relevant and useful to find out the understandings and experiences about matters of faith related to education among these Muslims, as a community of practitioners.

This research aimed to explore the conception of Muslim teachers regarding teachers and teaching, with particular reference to Muslim educational history and the life

history of Prophet Muhammad. In this part the identity of Muslim teachers is analysed by exploring the meanings that they attach to their faith and the impact, if any, that it has upon their life and career. In addition what they understand by a Muslim teacher is uncovered with a view to considering the need for faith to be included in the construction of teacher identities. In the construction of teacher identity the role of faith has been eclipsed and reduced to notions mainly linked with gender and race. Acker's (1989:1) edited book provides various studies on teacher, gender and careers and she recognised that gender was 'a fundamental organising principle in society' and that it was an equally important category for analysis as race, class or age. In it, McKellar (1989:69-85) investigated the impact of race, gender and class on Black women. She concluded that racial and sexual differentiations helped in producing positions whereby Black women were torch bearers. All except one of Henry's (1991:250) subjects were of African descent and his study enabled him to propose that when Black people were in a relatively powerful position the dynamics of the situation altered. However, Gersten's (1995) education biography is a story from a child brought up in an orthodox Jewish family.

The Census data showed that 52% of Muslims were under the age of 25 (BCC, 2001). For these young people the question of their identity is relevant and the projection of an identity which is comfortable in terms of faith and the state is necessary so that they may be in a position to see whether there is compatibility between them. Modood, et al., (1997) found that a very high percentage of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations declared themselves to be Muslims. Hence there is a greater sense of religious awareness among them. Therefore the question of the faith identity of these teachers is relevant not only because they are opinion-makers and figures of authority but also to make evident, as a consequence of their faith identity, their resultant attitudes and behaviours in British society, by showing how these teachers have created a space for themselves both in schools and in society. In addition, it shows how these Muslims are making a contribution as citizens of Birmingham. These narratives will also reveal their commitment to their faith and state, and how they handle differences and diversity both in their professional and personal life. Finally, the issue of fundamentalism and extremism and its relationship to terrorism, and the positioning of the Muslim community in Britain, within such a situation and

its related discourses, makes the view of Muslim teachers about their faith relevant as it will demonstrate the nature of the role that faith has in their life and work.

Faith in schools

Although faith itself was important to all these teachers in relation to their work, there were fundamental distinctions about its role. The majority of these teachers considered their faith as an integral part of their work and others thought of it as a personal matter. Mu'adh, a male Muslim, considered faith as an essential part of his life and work. Daily prayers provide such teachers with an opportunity to be thankful to God for the guidance and support in their life. They also provide them with occasions to solicit God for more assistance for their future career and as such they attribute success to their faith. Hence, Mu'adh was doubtful if he would have achieved what he has been able to achieve so far without his faith and religion. In practice, he is not hindered by the school in allowing him to fulfil his faith requirements since, although a prayer room is unavailable, his classroom suffices for this purpose.

Faith is reflected in the professional and social roles that Muslim teachers fulfil in school. Accordingly, faith guides everything that some of them do in school, especially in the arena of interpersonal relations with parents, staff and children. This is kept in mind from the start of the school day until it ends. Whilst these values are informed by the teachings of Islam their application is inclusive and not special for Muslims. Such is the case for Zaynab. Although to her Islam is the overriding system for moral and social aspects in school, she, nevertheless, ensures that everybody is treated the way one likes to be treated. When Jabir was asked if being a Muslim changed the way he taught, he confirmed saying he, 'always tell[s] the children what is right and what is wrong. I never take anyone for granted or anyone for advantage. I tell them from my best ability, or give the best advice I can give to them with regards to the situation they are in.'

Although faith was important in their workplace there seemed to be a clear distinction when it came to teaching children and matters of faith. These teachers, it appeared, had a mature and professional stance. Hafsah, for instance, was cautious, and felt that

teachers were conscious as to how much influence they could have regarding certain beliefs and whether teachers could bring faith into their practice since it was not encouraged by Management. For the majority of these teachers being a Muslim did not affect their teaching. In other words, their professional identity is at the forefront of their work. For a few teachers, this question provided a first opportunity to reflect on the impact of faith upon their work. They had clearly not thought about this aspect of their faith and its role in their profession and career. Whilst it is evident that they maintained their professional integrity, it does not mean that curricular enrichment, creativity, and teaching in a meaningful context is avoided. On the contrary, some teachers, due to the fact that they had certain beliefs and values similar to the children they taught, coupled with the care for the children and their responsibility to them, felt that, perhaps, as teachers as well as being Muslims, it was more likely for them to draw more perspectives from their cultural and faith background for teaching. For beginners, this phenomenon may not be evident at the start of their career but it may grow as their experience progresses. This is evident in the statement, by Khadijah, who said:

I think when I first started teaching I didn't acknowledge the fact that it [faith] did, but I think it generally probably does because if I think about it [faith]. My identity and the way I behave is based on my faith, so my ideologies a lot of them - are based on faith so that will come out but in a sort of not very overt way basically, just in a subtle way I think.

Ideal teachers

In considering teacher identity Pollard (2002:90) suggests that 'the first step is to consider the person we are'. According to him, this could be done in terms of social, cultural and educational background, experience and qualifications, position, interests and personality. In other words these factors are constituents of a teacher's 'personal biography'. Altogether they assist in 'the development of a unique sense of 'self': a conception of the person we are' (Pollard 2002:90). An individual's self-conception influences his or her actions and thoughts. It is well-known that for some people their faith influences their self-understanding and hence it has an impact on their perspectives and behaviour. Pollard's conception above appears to exclude the role of faith in considering the personal identity. An individual's personal biography has a

faith dimension and that faith is a contributing factor in the development of a unique sense of 'self' as exhibited in the narratives of this research. Pollard (2002:90) continues to state that individuals may also have a sense of an 'ideal-self' which they might want to become. The difference between the ideal-self and the self-image indicates a person's self-esteem. For some Muslim teachers the ideal-self would be exemplified in Muhammad: some desire to adopt his characteristics and wish to develop the type of teacher he was.

The second set of factors relates to the roles that teachers occupy. The expectations about their roles develop from many sources including head teachers, parents, media and governors and because these expectations are varied teachers make independent interpretation and judgements about the most appropriate actions (Pollard, 2002:90). A third dimension is a more dynamic perspective which is brought to bear on the process of looking at teacher identity. Maclure (2000) suggests that people inhabit multiple 'subject positions' and that identities are fluid, fragmented and negotiated in socio-political and cultural contexts through our interactions and relationships with others (cf. Pollard, 2002:90). Pollard (2002:90) therefore maintains that this post-modern perspective helps to challenge 'the simplistic, inflexible and externally imposed notion of teacher identity by asking what it means to be 'male' or 'Black'. In addition, currently there is a view circulating of what an ideal teacher is which is encapsulated both by research (Hay McBer, 2001) and also in government policy (TDA, 2007b). All these are critical constructions of teacher identity. However they apparently do not fully recognise the inner dimension of teachers, an essential element of which is their faith. Hence the faith dimension needs to be added to these constructions where appropriate.

Ideal teachers have been seen in terms of the aims of education and pedagogy by the participants of this research. Zaynab had more than one ideal teacher at various stages of her schooling. Juwayriyah was inspired by her Spanish English language teacher, in high school, in North Africa. As a child, she aspired to be like him and his teaching methods have influenced her because she feels she is currently teaching in the UK like him. Others saw ideal teachers in terms of the values they attached to pupils. Those who valued children and recognised the importance of teaching and considered it beyond a mere job were seen as ideal teachers. Such teachers were

described as those who went out of their way to ensure that they were doing as much as they could for the children and were creative in their work. Inspiring teachers were also those who were willing to take on new challenges and were open to new experiences and most importantly they liked and loved to learn with the children. Therefore, teachers, both Muslims and non-Muslims, who had these characteristics, inspire these Muslim teachers.

On the other hand, although, religiously, Prophet Muhammad was obviously a very important person to all of them, he was not specifically mentioned as an ideal teacher, but with one exception. This is unsurprising as Chapter 2 showed that Muhammad embraced numerous social, political and educational functions (Haykal, 1989; Ernst, 2004). This opened the possibilities for his followers to look to him from multiple perspectives in their life. Indeed, taking Muhammad as a model is not conceived narrowly by restricting him to religious affairs only. Muhammad is not seen as an ideal teacher by some of these teachers, this does not mean that he is not a model for them altogether. This is evident from the comments below as in other aspects of their lives; these Muslim teachers do consider him to be a model. `Anas specifically mentioned that the ideal teacher:

for me, and I think for most Muslims, is the Prophet Muhammad *sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam* because even if you look at it from an objective point of view, the ideal teacher should be able to spread whatever they are teaching very quickly and easily. If you look at the spread of Islam, it is an ideal teaching. An ideal teacher leads by example; the Prophet *sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam* very rarely became angry, was patient, was soft with his words and used manners to speak to people. I think that's important, that is the way to teach.

Generally, they regard him as a role model for the Muslim *Ummah*. His life was considered to be the life that Muslims should be following because, as Mu'adh, stated, Muhammad was:

a great teacher for the Muslim community. His patience, his leadership skills, his qualities, his communication with people ... all of that is what we should be trying to instil into ourselves but unfortunately people within wider society ... don't regard him ... as a model, as a role model that we should be seeing. For myself I try to improve my knowledge and

understanding by reading lots of literature and but I also try and follow some of the things that he has done in his life.

As teachers, they specifically availed themselves of certain characteristics applicable in their classrooms and in their professional work. They learn, from him, to a large extent in terms of his mannerisms, self restraint and calmness. Muhammad is described, by these teachers, as being kind and caring. Therefore, teachers, they say, need to be listeners and non judgemental, like him. They relate to these qualities as they consider them to be the requirements for the profession. Some of these teachers find huge comfort during stressful times in school in the example of Muhammad. Whenever Fatimah feels low she looks upon his examples. 'The way he talked, the way he faced challenges, the way he was so calm, the way he portrayed himself as [a] very patient person. So I look at him all the time and that is what really inspires me.'

From a teacher's perspective, it therefore, seems that Muhammad is considered as a model from the sociological, psychological, religious and moral standpoints. His teachings and his characteristics are considered relevant for the challenges that they face as teachers and how to conduct themselves in school.

As Muslim teachers who saw Muhammad as a model, it was relevant to find out from them, what they could relate about Muhammad as a teacher and his teaching methods so that their conception of Muhammad as a teacher could become apparent and the nature of his influence upon them. Three teachers were unable to offer much information on how, as Muslim teachers, they regarded Muhammad as a teacher. One teacher, surprisingly, even though she had a Masters in Education, admitted, 'I don't think I can tell you a lot to be honest there.' On the question of pedagogy, eight provided positive responses. It appears that a limited knowledge exists between them about Muhammad's teaching methods. Safiyyah stated that 'he used to just tell stories.' The head teacher, however, thought that 'they often recited from the Qur'ān and then explained it in people's language.' On the other hand, Fatimah looked beyond pedagogy to state:

I think he treated everybody equally whether they were of different races and colours and genders. The most important thing was he talked about

peace and calm and being patient, so I try to sort of work on those and stay calm.

The fourth response from Mu‘adh was relatively specific:

From what I remember reading, he used to go to lots of different places and talk to lots of people. His methodology was, if at first you don't succeed, then you have to keep trying, trying, trying again, because he had lots of perseverance. He had peoples' support around him, lots of people went with him, and he was patient with people, if the first time people didn't understand he went back and went through the same thing again, so there are lots and lots things that we can take from his life, his lifestyle.

In addition, Jabir cited a famous incident when Muhammad taught a person, who had desecrated the mosque, the sanctity of places of worship as one of the methods used by him. Jabir stated that Muhammad's companions were furious and wanted to deal with him harshly, whereas Muhammad spoke to the person calmly, patiently and explained to him about his action, why it was inappropriate and that he needed to show respect. As a teacher for Jabir this means that teachers need to calm down and speak to children in a nice manner and help them understand. In addition 'Anas stated the following in relation to Muhammad's pedagogy:

Yes, the methodology of making people feel valued, that was one of the things that Muhammad *sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam* [did]. One of his key traits was that people in his presence felt valued and worth something. They felt that they were being listened to. They felt that what was being said to them was being said to them and not to someone else. They as a person were valued. I think that is a key point. Your pupils need to be fully aware that you value them and their thoughts and their wellbeing.

