

**Author**: Masauda A. El-Aswed

**Title**: Islamic Education and Single-sex Schooling: an Investigation into the Motivations of Muslim Parents When Sending Their Children to Islamic Schools

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

**June 2014**

**Islamic Education and Single-sex Schooling: an Investigation into the Motivations of Muslim Parents When Sending Their Children to Islamic Schools**

**By**

**Masauda A. El-Aswed**

**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

**Department of Educational Studies**

**School of Education**

**June 2014**

# DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my dear husband Ibrahim and my beloved kids Almuatasem Bellah, Mohamed, Amera and my little angel Farah for their unflinching support throughout our life. I, particularly, appreciate their brilliant care and continuous assistance during my long and demanding study journey.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“My Lord! Grant me the power and ability that I may be grateful for Your Favours which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do righteous good deeds that will please You, and admit me by Your Mercy among Your righteous slaves”(Al-Qur’an , 27:19).

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of all the people who have helped me to get this work to fruition, in particular:

I sincerely offer appreciation to my senior supervisor Dr Andrey Rosowsky, the indispensable mentor and good friend, for his insights, guidance, continued encouragement, and unwavering support. His firm dedication in helping me succeed as a researcher is deeply appreciated and will always be remembered. He devoted countless hours, way above the call of duty, correcting and providing vital oral and written feedback, without which this study could not have been completed.

I am deeply indebted to my mother for her encouragement and support. I would also like to thank my husband ‘Ibrahim’ for his patience, support, and love during the years of study; and my thanks go to all my children for their love, support, and encouragement through this experience, and all my PhD student colleagues for their socialisation, academic and emotional support during the journey of my study.

Many thanks are sincerely directed to my research participants; this research would not have been possible without their co-operation, which has facilitated conducting my fieldwork and made it a very enjoyable experience

I would like to thank all my friends and colleagues who supported and helped me to complete this project.

# ABSTRACT

In recent years, Britain has witnessed an increase in the number of Islamic schools, at primary and secondary levels. This phenomenon of religiously-based schools is not new to British society. Christian and Jewish faith schools are well and long established and widespread. Some Muslim parents look for an Islamic school for their children. This study seeks to find out why. What is it that they think is lacking in state school education?

In this thesis I explore the debate over Muslim parents’ motivations for sending their children to Islamic schools and examine what this type of school can offer their children which state schools cannot offer. Qualitative data was collected for this study to identify some Muslim parents' reasons for sending their daughters and sons to Islamic schools. The data consisted of a questionnaire and interviews conducted with parents who had children in two case study Islamic schools, one for boys and the other for girls.

This research is needed because the opinions of these parents, directly involved, have not been methodically researched so far. By analysing the real arguments, we can gain insights into the difficulties underlying this debate. This data also permits me to explore how the issue of Islamic schooling relates to broader questions about minority communities’ responsibilities, rights and forms of belonging in multicultural societies.

The analysis shows that the most important motivations for Muslim parents who send their children to Islamic schools are a good education broadly understood, Islamic identity and culture and single-sex education.

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# LIST OF ABBREVATIONS

AAUW The American Association of University Women………………..117

AMSS The Association of Muslim Social Scientists……….……………..25

CMEB The Commission of the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain……….…..26

GCSE The General Certificate of Secondary Education…… …………..26

ICE Islam and Citizenship Education…………..……………………...233

IIS Institute of Islamic Studies……………….…………………………70

IoE Institute of Education…………………….………………………….70

ISC Independent School Council………………………………………...7

NOW National Organisation for Women………………………………..121

ONS Office of National Statistics………………………………………….19

OPSI Office of Public Sector Information………………………………...15

p. b. u. h. Peace be upon him……….………………………………………..124

PI Parents Interviews……….…………………………………………171

PQ Parents Questionnaires..…………………………………………..171

RE Religion Education…….………………………………………………4

RS The Researcher…...………………………………………………..171

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund………63

VA Voluntary Aided …...................……...……………………………….3

VC Voluntary Controlled…...……….......………………………………...3

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

# 1.0 Introduction

My purpose for this chapter is as follows: to set out this study’s background, its research focus and my concept for this research topic; to present my research aims, objectives and research questions; to identify the significance of my study and offer a short clarification of my methodology and approaches. I also present the structure and organisation of this thesis, outline my positionality and summarise my life experience.

## Background and Context of Study

Although the majority of Muslim children in the UK attend local state schools, a minority of Muslim parents have chosen independent Islamic schools. Islamic schools provide education for around 1% of an approximate population of 300,000–500,000 Muslim pupils in Britain (Berliner, 1993; Sarwar, 1994). However, there are no accurate new statistics about the pupils who attend private Islamic schools. The number of Muslim parents who send their children to Islamic schools is small; however, this small percentage makes this study more interesting and does not mean that it should be ignored. Examining those parent decisions, especially in the light of criticisms directed to Islamic school about separating communities and society (or fear of radicalising through excessive focus on religion, etc) makes this study very important. This study aims to discover why these parents decided to enrol their children in Islamic schools rather than in state schools even though they are facing all these difficulties and most of them, along with their children, have lived in the UK for a long time or even for all their lives.

British society is now very much a multi-faith society and the topic of faith schools has become increasingly controversial. Defining faith is a difficult task. In general, faith is a feeling or belief that something is accurate, real, or will happen (Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2010). Many, of course, equate faith with religion. However, different religions have their own definition of faith. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (“faith”, n.d.),

In biblical Hebrew, for example, ‘“faith” is principally juridical: it is the faithfulness or truthfulness with which persons adhere to a treaty or promise and with which God and Israel adheres to the Covenant between them’. In Islam, faith (Arabic *īmān*) is what sets the believer apart from others; at the same time, it is ascertained that “None can have faith except by the will of Allah” (Qur’an, 10: 100). The First Letter to the Corinthians in the Christian New Testament similarly asserts that faith is a gift of God (12:8–9), while the Letter to the Hebrews (11:1) defines faith (*pistis*) as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”.

More relevantly, faith schools are schools where the ethos of the school is based on the values of a particular religion. A recent report by the Runnymede Trust (Berkeley & Vij, 2008) defined maintained faith schools as “state-funded institutions that educate pupils within the context of a particular faith or denomination”. (p.4). In fact, independent faith schools share these particular issues and the same could be said for independent faith schools.

### **Faith Schools in the Wider School System**

#### 1.1.1.1 **Maintained Schools**

At the present moment, there are five types of maintained school in England: community schools; foundation and trust schools; voluntary-aided (VA) schools; voluntary-controlled (VC) schools; and academies. Recently a new type of school is the free school. The first four all receive funding from local authorities while academies are separately funded (Scott and McNiesh, 2012). Choices on the establishment of such schools are taken under local decision-making arrangements – either by the local authority or the Schools Adjudicator, following a statutory process. According to the British Humanist Association (2012), academies and free schools are legally independent and the registration left up to the schools’ proprietor.

As with other maintained schools, maintained faith schools follow the National Curriculum, have fully qualified teaching staff, participate in National Curriculum tests and assessments, are inspected by Ofsted regularly and follow the School Admissions Code (DfES, 2011). According to The Department of Education (2011), maintained faith schools need to meet all the usual requirements of maintained status, in addition to some areas where maintained faith schools have additional faith-based freedoms and flexibilities. First, these schools are required to reserve up to a fifth of their teaching posts as religious posts for teachers who are specifically selected to teach religious education.

Secondly, although all maintained schools are required to teach RE and to have daily acts of collective worship, the syllabus in VA faith schools is decided by the governing body in accordance with the trust deeds of the school. Foundation and VC faith schools follow the locally agreed syllabus but parents of any pupil have the right to request their child receives RE in accordance with the tenets of their faith and the school should provide such RE for these pupils.

Thirdly,even though faith schools may give priority to applicants who are of the faith of the school, they must admit other applicants if they cannot fill all of their places with children of the faith and ensure that their admission arrangements comply with the School Admissions Code.Fourthly, faith schools have a faith-based ethos that is written into the school’s Instrument of Government (DfES, 2011).

Of the 20,000 maintained schools in England almost 7,000 are faith schools. Around 68 per cent of maintained faith schools are Church of England schools and 30 per cent are Catholic. Table (1) shows the number of maintained faith schools in England and Wales.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Faith Schools | 7000 |
| Church of England | 4606 |
| Roman Catholic | 1985 |
| Methodist | 26 |
| Christian (other) | 141 |
| Jewish | 42 |
| Muslim | 12 |
| Sikh | 3 |
| Hindu | 1 |

**Table 1: The Number of Maintained Faith Schools in England and Wales.**

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

#### 1.1.1.2 **Faith Academies and Free Schools**

According to the British Humanist Association (2012), “faith ethos” academies and free schools are academies and free schools that have not legally registered as having a religious character, but nonetheless are run by an organisation with a religious ethos. This organisation can use its ethos to exert control over some aspects of governance, employment and curriculum. The Department for Education does not know which academies and free schools have a “faith ethos”, though it has begun to record this for free schools from 2013.

According to the DfES (2013), a faith academy is an academy with a faith designation order. Religious education must be offered in these academies to all pupils in accordance with the tenets of the academy’s faith as set by its faith body.

All academies have to provide religious education (RE) for all their pupils, except for those whose parents exercise the right of withdrawal (DfES, 2013). In most faith academies the beliefs of other faiths will be taught as part of the academy’s RE curriculum. Those academies will normally follow the locally agreed RE syllabus. Such syllabi must reflect “that the religious traditions in Great Britain are, in the main, broadly Christian, whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain”. (DfES, 2013).

Faith academies may also apply a faith qualification in employing their teachers and give priority to children of their faith in their admissions arrangements. As with maintained schools, this permits such schools to give priority to faith applicants but does not allow them to refuse “non-faith” applicants if they are under-subscribed. Maintained faith schools that choose to convert to become an academy will keep their religious character and their faith-based freedoms (DfES, 2013).

As of November 2011, there are 218 faith academies all of which have a Christian religious character bar seven: one which has a Sikh religious character, one which has a Muslim religious character and the other five are Jewish.

Free schools are all-ability state-funded schools set up in response to what local people say they want and need in order to improve education for children in their community (DfES, 2013).

The present government claims that free schools help children to achieve what they want through the programme that is offered in such schools and which might not be offered in other schools. It could be said that it is now much easier for skilful and committed teachers, charities, parents and education experts to open schools to address real demand within an area. However, this is a claim that has yet to be confirmed as this is a very recent development and at the time of writing there are many dissenting voices regarding free schools. Of the 24 free schools opened in September 2011, 7 have a faith denomination as indicated in the table below:

**Table 2: The Number of Faith-ethos Free Schools (DfES, 2013)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Christian | 3 |
| Jewish | 2 |
| Hindu | 1 |
| Sikh | 1 |

#### 1.1.1.3 **Faith Schools in the Independent Sector**

According to Miliband (2003), when designing an independent school to be a school with a religious character, the school’s proprietor must apply to the Secretary of State for an order under section 69(3)[[1]](#footnote-1).

The application must (a state the religion or religious denomination of the school; (b include the grounds on which the application is based and any supporting evidence of those grounds; and (c include any representations made by a religious body in support of the application. On receipt of an application for an order in accordance with these Regulations, the Secretary of State may consult any religious body regarding the school’s application, which he considers appropriate. (p. 2).

According to the Independent School Council (ISC) (2013), the independent sector educates around 625,000 pupils in 2600 schools in the UK, that is, 6.5 per cent of all school children in the UK. Pupils in ISC schools account for 80 per cent of the total number of pupils in independent schools in the UK. The 2013 ISC census shows that there are 1223 independent schools in the ISC educating 508601 pupils of which 25441 pupils are non-British with 66776 boarding pupils. ISC minority ethnic background pupils are more than the same minority in state maintained schools, that is, 26.7 per cent compared to 25.6 per cent. Moreover, the size of independent schools has been growing and is now one third larger than it was in 1985.

Currently there are 1010 independent faith schools educating approximately 305,776 pupils. Of those 1010 schools, 821 have a Church of England or are inter-denominational and the remaining 189 schools are as indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3: Faith Schools in the Independent Sector (DfES, 2013).**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Christian/inter-denominational schools | 821 |
| Muslim | 139 |
| Jewish | 46 |
| Hindu | 2 |
| Buddhist | 1 |
| Sikh | 1 |
| The total number of faith schools | 1010 |

Independent Islamic schools have been established since 1979. There are now over one hundred Islamic schools open though some have closed due to financial insecurity. Such Islamic schools often tend to be housed in homes, offices and mosques as an alternative school building. Compared to most other independent schools, independent Islamic school fees are very low with limited facilities and less well qualified teachers due to the funding constraints to pay salaries (Walford, 1995). Walford (2003) states that,

In England it is relatively easy to start a private school and the most difficult regulations that have to be adhered to relate to buildings and planning permission rather that any educational aspects. Private schools do not have to hire trained teachers or follow the National Curriculum. They are inspected, but are generally allowed to follow whatever teaching methods they wish. They must, however, show that the children are experiencing a balanced and broadly based curriculum. (p. 287).

### 1.1.2 **Independent Faith Schools in the Local System**

Locally, in the city where my study is carried out, there are a small number of independent faith schools, both Christian and Islamic. My study was carried out within two independent Islamic schools. The first case of this study is an Islamic faith secondary school for girls. According to the most recent Ofsted report (2009), this school was established in 1996 for pupils aged between 12 to 16 years old. There are 73 girls in the school from various backgrounds including Pakistani and Somali heritage. The school has a governing body, the Shura Committee, comprising five members, including a chair person who is also the proprietor. All staff and pupils are Muslims, generally speaking English as a second language. A very small number of pupils have special educational needs and/or learning disabilities. No pupil, at the time of writing, has a statement of special educational need.

The school states that it is helping the girls towards achieving a sympathetic view of their own faith, and understanding of the role of Islam in their lives, and to teach all subjects of the National Curriculum, as well as Arabic, Islamic and Qur’anic studies. The aims of the school are to ‘ensure that the students receive a broad and balanced education according to the National Curriculum and in an Islamic environment; provide a caring, safe and a well ordered environment for the girls to expand their educational and life skills, and encourage in each child the understanding that every human being is a valued citizen of the community’ (Ofsted, 2009).

The second case of this study is a school registered to provide day and residential education for boys. According to Ofsted (2009) the school opened in 2002 and received registration in 2006. It is registered to admit boys aged 11 to 16 years. Currently there are 64 boys on roll, six of whom are above compulsory school age. The majority of the boys are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly of Asian or Black origin. About three quarters of boys are boarders and a quarter attend daily. The majority of the boarders are from the United Kingdom but a few are from overseas.