Be that as it may, the role of Muhammad as a teacher in disseminating knowledge, removing ignorance and inspiring to improve the state of humanity is recognised. Hence, some of them have altruistic motives in serving others rather than always aiming for personal gains. Khadijah, who had a personal experience of observing closely the state of education in Ghana, thought that Muhammad was an ideal teacher as he created 'systems where all people have access to a form of education whatever that may be.'

It is possible that these teachers have not had any in-put on this aspect of Muslim education during their studies as it is not part of the content for courses in teacher education. In addition, the exposure to the *Sirah* for these teachers may have been confined to the historical and traditional aspects that are reiterated during various times in the year either in lectures, sermons in mosques and/or in their personal studies, they have not approached him in this light. More significantly, this aspect of Muhammad's life is a relatively new emerging field. Historically whilst there is ample literature about Muhammad's role in various aspect of human life and the impact of his teaching and his contribution to science and learning, teaching methods derived specifically and systematically from the *hadith* collections are relatively new (Abu Ghuddah, 1997; Abdel Haleem 2002; Doğan, 2002) although there are many classical texts on pedagogy. Nevertheless, in view of these accounts, it appears that this is a narrow conception of Muhammad in view of the specific role that has been attributed to him as being declared a teacher unequivocally (Al-Qur'ān, 62:2) and as reflected in Chapter 2 and Appendix 3. Hence he ought to be considered both a model for the necessary qualities and characteristics expected from teachers and to inform their pedagogy. Unsurprisingly, as Muslim teachers when they were asked if they would like to find out more about this aspect of Muhammad as a model, they unanimously agreed and appeared enthusiastic. Furthermore, this shows that there is a religious basis for encouraging more Muslim men and women to become teachers.

Significance of teachers in Islam

Overall, similarly, there seems to be a lack of awareness with regards to the status and image that has been projected in Muslim educational literature about teachers. Juwayriyah, who grew up in North Africa, observed that Muslim teachers used to work hard and some would conduct research into a subject which they then brought to other people. Nevertheless, she had not read much about this topic in Muslim literature. Fatimah, who had an MA from Pakistan, noted: 'I think the teaching profession is very respectable in Islamic literature and Prophet Muhammad has always encouraged, as far as I know, people to go for teaching.' On the other hand, Mu'adh was remorseful about his lack of knowledge about teachers in Islamic literature but gladly drew from his observations and experiences, in Bangladesh, to

talk about the reverence with which teachers are held in his community. Students, he explained, avoid the:

use of bad language in front of teachers. They would not smoke or take drugs as is very apparent in this country. Respect is a very big issue 'back home' and teachers have a much bigger role than in this country. They are much more valued and their purpose is much higher than it is in this country.

Yet, Khadijah, a female Bengali, offered the following insights about contemporary Muslim teachers in England:

I think I'm lucky enough to know some Muslim teachers. I do work with some Muslim teachers here and I have some friends who are Muslim teachers. So my image of Muslim teachers tends to come from those people. And I do know they are Muslim teachers, who can be a very diverse bunch and from different backgrounds and have different things to offer and do things in very different ways. But I think in terms of Islamic literature I guess I don't think I've read it in Islamic literature directly in relation to teaching but in terms of how we live our lives and how we, for example, as parents how we teach children and I think those things can come into play as well when you are teaching children in a school, in a school situation.

But, 'Anas is an exception regarding this matter. He demonstrated a broader conception of the meaning of a teacher in Islam. He noted that in Islamic literature, teachers are presented as respectable persons who earn respect through their methods, morals and manners and the way they deal with both their pupils and other people around them and this is how they earn their respect. He explained further that the teacher is also seen as somebody who has a very important role. To him, a teacher in Islam is a teacher, whether it is for teaching mathematics, moral and values or anything else. Hence, in his understanding, if you are a parent you are teaching children to distinguish between good and bad, and the teacher is always given a prominent role, and good teaching is always pushed in Islam.

Significance of teaching in Islam

All these teachers spoke confidently about the fact that Islam emphasises teaching. Juwayriyah related teaching to the very nature of Islam saying, 'Islam does promote

teaching because Islam is all about teaching and learning.’ On the other hand, Safiyyah recalled a tradition of the Messenger regarding the importance of learning which states that people should go to China in search of knowledge if they have to. Zaynab mentioned that teachers, in eminence, came only after parents and hence she reminded her pupils in school about this.

The relatively low participation of Muslims in teaching was explained by Fatimah, who had lived in Pakistan for 19 years and ‘discovered’ Islam in a university in Birmingham, in the following terms: ‘I think people are unaware of the *real* Islam. I think that is what the dilemma is. They are aware of cultural Islam. I can always talk from my experience.’ Even though these teachers confirmed the status of teaching and teachers in Islam, the historical experience of individuals or groups within public schooling is an important factor in developing positive or negative images of the teaching profession (Gordon, 2000:vii). This and other factors which dissuade people from teaching have been recognised in previous chapters.

In addition to the above discussion, it was necessary to probe their perception about teachers and teaching within their respective communities or families and to contrast these with those presented in Islam and with the findings from previous research studies. Talking about her native country of North Africa, Juwayriyah reported, ‘back home a teacher in my country is very respected. Over here not as respected as it is from where I come from.’ Speaking about her Pakistani community in the UK, the head teacher remarked, it was a very respectful image and as a profession it was regarded as worthwhile. In addition, another Pakistani teacher, Safiyyah, claimed that it was a good thing because several members of her family were professionals and teaching was normal and ‘it is a good vocation to have.’ Furthermore, ‘Anas observed, ‘I think the community respect teachers in the sense that they understand that they’re giving a service and that their role in society is important because they understand that without education their children will struggle.’

In contrast to these positive perceptions, it seems that in some ethnic minority communities, the status of teaching is different (Singh, 1988; Ghuman, 1995; Osler, 1997; Ross, 2001). Fatimah, another female Pakistani, shared the following insight which supports these findings:

Well in my community they really think people make a mistake going into teaching. It is underpaid, lots of work, very little respect, longer hours to work, no social life, all the time miserable and basically these are the reasons I have been given by my family.

Understanding the meaning of ‘Muslim teachers’

The question: what do you understand by a Muslim teacher, appeared to be obscured for Khadijah. She felt it was ‘up to individuals because at the end of the day they are all just labels, they are more about how much of an emphasis an individual puts on their personality.’ It seems she is suggesting that for the general public these may be labels but for the individual their Muslimness depends upon the extent to which an individual develops their personality in relation to the teachings of Islam. Nevertheless, about eight teachers responded to this question. Overall, it was not simple to capture a single conception of what they understood by a Muslim teacher. Their responses give the impression that the meaning attached to being a Muslim teacher focuses on three levels: philosophical, literal and functional.

One of the teachers spoke about the distinction between Muslim teachers in state schools and Muslim teachers in *madāris*. Whilst both are considered as teachers, perhaps, their training and their function has contributed to the creation of such a distinction. Therefore, it appears that the dichotomy in understanding what a Muslim teacher is continued along religious and secular lines.

A few interpreted the question literally. Generally, they understood a Muslim teacher to be someone who practised Islam and kept the faith as this is what being a Muslim meant i.e., submission to God. `Anas said a:

Muslim teacher at the moment is, I suppose what would be understood as, anybody who professes to be a Muslim and has a Muslim name or unfortunately still, if you are not White, you are considered ‘perhaps they’re Muslim’. But there are Muslims who are White, who are of all various races. What I would see as a Muslim teacher is someone who is comfortable with their faith and can use it to the betterment of their pupils.

At a functional level, a Muslim teacher was understood in the light of the role he/she

played both in school and in the community. Hence, a Muslim teacher was someone who had ‘the religious values,’ and ‘who uses those values to develop the children as individuals’ and ‘who practises those values and who could integrate into society successfully.’ Therefore, in such cases, it seems, Muslim teachers were expected to use their beliefs, their understanding of their religion, their ideologies which they have learnt from their religion to play a crucial role in presenting good role models for all children, but Muslim children in particular, within schools. In addition, according to Jabir, a Muslim teacher is one who conforms to the legal requirements and always teaches ‘the right stuff about life, about religion, about culture, about tradition.’

Generally, most of these Muslim teachers are unreserved about the faith dimension of their identity and would be happy to talk about it in school, especially if colleagues were interested. Some years back perhaps such curiosity was interpreted by Muslim teachers as a genuine search for knowledge and understanding. However, in recent years, it seems a shift has occurred in their thinking. Fatimah talked about how questions directed to her about who she is have created a degree of uneasiness for her. Her self-understanding and image have altered in relation to the perception held by colleagues in school. She experienced an unmistakable shift in how she saw herself after the bombings in London. Fatimah stated:

Nowadays when they ask, ‘Are you a Muslim teacher?’ the incidents that have happened always comes in front of my eyes and I just feel they are probably trying to relate me to one of those bombers.

Previously, on the other hand, whilst such incidents may have been irksome on a personal level, she now feels she is engaged with something more fulfilling due to her religion. Rakhit (1999), Osler (1997; 2003) and Benn (2003) identified challenges faced by Black and Asian women. The dynamics of gender and religion were significant for Fatimah in challenging stereotypes. She stated:

before I used to feel proud that I am, you know, a Muslim woman teacher because they always looked upon women as if they should be staying at home doing nothing and I am outside and I am kind of presenting Muslim women in a positive way. We can come out. We can teach. We can do things and it is not forbidden.

Therefore, from the responses of these Muslim teachers it appears that the meaning they attach to what it means to be a Muslim teacher is more complex than would first appear. Their interpretation is context driven and is bound within time-place constraints. There is a sense of understanding a Muslim teacher first of all in terms of being a teacher. Whilst faith is significant, it is a factor that informs their role and the values held by them. This sense was captured in the words of Juwayriyah who stated, 'A Muslim teacher is a teacher like everybody else only with a different religion.'

Summary

The above part has considered the meanings attached by these respondents to their faith and the influence it has upon their teaching and life. This research has provided some respondents with an opportunity to consider matters of faith and its relationship to their work for the first time. Therefore, participating in this study has been a reflective exercise and has probed their thinking about the role of their faith and the impact that it has on their practice.

In view of the esteem with which Muhammad is regarded by Muslims and the fact that, as a prophet, one of the roles ascribed to him was that of a teacher, it was queried from the participants of this study, who they considered to be their ideal teacher. Unsurprisingly, a lack of uniformity in their opinions was uncovered. A range of ideal teachers were identified by them. They acknowledged the role of Muhammad in promoting education and as an example for adopting his characteristics in their professional and personal life. The majority of these teachers, it seemed had modest familiarity with the specific literature, ideas and contents that exist in the field of education during both the early and classical periods. This appears to be a peculiar situation. Contemporary professional Muslim teachers appear innocent of their rich heritage concerning education.

Overall, their conception of a Muslim teacher is tied primarily to that of being a teacher first and foremost. Therefore, it could be suggested, cautiously, that, generally, for these Muslim teachers in the educational settings of Britain, whilst the centrality of faith is significant in their lives, there does not appear to be a necessary transference of being a Muslim and having a faith position into being a teacher.

Hence, it would appear that they are first concerned with teaching. Although their value system is informed by Islam, they maintain their own integrity and that of the children they teach by a clear demarcation between nurture and education.

None of these teachers reported that it was impossible for them to keep their faith and to fulfil the demands of the duties as professional teachers. Neither have they reported that they have been placed in uncompromising situations. The more conscientious teachers among them have been able to negotiate the system through the flexibility provided by their faith. This flexibility needs to be understood by school leaders especially in situations where a teacher's personal conscience is at variance with the requirements of the school.

Having considered the self understanding of teacher-faith identity of these Muslim teachers the next chapter exposes the views of these Birmingham teachers in relation to an essential aspect within Islam: the role of spirituality in their life as Muslim teachers.

PART 3: SPIRITUALITY IN THE LIFE OF MUSLIM TEACHERS

Introduction

One of the main areas of interest pursued through the life histories of Muslim teachers in this research is their views and understanding about spirituality. The teachings of Islam provide an integrated concept of life. The duality between materialism and spirituality and their respective extreme forms have no place (Nadwi, 1987). The teachings of Islam provide a system which inculcates a spiritual personality which functions practically in this world (Ramadan, 2004). The theme of spirituality was chosen to explore whether or not these Muslim teachers were concerned about their spirituality and what they did to develop it. Such an exploration would give hints about their world view and the nature of their personality. The uncovering of their perceptions and experiences related to their spiritual life was relevant for two main reasons: Islam places considerable emphasis on the relationship that individuals develop with their Creator. Hence questioning about this dimension of Islam within

their lives provides glimpses into the role and impact that the teachings of Islam have upon their lives. In addition, at the time of the interviews, all of these teachers were employed in secular institutions which are located in a plural society. Therefore, it would be informative to discover how these Muslim professionals respond to and cope with the demands of their work place, and with the social and moral challenges that they face in a multi-faith and multicultural community.