A girls’ section was established in September 2008 and admits 38 girls as day students between the ages of 11 to 14 years old. In total there are 102 students on roll. The school strategy aims to expand the age range to 16 years as girls progress through the school. The school has applied for the expansion of the age range for boys to 18 and for the admittance of girls.

No pupils, at the time of writing, have a statement of special educational needs and none are at the early stages of learning English. The curriculum reflects the traditional Dar-ul-Uloom where Islamic studies are taught in the morning followed by a secular curriculum, including some subjects of the National Curriculum, in the afternoon. The school aims “to provide a relaxed environment where boys [and later girls] can study Islamic sciences alongside National Curriculum subjects; to ensure that the new generation of Muslims are graced with Islamic values; and capable of becoming valued British citizens” (Ofsted, 2011).

One observation to make here, however, is how Ofsted identifies both of the schools’ pupils by their ethnic or their original background. In the report of the first school pupils have been identified by their original country (Pakistan, Somalia) and in the second school’s report pupils have been identified as black and Asian. The pupils’ identities should be expressed consistently in such reports especially when they are from the same communities. This argument perhaps leads us to question the way that Ofsted understands children’s equality in relation to their classification as pupils in an English school yet being educated in minority community schools.

In the preceding section I have identified the research background and set out the context to my research. The next section discusses issues affecting faith schools.

## Faith School Issues

In today’s liberal democratic societies, a significant minority of parents want their children to undergo religious schooling. In Britain more than one third of schools are faith schools. As the government retains its policy of increasing both the number and the range of faith schools funded from the public purse, families in Great Britain should gradually have the opportunity to access free education from their preferred religious orientation. Since the Islamia Primary School opened in London in 1998, several Muslim schools have been added to the list of Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Jewish, and Sikh schools funded by the British state(MacMullen, 2007). However, the place of such schools within the British education system remains a hotly argued issue with advocates and opponents.

In 2001 the New Labour government decided to increase the number of faith schools and offer funding for them. This decision was welcomed by most religious communities, but opposed by others (Short, 2002). The government saw faith schools as a way to encourage choice and diversity in the education sector. The participation of faith schools and religious organisations in the state-maintained sector was seen as important in highlighting the choice factor.

Walford (2003) advocates that the existence of faith schools enhances the freedom to choose a school as a basic human right with the education of children being regarded as parents’ responsibility with less importance placed on public or autonomous aspects of schooling. The primary objective of faith schools, regardless of their religious denomination, is to advocate for their children to grow up in and be recognised for their good religious practices. Faith schools allow a religious ethos to be sustained thereby encouraging the relationship, coherence and experiences of children at home, in school or their place of worship. Sometimes conveying religious beliefs and practices are deemed more important than academic qualifications which lead faith schools to include religious beliefs and practices as well as other activities which would be frowned upon or omitted from the curriculum by non-faith schools.

Freedom to choose a school in England is limited by three main choices:

1. Parents are free to choose any state school they want for their children, who will be accepted where the school has places, but if over-subscribed will be referred to schools at a reasonable distance from the child’s home. “Within the state sector choice is often constrained by geographical and financial factors”. (Walford, 2003, p. 288). State sector schooling offers the lowest level of freedom in relation to curriculum and teaching approaches. Being in the state sector is also often popular for religious schools. However, Walford also (2003) states that:

Church of England and Roman Catholic schools are allowed to select their intake taking the religious beliefs and practices of the families into consideration. Not all do so, but it can clearly exclude Muslims who might well make this choice because of the religious ethos of the schools. (p. 288).

2. Private schooling is the second option for parents with the financial means to pay for fees for their children to attend private faith schools. They can choose to not accept a child without any obligation on them to give a reason but which must not be on grounds of ethnicity. Islamic independent schools are private schools for the Muslim minority wanting to educate their children in their own schools.

3. Home education is where parents are allowed to teach their children themselves provided they can demonstrate that the child is following a stable and viable curriculum. However, “home-schooling fits well with the traditional view of the mother’s responsibility for child care”. (p. 288). This type of schooling offers the concentrated level of choice in relation to the curriculum and teaching methods (Walford, 2003).

Advocates of faith schools (Modood, 2005; Parekh, 2000) support communities’ rights to establish their own faith schools and educate children according to their religious beliefs. Parekh (2000) revealed a number of advantages in having such faith schools which

instil a distinct set of moral and cultural sensibilities, increase the available range of educational options, add to the variety of collective life by producing citizens with different characters and perspectives on life, respect the wishes of parents, prevent the state from acquiring a monopoly of education and exercising total control over its content, and so on. (p. 333).

Opponents of faith schools have concluded, on balance, that the most important aim of education is to encourage young people to develop their capabilities to develop their life. This point is built on the specific capabilities which must also include the abilities of young people to engage in rational discourse to determine the elements which make a good quality of life. Opponents consider that without such a foundation, any educational aims cannot be justified. In fact, this argument has been discussed politically and academically, most notably since the terrorist attacks in America and the 2001 civil disturbances in northern England.

### 1.2.1 Social Objections to Faith Schools

Criticism of faith schools has been raised by many social commentators, politicians and sections of the media who call for care in expanding the role of faith in education (Short, 2002). They link the faith school debate to increasing worries about many issues such as “social segregation, reported ‘parallel lives’ between different ethnic and faith groups, violent terrorism carried out in the name of religion, and ongoing discussion about the proper relationship between religion and the state”.(Berkeley and Vij, 2008, p. 3).

Another criticism made of faith schools is that religions encourage intolerance and therefore faith schools can cause friction between members of different faith groups. The creation of social division is another criticism of faith schools with opponents of faith-based education arguing that mixing children from varied faith backgrounds is an effective solution to racism and intolerance. MacMullen (2007) argues that

The state may worry that schools that are segregated along such fundamental lines of difference will undermine the foundations for mutual understanding, respect, and appropriate cooperation between citizens. (p. 2).

In this regard, Halstead and McLaughlin (2005) argue that faith schools are socially divisive in that they separate one group of children from other groups as well as from the rest of their local society. They also contend that faith schools lead to negative social consequences. They argue that because the nature of faith schools prevents children from making contact with those of other beliefs this therefore makes them unaware of and potentially hostile to other religions which leads to their second contention that faith schools lead to negative social consequences.

Conversely, advocates of faith schools assert that such schools do not cause social division and they, in fact, create social cohesion (Wright, 2003; Short, 2002, 2003; Short and Lenga, 2002). Short (2002) stresses that faith schools do not damage social cohesion and, in fact, enhance the confidence of their pupils by improving religious identity which reflects positively on their social interactions with their society without fear of assimilation.

That faith schools are divisive has been hotly argued in the media and the scientist, Peter Atkins, for example, wrote in The Independentthat,

No single type of school founded on religion, be it Church, Temple, Synagogue, Mosque or Voodoo tent, can contribute to the unification of society, even though it purports to instruct its members in toleration. Religions, being fundamentally irrational, are fundamentally intolerant of each other, and schools set up on the shoulders of religions inevitably propagate that intolerance in future generations. (Atkins 2001, as cited in Short 2002, p. 561).

Romain (2001) in The Times also states that “[i]f Muslim, Christian, Jewish and other children do not mix – and nor do their families – they become ignorant of each other, then suspicious, fearful and hostile” (Romain, 2001, as cited in Short, 2002, p. 561). Such anxiety about social cohesion is habitually linked to minority faith schools.

Muslim schools were at the centre of comments of the Chief Inspector of Schools, David Bell, during his speech in January 2005 where he stated that Muslim schools pose a challenge to the coherence of British society by declining to teach children about other cultures and faiths (Tinker, 2009). He asserted that Muslim schools failed to prove the requirement that they “assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions”. (OPSI) Office of Public Sector Information, 2003 as cited in Tinker, 2009, p. 546).

Kymlicka (1999), a political philosopher, states that enabling children to be good citizens needs to cultivate “the habit of civility, and the capacity for public reasonableness, in our interaction with others” (1999, p. 88); that is, this is not just about teaching children a series of facts about their rights and duties. Kymlicka believes that pupils in faith schools do not have the opportunity to be around those of different cultural backgrounds and religions from their own. For that reason such schools cannot offer a sufficiently adequate education in either civility or public sensibleness. Kymlicka therefore claims that only multi-cultural and multi-faith classrooms can achieve a sufficiently good education in citizenship.

Moreover, Judge (2001) believes that faith schools lead to “an unwelcome fragmentation of society”. (p. 465). Judge worries that faith schools will segregate society and make children unaware and hostile to other religions.

### 1.2.2 Philosophical and Moral Objections to Faith Schools

There are also some philosophical and moral objections toward faith schools. That faith schools are in the business of indoctrination (Hand, 2003, 2004) is one of the most popular criticisms with secularists believing that all schools should be free from religion. They argue that schools and parents have no right to indoctrinate children into any religion (East and Hammond, 2006). This claim promotes the questions: are faith schools indoctrinating rather than educating?Are faith schools at variance with a liberal education ethic?

The right of parents to choose the form of their children’s education is also another objection against faith schools (e.g. Flew, 1987). However, it is problematic to articulate rights of the child in conflict with the rights of parents.

Callon (1997) also argues that faith schools cannot offer a good civic education and so cannot build a good liberal citizenry. Advocates of faith schools maintain that even state schools cannot do so because they force a singular moral hegemonic perspective stand on secularism and Eurocentrism (Ameen and Hassan, 2013). Faith school advocates also add that state schools may have difficulty in accommodating their students’ cultural, religious and special needs. There is an opinion which considers that supporting faith schools in a liberal framework can provide critical rationality and independence and may be able to satisfy all conditions. McLaughlin (1992) argues that,

There can be a plurality of legitimate forms of liberal education and schooling that can be starting point for a child’s journey toward autonomy and liberal citizenship, and that these may start from a particular world view or cultural identity. (McLaughlin ,1992 as cited in Ameen and Hassan, 2013, p. 13).

MacMullen (2007) states that “liberals may fear that religious education is a form of indoctrination that leaves its victims unable to rationally endorse, revise, or reject the way of life they have been taught” (p. 2). However, the providers of faith schools are committed to ensuring that they “nurture young people in the faith of their family” (Petchey, 2008, p. 179).

Others call for ‘moderate separatism’ where early upbringing and elementary education within religious-based schools can “encourage greater knowledge of self without compromising the knowledge of others and that this knowledge of others may occur in sites other than schools or through transition to common schooling in higher grades”. (Spinner-Halev, 1997 as cited in Ameen and Hassan, 2013, p. 13). Therefore, Ameen and Hassan (2013) argue that “even from a liberal educational perspective, faith schools are a good idea and educationally defensible” (p. 13).

There are other objections that have been debated and conducted through the public and academic sectors such as the importance of autonomy in a liberal education (e.g. Gardner, 1991). Although the opposition arguments suggest that parents and communities should offer an objective education for their children, they should also encourage them to step back from their community’s belief system and focus on critical analysis. Autonomy has been identified as “self-knowledge, independence of thought, self-sufficiency, a responsibility for one’s own actions, individual freedom and the worth of the individual as an individual” (Ameen and Hassan, 2013, p. 13).

Educationally, autonomy is seen as a “key element of progress within the development of educational practice and theory as opposed to a perception of indoctrination within the educational aims of the past either through religious or class domination” (Ameen and Hassan, 2013, p. 13). This view of education is commonly based on supporting the development of rational and moral autonomy. Rejection of faith schooling, however, is based on protecting children from religious believers who want to impose on them a non-autonomous conception of “the good life”. According to this viewpoint, religious schools deprive their pupils of the choice and opportunity to expand their capabilities to make informed choices particularly because such schools are disposed to indoctrinate rather than encourage autonomy (Ameen and Hassan, 2013).

Their supporters claim that faith schools, especially modern schools, which follow the national curriculum, provide balanced systems that offer good opportunities for children to be good citizens from both sides, religiously and secularly.

All these social, philosophical and moral issues will be discussed more widely in the literature review.

## 1.3 Islamic Schools

Islamic schools began to be established from the 1980s, fitting with the long term tradition of faith schools in England. Most Islamic schools are community-based and many charge modest fees and rely on community support (Hewer, 2001). Founders of Islamic schools argued that there was a need for such schools based on the following principles: firstly, to provide a safe environment for girls after pubescence; secondly, to provide an Islamic surrounding to educate children; thirdly to offer Islamic religious sciences and general education to build potential religious leaders. Finally, Muslim schools were established to improve the academic achievement and performance of Muslim pupils (Hewer, 2001).

Although the 1944 Education Act organised categories of denominational schools on the foundation of levels of state funding, independent Islamic schools have struggled until very recently to achieve state funding though other faiths have established such schools (e.g. Jewish schools). This point was put by Tony Blair, the Prime Minister at the time, who supported the legitimacy of Muslim faith schools “It would be wrong to tell the Muslim community that they are the one community that can’t have faith schools”. (Blair, 2002 as cited in Flint, 2007, p. 256). Trevor Phillips, the Deputy Chair of the Greater London Assembly, said, “As long as Catholics, Anglicans and Jews have the right to create voluntary-aided schools, it would be a crime to say that Muslims cannot”. (Times Educational Supplement, 25 June 2002 as cited in Pring, 2005, p. 53). Likewise, the same opinions that reinforced religious diversity within a national system in 1944 apply equally to the present. Basically, Islamic schools are not innovations. Islamic schools are “merely following in the footsteps of Anglicans, Catholics and Jews in seeking to give their children a solid foundation in their own faith before they are let loose in the wider world”. (Hewitt, 1996, p. 22).

Islamic schools, however, have always been more a subject of criticism and hostility than other faith schools. Fear of the former has focused recently on second-generation Muslims most notably following the 7 July 2005 bombings in London (Song, 2012). Muslims have since been suspected by many of having constructed a self-segregating wall from the wider society. Modood (2006) notes that “there is a widespread perception that Muslims are making politically exceptional culturally unreasonable or theologically alien demands upon European states”. (p. 37).

In 2001 the Muslim population in England reached 1.6 million which was approximately 3% of British population. More than half of Britain’s Muslims (52 per cent) are under the age of 25, compared to only 31 per cent (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2001) within the population as a whole, and about half a million Muslim children and young people are currently educated in British schools.Muslim children are found attending every type of British school: state schools, foundation schools, city technical colleges, city academies and special schools while there are also parents who send their children abroad for education. The majority of Muslim parents educate their children in one of three kinds of schools:

1. State-maintained schools
2. State-maintained faith schools (including Islamic ones)
3. Independent Islamic schools.

Moreover, the Muslim population increased in the 2011 census. According to the recent census of 2011, 59.3 per cent of the UK population considered themselves Christian. Muslims were the second largest religion with 4.8 per cent, 1.5 per cent Hindus, 0.8 per cent Sikhs, 0.5 per cent Jews, 0.4 per cent Buddhist and 0.3 per cent for other religions. About a quarter (25.1 per cent) of the population either had no religion or did not state one.

Compared with the Office of National Statistics (2001) census (ONS), in 2011 the most important trends were:

• an increase in the population reporting no religion – from 14.8 per cent of the population in 2001 to 25.1 per cent in 2011.

• a drop in the population reporting to be Christian – from 71.7 per cent in 2001 to 59.3 per cent in 2011.

• an increase in all other main religions. The number of Muslims increased the most from 3.0 per cent in 2001 to 4.8 per cent in 2011.



**Figure 1: Changes in Religious Affiliation, 2001-2011, England and Wales (Office of National Statistics (ONS), 2012).**

Three quarters of British Muslims trace their origins from South Asia with others from Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Iran (Henfer and Zaman, 2007). The majority of Muslims reside in industrial cities. These include, in the north of England, Manchester, Newcastle and Bradford, Glasgow in Scotland, Nottingham and Leicester in the Midlands and London, Slough, Oxford and Bristol in the South (Ansari, 2004).

It is calculated that Islamic schools provide education for around 1% of an approximate population of 300,000–500,000 Muslim pupils in Britain (Berliner, 1993; Sarwar, 1994). There are no precise new statistics about the pupils who attend private Islamic schools. Merry (2005c) suggests the majority of Muslim parents in the United States and Europe are opposed to Islamic schools. The majority of American Muslim parents send their children to state schools and deem that Islamic schools are not a priority.

It can be argued that the shortage of state-funded Islamic schools has had a negative impact on the percentage of Muslim children in such schools. Owing to the financial position and educational level of the Muslim community, parents cannot offer the type of schooling they want to give their children which may explain the low number of Muslim children attending Islamic independent schools. Sending children to Islamic schools might be easier if the state were to offer more such schools in cities with high Muslim populations.

Independent Islamic schools which deliver ‘secular’ and an Islamic education are best described as Muslim schools with “the goal of living up to the standards of Islam, rather than implying its achievement” (Douglass and Shaikh, 2004, p. 8). Such schools are usually established by groups of anxious parents and community activists in homes, mosques and similar buildings (Hewer, 2001), the vast majority of which are low-fee schools in poorer standard buildings that lack many of the facilities available in state schools (Walford, 2003).

Independent Islamic schools are organised in a number of ways. Firstly, they may be single-sex or co-educational. Secondly, they may be primary or secondary, or both. Providing funding for schools was a confused issue for earlier Conservative Governments (1982–1997), which announced that it was uncomfortable with their establishment which could be seen as ethnically exclusive and might be socially divisive (Parker-Jenkins et al., 2005). The later Labour Governments that followed (1997–2010) made it easier for Muslim parents and other different groups to set up their own state schools because of that government’s belief that faith schools were successful and attained a high level of achievement (McCreery et al., 2007; Parker-Jenkins et al., 2005; Valins, 2003). According to the Department for Education (2010), the present Coalition Government aims to work with faith groups to enable more faith schools and facilitate inclusive admission policies in as many of these as possible. In addition, the new Government has provided an opportunity for establishing ‘free schools’ that offer an opportunity for charities, universities, educational groups, teachers, and groups of parents start new schools, including faith schools (The Department for Education (DfES), 2010).

### 1.3.1 My Research Area

Although the majority of Muslim children in the UK attend local state schools, I decided to focus my research on the minority of Muslim parents who have chosen independent Islamic schools. The number of Muslim parents who send their children to Islamic schools is very small, though this does not mean that they should be ignored. I was interested in finding out why these parents decided to enrol their children in Islamic schools rather than in state schools even though most of them, along with their children, have lived in the UK for a long time or even for all their lives. In addition, some parents struggle financially to provide school tuition fees but nevertheless persist in their desire to send their children to an Islamic school. An important issue here, however, is that the Muslim community is not homogeneous. Muslim parents are divided over the need for a religious foundation in the education of their children and present the same wide attitudes to their faith—from indifference to fervour—as Christians and Jews (Haw, 1994). Similarly, Muslim pupils all through the British education system reflect a varied ethnic composition which reflects that of the Muslim population as a whole. Meer (2009) states that,

Beside the Pakistani (40%) and Bangladeshi (20%) contingent, it includes Turkish and Turkish Cypriot; Middle-Eastern; East-Asian; African-Caribbean (10%); Mixed race/heritage (4%); Indian or other South Asian (15%); and not an insignificant number of white converts and Eastern-Europeans (1%). (p. 382).

However, even though they are as varied in their ethnic background as they are “multicultural, multi-racial and multi-lingual in nature, it is the faith dimension of their lives which provides the unifying character” (Parker-Jenkins, 1995, p. 93).

As mentioned above, the presence of Islamic schools - as other faith schools - within the British education system is hotly debated by both advocates and opponents (Daun and Walford, 2004; Meer, 2007). Haw (1998) divides the arguments of the opponents of these schools into two main categories:

* racial and cultural separation, already ominously deep, is encouraged by establishing Islamic schools because they provide for a commonly visible minority, unlike other faith schools such as Christian and Jewish.
* the educational opportunities available to Muslim girls are reduced by Islamic schools because they reflect a cultural tradition that prepares them for a life of domesticity and motherhood only.

Supporters and opponents of Islamic schools in general and state-funded Islamic schools in particular use the same issues to support their arguments such as children’s rights, social cohesion, children’s achievement and behaviour standards, different treatment of boys and girls, autonomy and identity (Tinker, 2009).

### 1.3.2 Muslim Parents and Islamic Schools

According to the Open Society Institute (2005), some Muslim parents would like to send their children to schools with an Islamic ethos, whereas others mainly want single-sex schooling. Some would be happy to send their children to public or church schools so long as these schools are respectful of their faith and understanding of their individual identity. However, at present some Muslim parents feel that state schools are not meeting the needs of their children.

Islamic schools appeal to Muslim parents who feel “their children are caught in a situation of ‘culture clash’, whereby the whole ethos of British state schools and educational policy is seen as inconsistent with their way of life” (Parker-Jenkins, 2002, p. 277). However, Parker-Jenkins (2002) points out that this is not true of all Muslim parents.

It is not the case, however, that all Muslim parents want Muslim private schooling for their children: some do not wish to see their children’s education in ideological isolation and instead look to state schools to accommodate their needs. (p. 277).

Although the majority of Muslims attend state schools, some Muslim parents feel that these schools are not providing their children’s needs. Some Muslim parents look for an Islamic school for their children; my study seeks to find out why. What is it that they think is lacking in state school education? What is it that they believe only an Islamic school can offer?

There is remarkable diversity in how Muslim parents want their children to be educated. Even though some parents would like to send their children to schools with an Islamic ethos, others merely want single-sex schooling; others send their children to state or state-maintained church schools so long as these are considerate of their faith and supportive of their individual identity.

Muslim parents have many concerns about state schools. Some concerns are: identity and belonging, discrimination, values and attitudes, and learning about Islam (McCreery et al., 2007). Haw (1998) summarises Muslim parents’ concerns into four major areas, namely: the failure of the state sector to present an Islamic education; the issue of how a minority sustains the integrity of its cultural identity; the issue of parental contribution; and everyday practical cultural issues. According to the Open Society Institution (2005) the key educational issues concerning Muslim parents are:

The continuing poor academic results of Muslim children; the need to eradicate institutional racism and racist and Islamophobic bullying; the lack of recognition or support for their children’s faith identity; and the inadequacy of spiritual and moral education that schools provide. (p. 104).

In a context of Islamophobia (Allen, 2010), the Muslim community believes state schools must make far more effort to address these issues. Leaders and teachers in these schools have to tackle such challenges by preparing their pupils for life in a multicultural society, advance their knowledge, and increase their ability to deal with racist and religious discrimination and the understanding of other communities (Shah, 2009).

Halstead (1989) states Muslim parents consider two basic principles to be necessary for their children’s education:

* Firstly, access to the opportunities provided by a general education, which include living as full British citizens, avoiding fear of discrimination and racism, competing in the employment market, and enjoying the benefits of modern scientific progress.
* Secondly, the protection of their individual Islamic beliefs and values, which helps them (Muslim children) to form their identity, and gives them a rooted nature as they grow up in the Muslim community.

Rosowsky (2008) reveals that many Muslim parents commonly express a very positive view of the education their children receive in state schools and are generally optimistic about their children’s experience compared to their own when they were in school in the 1960s and 1970s. However, parents were often ignorant of the educational disadvantages their children were subject to.

Muslim motivations for choosing Islamic schools are several. There is an “aspiration to integrate more faith-based principles into an incorporated education system”. (Meer, 2009, p. 385), which means the whole person can be taught in an Islamic environment (AMSS, 2004; Hewer, 2001; Meer, 2007, 2009).

According to the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS):

Education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality through the training of spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses. (2004, p. 19).

Meer (2007) adds that a further aim is linked to the educational achievement of Muslim pupils. For example, there is the belief that greater accommodation of religious and cultural difference can impact positively on academic achievement.

According to Halstead (2005), in 2000 only 30% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys achieved five GCSEs at grades A\*– C, compared to 50% of the national population as a whole. He says that these figures indicate a ‘sense of alienation and disaffection felt by many young male Muslims at school’(p. 136). This assertion came from an empirical study undertaken by the IQRA Trust (Pye et al., 2000), and was supported by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (CMEB, 2000). Halstead also listed other issues that were perceived to be relevant by Muslims themselves:

... religious discrimination; Islamophobia; the lack of Muslim role models in schools; low expectations on the part of teachers; time spent in mosque schools; the lack of recognition of the British Muslim identity of the student. (2005, p. 137).

According to Meer (2007) some features have influenced Muslim parents in choosing Islamic schools for their children. These are:

1. The integration of more faith values into an integrated education system where the child can be educated in an Islamic environment.
2. Greater Islamic culture embedded in the teaching of schools’ curricula to provide more precise knowledge of Islamic civilisations, languages, literature and arts.
3. Separate schools provided for boys and girls for post-puberty education.
4. Specialized training in Islamic religious sciences.
5. The enhancement of Muslim boys’ performances where many Muslim parents see that greater foundation of religious and cultural differences would help to resolve the shortage of boys’ achievements.

Badawi (2005) in her study about Muslim parents in the US found that Islamic schools missions can be understood as having two approaches:

a) A defensive approach confronting the undesirable impacts of the atmosphere of state schooling on Muslim children – “Muslim children can be shielded and protected from acquiring but not from learning about beliefs, values and practices that counter their own”. (p. 15).

b) A protective approach which seeks to “nurture the intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual growth of Muslim children with the hope of producing confident, competent individuals who can go out in to US society and contribute positively their Islamic beliefs and/or practices”. (p. 15).

Children in most Islamic schools want to be ready to be “well ‘versed’ and prepared to function positively and productively in a society that is their home and will be their home for many generations to come”. (Badawi, 2005. p. 15)

TheOpen Society Institution (2005) asserts that many Muslim parents would appreciate the inclusion of studying Arabic in school and receiving a form of religious education. It would help resolve Muslim sensitivities and interests in these particular areas and give their children more opportunities to improve their understanding of their faith as well as studying others.

### 1.3.3 Single-sex Islamic Schools

Local Education Authority closure of single-sex schools has led to many private Muslim schools being established. The history of British education since the 19th Century is that initially most schools were single-sex with some mixed schools in rural areas provided in a single room with one teacher. Larger schools had separate entrances, facilities and lessons for girls, boys and infants, the idea being at the time that females and males were different in how and what they should learn (Leonard, 2006). Initially, the curriculum was divided by societal understanding of the roles of males and females, with the former in the public field and the latter in the domestic field (Delamont and Duffin, 1978).

The UK’s elementary schooling started moving towards a co-educational system from the 1920s (Leonard, 2006) and by the late 20th Century co-educational schooling had become the norm. According to Ivinson and Murphy (2007) we have seen a dramatic decline in single sex schools since comprehensive schools were introduced in 1965. The move to independence for grant-maintained grammar schools also impacted negatively on the availability of single-sex schooling for the majority of state educated students. By the 1980s the number of single-sex boys and girls schools had fallen even further.

Nowadays, according to The Independent Schools Council (2013), although most ISC schools offer co-educational schooling, 20.9 per cent of their schools are single-sex. Moreover, single-sex girls’ schools are more common than boys only with the percentage of boys being higher than girls in co-educational schools. Single-sex schooling in ISC has become more common for children between the years of 7 to 11 where circa 40 per cent of ISC schools are single-sex. Over the past twenty years, the number of ISC co-educational schools has increased while the number of single-sex girls’ schools has not fallen as fast as the number of single-sex boys’ schools for the same period.

Issues such as gender and religion have been the main drivers and impetus behind the establishment of Islamic schools in Britain (Haw, 1998). In addition, there has been a concern about the development of a safe environment for post-pubescent children (Halstead, 1992, 1997; Hewer, 2001). A significant number of Muslim parents wish to send their children to single-sex schools; this is especially true for girls of secondary age (Daun and Walford, 2004; Halstead, 1989). As a result of this single issue, in 1974 the Muslim Parents’ Association was established. The main aim was to support the establishment of a number of private single-sex schools (Meer, 2009).

Ansari (2004) reports that many Muslim parents do not favour the mixing of sexes, particularly in secondary schools, believing that this may threaten the social fabric and harmony of Muslim communities. This can often lead to conflict with the authorities who believe that co-educational schools encourage gender equality and benefit pupils, especially girls. Some Muslim parents are aggravated by the clear challenge of co-education to their values and modesty. Some Muslim parents want different treatment for girls and have asserted their right to choose single-sex schools for their children (Ansari, 2004). Because of this religious and cultural context, some Muslim parents prefer single-sex schools and may wish their daughters to attend these schools. Furthermore, Muslim parents, as other parents, are always concerned about their daughters’ safety.

Growing interest in single-sex schooling (Smithers and Robinson, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2010) has also led to greater demand for evidence regarding its outcome. The questions here are: does single-sex education make a difference to pupils’ achievements? Do single-sex Islamic schools make a difference to Muslim pupils in terms of attitude and attainment?

My research aims to identify the motivations of some Muslim parents for sending their children to single-sex Islamic schools. Numerous reports and reviews of research have provided educators and the public with information about the impact of single-sex education on the achievement, aspirations, and attitudes of both boys and girls (Salomon, 2006). In my study I will explore the views of some Muslim parents on the effects of such schools on their children’s achievement and behaviour.