Muhammad embodied the spiritual relationship that a Muslim should have with God and he showed his followers the methods of developing spirituality both collectively and individually. The multidimensional role that he played for his immediate community was acknowledged previously (Jawad, 1990). Nasr (1987:41-58) has described some of the universal outstanding figures in Islam, contending that whilst they were masters in their respective fields they were, above all, sages. Hence, spirituality was an essential feature in the lives of most of them. Muslim teachers in Birmingham, interviewed for this research have apparently maintained the tradition of being observant about their spirituality. The aim of this part is to analyse and depict the extent to which this major aspect of being a Muslim is reflected in their life.

This part is organised into three broad sections. The first section focuses on their conception of God, what beliefs guide their lives and what they consider to be the purpose of existence. This is then linked with their understanding of spirituality, the role it plays in their life and their subjective experiences. The third section reveals what has given them the greatest joy in life, and how they conceive and respond to suffering, and the extent to which they find themselves at peace with themselves.

Conception of God

The spiritual and intellectual implications of the Oneness of God (*Tawhid*) are derived from the Qur'ān. Belief in one God is the basis of Islam. The spiritual journey covers three main areas: faith in God based on understanding the purpose of existence and the relationships that people have with God and creation; the second area is the fulfilment of practices called the five pillars of Islam, and according to Al Zeera (2001:122) the purification of the soul and heart underlies all such religious rites;

finally, to try and attain, progressively, higher levels of spiritual consciousness through an inner struggle against the soul (*nafs*), sometimes referred to as *tazkiyah*.

Mu‘adh considered declaring the creed of Islam as the fundamental expression of faith which assigns a person to be accountable before God and to develop a personal relationship with God. Safiyyah, a female of Pakistani background conceived God as Forgiving. Here she is anchoring herself on an essential attributive name of God which appears numerous in the Qur’ān and is often repeated by Muslims to reach God. She, laughingly, declared that God was ‘more like a friend’. In other words, she was endorsing one of the attributes of God, which according to Nadwi (1988:3) governs the relationship between the two. In addition, Ummu Salamah sees God as the Creator and it is to Him that she turns, and it is to Him that she believes she will appear one day. Although ‘Aishah found it hard to talk about God as it was a personal matter, nevertheless she saw God as a Guide.

In terms of the ritualistic aspects, the five pillars of Islam are recognised as contributors to socio-economic, moral and political development of the Muslim community and are crucial for spiritual upliftment. Muslim spirituality touches all dimensions of life, and goes ‘beyond the framework of ritual religious practice or rare moments of contemplation’ (Ramadan, 2004:122). Therefore, apparently, Khadijah looked beyond the accomplishment of rituals and meditation. She regarded the manner of integration and interaction with people as part of her principles, derived from Islam, that guide her life. She explained that one of ‘the biggest things about Islam is how we interact with people because that’s how we grow as, you know, as an *Ummah* and that is how we influence other people as well.’ Practically, this implies fulfilling social obligations and according to Safiyyah, ‘being of good character and doing Islamically what we have been brought up to be, I guess.’ Therefore, the key guiding belief for such attitudes would revolve around attainment of a pure heart and being good.

Purpose of life

Whilst providing everyday guidance, Islamic spirituality vitally addresses ultimate questions, which have profound significance for humankind, such as: Who am I?

Where do I come from? Where will I be going when I die? What is the purpose of living? (Alavi, 1988:11-15; Wan Daud, 1989:15-26). Hence it is pertinent to reflect on the extent to which these feature among these teachers.

Sarwar (1996:9) maintains that human beings were created to obey God. The purpose of life for these teachers appears as three interconnected components: manifesting their faith and belief, fulfilling social responsibilities and eschatological preparation. According to Nadwi, (1987:82) life is not a fleeting opportunity for material satisfaction and sensual delight: it is a Divine gift to attain nearness to God, to attain perfection by maximum usage of the body and soul. Thus, Zaynab believes that the purpose of life for her is 'to serve God'. In turn this implies creating a positive impact on people by living according to one's beliefs, and ensuring that everybody is dealt with in a constructive way. This to Jabir means treating others fairly, treading the right path and worshipping. In other words, for him worship encompasses all activities from the moment he wakes up to the moment he falls asleep. Significantly, 'Anas points out that, 'It is not just about prayer, it's about how I live my life, the actions that I do, the morals, manners and everything else.'

Khadijah, a Bengali female thought that '...everything is a challenge, everything is about making the right decisions, making the right choices and whether or not those right choices are going to land you in, you know, *Jannah*...'. This was echoed by a male teacher Mu'adh and Ummu Salamah, a female, who believe that the aim of life was 'to think about the life of the Hereafter, to think about what and where we are going to go and how we are going to go there.'

A related question was about finding out the highest ideal that these teachers could strive for. It was interesting to discover that their conception was diverse and reflected theological, professional and humanistic tendencies. For instance, for one teacher following the Qur'ān was her highest ideal whereas for Fatimah it was aiming 'to be a head teacher', and 'to be good to people and be remembered'. On the other hand, there was a view that 'the human values are to respect each other, to love each other, and try to help each other to create harmony in the environment and in the community', these were the highest ideals.

Spiritual guides

Muslim teachers are expected to be persons deeply committed to Islam both outwardly and inwardly (Husain and Ashraf, 1979:107). It was noted previously that the tradition of spiritual mentors has continued among the Muslim community in the UK. The role of spiritual mentors (*shaykh*) has been dealt by several authors (Hanifi, 1964:151; Stanton, 1990; Nasr 1993:66-69; Ernst, 2004:174,182). None of the interviewees explicitly stated that they had a spiritual guide whose guidance they followed. However, some did indicate that they have had a personal inner consciousness of a guide within them. Khadijah conceived a guide as 'the existence of a continuous conscious realisation that God is All-Knowing and therefore guidance should be sought through Him'. For Fatimah, it was that which helps her to make 'the right decisions', and for others it was the 'inner strength linked to God or provided by God'.

With the strict monotheism propounded by Islam and the relatively clear code of life, it was intriguing, within the context of contemporary Islam, to hear the attitude of these teachers in relation to what values they would not compromise. `Anas was adamant that he would not compromise on something that he firmly believed in, no matter what hindrance he may come across, probably indicating thereby, the mind-set of Islam in relation to *Tawhid*. Similarly, Mu'adh stated that he would definitely not compromise on the importance of his religion because of its significance. However, for others the question was not simply a matter of belief and religion, it seemed to be more complex than that, as it extended to their responses to particular behaviours when choosing between people and rules. Hence, honesty, self-sacrifice and treating others with respect, were values not to be compromised. However, on a practical level, there was a specific example related to a regulation (Al-Qur'ān, 2:219) which was challenging. Safiyyah would not compromise on any of the Islamic values especially on the fundamentals such as drinking alcohol and gambling. She cited an incident from her school where she once faced participating in a staff lottery. She opted out and was pleased that her headteacher, who was a Christian, did not participate as well. She found strength in the fact there was somebody who stood up for similar values. It was more significant for her as it came from a headteacher, although she would have opted out even without her. In other words she was resisting

the temptation to fulfil her materialistic desires which moved her along the path of purification (Al Zeera, 2001:66).

So far it has become evident that having a firm faith in God, fulfilling the guidance for living with the primary aim of pleasing God and recognising the purpose of life pave the way for achieving spiritual development. The next section seeks to present what these teachers understand by spirituality, its role and their experiences of it.

Spirituality

The terminology, origins, understanding and definition of spirituality are varied and contested (Hanifi, 1964:147; Nadvi, 1992; Ernst, 2004:164-168), and for some it is a notoriously difficult term to define (Wright, 2000:7). Spirituality aims at attaining the pleasure of God through purifying oneself from all that is displeasing to God. It is integral to Islam and has two dimensions: esoteric and exoteric. These are linked and complement each other as mentioned earlier (p. 11-12). Khadijah acknowledged that the subject matter of spirituality was complex and that it was 'a big question'. Nevertheless, all participants, even though for some it occurred towards the end of the conversation, talked openly and enthusiastically about their spirituality, and shared some of their personal and private moments.

Safiyah recognised spirituality as basically the faith of an individual, and this faith did not have to be in a God since one could be a spiritual person by thinking and being conscious all the time. Without a spiritual dimension, Hafsa claimed that things could be very stressful. Therefore, according to Jabir spirituality helps a person to remain calm, relaxed and to be more peaceful. Unsurprisingly, therefore, whilst the need for exploring spirituality was considered very important for all human beings because it separated them from everything else, defining it was rather problematic and varied. At least four distinct conceptions of spirituality were evident from this group of Muslim teachers.

Spirituality was related entirely to Islam. In other words Islam was about spirituality. The call to prayer (*adhān*) is richly, melodiously and eloquently imbued with the spirit and high ideals of Islam (Nadwi, 1988:43). Khadijah was in the Gambia on an

exchange programme with a few non-Muslim colleagues from Birmingham. Upon hearing the *adhān* one morning, she woke up to it feeling ecstatic, in a place where she was totally out of her comfort zone. She described this incident in the following words:

It was just one of the most beautiful experiences. It really gave me strength, you know. They actually found that as a group. One of the people said to me, “when you mentioned that, that was a real, like a light bulb moment for me but, but I’d learnt so much from you saying that”. So you know its, its going of on a tangent a little bit. But you know things like that, I think its little things that happen in your life that involves spirituality but there’s also...

In understanding spirituality a second perspective emphasised the inner dimension of individuals. It is something that one has a belief in, something that is within oneself, within one’s control and how one perceives other people and the way one calls to God in different ways at different times. All of these areas were considered part of spirituality. Juwayriyah had the following to reveal:

Yes I am a very spiritual person I strongly believe in Allah and without Allah’s help I wouldn’t have achieved what I have achieved. He has always been there for me. I always ask for His help and I always thank Him and I always ask for His guidance. I go to bed sometimes confused and I say, ‘Please Allah, whatever you want me to do, just make my mind clear for me in the morning.’ I wake up in the morning and I know what I’m going to do and I know that it is Him guiding. But then I know I haven’t been a good person. Well I have been a good person but I am not covered, that’s the only thing I’m not doing. He knows I’m a good person. He knows I am there doing a good job of raising my children and teaching children in school teaching in the morning things [i.e., collective worship]. I have learnt a lot along the years. Yes I rely on Him a lot and I ask for His help and for His guidance and without His help I wouldn’t have achieved any of that.

Finally, spirituality is an inner driving force probably because it creates an awareness of God at all times and of one’s mortality. Therefore, spirituality can be about the soul and the purity of the heart as stated earlier. Safiyyah believed that her family was very spiritual, since, according to her, they were ‘like Sufism’ and had ‘that kind of connection’ because they were involved in ‘a lot of spiritual stuff.’ She went on to explain, with some uncertainty, that ‘in Pakistan there are some shrines and stuff like in Lahore and everywhere. I know my family that are there, because they go to lots of

stuff like *langar* and stuff and like the shrines and stuff.’ This is a clear reflection of the populist Sufi traditions manifest in the UK.

Whatever the perspective and form of spirituality understood and practised by these teachers, spirituality is an ongoing learning experience, and it operates at different levels. The highest level has been considered the annihilation of the self (Markham, 1999:146). It is, for some Muslims, a continuous process culminating in death and union with God.

Role of spirituality

Spirituality plays a very important role both during difficult and happy times. It provides a time for reflecting on the manner of outward behaviours and for seeking guidance in everything that is carried out. It also helps to ponder over one’s action and make plans for the future.

The consciousness of one’s spirituality offers a mechanism for resistance as well. Jabir is affected in a major way when choosing his actions in life. Similarly this is demonstrated in the account of Safiyyah. She said, ‘... like when we go out, [with fellow teachers] on a Friday and like, people are giving you, like, alcohol and stuff and they’re like ‘only a little sip, sip’. And it’s like you know, ‘I’m a Muslim. Don’t give me that’. Because I know some people probably would, and it’s like ‘It’s only a sip, and nobody’s watching’. But you know, obviously God is.’ Such actions are considered passive worship due to abstaining from prohibitions. Also, it seems to be the concrete dimension of spiritual teaching that requires the establishment of a constant link between the demands of conscience and life choices (Ramadan, 2004:125).