Many studies (e.g. Jimenez et al., 1991; Lee and Bryk, 1986) have found that female students can improve their performance if they attend single-sex schools and they can gain higher academic achievement in science and maths. In addition, they can gain more self-confidence and express themselves better in non-traditional subjects. Jimenez and Lockheed (1989) in another study found that girls who attended single-sex schools did on average 40% better than girls in co-educational schools. On the other hand, research shows that boys gain more academic achievement in co-educational schools. In a similar study, they found that boys who attended single-sex schools did 20% worse than the boys in the co-educational schools. They attribute this to classmate group influence because girls have a positive effect on boys’ achievement while boys have a negative effect on girls.

Since single-sex Islamic schools were created because of religious and social issues, my study seeks to discover how some Muslim parents see the effects of this type of school on pupils’ achievement and behaviour. Although there is a lot of public discussion about single-sex Islamic schools, academic studies about Muslim parents’ opinions of the impacts of these issues on pupils’ behaviour and achievement are lacking, and we need more research in this area.

Since Muslim communities have been numerous enough to make their voices heard, single-sex schooling has become one of the most important demands on Muslims in the UK (Anwar, 1982; Haw, 1998). According to Halstead (1991), the argument in support of co-educational schooling is set out most clearly by Dale ( 1971, 1974) and has five elements. First of all, mixing of the sexes is not only “natural but also mutually and of positive educational value in our society” (p. 264). Secondly, mixed education offers a healthier attitude to sex and normal relationship between the sexes. Halstead argues that mixed schooling provides a solution for the evils of male “debauchery” and “vice” (p. 264). Thirdly, lessons in mixed classes are much more attractive and preferable for most pupils. Fourthly, teachers also favour mixed schooling because the attendance of girls is measured to have positive effect of boys’ behaviour and learning and make boys less noisy and rude. According to Dale (1971) co-education improves boys’ progress and does not harm girls due to the friendly competitive atmosphere where boys are encouraged and girls communicate. Finally, co-educational schooling offers equality of the sexes in principle and facilitates the equal treatment of the sexes in practice. It avoids discrimination against girls and provides fairer access to resources and curriculum options (Halstead, 1991).

On the other hand, Halstead (1991) also states that there is a set of Muslim counter-arguments which addresses all of the elements identified by Dale (1971). Firstly, in respect of the segregation of sexes as being unnatural this implies that “the extent to which men and women interact socially is somehow biologically determined rather than socially conditioned by cultural, religious, social and economic values, beliefs and practices” (p. 246). He asserts that Muslims believe strongly that single-sex schooling is deeply-rooted in their religious faith. Muslims find it hard to find positive educational values in co-educational schooling. Secondly, in respect of promoting healthy attitudes toward sex, Muslims see that it is the parents’ responsibility to encourage a suitable attitude to sex and to build a shared understanding between the sexes, set within the context of Islamic norms and values. Furthermore, Muslim girls in an Islamic school can develop a reasonable understanding of the opposite sex with much less danger of sexual annoyance than in mixed schools. Muslims would stress the negative effects of the free mixing of sexes outside the context of the extended family at an age when they are young, knowledgeable and susceptible (Iqbal, 1975 as cited in Halstead, 1991). Thirdly, even when boys and girls do attend mixed schools the presence of the opposite sex might have distracting effects on both sexes’ educational achievement. Fourthly, some Muslims put more emphasis on the interaction between teachers and pupils than on the interaction between pupils themselves. Furthermore, Muslims argue that the principle of equality is not necessarily satisfied by identical treatment because there is a relevant difference between both sexes in their physical, emotional and mental development (see, for example, Hughes, 2006, 2007; Sax, 2006; Vrooman, 2009; Weiner, 1994). Treating them in the same way is therefore inequitable due to these differences. Furthermore, the notion of equality in Islam has a spiritual basis, where Islam proclaims the equality of men and women in terms of their moral nature, soul, spiritual right and potential (Halstead, 1991). In Islam, differentiated social roles are not seen as a denial of equality (Iqbal, 1975).

One criticism of Halstead's work is his use of the word “Muslim” in general without specifying whether these arguments relate to all Muslims or only some of the Muslims who oppose co-educational schooling. Halstead recognises that Muslim communities are not homogenous and that there are differences between these communities’ views regarding their children’s education. As previously mentioned, those Muslim parents who send their children to single-sex Islamic schools are part of a very small minority which may reflect the many challenges they face in their host society. These challenges include social, economic and educational issues in addition to the shortage of state funded Islamic schools.

In my opinion, if Muslim parents choose a state funded Islamic school, even if a mixed sex school, they do so for their children because they believe an environment reflecting the Islamic character is safer.

In my study, I will explore the views of some Muslim parents regarding single-sex education, their perceptions of the value in sending their children to single-sex Islamic secondary schools, whether they prefer this type of education for girls only or for both boys and girls. I will also explore their feedback regarding their children’s achievements, behaviour and the effect these schools have on their children’s morals and values.

## Research Aims

The aims of this project are:

* To contribute to an understanding of single-sex Islamic schools.
* To explore the motivations of some Muslim parents in choosing single-sex schools for their children.

## 1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives are to:

* Describe the background of single-sex Islamic schools, their philosophy, their aims and the issues they give rise to UK society at the beginning of the twenty-first century.
* Identify how some Muslim parents feel about single-sex Islamic schools including their motivations for sending their children to these schools.

## 1.6 Research Questions

Research questions are central to my research design. As Clough and Nutbrown (2002) say, “The careful formulation of research question…is key to the realisation of a successful research study, however large or small”. (p. 41).

My research questions are as follows:

1. Why do some Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools?
2. Why do some Muslim parents prefer single-sex Islamic schools for their children?
3. According to some Muslim parents, how does single-sex Islamic education influence their children’s behaviour?
4. According to some Muslim parents, how does single-sex education benefit their children’s academic performance?

## 1.7 Significance of the Study

This study is important as it focuses on an area that has not yet been adequately concentrated upon in the literature. Many studies exist which explore and investigate the reasons and motivating factors that lead some parents to choose faith schools. However, although many studies have investigated factors that influence parental decisions to enrol children in Christian and Catholic schools, few, if any, have been carried out to investigate the reasons which lead some Muslim parents to enrol their children in the full-time independent Islamic schools. Parental motivation for Islamic schools is a field that has been virtually untouched. The results are likely to be useful to different stakeholders in education, including educational planners, policy-makers, parents, students and teachers. Subjects related to the enhancement of academic results and cognitive improvements are topical issues in education at this time. It is my hope that this study will make an important contribution to contemporary debates and possibly present a foundation for further research in this field.

## 1.8 Methodology and Approach

My key resource of empirical data is the perspectives of some Muslim parents in two independent Islamic schools. Their perspectives are collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews which are used to collect qualitative data on the views of my research participants. My analysis of the data entails transcription and familiarisation with my data consisting of my listening to the digital recorder, reading of transcripts with a view to identifying themes and categories, interpreting, analysing and discussing my findings.

I now turn to the thesis organisation.

## 1.9 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters as explained below:

Chapter 1: Introduction

I explain the background and describe the context of my study in this chapter, making clear the context and subject of the study and ordering the project’s aims, objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study and a brief explanation of my methodology. I also highlight where I come from as a researcher, that is, my positionality, focusing on how I chose my study area and my research topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The second chapter introduces the theoretical framework of my research as well as the body of knowledge within which my research is situated and aims to make a contribution.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Procedures

In this chapter I explain, analyse and validate the approaches used to deal with my research questions, including the exact techniques used to generate the research data. The chapter also includes a thorough discussion of the proceedings of the fieldwork, i.e. the designing, piloting and use of the research instruments. An account of reflexivity, reliability and credibility and the ethical principles underpinning the study is included in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, data generated from the participating parents involved in the study is presented in a clear manner to enable understandable explanation and analysis. The themes that arise from the study are discussed in this chapter. The discussions are developed with reference to the research data and the literature.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Some important conclusions are drawn in this chapter from my research findings, including educational suggestions. Opportunities for future research are outlined in this chapter.

## 1.10 Positionality

The function of this section is to draw attention to my relevant background, beliefs and philosophies that might explain my subjectivity in my research decisions. Rosen states:

A person’s knowledge can only exist by virtue of a vast range of past experiences which have been lived through, often with the most intense feelings. These experiences, including textual experiences (books, lectures, lessons, conversation, etc.), we have been taught to disguise so that our utterances are made to seem as though they emerge from no particular place or time or person but from the fount of knowledge itself. (1998, p. 30).

In social science research, positionality has become very fashionable. Wellington et al. reveal:

The methodology and methods selected will be influenced by a variety of factors, including the personal predilections, interests and disciplinary background of the researcher. (2005, p. 99).

Sikes (2004) states that it is essential to understand “where the researcher come[s] from”. (p. 19), and she presents a simplified definition of positionality when she says positionality makes known your stance as a researcher “... in terms of [your] philosophical position and [your] fundamental assumptions concerning social reality, the nature of knowledge and human nature and agency”. (p. 18).

### 1.10.1 My Life History Experiences

I will clarify in brief where I am coming from as a researcher. I believe that as a researcher in the social sciences, my own principles, as Winter (2000) states, “are inevitably embedded within the research and play a significant role in shaping it”. (p. 129)*.*

Educational and professional backgrounds as well as other factors like economic and political climate, among others, have played a considerable role in defining my position as a researcher in education. My home is Libya, and I was born into a Muslim family from which I imbibed Islamic principles in elementary and secondary schools. I studied in a co-educational primary school for six years, and then continued my education in single-sex public preparatory and secondary schools for a further six years. The Islamic curriculum and Arabic language are compulsory subjects in public schools.

I graduated with a BA Honours degree in 1992 from the Faculty of Arts and Education at the Seventh of April University, Azzawia – Libya. After this I was awarded a scholarship from the same university to study for a master’s degree in Islamic sciences. During my postgraduate study I taught the Arabic language and Islamic studies at Jodeddaim single-sex secondary school for three years in Libya. I completed my MA study in 1995 and travelled with my husband to the Netherlands for three years. During my presence in the Netherlands, I helped the Muslim community and Muslim families in Delft by teaching their children the principles of the Arabic language and the Islamic religion. This step was very important for the children to preserve their Arabic and Islamic identity, and it received full support from their parents. I had an interest in Islamic schools and I felt that trying to maintain their children’s identity and religion was a big problem for those parents. I had not realised personally that this was a problem in Western society, because my children at that time were young and I had not yet been in Europe for long. Muslim parents (Libyan and others) were concerned about the future of their children in terms of belonging and their attitude to their language and religion. There were some Islamic schools but they were far from their homes and very expensive in relation to their economic circumstances. I taught a Libyan girl Arabic and Islamic studies. My interest in the role and importance of Islamic schools in the West started from that time.

After my return to my country in 1999 I obtained a post as a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Tripoli University in Libya. I taught Islamic studies and the Arabic language in addition to teaching methods. In the meantime I supervised many final-year students in their research projects, as well as in their practical training in teaching and research methodology. In 2008, I was awarded a scholarship for PhD study in the UK from The Ministry of Higher Education in Libya. It was a great opportunity for me to do my PhD in the UK because of the presence of many Islamic schools when compared to other European countries (Neilson, 2004). There are more than one hundred independent and twelve state-funded Islamic schools in the UK (DfES, 2011).

In undertaking my research on UK Islamic schools, I understand that I am an outsider to the education system and may not be able to interpret everything that goes on in the school easily. English is my second language and it is possible that due to cultural and linguistic differences my explanation of events and activities during the research process may be heavily influenced by my background. My position as an external researcher and speaking English as a second language are likely to be significant challenges in this study.

### 1.10.2 My Epistemology and Ontological Assumptions

I believe it important to emphasise my ontological and epistemological assumptions since they influence my research questions, choice of research methodology and methods. My view concerning the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and my background have had a huge impact on my concept of the world (ontology) and consequently my approach to research.

In my view, knowledge is highly constructed and highly subjective. It is therefore vulnerable to human factors, open to human expansion, improvement and criticism. My epistemological assumption is that knowledge is value-laden, subjective and observed. Moreover, I strongly believe that God accorded the human mind to build human societies and institutions. Because human society and institutions are constructed, they are subject to alterations, amendments and development. Based on these epistemological and ontological views, I consider a research method that entails the collection of peoples’ subjective views and perceptions about social reality, and my understanding of them, as the most valuable means of gathering and analysing data for producing believable knowledge in my research. My research will adopt two principal research methods, i.e. the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview, to explore Muslim parents’ motivations for choosing Islamic schools for their children.

## 1.11 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide the background to my study that investigates the motivations of Muslim parents who choose to send their children to independent Islamic schools. I did this by describing faith schools in general and Islamic single-sex schools in particular. More specific information was given about Islamic schools in the local system where the study is carried out. The chapter also included the research objectives, aims, questions, thesis organisation in addition to a statement on my positionality.

**CHAPTER 2**

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

## 

## 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of a literature review is to help researchers situate their research within the broader body of knowledge, expand a theoretical validation (Wellington et al., 2005), identify gaps in knowledge that a researcher may aspire to fill, extend the researcher horizon and enable them to recognize related theories and ideas in the research field.

This study focuses on parents’ motivations for sending their children to single-sex Islamic schools. It focuses on schools which typically deliver the national curriculum in a self-defined Islamic environment. For my literature review the relevant areas to my study are:

* Faith schools: contemporary issues.
* The historical background of Muslims in Britain.
* Muslim parents: their motivations and concerns
* Islamic education.
* Single-sex schooling.

## 2.2 Faith Schools: Contemporary Issues

In England the issue of faith schools has prompted the most hotly debated questions affecting religion and education. I will explore in this section issues such as indoctrination, social division and the subject of children’s rights vs. parental rights as objections to faith schools.

### 2.2.1 Indoctrination

According to Tan (2011) “indoctrination is derived from the Latin words ‘docere’ meaning ‘to teach’ and ‘doctrina’ meaning ‘whatever is taught’. So indoctrination literally means the imparting of what is taught”. (p. 2). The word “doctrina” was unrelated to religion until the Middle Ages when it became known with teaching of the Roman Catholic Church (Gatchel, 1972 as cited in Tan, 2011). Indoctrination was first used in the pejorative sense in the twentieth century. By this time indoctrination had come to have negative connotations resulting from U.S. progressivist educationists who maligned all aspects of authoritarian education including religious education (Tan, 2011).

Although the meaning of indoctrination is controversial, it is widely accepted as “(a) pejorative and (b) related to beliefs” (Hamm, 1989, p. 97). Recent debates show us that the concepts of indoctrination regarding religious or moral beliefs have been revived with indoctrination seen as synonymous with education. In the past century, indoctrination was held to be synonymous with education rather than a negative concept, whereas more recently indoctrination is something no one wants their children to experience.

By the 1970s and 1980s the concept of indoctrination had come to be known as the belief of knowledge transmission. According to Taylor (2012), “this renewed attention regarding indoctrination has focused on whether parents may give their children a religious upbringing and whether such an upbringing is necessarily indoctrinatory” (p. 1).

It is, however, difficult to identify indoctrination exactly because, in some way, all education is indoctrination, as education generally informs and launches the child into the doctrines and beliefs of the environment wherein he or she is situated (Ameen and Hasan, 2013).

Kleinig (1982) identifies “indoctrination as teaching in which the beliefs, attitudes, values, etc. taught are held in such a way that they are no longer open to full rational assessment”. (Kleinig, 1982 as cited in Taylor, 2012, p. 3). When deciding whether indoctrination is morally objectionable, we need to focus on indoctrination within the school setting. According to Taylor (2012) indoctrination is a process of teaching which involves a hierarchical relationship between the indoctrinated and the indoctrinator and that results in closed-minded belief (p. 5). Tan (2011) states that,

Interestingly, the charge of indoctrination has also been levied against public schools in Britain and even teacher education, science education and secular education domains that are traditionally thought to be free from indoctrination. (p. 3).

Liberals object to faith schools on the basis that it undermines the child’s autonomy and claim such schools and parents have no right to determine the beliefs of their children (Levinson, 1999; Parker-Jenkins, 2005). They further believe that children should be educated objectively. Some theorists claim that faith schools indoctrinate their pupils by passing on religious beliefs that are not to be regarded as true (Hand, 2003, 2004; Siegel, 2004).

The importance of individual autonomy is yet another objection to faith schools; a traditional liberal, Barry (2001), claims that multiculturalism anxiety with identity, culture and politics of differences harms the individual’s rights. He also claims that liberal principles should not be a concession. Others claim that children in faith schools are indoctrinated into a specific religion and that children in religious communities should be encouraged to step back from their community’s belief and focus on critical analysis (Halstead, 1995).

Opposition to faith schools is due, therefore, to indoctrination and such opponents contend that these schools indoctrinate pupils in their failure to give children any choice. In other words their pupils are exposed to theories and ideas which may be contrary to these schools’ religious ethics.

Wright (2003), however, states that faith schools, whether Muslim or Christian, adhere to the principles of teaching values and morals in the local and universal senses, and teach how and why things happen rather than dictate and instruct.

It can be argued that indoctrination does not mean brainwashing but rather that it means teaching somebody else beliefs which they may accept. This acceptation could, however, apply to any subject, such as biology, English or history, say rather than a particular religious subject. Such education could also take place anywhere for example, in the home, with family or friendship groups. It could also be argued that state schools indoctrinate their pupils into the norms and values of a society that privileges individual self-interest above the collective, harmful competitiveness and the preservation and continuation of a social system that favours a materialist way of life. It would be impossible to find a school that does not ‘indoctrinate’ its pupils in one way or another.

Children who may feel they were indoctrinated in their school life can, on leaving school at 16, embark on discovering and deciding for themselves how they want to live their future life.

### 2.2.2 Social Division

Faith schools are often seen as divisive. Judge (2001), an opponent of faith schools, argues that faith schooling “institutionalises segregation [and] children will be bought up ignorant of or hostile to other religions. And this could be a breeding ground for the rioters, or terrorists, of the future” (p. 473). He believes that faith schools will lead to “an unwelcome fragmentation of society” (p. 465).

Kymlicka (1999) asserts that preparing new generations for knowing their duties and rights as citizens cannot come from enrolling in faith schools. He suggests teaching children sequences of facts about their rights and duties is insufficient to foster good citizenship; they need to encourage the practice of politeness, and the capacity to deal with public reasonableness in interaction with other people. He states that being in faith schools cannot offer an adequate education in civility and reasonableness because children in those schools are not around others of different religions and cultural backgrounds (Kymlicka, 1999). He (1999) believes an adequate citizenship education can only be developed in multi-cultural and multi-faith schools.

It is not enough simply to tell students that the majority of people in the world do not share their religion. So long as one is surrounded by people who share one’s faith, one may still succumb to the temptation to think that everyone who rejects one’s religion is somehow illogical or depraved. To learn public reasonableness, students must come to know and understand people who are reasonable and decent and humane, but who do not share their religion. (p. 89)

Interestingly, as with many such arguments, the far greater social divisiveness of the UK’s private school system is never questioned although it unarguably leads to far greater ignorance of social diversity among its pupils than faith schools do. Private school pupils, overwhelmingly from a similar class, social and cultural background, are educated in extreme isolation (far greater than that argued against faith schools) from their less-advantaged peers. It could be argued that the social issues that arise from such an arrangement have far more extensive and deep-rooted implications for society than the presence of faith schools.

Accusations of causing damage to societal cohesion are usually directed exclusively towards minority faith schools. According to Parker-Jenkins et al, (2005) 43 per cent of respondents in a (MORI) report were opposed to Muslim, Sikh and Jewish Orthodox schools in particular compared with 21 per cent opposed to faith schools in general. In many respects, this is a clear example of an underlying racism.

Toynbee (2001) writing in The Guardian newspaper, claims that religious schools are brainwashing and divisive and argues “if ever there was a time to set out the unequivocal value of a secular state it must be now”. Toynbee, despite writing from a supposedly “left” position, was educated privately and had her children educated privately. She apparently fails to see the irony here in what she claims about faith schools.

Concern for the social consequences of religious schools does not come only from anti-religious visions. Romain (2001) claims in The Times, “If Muslim, Christian, Jewish and other children do not mix – and nor do their families – they become ignorant of each other, then suspicious, fearful and hostile” (Romain 2001, cited in Short 2002, p. 561).

However, the advocates of faith schools in general, and Muslim schools in particular, assert that faith schools are not socially divisive and do encourage integration and social unity (Tinker, 2009). In this way Short (2002) argues faith schools are not socially divisive. He asserts that even mixed schools cannot eliminate prejudice, cannot guarantee social cohesion and actually have a high degree of racism and discrimination among their pupils. Short (2002) argues that in spite of a long history of Anglican, Catholic and Jewish schooling in England there is no evidence to prove that pupils attending faith schools are any more prone than those in non-faith schools to develop feelings of hostility towards supporters of other faiths and no faith.

Short adds that social cohesion is enhanced by faith schooling which enables pupils to develop confidence in their religious identity and so allows them to interact in the wider society without fear of assimilation. Wright (2003) supports this view and argues that identity is very important for many minority faith communities, who, if they feel secure in their identity and religion, will seek to make good relationships with those outside their boundaries.

Communicating with other children from different cultural and religious backgrounds does not necessarily mean that prejudice and discrimination is eliminated. In fact many mixed ethnicity schools have large amounts of racism and prejudice amongst their pupils. Such schools do not give any assurance for social cohesion and single-faith schools do not necessarily encourage social division. Abolishing faith schools may not avoid the social segregation of students in state schools who would spend their time at school with students from the same faith and ethnicity anyway.

In my study many participants agreed with Shah (2012) who argues that state schools have failed in fighting racism, religious hatred and encouraging societal cohesion. This is a view confirmed in an international survey of two thousand 14 year-olds in 28 countries about their attitudes toward issues of citizenship. Kerr et al., (2002) argue that,

The average score for students in England on the positive attitudes towards immigrants’ rights scale was significantly below the international mean score. (p. 78).

Billings and Holden (2007) state in their study that the majority of young people from mainly white schools “were intolerant of people of other races, faiths and cultures; they saw little reason to study or respect other (non-Christian) faiths”. (p. 9). Such schools are not doing enough to combat racism, encourage race/inter-faith relations and develop achievement. Some participants in my study claimed that state schools have to do much more to combat racism and discrimination.

For encouraging social cohesion Conway (2011) suggests that government should fund more Islamic schools by giving state-funding to take more control over this type of schools.

I believe that this is not the way forward for community cohesion in this country, but that, on the contrary, state-funded Muslim faith schools should be welcomed, provided that they are sufficiently rigorously regulated and inspected by the state. (p. 9).

### 2.2.3 Parental Rights vs. Children Rights

Faith schools by their nature overtly privilege parents’ rights over their children’s education, determined by their religious beliefs. Many national and international documents acknowledge parents’ rights such as, for example, the European Convention of Human Rights which stipulates:

in the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and teaching, the state shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. (Parker-Jenkins, 2005, p. 41).

These schools might be seen to harm the children’s rights and opponents of faith schools have used children’s rights as an influential argument against them. For example, Gillard (2002) asserts that “religion and education are mutually incompatible. Indeed, religion is the antithesis of education”. (p. 22). They also maintain that faith schools ignore a child’s autonomy and contend that children who are not in a position to give their sensible consent should not be exposed to religious instruction (Parker-Jenkins, 2005). The European Charter on the Rights of the Child (1979) is clearer when it states: “the child must no longer be considered as parents’ property, but must be recognised as individuals with their own rights and needs” (Parker-Jenkins, 2005, p. 41).

The question here is: whose responsibility is it to choose which school is the best school for a child to attend? In practice, it is the parents’ responsibility. When parents want their children to follow their values and beliefs many ways are offered; whether they teach them in their private home, places of worship, schools or supplementary schools.

Those who support parents’ rights believe that parents are responsible because of the three categories stated by Dwyer (1994):

1) Children's interests in intimate relationships and in receiving care from those who know them best and care most about them;

2) Parents' interests in intimate relationships and in moulding a new life in accordance with their ideals; and

3) Society's interests in pluralism and in the family as an essential building block of democratic culture. (p. 1373).

On the other hand, the supporters of children’s rights see that:

the claim that parents should have child-rearing rights rather than simply being permitted to perform parental duties and to make certain decisions on a child's behalf in accordance with the child's rights is inconsistent with principles deeply embedded in our law and morality. (Dwyer, 1994, p. 1373).

These supporters regard the relationship between people as irrelevant and that no individual is allowed to control the life of another person, most notably where the way of control is unfavourable to the other person’s temporal interests. But this, of course, begs a crucial question. If parents do not decide such matters, who does? For young people the only alternative is the state. This in itself raises even more issues with children’s and parents’ rights.

In summary, faith schools established for parents, who want their children to follow their beliefs and values, face a number of challenges reflected in the view that faith schools harm the child’s rights to autonomy and indoctrination. In order to solve this dichotomy Parker-Jenkins (2005) states that:

In the present climate of support for the expansion of this category of school, there is little likelihood of the counter-argument being given equal weight, and only advocacy for children’s rights from individuals within faith-based schools and by interested parties outside these communities will keep the issue alive. However, new models have been proposed which suggest that religious and philosophical convictions could be accommodated within an inclusive community school in which both parents’ and children’s rights might more readily be accommodated. (p. 45).

The foregoing section focused on faith schools in general, controversial issues and debates between opponents and advocates of faith schools. In the next section I am going to explore the historical background of Muslims in Britain and Muslims’ motivations and concerns in British society.

## 2.3 The History of Muslims in Britain

Muslims have been arriving and settling in Britain for over a thousand years, entering the economy and society as traders, bankers, spice merchants, medical students, sailors and servants (Abbas, 2010). Major Islamic contact with British society first occurred with the British Empire in India. Britain also interacted with Muslim countries in commercial and trade sectors (Frazer, 1908; Nielsen, 2004).

More recently there have been Muslim migrations to Britain via the employment of seamen from Bengal, Yemen, Sind, Gujarat and Assam who came to work on British merchant ships (Ansari, 2004; Runnymede Trust Report, 1997). According to Abbas (2005), some of them returned to their countries of origin while others chose to stay and set up small settlements in port cities such as Cardiff, Liverpool, London and Glasgow. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, a new wave of immigration took place due to the need for more men to work at the ports and on ships (Lewis, 1994).

British Muslim communities thus grew slowly and steadily and by 1951, the Muslim population was around 32,000. However, over the next 20 years it rose sharply to 82,000 in 1961 and to 369,000 by 1971 (Peach, 1990). During this post-war period, Britain required manual workers to rebuild the country and invited workers from overseas and the Commonwealth in particular. Muslims, among others, found a way to Britain through commerce, trade, services and education.

Kepel (1997 as cited in Poynting and Mason, 2007) states that in 1948, legislation allowed people previously considered as subjects of the British kingdom to become citizens of the Commonwealth, yielding them full rights to take up British citizenship. However, after mass immigration during the nineteen-fifties and sixties, legislation was changed by the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Bill, the 1968 Commonwealth Immigration Act, and the 1971 Immigration Act.

The census of 2001 reports that the majority of Muslims reside in post-industrial cities in the north of England, Manchester, Newcastle and Bradford, Glasgow in Scotland, Nottingham and Leicester in the Midlands as well as London, Slough, Oxford and Bristol in the south (Ansari, 2004). Islam had by this time also become the second largest religion in Britain (Abbas, 2005; Parker-Jenkins, 2002) by virtue of the Muslim population’s growth.

Owing to the UK Muslim community’s disproportionately high percentage of young members, Muslim parents feel keenly the pressure of living through a new culture in a different society. It has been reported by many that the main concern Muslim parents have for their children is the adoption of English lifestyles, westernisation, and the loss of their heritage and identity when educated in the secular atmosphere of British schools (Ijaz and Abbas, 2010; Iqbal, 1975; Parker-Jenkins, 2002; Sarwar, 1983, 1994). It is clear therefore that Muslim parents are considering how they can safeguard their children’s identity and cultural ethos. My study will explore the experiences and drivers affecting some Muslim parents in relation to their motivation for sending their children to independent Islamic schools.

Woodward (1999) defines identity in the following manner,

Identity gives us an idea of who we are and of how we relate to others and to the world in which we live. Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share that position, and the ways in which we are different from those who do not. (p.1 -2).

In my view, issues around identity and culture are a major influence on parents’ vision about their children’s education and these will be explored in my study.

In order to establish accuracy, consistency, and to avoid potential misunderstandings and confusion, I use the same words to mean the same thing. I am going to identify the principal terms used in my study such as ‘Islam’, ‘Muslim’, ‘Islamic schools’, and later ‘Islamic education’.

### 2.3.1 Islam

Islamic terminology has led to misunderstandings by many writers and commentators. ‘Islam’ is usually used as the name of the religion, ‘Muslim’ is used as a personal noun or an adjective and ‘Islamic’ likewise is used, often interchangeably with ‘Muslim’, as an adjective (Douglass and Shaikh, 2004).