It is also linked with the emotional state of individuals. When some people experience downward moments, active worship, especially prayers, lifts them into optimism. The reading of the Qur’ān helps Fatimah because she has moments when she feels there is no hope in the world. The process, for her, it seems, is to place trust and faith in God and believe that ‘whatever happens, happens for a reason whether it is in the family or outside. And if it is something that is being petitioned for

repeatedly, and it is not happening, then, it is not happening for a reason.’ Therefore individuals try their best and leave the rest to God, thereby exercising reliance (*tawakkul*). Such an approach gives comfort for those that do so and is indicative of the bond maintained through a personal relationship with God. Hence, formal prayers and litanies, throughout the day, enhance spirituality, as in the case of Hafsa who petitions at night which helps her to take account of the day so that she can be grateful and appreciative of everything, thereby manifesting gratitude (*shukr*).

Some Muslims see life as a trial. Juwayriyah considered being in this world as if she was a student ordered to accomplish tests. The mission, according to her, was to pass God’s test of patience and endurance in suffering. She maintained that people need to understand that suffering is part of the exercise and of the teachings of Islam. Therefore, when good things happen one should be grateful and offer thanks to God. On the other hand, if bad things happen one should continue to offer thanks to God: otherwise one would not have fully understood and valued good things. To support this view, she quoted a verse from the Qur’ān in Arabic which reads, ‘But you may dislike something which is good for you, and you may like something which is bad for you. God knows while you do not know’ (Al-Qur’ān, 2:216). Hence, to her, the response is to abstain from making judgements until the event has passed.

Spiritual experience

As with several other questions related to spirituality there was uncertainty regarding the precise meaning of spiritual experience. Khadijah found this question tricky. Hence, from the outset the interpretation of spiritual experience was left entirely to the respondents when they queried the question. However, when clarifications were sought, visions and intervention as exemplifications of spiritual experience were mentioned. In the realm of spirituality, metaphors are occasionally used to convey the meaning of the experience (Wan Daud, 1989:11; Al Zeera, 2001:122). It is significant, therefore, to appreciate the importance of the experience to those experiencing it. Four accounts demonstrate the diverse nature and interpretations of spiritual experiences.

Hafsah narrated what could be described as a form of intervention from God. There have been certain times when things have not gone well for her. She acknowledges that certain events happen for a reason. On one occasion, for her, it was as simple as leaving her son with her grandmother. Hafsah and her husband once had a very serious accident. Their son was not with them at that time and she felt that that was the reason why they were made to leave him at home. After the accident, she concluded:

And then even when we had the accident the car was really badly damaged. We were okay so I felt that, you know, *alhamdulillah* there is you know Allah, Allah is sort of, you know, I don't know something like that perhaps.

Mu'adh took the fulfilment of prayer as a sign of spiritual experience as depicted in the following account:

I've had lots of experiences where I have prayed to Allah (SWT). I've prayed to Him for different things and everything's just happened the way I've wanted it to happen. And if you, if that's how you define spiritual moment, then those are [some of the moments]. For example, in football tournaments, I've got all the kids to pray, to do *dua* before our game. And I've said to them, 'Pray from your heart, and say to Allah, "Please help us win this tournament"', and we've done that and we've won it. Whereas the times when we haven't had the time to pray, or where we haven't had time to get together, you know we haven't done so well, but I suppose that's a spiritual moment, and also everything that I've done in my life, before I did my exams before I did my degree. I went to mosque before I had my interview I read two extra erm... *rakats* of *namaaz*, all of those things that *inshallah* I've done and you know Allah has helped me, so if that's what you mean then it's been very instrumental.

Juwayriyah, talked about what seemed to be *tazkiyah*, the purification of the soul, as the crux of spirituality in the following account:

I do feel like when I am praying and when I am really really sad and down I do feel like He is cleansing me. I feel Him in myself. I have seen Him in my soul. I feel like He is. I cry. He is there to guide me. I feel His presence. But I've never had a vision. I did go to sleep and I will ask for His help and in the morning I have a clear path and I know what I'm doing.

Zaynab shared insights of her experience with the scripture. She reported:

...I can't really say I just think that when you read the Qur'ān you do. I never leave the house until I read *namaaz* and I read err Qur'ān. I read, you know, I don't leave the house without reading my *tasbih* as well, there are times in the day when I will sometimes read it.

Khadijah, who felt ecstatic upon hearing the call to prayer in the dark and early hours of the morning in the Gambia, talked about her experience during formal prayers:

I think when you pray I think that's a highly spiritual experience, you do feel, you know, closer to Allah and it's something that, you know, is a must. I think, you know, there are lots of routines that fall into faith and spirituality, there are moments where you do feel, you know very, very close to, you know, Allah, and there are times where perhaps you... you are busy you, you're involved in, you know, life so you don't necessarily think about it...

Essentially, these accounts show that for some Muslims, spiritual experience is about the personal relationship that one has with God which is manifested in a range of ways and resulting, not always, in a sense of heightened spirituality. For example, Ummu Salamah did not have the words to explain how she felt when she first stood in front of the Ka'bah. As a born Muslim, Sawdah took many things for granted. However, she realised what Islam was all about during '*Umrah*' when she found the 'final piece of the jigsaw'. These would also include moments of joy, the meaning they attach to suffering and the state of the heart in relation to the extent to which it feels at peace. These three elements are considered next.

Joy

The single experience that had given these interviewees the greatest joy was explored to elicit internal and external contributors to the feelings of spirituality. Professional, communal and theological incentives were shared. For Fatimah, achieving her current job after eight long years was 'the greatest joy', and for Khadijah gaining her Masters degree was equally a joyous occasion. Five teachers talked about the joy of having a family, marriage, and the birth of a son. On the other hand, for 'Anas, in addition to the day his son was born, the greatest joy came at a distant place. He recalled, 'The day of '*Arafat*', which is the most significant day of Hajj, where you

actually stand and you make prayer to God to just ask for your forgiveness, to ask for God's forgiveness and those two days still stick out'. Jabir feels joyful and happy in prayer and Mu'adh stated 'I think being a Muslim has given me the greatest joy.'

Suffering

Suffering was explained in various ways. It was considered to be a philosophical question, and hence suffering, 'was needed, to know what happiness was. It is like, erm, you wouldn't know what good was... if there was no bad. It is like those two things that come together'. In addition, suffering was considered to have a utilitarian purpose, i.e., to induce altruism and compassion since some people are self-centred and inconsiderate to others. Hence, Zaynab reflected and said, 'it is a sad case of human neglect and probably it is also there to make us invoke in us passion to help others, you can't all be the same, we can't have all the same things.'

There was a collective dimension in suffering where there was a lesson for all to learn from and to realise that people do not dwell on their own miseries. Khadijah, having been exposed to life in the Gambia, was particularly sensitive about this. According to her, 'at the end of the day there is always someone else who has got something worse off than you, seeing that, we should be grateful to, for what we actually do have, you know, I think suffering is a part of life and we have to accept that and we don't, you know.' Hence 'Anas, Ummu Salamah and Jabir consider suffering to be a test of endurance, responsiveness and patience.

Two teachers, perhaps, being introspective of the condition of some Muslims, thought that there was suffering 'because Muslims are turning away from their religion and there are sort of not really practising Islam', said Fatimah. Similarly Mu'adh stated:

...we are not following life as it should be. There's lots of wrong things that we've done. People are not following the guidelines. The guidelines of a Muslim, how they should be living their lives, there's no tolerance, there's no patience, there's greed, there's, in this world at this time there are people who just want money. The only thing that they want is money, and it doesn't really matter how they go about doing it. They'll do it because at the end of the day, all they want is money, and that's greed.

Peace

All thirteen teachers except one, who is returning to God as “it is the only thing [she] can do”, felt at peace with themselves. According to Al Zeera (2001:121-122) the serenity of acknowledging the sacred inside us creates inner and outer peace which helps to keep one’s life in order. This state of peace was attributed by some teachers to their feelings of happiness and to those around them who make them feel valued. Khadijah considered it to be a longer process because people experience ‘peace at various points in life but being a very self critical person it is a continuous battle and it has been for a long time.’ On the other hand, Mu‘adh feels at peace through his:

...religion, through praying, through thinking about things I have done wrong in my life. Everybody makes mistakes. Everybody does some things that are wrong, but the most important is that you learn from your mistakes. Ever since I have started to read my prayers on a daily basis, and not missing any of them, that has helped me, that has guided me and every time I do *dua* I ask Allah (SWT) for help and for guidance and for patience, and that helps me more than anything else.

Whilst some people may have such experiences regularly, for Safiyyah her serious devotion appears to be seasonal. She considered doing something bad to be the antithesis of peace. She, therefore, takes advantage of special times during the year to compensate for her shortcomings. Hence Ramadhan becomes rather special, ‘...I mean, when I’m fasting - during fasting I’m really good, but not normally. During fasting I read the Qur’ān and I try and do five prayers...’

Summary

In the demanding and challenging life world of teaching it is fascinating to note the diverse ways in which some of these Muslim teachers have quenched their spiritual thirst. Both males and females have shared moments and incidents that they considered to be important spiritual experiences.

Although their individual practices could not be explored in more detail, what has been revealed seems to be grounded in the traditions of Islam. Some of them, it appears, take the more traditional understanding as reflected in doctrines and practices

of Islam. A few, as is evident, reveal the signs of their approach being underpinned by the formalities of Sufi traditions. It is noteworthy that none of the interviewees mentioned the mosque in the context of spirituality, neither were mystical experiences stated.

Surprisingly, teaching as a service to humankind and an imitation of the act of God has not featured. Teaching, when conducted to seek the pleasure of God, provides avenues of spiritual growth as discussed in the previous chapters and as is evident in Appendix 3. Nevertheless, this section has demonstrated some features of spirituality among contemporary Muslim teachers in Birmingham which has some resonance with that of the early Muslims during the Prophet's era and the classical period.

Before concluding this chapter, in the context of increasing educational empirical work related to Muslims, it is useful to draw attention to some pointers for conducting research among Muslims.

PART 4: RESEARCHING MUSLIMS

The collection of data is not as simple as asking questions orally or in written form. There are factors that affect the researcher, the researched, the research process and the outcomes. The notion of having a match between the researcher and the researched has been recognised as an important factor which enhances or hinders the quality of the data resulting from a research (Archer, 2003). The need to match covers gender, class, language, race and religion. Such matches may be necessary in some research contexts for access and developing trust and therefore need to be recognised where necessary. However, research related to Muslims needs to take into consideration some other factors too, although these factors were apparently not significant for the research process discussed above. The researcher did not query the ethnic, caste, racial and linguistic backgrounds of these teachers and did not attempt to match these to the researcher's background as the researcher was particularly interested in their religious affiliation. It was their identification with Islam which was the criterion for interviewees' eligibility. This position raises the question about the role of matching, between the research and the researched, on the basis of religion

for research purposes. The various interpretations, levels of commitment and application of the teachings of Islam by Muslims are necessary for understanding the role of religion in their life and these are subjective. It is important to know whether respondents are nominal or committed Muslims. Equally significant is the tradition that a person belongs to, within the wide spectrum represented in the UK, which were referred to in an earlier chapter. Knowing these factors allows a researcher to understand the tradition that is informing some of the views of the respondents. In turn, this prepares a researcher to avoid areas which are controversial and either take a neutral stance from the start or be in a stronger position to handle potential differences of opinion. Knowing areas of commonality is useful as it can be the basis of discussing contemporary issues that these teachers are concerned with.

Texts on research methodology provide various suggestions on how to enhance the effectiveness of a research and make it more creditable. Some of these considerations have been applied and analysed above. However, most of these practical and technical constructs and concepts are usually based on a cultural understanding that is grounded within European or American experiences. Some of these issues can be common to all research participants but some might not be. Therefore a research design that has been informed solely by such constructs and concepts might not be a best fit approach for other communities. Conducting research among Muslims requires some awareness of the codes that guide their behaviours. Before identifying these it is important to recognise that these should not be generalised to all Muslims as the extent to which each Muslim applies these codes will vary.

For instance, Ummu Salamah had clearly stated that had she not known the researcher she would have preferred an alternative venue. This directs researchers to consider conducting interviews in public places where onlookers can easily conclude what the purpose of the meeting could likely be. Whilst a professional Muslim woman brought up in the UK may be comfortable to venture into public space it might not be the case for all such Muslim women. Hence one should also consider offering all participants the option of bringing along someone from within their family. Such a strategy should equally be considered by a researcher by asking the participants if it was acceptable for the researcher to be accompanied by someone. In all cases, the third person would not be privy to the interview and its contents by ensuring that they were

not sitting within listening distance from where the interview was taking place but remain in its vicinity to afford both parties the space to meet their requirements of modesty and gender interaction distance where applicable. In some cultures even female interviewers may need permission from close family males to interview females (Patton, 1990). Where the subject of the research is Islam and Muslims generally, then, perhaps the third party may stay and in fact be allowed to contribute as the third person is a Muslim as long as the criteria for the research are not compromised. However, where the subject under study is personal in nature, as in this research, it might be better to rearrange the interview so that the respondent is not placed in a compromising situation and respondents views are not influenced by the presence of a third party. Questions related to the presence of third parties should be clarified at the invitation stage and interviewees should be asked what would be their preferred method of distancing the influence of a third party.

The second experience was linked to anonymity which is not exclusive to Muslims. Whilst the contents would not be disclosed or shared by the researcher, some participants would know from each other that they had participated in a particular piece of research. In this research three participants worked in the same school. A researcher may take all possible steps to ensure confidentiality and anonymity but there would be no guarantee that the information, both about their life and about their participation in this research, is totally unknown by their fellow teachers. Teachers are social beings and they will and do share their lives with their colleagues and friends. However a Muslim researcher should adhere to a principle to guide the research process which is the statement of the Messenger, *conversations are a trust* (Al-Sijistānī, 1984). Hence what transpired specifically during the interview should not be divulged by both parties.

A further consideration is that of time. It is important to recognise that some Muslims may be offering prayers during the time that coincides with the times used by many researchers to conduct interviews. Friday is a special day which for some involves them in various religious activities. Ramadhan is the month of fasting. It may be recommended for researchers to avoid these times if appropriate. However, one interview for this research was conducted on a Sunday in Ramadhan. When the researcher drew attention to this, the teacher invited the researcher to break the fast

together and asked the researcher to lead the prayer at the interviewees' house thereafter. On another occasion during an interview at the researchers' house a teacher was given the option of praying at home or going to the mosque. He agreed to pray at the mosque. After prayer the interview resumed and finally hospitality was extended. These incidents point to the need for both parties to be flexible. It also means that researchers should bear in mind these times when they plan their fieldwork. It may be useful for researchers who are not Muslims to accompany, where appropriate, their respondents, to the mosque since such experiences, depending on the nature and subject of the research, could provide additional insights about the Muslim community.

Some Muslim women choose to wear the *niqāb* (face veil), others wear a head scarf (*hijāb*) and others will wear neither of these. In addition, the remaining dress may well depend on religious and cultural preferences. Researchers need to take account of this diverse practice and should not assume that the absence of a *hijāb* or *niqāb* means that the person concerned will not adhere to the etiquettes for gender interaction encouraged by religious or cultural norms. Hand shakes, hugging and pecking require careful monitoring. Greetings, such as *al-salāmu 'alaykum* (peace be with you), may be helpful as part of the trust and familiarity building process, others may prefer conventional greetings. Conversations around the marital status, age and children for both parties need to be approached sensitively.

Conclusion

This chapter began with an exposition of the common and distinctive features of thirteen Muslim teachers in Birmingham and ended with some pointers for researching Muslims. These narratives cannot be representative of a diverse faith community. Nevertheless based on the discussions and findings from the literature review about EMT in Britain it was established that Muslim teachers are not living in a vacuum. Muslim teachers are and have been studied within the broader parameters of race and gender and because they are part of that political and social fabric they do not exist separately and in isolation. Hence their experiences may have some similarity with the experiences depicted in earlier studies.

In sharing her life history Ummu Salamah revealed a strong sense of her Muslim identity. In making this declaration she transcended linguistic, geographical and class distinctions. She takes considerable pride in her job and the numerous activities that she offers reflect a desire to assist others and she is proud of her accomplishments as a professional although she has not risen to the higher positions in school. Through this it would appear that she was establishing her professionalism among her peers and learners and her personal identity at the same time. The issues of racism and discrimination are almost absent in her account. She is, however, fully committed to the principle of equality, justice and to raise the achievement of all children. The most significant theme to emerge from her life, it seems, is her heightened sense of independence.

Following the entire life history of Ummu Salamah four additional narratives were presented reflecting a range of experiences and characteristics. Sawdah was born and grew up in Malawi where race and class were prominent features in her social and educational life. She had many Black and White friends and felt at a distance from her Asian peers. ‘Aishah was born in Birmingham in the late 1960s and described her childhood days within a plural society. She creates a positive image of her neighbourhood although racism featured in Birmingham in the 1970s. When both of these teachers were established in their careers they revealed a distinct approach to the issues that seemed dear to their hearts. Sawdah perceived the lack of responsiveness within her school to provide effective facilities and activities for Muslim children in a multi-faith and multi-cultural school. She led the way to fulfil this need by investing her break and lunch times. She explained this in terms of her colleagues feeling sensitive about delivering appropriate activities. At the same time she also reflected on her own experiences of attending a Seventh Day Adventist school where she had limited choice but to participate in all activities. Here in Birmingham there was choice and she felt she should respond and exercise that choice and support the children, the school and the community. On the other hand a prominent impression gathered from ‘Aishah’s narrative is her considerable emphasis on the need to support ethnic minority children and in raising the achievement of all children. Again it seems that this has been informed in some way by her early experiences as she referred to an incident about her own reading. Therefore, Sawdah, it appears has seen unfairness through the perspective of faith and ‘Aishah has seen it in terms of class

and/or race. This is significant as it points to the complexity of the interconnectedness of race and faith and that it is not always a straightforward matter when determining teacher identity and philosophy. Indeed the struggles of Sawdah to attend school and university add a gendered layer to this matrix of understanding the life and career of teachers.

The other two teachers whose life histories were selected were Juwayriyah and Mu'adh. Juwayriyah was born in a North African country. Her life history illustrates the significance of continuing the provisions of alternative routes into teaching. She recalled that when she applied for the course there were 120 applicants with her which reflects the nature of the demand at the time. After evaluating several courses specifically initiated for recruiting EMT, Arora (2005:120) concluded that such courses can be successful especially when institutions are more flexible and imaginative. Juwayriyah experienced racism as a classroom assistant and was also aware of Asian teachers suffering discrimination. This demonstrates the need to monitor and continually address racial and all other forms of discrimination. Like many others, the life history of Mu'adh provides a useful model of success in schools. He arrived from Bangladesh and attended a primary school for a relatively short period before joining a secondary school. His is a positive story and is significant as it illustrates a Muslim teacher who is comfortable with his identity which he sees as multiple. In his narrative he shared incidents about the expectations placed on him due to his professional and personal identity. His linguistic and ethnic heritage played a role with parents and cultural activities. His gender became significant to the school in delivering certain aspects of the curriculum and on certain occasions his faith was crucial to the staff and the school.

Following these life histories three themes were analysed. The literature surveyed on EMT showed that one of the factors contributing to the image and perceptions of the teaching profession was the experiences of teachers and students of schooling. Overall, the historical experience of this group has provided a positive image of schooling and of teaching as a career. Their individual encounters differ but they are not filled with severe discrimination and hostility. This does not rule out the fact that these exist. These positive experiences should enhance the suitability of the profession for future Muslims. Some of these Muslims have their own ideas

regarding recruitment and increasing the representation of Black and Asian and Muslim teachers in the teaching profession. None has emphasised the significance of academic excellence at GCSE and A-level. Some of them have advocated community-based initiatives to raise the profile of the teaching profession and foster further recruitment.

All these Muslim teachers declared faith to be important in relation to their work and personal life. However, they made clear distinctions about its role in these contexts. For many their faith was reflected in the professional and social roles that they fulfilled in school. However, they made a clear distinction when it came to teaching children and matters of faith. There are, in taking this position, perhaps, guided by their professional integrity. Not all of them see Muhammad as their ideal teacher in relation to their teacher identity. Some of them see ideal teachers in the light of their values system, their pedagogical excellence and for their personal inspiring characteristics.

In the exploration of spirituality in the lives of these teachers none of them made explicit mention of being tutored by a spiritual mentor to guide them along their spiritual path. They mentioned that spirituality played a significant role during challenging and happy times. Their individual practices provided them with opportunities to ponder over their relationship with fellow humans and the rest of creation. They also used these opportunities to petition for assistance and guidance in everyday matters. Hence these Muslim teachers, like some of their counterparts, rely on other means of support and coping mechanism in addition to those available within the confines of the schools.

Overall the experiences reported in this research have been positive. There have been some negative experiences, as in Juwayriyah and Fatimah's case. Such negativity has reaffirmed for them that their faith is and will be a factor which they will need to keep monitoring when socialising in school. It is significant to note that reference to negative experiences have been minimal, considering the fact that Muslims and Islam have been under considerable pressure and at the receiving end of criticisms from the media and other quarters for the past six years. It could therefore be cautiously

concluded that the narratives of these teachers suggest that they have apparently not struggled with Islamophobic attitudes and prejudice.

Each Muslim teacher's life history and experience is unique but there are some commonalities within them. The life histories of teachers from a faith perspective have been neglected and hence they have now become part of the history of teachers in Birmingham.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to collect and explore life histories of Muslim primary school teachers in Birmingham. These thirteen interviewees expressed the holistic viewpoint of the biographical perspective by talking about their early life within their families and in their cultural settings until the moment when the interview was completed when they were teachers and professionals. They talked about socio-political and educational issues and as Muslims their faith and spirituality added to this holistic dimension. The significant events were the historical moments they shared since it was these events that impressed them over time. In narrating their life history they informed the researcher about the opportunities and limitations available to them and their responses to them. In other words they have shared their personal interactions as teachers with the social structures in society. These interviews have shown how these Muslim teachers have negotiated their paths, personally and professionally, through changing societal structures. The life histories of this research represent a collection of the memories of Muslim teachers in various areas of their life and work. They show that respondents have provided personal views on a range of subjects which were systematically collected and since this study was ethically guided it makes these life histories historically important to them.

This final chapter consists of three elements: a critique of the methodology, the main conclusion from the study and recommendations.

Critique of the methodology

This research has established the recognition of life histories as valuable sources of information and highlighted the value of subjectivity in teachers' behaviour since each one of these life histories is unique and subjective. These thirteen life histories are not homogeneous. Within their narratives there are emotions, attitudes, behaviours and experiences with which other non-Muslim teachers may be able to relate and identify. These life histories may be of value to them as well. There are two other dimensions regarding the usefulness of these life histories. Other Muslim

professionals and laity can share their life histories by revealing their experiences in their respective areas of life, work and career which can contribute towards the collection of oral and narrative histories of Muslims in Birmingham. This research has also offered a model to researchers to study other professions and careers from a faith perspective. The value of life histories, as used here, also lies in its demonstration of the experience of schooling and teaching from a faith perspective and highlights its implications for intellectual, social and emotional development. From a Muslim point of view life history inquiries have provided opportunities for *muhasabah* (introspection) and thereby illuminate the soul (*ruh*) and awaken the inner self.

One of the major advantages of using the life history method is that it has provided the interviewer with an opportunity to probe various dimensions about a particular event that the interviewee has narrated. In so doing it has allowed the researcher to elicit from the participants areas which are significant for the research whilst at the same time it has prevented the researcher from driving the response exclusively towards a particular research agenda. In turn, this has enabled respondents to gain an opportunity to view a particular event of their life from a perspective which they may not have considered before. In so doing it has enriched and increased the layers of the meanings that they attached to episodes in their life. This research has established that there are internal and external factors which affect the telling of a story and as such there will be limitations in using such a method. Life histories are selections of memories and experiences.

These teachers had the choice to omit or alter the details from their life histories as they wished. In other words these interviewees had control over the contents of their life histories. In addition, the interviews were restricted because they were conducted for specific lengths of time and by how much the interviewer could ask.

The design contained only a single form of data collection instrument, i.e., semi-structured life history interview. Such a method is void of triangulation through which validity and reliability are enhanced further. Had these interviews been supplemented with classroom observations, then the researcher would have been able to observe them functioning as Muslim teachers in their respective settings. The

research design could also be enhanced by the inclusion of a survey across the city to achieve a larger sample to complete a questionnaire. From these returns a list of interviewees could then be drawn up for life history interviews. Nevertheless the data that has been found is 'thick' of context and richer than before and which has provided glimpses of the educational and social change taking place. The data have also offered the understanding of individuals from the perspective of the individuals and information about the opportunities, aspirations and turning points of these teachers. The narratives have provided data which is useful for generating ideas and have located the lives of these Muslim teachers in historical times.