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2013),

'The Arabic term islām, literally ‘surrender’, illuminates the fundamental religious idea of Islam - that the believer (called a Muslim, from the active particle of islām) accepts surrender to the will of Allah (in Arabic, Allāh: God). Allah is viewed as the sole God—creator, sustainer, and restorer of the world. The will of Allah, to which human beings must submit, is made known through the sacred scriptures, the Qur’an (often spelled Koran in English), which Allah revealed to his messenger, Muhammad'.

Ramadan (2004), on the other hand, considers that Islam is a religion comprising shared foundational doctrines held by Muslims premised on the belief that the Qur’an and the *Sunnah* (the Prophet Muhammad’s action and saying) are the revealed texts from God to human beings (p. 23). He argues that the word,

“Islam” has often been translated as “submission” to God, or “entering into the peace” of God. But what is missing from this approach…is the understanding of the fundamental conceptions of Creator, human being, and universe that underpin this conceptualization. It is assumed that the meaning is obvious whereas one cannot truly apprehend the meaning of “submission” or of “peace” in the Islamic universe of reference if one does not study…what is meant at the heart of the Muslim tradition by the realities of “God,” the “human being,” and “Revelation” (p. 11).

### 2.3.2 Muslim

From this, some might wonder at the need to identify and define the word ‘Muslim’ but I think it is useful to clarify this term in this thesis to ensure that the reader readily understands the meaning of being a Muslim. It might also be useful to understand Muslim parents’ views regarding their children’s education and their aspirations for their children to be good Muslims. Tan (2011) identifies a Muslim as “a person who wants to be known as a Muslim and partakes in activities he has identified as Islamic” (p. 6).

According to Malak (2005) “*Muslim* is derived from the Arabic word that denotes the *person* who espouses the religion of Islam or is shaped by its cultural impact, irrespective of being secular, agnostic, or practicing believer” (p. 5).

Ramadan (2004) identifies ‘Muslims’ as

…[w]hether…Western or Eastern, the Muslims of the world refer to a universe of meaning elaborated and constructed around a certain number of fundamental principles. Above and beyond the diversity of their national cultures, the essence of their faith, their identity, their being in the world, is the same; they define themselves on the basis of points of reference that explain their sense of belonging to the same community of faith and at the same time, more profoundly, root them in the universe of Islam. (p. 9).

### 2.3.3 Islamic Schools

Muslims often describe full-time schools that deliver both secular and Islamic education as ‘Islamic schools’. An Islamic school “is any educational institution that emphasizes the transmission of Islamic knowledge, and inculcation of Islamic values and ethos”. (Tan, 2011, p. 5). Douglass and Shaikh (2004) state that it is more precise to express ‘Islamic schools’ as ‘Muslim schools’ to specify “the goal of living up to the standards of Islam, rather than implying its achievement” (p. 8).

Parker-Jenkins (2005) argues that a difference can be drawn between “Muslim – or Islamic - schools’ and ‘schools for Muslims’. Islamic schools ‘develop an entire ethos consistent with religious values”. (p. 277), whilst schools for Muslims are typified by a shared religious identity without insisting upon an entirely Islamic curriculum or ethos, often due to staffing and financial difficulties. The latter tend to be state funded primary and secondary schools. Some suggest that an ‘Islamic school’

[b]etter describes this desire to develop a school along the lines of Qur’anic scriptures, with a strong nurturing of an Islamic ethos which permeates the school curricula. (Parker-Jenkins, 2005, p. 278).

For the purpose of this work, I use the term ‘Islamic schools’ as synonymous with the term ‘Muslim schools’ as it occurs in direct quotations from my participants who chose to refer to these schools in that way.

In the UK educational system, Muslim schools are a comparatively new phenomenon. By the 1990s, there were about one million Muslims in England and more than 400,000 Muslim children of school age (Berliner, 1993; Sarwar, 1994). The vast majority were in state schools, Voluntary Aided Church of England or Roman Catholic Church schools. By the late 1980s and early 1990s it was estimated that numerous schools across the UK had a Muslim intake of 90-100 per cent of Muslim pupils most of which were primary schools (Daun and Walford, 2004; Nielson, 2004). Census data from 2011 suggests these numbers had grown significantly.

Issues which have caused difficulty for Muslim parents include school meals, appropriate dress codes, co-educational settings, and religious and physical education (Haw, 1998). I will discuss all these issues in more detail later in this chapter. Recent research (Elbih, 2012) suggests most parents are satisfied with sending their children to local state schools. However, there exists a minority of parents who wish to send their children to Muslim schools Elbih (2012) observes that

Many Muslims wish to educate their children in a diverse society rather than isolate them in religious schools, but they also wish their children to maintain their religious and ethnic identities. (p. 164).

The paragraphs above address some of the historical background of Muslims in the UK. I now turn to a review of relevant recent studies in order to situate my research within a wider body of knowledge.

As previously stated, a number of Islamic schools were established in the 1980s, some of which primarily taught the UK national curriculum while others taught Islamic sciences only.

The Islamia School, the first state-funded Islamic school, was established in 1989 by some Muslim parents who sought an Islamic environment in order to educate their children (Parker-Jenkins, 2002). By 2007, seven state-funded Islamic schools had been established. By 2010, this had increased to 12 (DfES, 2011). The main goal of these schools was to foster an Islamic ethos rather than to teach the religion itself (Meer, 2007, 2009; Parker-Jenkins, 2002, 2005). Alongside these state-funded schools, there are also a relatively larger number of independent Islamic schools. In my study, I am going to explore Muslim parents’ motivations for sending their children to two of these independent Islamic schools.

### 2.3.4 What are Islamic Schools?

Both primary and secondary Islamic schools in Britain differ from one another and cannot be seen as homogenous. To help identify what Islamic schools are, we need to take an overview of Muslim inhabitants in Britain. British Muslims are a heterogeneous group who differ in their national and ethnic identity, culture, class and ideological standpoints. Nowadays, Britain’s Muslims constitute a number of ethnic and racial groups: out of more than 2.7 million Muslims in the UK, 80% are of Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi descent whilst the remaining 20% is made up of Turkish, Arab, Persian, African and many other ethnic origins.

Originally, Islamic schools were established with regard to the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the Muslims who collaborated in the setup arrangements (Hussain, 2004). As such, these schools appear to have a more cultural than a religious emphasis. Most of these schools have pupils from the Indian subcontinent background due to the high percentage of pupils of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian ancestry (Hussain, 2004).

Muslims were looking for a comprehensive education and Islamic schools were seen by some as the solution for many of these issues. Ramadan (2004) points out that these schools were “for people who are dissatisfied with the educational methods and curricula and deeply mistrustful of the atmosphere in public schools which they consider to be lacking in morality” (p. 130). He adds that:

In an Islamic school, children understand the essentials of their Muslim identity and the priorities of their upbringing through their relationships with their teachers and fellow-pupils and also acquire the tools that will help them to succeed in the other disciplines. To judge from performance indicators, most Islamic schools produce excellent statistics and are often at the top of regional and national school tables. (p. 132).

In Ramadan’s (2004) view, however, Islamic schools cannot be the sole solution for Islamic Western education because they only take a small percentage of Muslim children. Consequently, as these schools are self-funded with high fees and only children from wealthier families are able to attend them, other families need to find other approaches. He (2004) criticises Islamic schools and questions the underlying motivation for establishing such schools. In most cases, Islamic schools are established to protect children from the pressured bad influences of society, harmful environment and to enable them to live alongside Muslims. He considers that this strategy leads them to live in an “artificially Islamic closed space”. (p. 132) and isolates them from their surrounding society.

The school puts forward a way of life, a space, and a parallel reality that has practically no link with the society around it. Some Islamic schools are in the West but, apart from the compulsory disciplines, live in another dimension: while being not completely “here,” neither are they completely from “there”, and one would like the child to know who he is. (p. 131).

Ramadan (2004) states that if we want to establish good Islamic schools we need to explore Islamic education objectives which are:

1. The education of the heart which links us with God and awakens us to an awareness of our responsibilities toward ourselves, our bodies, our relatives, our communities, and the human family at large
2. The education of the mind where Muslims can make a link between the message and the spiritual sources to develop knowledge of the surrounding human beings to find the way of faithfulness in daily life.
3. A combination of the education of heart and mind which guide Muslims to attain personal development and become autonomous in their lives, choices and freedom. (p. 129).

Furthermore, he states:

In most cases, we are still far from having achieved even a small part of these aims, and some schools continue to serve up an education that pushes children toward the development of two contradictory personalities one within a school that tries to provide a happy environment and where Islamic teaching and behavior have been inculcated, and the other outside school, where they end up getting lost without knowing how to use ethical references to establish their own ethical guideposts because they have not really been prepared to face life in society and to interact with others in it. (p. 132).

Ramadan (2004) goes on to state that education should transfer the spiritual knowledge of the cultural and social environment, the human being and history to lighten the person’s heart and mind with faith. Education should provide deep knowledge and offer the general resources and sciences that give Muslims the means to live at home in their environment. He also suggests an alternative approach to deal with this situation:

1. Build the framework of a complementary, not parallel educational approach.
2. To concentrate on establishing connections as active as possible between the education provided in the West and the overall philosophy of the Islamic message. (p. 135).

Ramadan (2004) observes that most Muslim children attend state schools which offer well organised basic education and questions the need to reinvent the state system, spend money, energy and time on subjects and programmes most of which exist in the state education system. He sees that the difference between Islamic schools and state schools is the structure, the rhythm and some supplementary subjects. Rhetorically, he questions, “would it not be wiser to think of an approach that proposes a “complementarity” between what society provides for all children and what Muslims want to pass on to their own?” (p. 134).

The invaluable benefits of this plan are, according to Ramadan:

1. Allowing children to interact among their realities of the society to help them to build their lives and futures.
2. Reducing investment to reach more school age children.
3. Give children a good opportunity for in depth study within the wider society (p. 135).

Ramadan also recommends that Muslim parents should be encouraged to be interested in schools, have contact with teachers and participate in schools’ events in order to understand, enter into and play a real part of their children’s education.

It can be argued that Ramadan’s plan exists in the context of state-funded Islamic schools. Adapting a state-funded Islamic schools strategy could be the solution where the issues affecting Islamic schools in particular and faith schools in general could be resolved by providing state-run faith schools. State-funded Islamic schools would determine issues such as the number of children who can attend, integration, and autonomy could be solved by ensuring these schools are state run. It would increase the number of children able to attend as well as enhancing integration with wider society, whilst ensuring the autonomy of the school. When such schools are funded and controlled by government it might create the opportunity for a vast number of Muslim children and children from different religions to attend schools and facilitate community cohesion. It is also a good opportunity for Muslim children to learn how to protect their individual identity and deal with others who share their society but not their religion.

Revising approaches towards Islamic education is very important in Ramadan’s view. Firstly, Muslims should listen to young Muslim people in order to discern their needs, expectations, and difficulties and build a comprehensive view of their experience. Islamic organizations should be concerned more than any others and should “be characterized by their strength, competence, and seriousness, because this is about working with hearts and minds, and a hodgepodge of contributions and wild experiments have grave consequences” (p. 137).

He concludes that:

In this way, the Muslim presence in the West can become normal without becoming trivial - not by voluntarily clinging to Otherness or by justifying difference but by offering solidarity and moral principles coupled with a confident competence in one’s field. One is valued by making a visible contribution, not by being different. (p. 138).

Many Muslim educators have stressed that Islamic schools should teach the religious sciences alongside all other subjects which themselves should be taught with regard to an Islamic ethos. In Islam, all knowledge is referred to as science (*ilm*) regardless of whether the subject is history, poetry, biology or theology. In Islamic teaching, all sciences are recognised to be from God with two main categories of knowledge. Firstly, all religious sciences have their origin in the Qur’an and this knowledge brings human beings closer to God. Secondly, there is also the knowledge that a human being acquires through speculation and rational effort based on the intellect (Al-Attas, 1979).

Ramadan (2004) states that:

…Islamic associations concerned with education in the West that would like to take the path of complementary action should therefore decide who their partners are and what their human resources (school, parents, students) are; what their precise objectives are for each year; and what is the scope of activities that can be covered in a balanced fashion (religious, community, civic, cultural, and sports education), keeping always in mind the need to integrate their educational project with the life of the city. (p. 137).

Ramadan’s views notwithstanding, Islamic schools are seen by some Muslim parents and educators as a way in which Muslim children can realize and contextualize Islam within their local British environment. This view has been addressed in this study where I have explored Muslim parents’ views about the role of Islamic schools in their local British environment.

### 2.3.5 Types of Islamic Schools

Britain has two main types of Muslim school: day schools and supplementary schools. Supplementary schools are part-time schools and, as with the supplementary schools of other ethnic minorities, such education takes place primarily in the evenings and at weekends. Muslims use mosques, houses, school buildings and youth centres. In these schools children primarily learn how to read the Qur’an, learn about the Sunna (the Prophet Muhammad’s sayings and actions) and, occasionally, community languages. Some schools also teach national curriculum subjects such as science and mathematics (Issa and Williams, 2009; Sneddon, 2009). These schools, sometimes called mosque schools or Qur’anic schools (Rosowsky 2008) were established by Muslim communities from the late 1960s onwards.

Full-time day schools, known as faith schools, are the second option. These are divided into:

1. Independent Islamic schools which provide a mainly Islamic education (seminaries)
2. Islamic schools which provide the National Curriculum alongside religious and cultural subjects.

These schools in are, in turn, divided in two: state-funded; and independent.

My case study was conducted in two full-time independent Islamic schools which offered the national curriculum and religious subjects.

Furthermore, Islamic schools are usually organised into either single-sex or co-educational establishments. Primary Islamic schools may be either single-sex or co-educational whilst secondary schools are single-sex only. Britain has a wide variety of Islamic schools ranging in size from 5 pupils to 1800 (Parker- Jenkins et al, 2005). Daun and Wolford (2004) reveal that independent Islamic schools are estimated to accommodate only about 8000 children (2% of all Muslim children in England). State-funded Islamic schools are required to teach the full curriculum and this is also the pattern in most independent schools.

The above section addresses my preliminary literature review and sets out the historical background of Muslims in the UK and explores the phenomenon of Islamic schools. I now turn to the second element of my literature review, other relevant research projects, in order to locate my research within a wider body of knowledge.

In the next section I will review some of the issues raised in previous research which examined what motivates Muslim parents to choose Islamic schools for their children.