The inclusion of both males and females is an additional strength of this study since Benn's (1998) study consisted of females only. In addition teachers who have entered the teaching profession through a variety of routes rather than the traditional route, have participated and shared some of the struggles and successes of these routes.

During the period of the research the city of Birmingham was experiencing tensions related to alleged terrorist arrests and a bomb scare. Being a Muslim perhaps assisted in gaining access to these teachers. It is difficult to be certain that this was the only influential factor. It is possible that being a lecturer and/or researcher may have assisted in gaining the confidence of some to participate and others may have agreed due to previous acquaintances.

The study was able to locate Muslims from a range of ethnic backgrounds although they were mainly from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds. It could be criticised for not including Black and White Muslims. In defence it is argued that the relatively high number of teachers from these two ethnic groups have reflected in the sample. In addition, both in schools and in the city these two ethnic groups have the highest representation proportionately. Furthermore it appears that there are very few Black and White Muslim teachers in the city. In other words although the sampling techniques used for this study were varied they did not provide the maximum advantage.

Another limitation which is evident from some of the responses given by these teachers is the intersection of religion, race and gender. Other than religion, this study

did not put gender and race at the forefront as such. The particular external identity markers for Muslim males and females were not significantly reflected in this sample. There was only one male who wore a beard but dressed in 'western' clothes. Among the females, there were only two who could be considered, based on the manner in which they had tied their *hijāb*, to be fully observant of the *hijāb*. Nevertheless, this reflects some of the comfort and the space that some Muslims have carved for themselves to 'fit' into the professional and social arena.

The sample has only yielded one headteacher. At the time of the field work there was another headteacher who, when approached by the researcher to participate, stated that his information was available on the BCC website and could be accessed from there. The researcher accessed this single page and did not consider it to be a life history and hence ignored it. The researcher did not approach the headteacher again because the initial response was taken as an indication of being preoccupied with school affairs shortly after being appointed. By the end of this study, as far as could be ascertained, there are currently at least six Muslim headteachers in the city. The generalisations from the findings of this research to headteachers and classroom assistants remain limited.

This study is also limited to the primary age phase of schooling and those working in the city of Birmingham and not beyond. Based on the findings from this sample it is difficult to assert whether some of these findings will apply to other Muslim primary teachers in other parts of the country or in the secondary school sector. The sample is also limited to teachers employed by BCC and as such it does not consist of Muslim teachers working in faith primary schools whether independent or voluntary aided.

The data were analysed in three ways. Possibly the strongest and more meaningful method was the thematic approach. The prosopographical method, which was discovered through the readings undertaken for the literature review, has been a valuable method as it has provided a model for creating a framework consisting of common questions to explore a research topic with a group of people. The weakest form of analysis seems to be the complete life history method. In response, it could be argued that the manner in which the researcher has presented the life history in this research has been problematic rather than the actual use of a complete life history as a

research tool in itself. The researcher placed the full life history as an appendix and provided a reflective commentary in the main text. Perhaps this detachment should not have been made. However, a balance has to be made in any research which has limitations placed upon it in terms of space.

The life history interview focussed on the experiences and perceptions held by teachers. These experiences and perceptions are limited and subjective but have provided insights into their lives as Muslim teachers. As stated above this may offer other teachers from other faith backgrounds a prism through which they could consider their work and lives as teachers.

The data from this research provides an insider's view of a culture and presents sources of hypotheses for further research. For instance based on the fact that all of these thirteen teachers work in inner city schools, a researcher could hypothesise: Muslim teachers prefer to work in inner city schools and investigate this further.

Main findings

The above section has provided a critique of the methodology applied in this research. The next section consists of its main findings. One of the purposes of this research was to explore the perceptions of Muslim teachers regarding the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority teachers in Britain generally, and Muslim teachers in particular.

There has been a concern about the participation and experiences of EMT for about thirty years. These Muslim teachers have similarly endorsed some of these concerns and experiences and have demonstrated the changes that have taken place. As the largest religious community after Christianity in Britain, they are equally in favour of increasing the number of Muslim teachers in state schools. In addition to being role models, some of them felt that their presence is a source of strength and builds the confidence of minority ethnic children, especially of Muslim children. They stress the need for the teaching profession to be more representative of ethnic minorities to reflect contemporary society. These teachers felt that their presence also helps children to aspire. Whilst the concept of role models is significant, nevertheless,

However, historically, joining and remaining in the teaching profession have not been easy for EMT for a variety of reasons, prominent among them being discrimination based on racism. The *Macpherson Report* (Macpherson, 1999) found institutional racism in England. Whilst personal accounts in this research reflect perceived racism and ridicule based on faith and its physical features, these respondents have not reported overt and severe racism as in previous studies. Juwayriyah reported an Asian Muslim being disliked not because of her faith but because of her race. An assistant head teacher admitted that some elements of racism will never change. Although she was aware of the system nevertheless she felt that racism is definite, and gender prejudice and stereotypes do exist, whilst society strides towards being multicultural. Nevertheless, overall their experiences have been mostly positive.

The underachievement of some children from Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritages and White working class boys featured in most interviews. Some of them referred to research studies to acknowledge this underachievement. They attributed the causes to a range of factors which are not dissimilar to those identified in published reports. The NC was also criticised for the role it may play in creating such a situation. In terms of the solutions to address this underachievement some of them suggested that boys need more coaching and career advice to channel them where they want to go. The strategies that schools have put into place are considered appropriate. In addition it has also been suggested that different groups of children ought to be taught differently. In other words different groups of children's needs need to be catered for accordingly. All these Muslims teachers are concerned with the success of all children and were committed to the principles of justice and equality.

The literature review on EMT in Britain showed that the theoretical underpinnings within most research in education are usually based on class, gender and race. This research argued that such an approach to studying teachers remains incomplete for demonstrating the experiences of teachers with a faith background. In the life of these

Muslim teachers there is unambiguous evidence which demonstrates that their understanding and experiences transcend class, race and gender configurations which demonstrates the complex nature of teacher identity. In the life of teachers the exclusive role and impact of only one identity upon their attitudes and behaviour is a misconception of the individual. Teachers, and people in general, have a hybrid identity and these various identities that they have may impact and affect each other. Hence failure to recognise the role of faith in the construction of teacher identities, and how it relates to other identities, limits one's understanding of individuals and of teachers. Consequently, one of the aims of this life history approach in studying Muslim teachers was to make a contribution towards existing knowledge about teachers and to theories which inform such studies, and to fill a gap in the reductionist approach to sociological approaches in education. Therefore, this study advocates that in studying the work and life of all teachers, their faith should be included.

The question of teachers' commitment in relation to the process and the purpose of teaching are issues continually debated. This research has revealed that for some teachers from a Muslim background in a range of schools their faith affects their teaching and their own views about the curriculum and its features. None of them have expressed any reservation during the interviews about the teaching of religious education - a contentious aspect of the curriculum in schools. They feel confident to operate within the state school system and not just within alternative Muslim schools. In fact one of the longest-serving teachers set out to work in state schools rather than independent ones set up by Muslims. In addition, at least two teachers had been employed in a church school at some point during their career. Perhaps in these and other cases there is evidence of some similarity with the work of teachers during the classical times when learners from various faiths were taught by Muslim teachers and Muslims learnt from non-Muslims.

These thirteen Muslims are a heterogeneous group. Their ethnic background, gender, language and age were different and their motivations also varied. They all saw themselves as Muslims, but their preferences in the context of schools and the teaching profession did not display this uniformity. Interestingly, none identified themselves through gender or race, but they did speak from such perspectives. They spoke about how their faith identity impacts on their teacher identity and how, whilst

being part of a community under scrutiny, they are making a positive contribution to society. The male participants were able to set an example in a female-dominated profession. On the other hand, the female teachers were able to present a viable model for their community, and to challenge negative and stereotypical views held about Muslim women and their role in society. This shows that all of them are confidently working as state servants and making a contribution towards nation building. Their professional activity has engendered a feeling of empowerment as it impacts on public life.

There is no doubt that the Muslim community in Britain has become the focus of much debate in recent years. Muslims who permeate communities which were once seen through the lens of migration, race and ethnicity have a common factor of religion. Their faith aspect has attained considerable significance in a community that is diverse in many ways. Yet their identity is sometimes overshadowed by race and as a religious group they are often understood racially. This does not imply that Muslims will not identify themselves through other preferred descriptors. Such preferences are, perhaps, a matter of individual choice. Public bodies, however, need to be astute to such matters when circulating both current and historical data.

Media and research reports reveal that some Muslims are experiencing religious prejudice in their work places and are facing abuse on the streets. These teachers were specifically asked the question about religious prejudice and discrimination. Of these thirteen, at least ten reported that they did not experience any form of discrimination. This does not mean that it does not exist in schools and in the educational system. It is possible that anti-discriminatory policies and procedures are making a difference. The geographical catchment areas where these teachers were working may have provided a more conducive atmosphere and school ethos to work in, thereby reducing the perceptions of discrimination and prejudice. Nevertheless one teacher felt that her threshold application was denied because of her faith. She also expressed 'subtle' negativity evident in the behaviour of a teacher based on his lack of sensitivity, understanding and unwarranted humour about Muslims and their faith. The lack of response from senior managers, despite the repeated sarcasm from this male White teacher towards Islam and Muslims, made her feel somewhat helpless. This suggests that religious discrimination is present in schools.

This research has also provided significant aspects for considering the development of some educational affairs within the Muslim population of Birmingham. Surprisingly, these teachers did not mention the need for a sufficient representation of Muslims on the governing bodies of schools nor did they discuss the influential role that governors have in schools. Nevertheless a means for the increased participation of Muslims in state schools is that of recruiting more Muslim governors so that they can have a share in making decisions at policy level and further contribute to strengthening schools. Having Muslims on governing bodies provides a sense of empowerment and engagement within the school for the community as a whole.

The role of the mosque in contemporary British society has come under considerable scrutiny both from Muslims and others. A few teachers advocated that mosques are a potential venue for encouraging Muslim recruitment into the teaching profession. They suggested that Imams could address this issue in their sermons and study circles and initial teacher training institutions in turn could use them as venues for publicity. Some of these Muslim teachers have narrated their experience of *madrasah* education in Birmingham which draws attention to the need for enhancing the knowledge, skill and understanding of various principles of teaching and learning especially in the areas of pedagogy. There are three dimensions which provide the impetus for such a recommendation in addition to the political demands being placed on Muslim institutions. The absence of the Prophet's model of teaching is evident in some *madāris*. Some *madrasah* teachers, both formal and informal, have not had such training due to absence of such provisions both in some of the countries of origin and/or in the institutions where they have studied here in the UK. Finally, it could be argued that some Muslim children benefit from both the child centred pedagogy in state schools and the methodology in *madāris*. However, an approach which takes the objectives of the content being taught to reflect the pedagogy is a necessary consideration. This demonstrates that Muslim teachers from state schools can make a considerable contribution by offering appropriate training sessions and sharing their expertise more widely.

Another aim of this research was to explore the role of spirituality in the life and work of Muslim teachers. This is the first study to explore spirituality in the life of Muslim

teachers in primary schools which has implications beyond its constituency of Birmingham. There is evidence in these accounts that spirituality is conceived and approached through three interconnected ways. For some of these Muslim teachers spirituality begins with the Qur'ān and the practice of Muhammad. Historically this would be seen as the 'traditional' approach where recourse to a third source may not be made. A second approach delineated is that of joining a spiritual community through which individuals are organised around a righteous and pious guide with an established path. None of these teachers explicitly mentioned such an affiliation. The third approach, perhaps where the majority situated themselves, is where individuals were self-directed. They participated in a range of activities which were linked to family customs, events and functions organised by mosques or personal interests. In all three approaches, the ultimate exemplar of spirituality is Muhammad. Some of these Muslim teachers had never thought about some of the questions which were asked during the interview. For them it was a first occasion to consider faith and spirituality in relation to their profession. Perhaps this has been the most significant finding of this research. Their interviews have become a means for them to cross the professional line and look into their spirituality or consider the interconnectedness between their work, faith and spirituality. In other words, affording contact with one's own life history is a path to self-discovery, personal dialogue, and self-understanding, leading to spirituality. Consequently, although the Qur'ān and Muhammad are the primary fountains of faith and spirituality, individuals experience and derive nourishment from them according to their individual capacities, and hence as with other notions of identity this aspect is also diverse. The identity derived from faith and spirituality and its experience/s may not be the same even if these Muslim share the same gender, class, language, ethnicity, age and religious tradition.

These Muslims do not view their self-identity in discrete terms along religious and ethnic perspectives but in their different roles in their lives they understand their identities in flexible ways. For example, one respondent identified with Pakistan due to the atmosphere of a village life and the freedom which it provided to him. Several others recalled the South Asian cultural emphasis on the family and therefore they expressed an openness and tolerance towards their parents' homeland. Yet, a male teacher expresses a visitor's admiration of his birth place Bangladesh having visited it on at least four occasions for a variety of reasons including taking a break from work

to get refreshed. On the other hand another teacher combines her gender and faith identity when she refers to the role of women in society and another female claimed to be disadvantaged due to her faith. Hence some of these Muslim teachers construct a multiple and hybrid identity. There is also an idea of a cosmopolitan identity embedded in their narratives based on the principles that Muslims are one community - the *Ummah*. In addition they prefer to assert a particular identity for particular purposes and situations. The expression of their faith identity is an area for some where they have to negotiate and show alertness. A male teacher interviewed during his post NQT year is less confident about wearing his traditional outfits and prefers the professional attire to fit in with other colleagues and another expressed a view that some Muslims lacked assertiveness to express their religious identity which is, to her, unhelpful in countering media stereotypes and depictions. On the other hand a senior manager deliberately wore her traditional dress to assert herself when she wanted to do so. In mentioning prejudice she explicitly stated that gender and faith are liabilities for progress and promotion. In the current political climate, she felt, schools could be seen to be taking a risk by employing a certain type of Muslim. Referring to herself she felt she could be perceived as being more employable than somebody who appeared like the researcher. She explained, ‘Well they may say, hang on what is this man’s belief? How politically active is he?’ In other words judgements could be attached to Muslims due to their physical features, traditional clothing and accents. Hence, appearance will be an influential factor and perhaps for a woman it may be her full *hijāb* and/or *niqāb*. The realities of these were reported by other researchers as well.

Relatively little was hitherto known specifically about what it is to be a Muslim teacher in a primary school in Birmingham, and what their experiences have been, and the nature of identities that they have constructed for themselves. Muslim teachers have been participants in other studies which have focussed primarily on gender, race and generational perspectives. This research aims to fill this gap by emphasising the inclusion of the faith dimension within the life history approach in studying the life and careers of teachers. This life history approach has enabled the collection of testimonies from Muslim teachers who are living in Birmingham. The memories of these teachers are historically important. These are unique life histories of teachers which are valuable for schools and the educational enterprise as a whole.

Indeed they are significant for Birmingham as a community. The originality of this research, it is argued, is that it is the first study to use the life history approach in primary schools, exploring their early life and events up to the interview, the participants of which were Muslim teachers, male and female.

The need to further understand Muhammad as a teacher among Muslim teachers has become evident from some of these interviewees. All of them look up to him in a general sense i.e., being a Prophet, a guide and model. However, more recognition, about his systematic approach to educate people on a mass level as well as at an individual level, is required so that educational endeavours both local and international, as realised by Khadijah on her visit to Gambia, may become more prominent.

As for the future, Juwayriyah prefers to change her career from a generalist to a specialist by focussing on French or Arabic due to her previous experience, the recent language initiatives in primary schools and her multilingual competencies. It was challenging for Safiyyah to predict the future due to her open mindedness. If teaching gets boring she is prepared to change her career. However, variety in school would retain her which can be achieved by teaching different year groups, taking on different challenges or learning something new. In contrast, Ummu Salamah approached the question theologically by reflecting a strong belief in predestination and is happy to resign her decision to the *Will of God*.

At least three teachers, pragmatically, see themselves in a managerial post. Hafsa has no ambitions of going beyond middle management to ensure that an equal balance between family life and work is maintained. Marriage is forthcoming for two teachers - hence it is a transition period with considerable changes which include moving away from home. Khadijah would like to continue working for at least three years. After having a family her priorities might change and she may opt for supply teaching. At the same time she will look for other ways of teaching outside schools. On the other hand, Sawdah does not see herself teaching in this country because of the quality of life and a variety of other school related issues. Nevertheless, in the immediate future she wants to change schools and gain promotion into management. Her philosophy is that once she has mastered teaching she would like to master something else.

At least six teachers aspire for a strategic role. Fatimah aspires for a headship and Jabir aims to continue with his voluntary work supporting the education of local children and eventually head a school to make it more multicultural where everybody's views and beliefs are welcome and to become stronger in his faith. 'Aishah wants to focus on a healthy and happy family and to be content with her job. During the intervening period of the interview she gained a deputy head teacher's post. She is currently not aspiring to become a head as she wants to gain more experience and become successful in her current role. Mu'adh relies on Allah for future directions. He has high ambitions but occasionally the pressure, responsibilities and his young family make him ponder. His strategy is to take a step at a time beginning with an assistant head, deputy and according to him, 'if Allah wants me to be in charge of a school one day, then one day I will be.' A year after this interview Mu'adh had gained an assistant head teacher's post.

As an assistant head, although Zaid is thankful to Allah for his achievements, he is nevertheless less enthusiastic about the future. He is fully aware of the issues in a strategic role which are intense and integrated into life. The responsibilities are deep and make work-life balance difficult without a supportive team. At least on one occasion he has been unsuccessful in applying for a headship after his interview for this research. On the other hand, for 'Anas the provisions of Friday prayers are critical. If left unresolved he sees himself outside teaching and will opt to do something different or move abroad. Eventually, he would like to progress into a senior management post or take up a strategic role in the Local Authority.

There is a scarcity among this research group of Muslim teachers who have studied for higher education and master's degree with one exception. None of these teachers raised the topic of arranged marriages and sexual harassment, unlike respondents in other studies. The majority of these teachers have contemplated at some point to move abroad.

Finally, this research has allowed the researcher to conclude that faith and belief are often taken for granted. The creation of educational biographies introduces teachers to reflect critically upon their educational philosophy and origins, and the values

which underpin these. The faith dimension within people in general and within teachers in particular needs to be utilised further as a positive force.

Ways forward

Based on the limited extent of this research it is suggested that the life history approach needs to be utilised to its maximum potential to explore issues and life experiences about religion, spirituality, prejudice and discrimination among various communities in Britain as a whole. Also, a direct approach to understanding experiences and relationships through life histories is needed in contemporary society so that people of all persuasions, religious or otherwise, can listen to one another first hand. Based on the narratives of thirteen Muslim teachers it is suggested that the Muslim community as a whole in Britain should make education a priority in all its facets. Mosques should encourage Muslims to become schools governors and teachers. They should establish learning centres for women in particular. Major organisations should offer professional development for training *madrasah* teachers and leaders to enhance teaching and learning. They should also work closely with various agencies and organisations to enhance the quality of education in respect of Muslim children. Qualified Muslim teachers should provide support to supplementary schools and help them to continue providing effective services to their communities. Furthermore, in Friday sermons although the importance of teaching and learning is included by faith leaders, more focus, within contemporary contexts and needs, should be given on how Prophet Muhammad encouraged people to become teachers and his role as a teacher.

At a time when the question about the loyalty of the Muslim community in Britain is questioned, the issues of integration and assimilation are debated and multiculturalism being challenged, the indication that Muslim teachers are clustering in inner city schools should be monitored with its related impact upon children, schools and the community so that teaching remains a profession by all for all.

Birmingham City Council is committed to equality and should continue to challenge discrimination on the grounds of belief and religion, and to promote the creation of an environment free from victimisation and harassment for faith groups. It should

continue to recognise the significant role that faith has in the life of some people. The Council should therefore continue to monitor the composition of its teacher workforce so that it reflects the diverse communities of Birmingham.

Higher Education Institutions need to reach out to all faith-based community organisations in the city and utilise them for the enhancement and promotion of the teaching profession. Indeed, the TDA should consider a national publicity campaign which uses serving teachers from various faith communities. These narratives are indicative of some vertical mobility of Muslim teachers and it is expected that this trend will continue with the initiatives of the NCSL. However, none have revealed their engagement in research related to the classroom and only one declared having studied at higher degree level. Hence this level of study and research activity is an area which needs to be encouraged. It appears from at least three Muslim male teachers that they would like to see the city council providing guidelines to schools in relation to the Friday prayer. These teachers do not perceive the solution to be complex, and according to them it is practically viable without significant disruption to the activities taking place in schools.

Finally, this study has provided a basis for exploring the journey of some existing Muslim headteachers and those from this sample who may become headteachers in future. In addition, the high concentration of Muslim teachers in inner city schools needs exploring including the perception of parents, children and wider members of society regarding this phenomenon. Furthermore, extensive research is recommended among all those Muslim teachers who have left the profession so that a much more complex understanding of their withdrawal from the profession is gained. The teaching profession has gone through huge restructuring and reformation in the past decade. Such changes when they are combined with the teachers' personal circumstances make the issue of racism, sexism and religious prejudice insufficient as reasons for leaving the profession. This, therefore, suggests that the life world of teachers and how it affects the teaching profession as a whole needs to be researched continuously.

APPENDIX 1: FORMS AND VARIETIES OF THE BIOGRAPHICAL METHOD (Denzin, 1989:188)

	Term/Method	Key features	Forms/Variations
1.	History	What happened? How?	Oral, life, personal
2.	Fiction	An account, something made up, fashioned	Story (life, self)
3.	Biography	History of a life	Autobiography
4.	Story	A fiction, a narrative	Life, personal experience
5.	Discourse	Telling of story	First, third person
6.	Narrative	A story having a plot and existence independent of the teller	Fiction, epic, folklore
7.	Narrator	Teller of a story	First, third person
8.	Life History	Account of a life based on interviews and conversations	Personal history, edited, complete, topical
9.	Case	An instance of a phenomenon	Event, process
10.	Case History	History of an event or social process, not of a person	Single, multiple, medical, legal
11.	Case Study	Analysis and record of a single case	Single, multiple
12.	Life Story	A person's story of his or her life, or a part of thereof	Edited, complete, topical, fictional
13.	Self Story	Story of self in relations to an event	Personal experience story, fictional, true
14.	Personal Experience Story	Stories about personal experience	Single, multiple episode, private to communal folklore
15.	Oral History	Recollections of events, their causes and effects	Work, musical, family
16.	Personal History	Reconstruction of life based on interviews and conversations	Life history, life story

APPENDIX 2: THE NEED FOR MINORITY ETHNIC TEACHERS (Ross, 2002:3)

First of all, the profession must have the capacity to reflect the full spectrum of the cultural and social traditions and systems in their collective professional practice. Secondly, racism and xenophobia – individual, institutional and otherwise – continue to be major issues in contemporary society. Racism in schools needs to be very explicitly and forcefully challenged – partly because this is the moment in the development of personal value systems that it can be stopped and challenged, and secondly because of its effects on both minority communities and the majority community. Thirdly, aspirational role models are needed for all pupils, particularly for ethnic minority pupils. It is known that ethnic minorities are generally poorly represented in positions of power, authority and prestige in British society. There is a clear need for more police officers, social workers, accountants, politicians, senior civil servants, captains, and in industry from the ethnic minorities. But, teachers are a particular and special category: they are the one face of civil society that every child will meet, every working day, through the whole of their formal education. It is, therefore, particularly critical that this 'face' of civil power is seen, visibly and explicitly, to represent the whole of society.

APPENDIX 3: MERITS OF TEACHERS AND TEACHING

These are a few selected sayings of Muhammad related to the significance of teachers and teaching in Islam.

1. When a man dies, his actions also stop except for three (i) acts of charity, which are continued (ii) knowledge by which everyone benefits and (iii) a righteous child who prays for him (Muslim).
2. Verily what reaches a Muslim from his good actions after his death is the knowledge which he acquired and spread it or a book which he gave in inheritance (Baihaqi).
3. No present or gift a parent presents to a child is superior to a good education (Trimidhi).
4. That a man gave education to his child is better for him than that he gives a large measure of corn in alms (Trimidhi).
5. Who so decides (a question) without knowledge, it shall be a sin against him; and who so advises his brother in a matter in which he knows the right to be otherwise, he has defrauded him (Abu-Dawud).
6. Who so walks in a path seeking knowledge therein, God will thereby make easy to him the path of paradise (Muslim).
7. Who so goes forth in search of knowledge, engages himself in the Cause of God until he returns home (Trimidhi).
8. Who so seeks knowledge, it will be an atonement for him for what is past (Trimidhi).
9. Do you know who is the most beneficent? God is the Most Beneficent; then of the children of man, I am the most beneficent and after me the most beneficent among them is the man who acquires knowledge and spreads it: he will come on the day of resurrection as a chief by himself (Baihaqi).
10. The Messenger of God was asked about two men who were of the children of Israel, one of them a learned man who observed the appointed prayers and then sat down and taught men good and the other who fasted all day long and stood up (to pray all night long which of them was superior. The Messenger said: "The superiority of this learned man who observed the appointed prayers and then sat down and taught men good over the worshipper who fasted all day long and stood up to pray all night long is as my superiority over the least among you" (Darami).