## 2.4 Muslim Parents: Motivations and Concerns

As previously mentioned, some Muslim parents appear to seek an Islamic school education for their children due to concern for their children’s welfare. Some parents suggest that perhaps their fears would be allayed if state schools would take the needs of Muslim pupils more seriously (McCreery, 2007). It is interesting to note that some parents in my study agreed with this view when they were talking about state schools. Other factors which influence their concerns include the lack of relevant community languages in the school curriculum such as Arabic and Urdu for instance; and a concern about single-sex provision, either as separate schools or within co-educational schools (Khan-Cheema, 1996). Notwithstanding these religious requirements, it should be recognised that Arabic is the sacred language for Muslims (Ali, 2008). In my study I explored these issues as factors having a major effect on Muslim parents’ decisions for sending their children to Islamic schools.

Education plays a significant part in being a good Muslim; and, in the same way as any other parents, Muslim parents want the best education for their children. This provision has a long history in Islamic civilisation. According to Coles (2004)

[it] was due to the insistence on research and inquiry as a religious duty that early Muslims produced some of the greatest scientific works and developed as a great civilisation. (p. 44).

‘Being a good Muslim’ was one of the most significant objectives for this study’s respondents. Most of the participants considered that Islamic schools are the quickest way to achieve their aspiration to ensure their children were good people for their families and the wider society.

In respect of religious practice, a recent government report which measured the importance of religion and its effect on how people lived their day-to-day lives found that:

Religious practice is much higher in the Muslim population, with 75 per cent of Muslims considering that they actively practised their religion compared with 29 per cent of the general population. (Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2010, 46).

Additionally, the report states that 26 per cent of Muslims were less likely to agree that their religion affected or would be affected by sending their children to state schools compared to 33 per cent of the general population.

This probably reflects the relatively limited availability of faith schools for Muslim parents; there are considerably more Church of England and Catholic schools in England than Islamic schools and the vast majority of Islamic schools are fee-paying. Limited choices may also explain why Muslims are more likely to say that their religion affects where they live; Muslims may prefer to live within travelling distance of a mosque and whilst churches are widespread across England, mosques are located within areas with existing Muslim populations. In addition, Muslims may wish to live near to others with the same religion and culture. (Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2010, p. 46).

A number of issues have been reported in previous research pertaining to why some Muslim parents seek Islamic schools for their children. In this section I will deal with each one in turn. The issues I have chosen to focus on are:

* Good education
* Curriculum
* Islamic festivals and facilities for prayer and ablution
* The shortage of Muslim qualified teachers
* Discrimination in society
* Muslim girls and discrimination
* Islamic dress
* Islamophobia
* Islamic identity
* Culture and multiculturalism
* Islamic values and moral
* An Islamic environment

### 2.4.1 Good Education

Being a ‘good person’ can mean having had “good education”. This quality has always appeared to be an important criterion when choosing schools and in parents’ choices (see for example, Denessen et al., 2005). All parents, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, want their children to have the highest possible standard of education on offer which includes, according to UNICEF (2000):

* Learners who are healthy, well-nourished, ready to participate, learn and are supported in learning by their families and communities.
* Environments that are healthy, safe, protective, gender-sensitive with adequate resources and facilities.
* Content reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in literacy, numeracy, skills for life, and knowledge in areas such as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace.
* Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities.
* Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society. (p. 4).

Regarding this definition, education is not only about teaching and learning but it is “a complex system embedded in a political, cultural and economic context” (UNICEF, 2000, p. 4).

Quality or ‘good education’ was one of the most important motivations for Muslim parents who chose Islamic schools for their children in my study. Parents asserted that Muslim children should have the best education which, in their opinion, Islamic schools offer. They also wanted their children to have good religious and secular education.

The main questions remain, however:

1. Do Muslims only regard Islamic education as ‘good education’?
2. Do Islamic schools satisfy all these criteria?

In order to address the issues raised by these questions I shall review how Muslims regard Islamic education and its aims. Douglass and Shaikh (2004) state that “Islamic education can refer to efforts by the Muslim community to educate its own, to pass along the heritage of Islamic knowledge, first and foremost through its primary sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah”. (p. 8). They illustrate that Muslim educators generally consider that:

[I]n order for the youth to live as Muslims in a free society that places few outward constraints on individual behaviour, students must truly understand and internalize Islam's principles, beliefs and practices, and learn how to apply them in contemporary society. (p.9).

However, they also state that “Islamic education should embrace logical reasoning, doubt inherited beliefs and even the elements of faith, challenge tradition, and engage in critical thinking” (p. 97).

Regarding the aim of Islamic education, the First World Conference on Muslim Education states that, “education should aim at the balanced growth of the total personality through the training of spirit, intellect, the rational self, feelings and bodily senses” (AMSS, 2004, p. 12).

On the other hand, Halstead (2004) argues that the meaning of education in liberal philosophy in the west is illustrated clearly more than its meaning in the Arabic language. He states that

there are in fact three words in Arabic that are normally translated as ‘education’; one emphasizing knowledge, one growth to maturity and one the development of good manners. (p. 519).

Halstead also states that

However, the Arabic language does not allow for any of the distinctions between education, schooling, teaching, training, instruction and upbringing that have been made much of by western philosophers of education working in the analytical tradition, for the words for “education” in Arabic carry all of these meanings. (p. 519).

It can be argued that this explanation could provide an overview of Muslim parents’ understanding of education. From the wide meaning of the word “education”, Muslims understand that education should be a mix of all those meanings of teaching, learning, and upbringing. In fact, we can say that when Muslim parents say we need a “good education” for our children they mean all of these issues under the name of education. It can be confirmed that the Muslim parents who participated in my study were looking at their children’s education from different perspectives with regard to their understanding of the word “education”. Although some participants regard “good education” as being the means for becoming a religious person, others believe ‘good education’ also means to have good values, morals and growing up in a safe environment. Conversely, others regard a “good education” is to combine religious and scholarly education which they measure as being good education. It is also worth adding here, that no satisfactory overview exists which encompasses the entire meaning of “good education” which is determined by people’s views, opinions and circumstances.

From this analysis it can be argued that the main UNICEF definition of “good education” seems to concur with the desires of Muslim parents. Those people who choose to send their children to Islamic schools aspire to find good quality education, yet protect their children’s religion and identity. There is no guarantee, however, to say that Islamic schools are really able to offer all these features even where they are measured by the school’s performance and parent satisfaction. In order to establish this is indeed the case, we need to carry out more research on these issues. Primarily, and with regard to my study’s findings, participating Muslim parents were highly satisfied with the performance of such schools with regard to their children’s behaviour and achievements.

### 2.4.2 Curriculum

This study focuses on the value which the Muslim communities place on education, their perceived needs and favoured solutions to their educational problems. A specific area of Muslim concern regarding the state school curriculum is religious education (Halstead, 1992). In addition, sex education has been an obvious area of concern for Muslim parents (Halstead, 1997). The balance between secular and religious education, one of the areas of focus in my study, has been an important issue. Some Muslim parents are worried that Islamic schools are likely to pay less attention to the secular curriculum and will instead focus on providing Islamic education which may lead children to be less academically successful in secular subjects (Merry, 2010). However, Islamic schools offer considerable diversity in provision which is not necessarily comprised of solely conventionally exclusive Islamic education. All state-funded Islamic schools, for example, teach the full national curriculum with the only significant differences being Islamic and Qur’anic studies and the consideration of practical requirements such as prayer times and festival holidays (Hewer, 2001; Meijer, 1999). In my study, I explore the place of religious education and practices within Islamic schools as well as the factors motivating parents’ decision in school selection.

Personally, I agree with Meer (2007) who maintains that Islamic schools appear to be doing reasonably well in meeting the challenges of delivering both “secular” and “Islamic” education. Many of my respondents were more than happy with Islamic schools which offered education in both forms because it gave their children the opportunity to learn both their religion and their knowledge about the world more broadly though conventional curriculum subjects.

Another significant benefit of Islamic schools is that they can substitute the nature of knowledge in the school system with Islamic epistemology and knowledge (Elbih, 2012). My study ratifies the view that many Muslim parents feel that these schools offer good opportunities to receive a balanced secular education in a religious context.

Other curriculum areas that are of concern to some Muslim parents include the teaching of evolutionary theory as a fact within science lessons, the Eurocentric nature of the history curriculum, the teaching of other European languages instead of pupils’ heritage languages, and mixed-sex PE classes (Hewer, 2001).

Muslim parents who seek Islamic schools for their children are no different to other parents of children in other religious education settings. Many parents, regardless of their religious denomination, regard their children as an investment and are concerned by many things, including school textbooks on religious education found in state schools. In my view, most parents irrespective of their background and religion, want to protect their particular religious heritage from misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Recent research has shown that textbooks are a primary cause of misleading children with inaccurate information regarding their faith. In their study of typically used textbooks, Douglass and Shaikh (2004) found that Islam is rarely represented in the ways its followers would understand but more through the ethnocentric perceptions of their authors. Meer (2009) states that,

Common examples of the sorts of inaccuracies include the portrayal of the prophet Muhammad as the ‘inventor’ of Islam, rather than a messenger or prophet, as well as an artificial separation of Islam from other monotheistic faiths. (p. 389).

In respect of this issue, Muslim educators have recently called upon teachers to critically examine existing curricula and textbooks to carry out essential revisions that reflect an Islamic view of morality as taught in the Qur’an and Sunnah (the Prophet Mohammad’s saying and actions) (Merry, 2005c). Sarwar (1996) considers that there are books used even in Islamic schools which likewise contradict the principles of Islam and which must be revised, discarded or substituted in accordance with Muslim educators’ views.

Research reports also that Muslim parents can disapprove of other state school curriculum subjects such as sex education, dance, music and arts (Halstead, 1994). Although most Muslim parents only object to certain forms of dance, drawing, and music, they still argue against the way sex education is taught considering any suggestion of sexual relations outside marriage as immoral and in conflict with their religious and cultural practices (Merry, 2005a). They argue that the kind of sex education many state schools offer contravenes Islamic principles. The views of parents in my study coincide with Ashraf (1996) who claims that “the basis for sex education in schools in the secular system of education is purely physical...without any spiritual and moral dimensions”. (p. 1) Halstead (1997) has identified certain aspects of modern practices of sex education which seem to disregard Islamic teaching and therefore are legitimate targets for Muslim opposition. These include the resources used in sex education which might offend against the Islamic attitudes of modesty and decency; that certain behaviour which is presented as normal and reasonable in sex education lessons is considered immoral according to Muslim beliefs; and that certain forms of sex education are interpreted as challenging the Islamic concept of family life.

For this reason, Muslims have emerged as one of the main pressure groups opposing the way sex education is taught in British state schools (Halstead, 1997). Although many Muslim leaders, parents, and even young people are concerned by sex education teaching methods and their underlying values, this strong opposition is not always shared by those Muslims who prioritise developing increasingly westernised attitudes and who seek to influence school policy using democratic and co-operative ways rather than oppositional methods. However, Muslim opposition to the practice of sex education in state schools in Britain has been shared to a greater or lesser extent by other religious minorities. These minorities include observant members of the Sikh community, Hindus, black Christians, Orthodox Jews, evangelical Christians, Catholics, and by other religious minorities in other Western countries (Halstead, 1997). Alternative approaches to sex education for Muslim children have been outlined by some. For example, the British Muslims for Secular Democracy (2010) have published their own guidelines on sex education which argues against any opting out of such lessons and the accommodating of Muslim belief within the teaching context.

In the data from my respondents, most of them consider the way sex education is taught in state schools as a motivating factor in their choosing an Islamic school for their child.

### 2.4.3 Islamic Festivals and Facilities for Prayer and Ablutions

Another major parental concern identified in the literature is the facility and opportunity to pray and celebrate Islamic festivals. The lack of facilities for conducting lunchtime prayers is mentioned as an issue of concern. Sports clothing requirements have been problematic for some Muslim pupils, especially swimming lessons for girls where many wish to swim fully clothed (Haw, 1994; Molokotos Liederman, 2000).

Ablution facilities are another source of concern for Muslim parents. Many parents object to their children changing clothes during the sports lessons in communal changing areas. They have also requested that water should be offered in school toilets for pupils who use the Islamic approaches to cleaning themselves (Woodward, 1993). The lack of halal meat for school dinners has also posed problems for Muslim pupils and schools (Hampton, 1992).

However, both Hurst (2000) and Hewer (2001) have noted that attempts are being made to adapt school structures to accommodate Muslim pupils’ religious requirements by providing, for example, prayer rooms and having specific arrangements put in place for physical education lessons.

### 2.4.4 The Shortage of Qualified Muslim Teachers

Although Islamic schools have grown rapidly in the West, there is no formal teacher education programme for Islamic schools’ teachers. Despite some programmes in parts of the Muslim world and the US, there are no formal accredited teacher education programmes for Islamic schools’ teachers in North America, Europe, or Australia. In fact, Muslim educators rely on professional conferences, seminars, workshops to offer teacher training in Islamic teacher education. Such professional development activities are usually undertaken by teachers with undergraduate or graduate degrees in education but rarely in the philosophy of Islamic education specifically (Memon, 2011). In my view, Muslim parents are concerned with the quality of teachers in these schools as well as the curriculum. Many respondents in my study pointed out that the shortage of qualified teachers in Islamic schools has had a negative impact on the standards of these schools. Some respondents also referred to the financial difficulties affecting these schools.

However, there have been some attempts to overcome these challenges. For example, institutions such as the Al Maktum Institute in Dundee have recently indicated their intention to offer a graduate degree in Islamic education. There is also collaboration between the Institute of Islamic Studies (IIS) and The Institute of Education (IoE) at the University of London which offers an MTeach and MA Education which is a programme to train teachers of supplementary schools using a historical, cultural and civilisational approach to Muslim studies (Memon, 2011).

To date few institutions have understood the increasing need for full-time Islamic school teachers. There is no formal research-based consideration of the principles of an Islamic pedagogy and the training of teachers in setting standards for and supporting religious development, compared to other daily faith schools where teachers have received precise training in educational aims, teachings of the faith and instructional strategies needed to nurture faith realisation. For example, Jewish and Catholic teacher education programmes in Canada serve as worthy models of consideration (Memon, 2011).

### 2.4.5 Discrimination in Society

Avoiding discrimination is an important motivator for Muslim parents sending their children to separate faith schools and many studies. Al-Hashimi (2007) and others (Al-Zeerah, 2001; Merry, 2010; Smith, 2000; Zine, 2006) suggest that Islamic schools are required in order to ensure child safety and protection against racism and religious discrimination which affect Muslim pupils in state schools.

According to Zine (2006), Islamic schools provide a more considerate environment for all students regardless of their gender, class and ethnicity. They provide a suitable location for their students to practise their religious, cultural and political identities freely with a sense of equality and belonging.