APPENDIX 4: STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS

[Online] <http://www.tda.gov.uk/Recruit/lifeasateacher/staffstructure.aspx> [Accessed 14 May 2006].

Senior management team

Headteacher

Has overall responsibility for the school, its staff, its pupils and the education they receive.

Deputy headteacher

Plays a major role in managing the school, particularly in the absence of the headteacher. Often responsible for a curriculum area and/or specific areas of school management.

Early years coordinator

Responsible for children in the foundation stage, leading the foundation team of teachers, nursery nurses and teaching assistants.

Assistant headteacher

Usually only in larger primary schools. Supports the head and deputy head with the management of the school.

Key Stage coordinator

Employed to lead and manage either Key Stage 1 or 2. They usually also have a class teaching commitment.

Special educational needs coordinator

Responsible for day-to-day provision for pupils with special educational needs.

Subject leaders and curriculum coordinators

Responsible for the leadership and management of a particular curriculum subject. Class teachers may be expected to accept responsibility for an area of the curriculum as part of their normal professional duties.

Classroom teachers

Plan, prepare and deliver lessons to meet the needs of all pupils, setting and marking work and recording pupil development as necessary.

Includes advanced skills teachers and supply teachers.

APPENDIX 5: FLICK'S ADAPTED DOCUMENT SHEET

This document sheet was be used prior to commencing the interview adapted from (Flick, 2002:172).

Identifier

Date of interview

Place of interview

Gender

Age

Marital status

Children

Gender

Schools

Ambitions

Heritage/ethnic origin

Languages

Religious persuasions

Schooling

Primary

Secondary

College

University

Teaching

First appointment

Subject specialism

Current role and responsibility

Current scale

Peculiarities of interview

Start of interview

End of interview

APPENDIX 6: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Could you tell me about your upbringing and early life?
2. Tell me about your parents and family.
3. Could you relate to me something about your religion and faith?
4. Now that you are in school can you look back and think how your school days were?
5. Take me through your childhood, teenage, adolescence, and youth.
6. What was your route into teaching?
7. Having qualified as a teacher how did it feel and what happened after that?
8. Describe your NQT year.
9. After that, once you were ‘fully licensed’, how did you feel?
10. What subject did you specialise/major in?
11. How philosophically do you see teaching?
12. Some teachers say teaching is joyful but challenging – what do you say?
13. Is there an ideal teacher/educator for you? Who and why?
14. What do you understand by a Muslim teacher?
15. What do you understand by spirituality?
16. What is your impression about Muslim teachers in state schools?
17. Where and how do you see yourself in the next five years?
18. Why did you want to be involved in a conversation about your life as a Muslim teacher?

APPENDIX 7: CLEARANCE NOTE AND DEPOSIT INSTRUCTIONS



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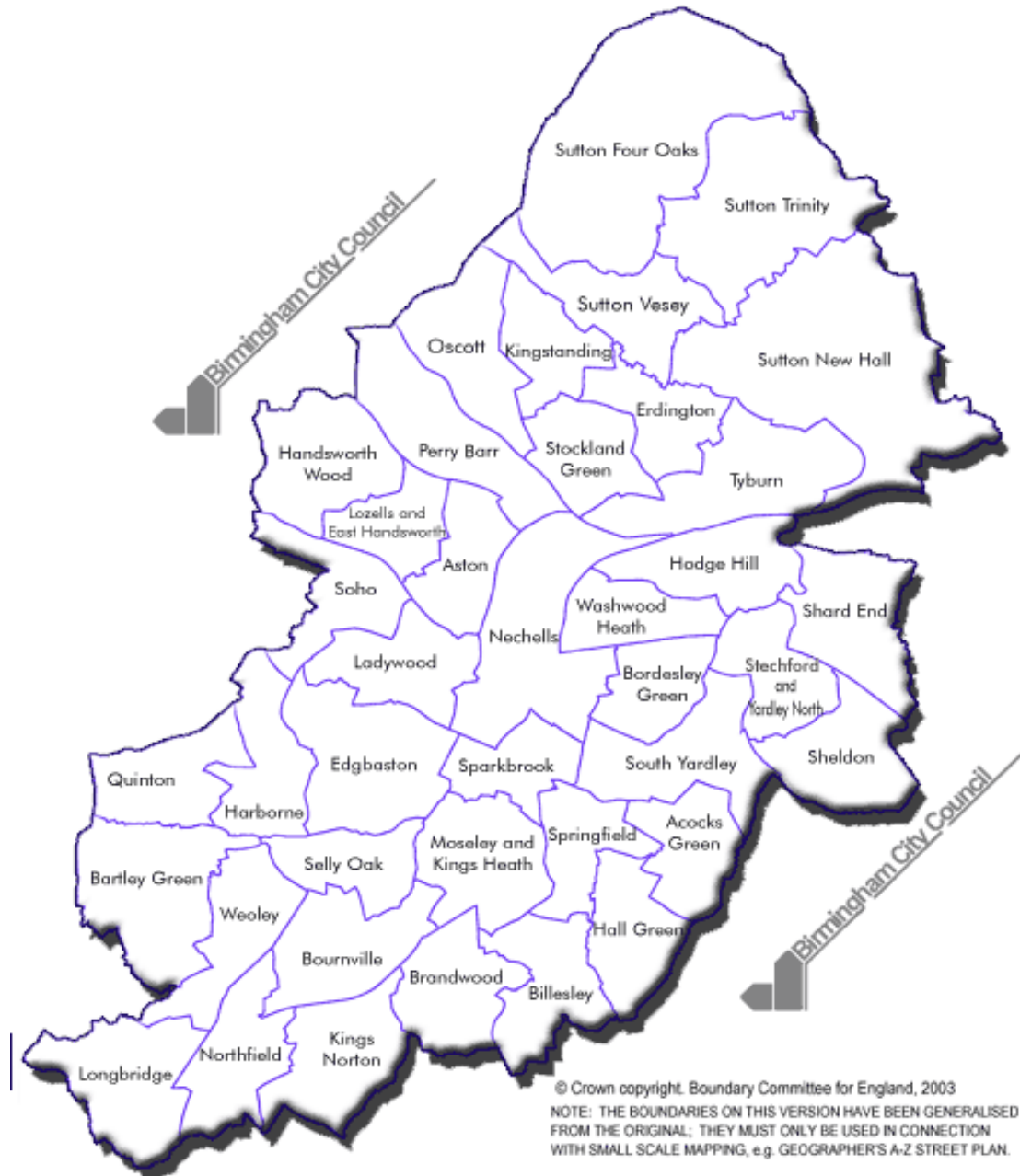
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APPENDIX 8: PRIMARY TEACHING DATA FOR BIRMINGHAM

Primary Teaching Data As At 11/04/2007

	FEMALE		FEMALE		FEMALE		FEMALE		MALE		MALE		MALE		MALE		Sum:
	15-23	24-33	34-43	44-53	54-63	64+	15-23	24-33	34-43	44-53	54-63	64+	Sum:				
ASIAN/BRIT-RANGI ADFS.	2	15	3	1	1			4					26				
ASIAN/BRIT-INDIAN	4	55	58	19	10			1	4	1			151				
ASIAN/BRIT-KASHMIRI		4	2					2					8				
ASIAN/BRIT-OTHER	1	10	15	7				3	1	1			38				
ASIAN/BRIT-PAKISTANI	2	57	42	8	6		1	4	3				124				
BLACK/BRIT-AFRICAN		3	4	3									11				
BLACK/BRIT-CARIBBEAN	1	17	30	18	2			1	3	1			75				
BLACK/BRIT-OTHER		7	23	18	1					3			52				
CHINESE/OTHER-ARAB			1										1				
CHINESE/OTHER-CHINESE			1	2									3				
CHINESE/OTHER-OTHER		3	11	2	1				1	1			20				
CHINESE/OTHER-VIET		1		1									2				
MIX-OTHER	1	4	3	1									9				
MIX-WHITE/ASIAN		1	4	1				1					6				
MIX-WHITE/DLK AFRICA		2							1				3				
MIX-WHITE/BLK CARIBB		7	3	2				1	2				15				
NOT DISCLOSED	48	317	128	54	8		4	54	36	18	4		688				
WHITE-ALBANIAN/KOSOVO		1						1					3				
WHITE-BRITISH	95	771	629	591	468	8	8	125	128	69	76	1	2,970.00				
WHITE-IRISH	5	11	18	21	14			1	9	6			91				
WHITE-OTHER	1	182	223	208	150	4		27	51	44	34		836				
Sum:	158	1,483.00	1,183.00	850	602	13	14	223	243	143	123	2	5,214.00				

APPENDIX 9: MAP OF BIRMINGHAM WARDS AFTER JUNE 2004



APPENDIX 10: FEMALE SAHABIYYĀT (COMPANIONS)

Ummu Salamah

She was named Hind and was amongst the first to embrace Islam in its early days. It is recorded that she first migrated to Abyssinia after facing persecution in Makkah, and later to Madinah. She learnt the whole Qur'ān and was famous for her intelligence. She was a wife of Muhammad who sought her advice.

'Aishah

Historians note that 'Aishah was a very intelligent and observant lady who had an excellent memory. She was a wife of Muhammad who spent seven years with him. A great deal of knowledge that Muslims possess today was first observed by her and passed on to others. Muhammad once said about her: Learn half your knowledge from this rosy-cheeked person i.e., 'Aishah. She memorised the entire Qur'ān and transmitted more than 2000 *ahādith* (sayings) from Muhammad.

Sawdah

She was the first woman to migrate to Abyssinia and is described by historian as jolly and plump with a kind disposition. Biographers mention that she was a middle aged widow when Muhammad married her after the death of Khadijah.

Juwayriyah

She was a wife of Muhammad who led a pious and austere life. Her initial name was Barra which was changed by Muhammad.

Hafsah

It is reported that Hafsah memorised the entire Qur'ān and possessed the written text which was recorded by Zaid ibn Thabit under the instruction of the first Caliph. She was also married to Muhammad.

Fatimah

She is the daughter of Muhammad through whom his lineage survives. Commentators describe her conversation and some characteristics to be like those of her father. She was God-conscious with little concern for pomp and show.

Safiyyah

She was a wife of Muhammad. She was an embodiment of virtue, learned and intelligent woman. Her most outstanding merits were patience and forbearance.

Khadijah

Books of *Sirah* record that she had employed Muhammad to trade in Syria before marrying him. Khadijah was a source of help and comfort for many years. She fed the poor, sheltered the persecuted and freed slaves. They were married for 25 years and had five children. The year in which she died is called the 'year of sorrow'.

Zaynab

Zaynab bint Khuzaymah was widowed then married Muhammad. It is claimed that she gave meals to the destitute liberally and was known as the 'mother of the poor'. She was with Muhammad for only a few months and died. Muhammad offered her funeral prayer.

APPENDIX 11: MALE SAHABAH (COMPANIONS)

Mua'dh ibn Jabal

Historians note that he was handsome with black eyes and curly hair and had an imposing character. He was distinguished for his intelligence. Mua'dh studied the Qur'ān and the laws of Islam until he became one of the most well-versed persons. Muhammad praised him with the following words: 'The most knowledgeable of my Ummah in permissible and prohibited matters is Mu'adh ibn Jabal.' He was one of the six who collected the Qur'ān during the lifetime of the Prophet.

Jabir ibn 'Abdullah

He was born in Abyssinia when his parents migrated there. He was generous and eloquent. When Jabir paid his father's debt, Muhammad asked forgiveness for him twenty-five times. He narrated 1500 *ahādith*. According to some biographers he was the last of the companions to die in Madinah.

Zaid ibn Thabit

He was one of the scribes of the revelations received by Muhammad and recited the Qur'ān beautifully. Muhammad directed him to learn Syriac and Hebrew and he interpreted communication from them. It is reported that he was a prolific judge and an expert in distributing the shares of inheritance in Madinah.

`Anas ibn Malik al-Ansari

`Anas served Muhammad when he was ten years old and stayed with him for twenty years. He has related 2206 *ahādith*. It is claimed that he was among the longest living companions of Muhammad.

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