The hostility towards Muslims, especially after the 7/7 bombing in London, has intensified the challenges for Muslims living in secular societies (Shah, 2012). In the words of Tinker and Smart (2012), “Muslims became perceived less as ‘potential victims of social inequality’ and more as ‘potential aggressors”. (p. 645). Many Muslims believe that Islamic schools foster “Muslimness” and counter the marginalisation of their experiences in secular society. They consider those schools as essential in order to curtail the hate and aggression towards their religious beliefs.

With regard to discrimination in state schools, Muslim pupils also experience bullying by their peers. According to Woodward (1993), Muslim pupils in state schools can be bullied by white pupils alongside other ethnic and religious minorities. As a result, Pilkington (1999) states that there is a close relationship between racism and under-achievement of ethnic minority pupils in state schools. Short (2002) suggests that protecting children from individual and institutional racism in faith schools might aid their academic success. He also reports that parents felt that some teachers not only had negative attitudes towards Islam but occasionally undermined their [parents’] children’s beliefs and practices (p. 566).

Many studies (Abbas, 2004; Anwar and Bukhsh, 2002; Haque and Bell, 2001) confirm the low achievement of Muslim pupils in state schools which can be linked to factors such as gender, socio-economic background, school factors, population mix, region, length of stay in Britain, religious discrimination and Islamophobia; all of which contribute to dissatisfaction and under-achievement among Muslim students.

In respect of gender and discrimination, Muslim girls have been affected by discrimination. In the next section I am going to explore negative effects towards Muslim girls in some aspects such as education and Muslim dress.

### 2.4.5.1 Muslim Girls and Discrimination

Basit (1997) has explored Muslim girls’ experiences of schooling and highlighted the stereotypical suppositions some teachers make about the lives of Muslim girls with many teachers holding to the stereotypical view that south Asian Muslim children are somehow “trapped between two cultures”. Basit argues that this view has become so widespread that there are young British Asians who have adopted this ethos in recognition that people will empathize with them instantly when they ascribe the difficulties they are experiencing to cultural conflict.

Other studies have reported that teachers have also identified low self-esteem in Muslim girls as a factor and suspect that their parents have lower expectations of them than of boys (Abbas, 2005; Basit, 1997). Furthermore, other studies have challenged the stereotypical view that Muslim parents do not value education for young women (Abbas, 2003; Basit, 1997a; Hussain and Bagguley, 2007; Ijaz and Abbas, 2010; Shain, 2003; Tyrer and Ahmed, 2006). These studies state that parents who responded to the question of the importance of educating Muslim women did so positively. They also agreed on the need for young Muslim women to reach higher education without differentiating between genders and stressed that Islam gave both genders the same educational rights.

My study focuses mainly on parents’ opinions and motivations regarding their children’s education with particular regard to their daughters, evaluating their future in order to safeguard the continuation of their studies in a multicultural society.

Ijaz and Abbas (2010) reveal that Muslim parents value the place of Muslim women in education for various reasons:

* education is important to increase the ability of human capital for the labour market
* it facilitates social interaction.

In his ethnographic study of how Muslim American students preserve their identity in Canadian schools. Zine (2001) found that many students stated that their teachers placed them at lower levels because of the stereotype that Muslim girls in particular had no interest in education. My study offers an opportunity for participating Muslim parents to state whether Islamic schools have empowered Muslim girls to internalise and affirm themselves, and how they are verifying their achievements in Islamic schools.

### 2.4.6 Islamic Dress

Other studies have confirmed that issues around Islamic dress are critical to the decision that Muslim parents take in sending their children - especially girls - to Islamic schools. It is evidently agreed through this that parents attempt to preserve the individual Islamic character of their children.

In this section I will discuss the concept of *hijab* and *niqab* as being the most popular forms of attire identifying Muslims in British society. *Hijab* refers to the scarf that Muslim females use to cover their hair and habitually cover their ears, neck, and chest with the same piece of cloth. According to Islamic teachings, Muslim women are permitted to wear diverse but modest clothing styles in public. Modesty includes covering one’s hair with a scarf, covering one’s legs and arms, wearing loose clothing and avoiding use of makeup or other beautifications. In my study it is essential to mention that the dress code for Muslim women is one of the most important factors influencing participating Muslim parents in their decision to choose Islamic schools for their children.

Many in the West have interpreted wearing *hijab* as a mark of oppression of women and of men’s domination in Muslim societies (Rangoonwala, Sy, and Epinoza, 2011). The Islamic position of modesty for both genders is of paramount importance and is considered a measure to prevent illegitimate gender relations such as pre-marital relationships, dances, parties, alcohol and drugs all of which are forbidden to Muslims. As Islam also takes the view that woman’s beauty is for her husband and marital relationship, this beauty should be covered when women are outside their home (Rangoonwala, Sy, and Epinoza, 2011).

The number of Muslim women wearing *hijab* and *niqab* globally has increased. Nasser (1999) has noted that the new phenomenon of *hijab* began two decades ago in countries such as Egypt and the practice has since spread around the world. People may respect, be curious about, or be intolerant of women wearing *hijab*. Young Muslim women wearing *hijab* can find the level of intolerance hard to manage particularly because this action creates greater visibility, more tension and receives more intolerance than Muslims who dress less obviously. In my study I explore participating Muslim parents’ ideas about their children’s clothing and their dress to maintain an Islamic tradition in relation to school regulations about school uniform.

Wearing *hijab* and *niqab* is an obvious social sign that the wearers are declaring themselves as Muslims. In France, a society with strict sense of secularism, for instance, *hijab* was ruled to be so problematic as a religious symbol that it was banned in public schools. Rangoonwala et al. (2011) maintain that,

[d]ue to the controversy surrounding Islam and its practices, now more than ever before, social attitudes towards *hijab* are likely to have psychological and social effects for Muslim women. (p. 233).

On the other hand, wearing *hijab* and *niqab* may have a positive impact on student adjustment. It may help them find a culturally legitimate space for young Muslim women while growing up, building their identity and stability in their home, religious and school lives. When a Muslim woman identifies herself as a Muslim by wearing *hijab*, she may have the advantage of having a clear sense of belonging to a particular community. In addition, she may create friendships with other women and offer support to other school age students who are wearing *hijab* too. Some participating parents in my study mentioned that they found their daughters in Islamic schools formed good relationships with their classmates because they had the same character as Muslim girls wearing *hijab.*

The majority of Muslim women contend that *hijab* is their identifier as a Muslim and a manifestation of the faith (Haddad et al., 2006). To date, the right of wearing *hijab* has never been subject to legislation in Britain. Although the state school policy on uniforms does allow Muslim girls to wear *hijab* and *shalwar kameez*, this has not prevented continuing debates about integration into mainstream British culture centring on “the veil” as a symbol of isolation (Haw, 2009). My study addresses integration into British culture, explores Muslim parents’ views of their integration into society and how Islamic schools could affect community cohesion.

Central to Western objections and opposition to *hijab* is the concept of the “liberated woman”. It is therefore revealing that the concerns and language which such concerns are expressed in are nationalistic in tone. Williamson and Khiabany (2010) state that,

Labelling Islam as “unique” and “exceptional” and in diametric opposition to what the “West” stands for, the debate about *hijab* is effectively no longer about “liberation” – despite the claims of some liberal feminist journalists – but a reflection of the anxiety over perceived threats to “national culture”, “our way of life” and the very future of the nation. (p. 93).

All Muslims regardless of their gender are expected to conduct themselves correctly in accordance with the laws of Islam, and those Muslim women who fail to comply with those codes of behaviour, dress and speech put their reputation at stake which will have a negative impact on their families and communities (Elbih, 2012). Basit (1997) argues that young Muslim females are seen as the public face of their community and have the responsibility of guarding the honour of their family. It is remarkable to observe that many parents in my study see that Islamic schools help them to protect their family’s honour by protecting their children’s values and identity. Shah (1998) also asserts that family pressure towards enforcing restrictive versions of such values can be extreme. She also points out that family pressure in these immigrant communities can be the prime source of female suppression and oppression. This view is echoed by Keddie (2009) who posits that,

Attempts to retain the Islamisation of women’s roles to protect family honour and to preserve the broader moral and religious status of the community can be especially concerted in times of heightened antagonism between the West and Islam. (p. 266).

### 2.4.7 Islamophobia

In the context of Islamophobia (Allen, 2010), the Muslim community believes state schools must make far more effort to address these issues. Leaders and teachers in schools have to tackle such challenges by preparing their pupils for life in a multi-cultural society, advance their knowledge, increase their ability to deal with racist and religious discrimination, and understanding of other communities (Shah, 2009). According to Moghissi et al. (2009), Muslim American students attending American public schools are dealing with negative ideas that manifested themselves after 9/11 especially among Arabs who comply with Islamic dress codes or have a stereotypical Arabic appearance. Such students find little support from their teachers, counsellors and schools in dealing with Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment. The Runnymede Trust Report (1997) defines Islamophobia as: fear, hatred or hostility towards Islam and Muslims. This definition has been criticised, for instance, by Modood (1997, 2005) who argues that cultural racism is a preferable expression as it contextualises Islamophobia within the wider argument of ethnic equality. Furthermore, Halliday (1999) illustrated “anti-Muslimism” as a description for this phenomenon because it is not against Islam as a religion but against Muslims as people. Furthermore, Cesari (2006) identifies it in the following way:

Islamophobia groups together all kinds of different forms of discourse, speech and acts, by suggesting that they all emanate from an identical ideological core, which is an “irrational fear” (a phobia) of Islam. (p. 6).

A report on Islamophobia defines Islamophopia as “a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims”. (Allen, 2010, p. 1).

Many reports which have been published following the events of 11 September 2001 show that Muslims and other minorities have become the target of increased hostility. For example, The European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (2002) noted that Muslim people who had a much more visual aspect to their religion like women wearing *hijab* were the most likely targets in addition to Islamic schools, Muslim-owned businesses, mosques and Islamic cultural centres. In another report (Open Society Institute), Choudhury (2005) illustrated levels of disadvantage and discrimination being experienced by British Muslims in four areas: equality and discrimination, education, employment and criminal justice. It showed that Muslims experienced seven out nine indicators of unfair treatment. Moreover, a European report (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 2009) noted that 34% of Muslim males and 26% of Muslim females in Europe had experienced anti-Muslim discrimination and the report concluded that someone aged between 16 to 24 was most likely to be a victim with chance seeming to reduce with age (Allen, 2010).

A 2010 report showed that Muslims in London have suffered serious assault and arson beside other less serious assault, abuse and intimidation such as spitting and threatening. However, this report highlights how the majority of Islamophobic hate crimes are not reported to the police either because of a lack of confidence or because victims are unaware of a police interest. Because of this, evidencing the true extent of Islamophobic hate crimes remains difficult to assess or quantify (Allen, 2010).

Fundamentalism is also another problem that has faced Muslims in British society since it has been used broadly in the British media. Muslim schools are in general equated with fundamentalism. According to Parker-Jenkins (1994), Muslims never call themselves “fundamentalists” with that word being seen as pejorative and primarily used by the media in the context of ‘Islamophobia’.

### 2.4.8 Islamic Identity

Many recent studies conducted largely on Islamic education have focused on identity. This will be reviewed in the following subsections. I have decided to refer to these studies as I see a strong relationship between identity and Islamic schools.

### 2.4.8.1 What is Identity?

In general, identity means the character (physical, cultural, linguistic, social, national, etc.) that a group of people or individuals recognise as theirs to differentiate themselves from others and to be unique. This character also includes the values, morals, beliefs and the structure of life of that group or those individuals (Merry, 2010). Taylor (1994) states that ‘what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctiveness from everyone else’ (p.82). Taylor (1989) also sees that identity is “our style of movement [which] expresses how we see ourselves as enjoying respect or lacking it, as commanding it or failing to do so”. (p.15). It can be understood that identity, in Taylor’s view (1994) includes a person‘s self-perception both as a person and as a part of a group.

Nelson (2001) identifies identity as “the interaction of person’s self-conception with how others conceive her: identities are the understandings we have of ourselves and others” (p. 6). Nelson (2001) also sees that identity relates to how people around you understand your self-understanding, self-esteem and self-reflection as well as how they value, review and appreciate your self- conception:

Identity is a question of how others understand what I am doing, as well as how I understand what I am doing. If other people perceive my actions to be those of a morally trustworthy person then they will permit me to act freely. In addition, though, I must see myself as a morally trustworthy person if I am to act freely. Both others’ recognition that I am a morally responsible person and my own sense of myself as a morally responsible person, then, are required for the free exercise of moral agency. (p.22).

The discussion of identity in anthropological discourse means being the same as one’s self as well as being different (Ali, 2008). Another way of saying something similar is Erikson’s (1993) comment that the study of identity must “oscillate between the poles of disconnected singularity and globalising unity” (Erikson, 1993, p. 45). According to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2009), there is no clear notion of identity in modern sociology. It is used broadly and loosely in reference to one’s sense of self, and one’s feeling and concepts about one’s self.

Ali (2008) states that,

It is sometimes assumed that our identity comes from the expectations attached to the social roles which we occupy, and which we then internalise, so that it is formed through the process of socialization. (p. 6).

Some researchers see that identity means change (Kahani-Hopkins and Hopkins, 2002). This thinking was identified by Durkheim when he wrote:

As we advance in the evolutionary scale, the ties which bind the individual to his family, to his native soil, to traditions which the past has given to him, to collective group usages, become loose... as intelligence becomes richer, activity more varied, in order for morality to remain constant, that is to say, in order for the individual to remain attached to the group with a force equal to that of yesterday, the ties which bind him to it must become stronger and more numerous. (Durkheim and Halls 1984, as cited in Ali, 2008, pp. 6. 7).

People may consider themselves to have two or more identities, for example, British and Muslim identity. According to Hutnik (1991), identity strategies of ethnic minority youths can be linked to the degree they identify with majority and minority groups. Because the identity of these groups can be dichotomised, there are four possible strategic outcomes:

1. Dissociation – high for their ethnic minority group, low for the

majority group;

1. Assimilation – high for the majority group, low for their minority

group;

1. Acculturation – high for both the ethnic minority and the majority

group;

d) Marginality – low for both their minority and the majority groups.

In my study, I explore the idea of Muslim and British identity by asking questions about how Islamic schools can help shape the identity of Muslim children as Muslims and as British citizens. The majority of my respondents had no doubt that Muslim identity is critical. I will discuss this point in the findings chapter.

Delic (2006) states that:

Islamic identity is not, as many believe, narrow-minded and confined to rigid and inflexible. Indeed, it is based on a constant dialectical and dynamic movement between the sources of Islam and the environment, whose aim is to find a way of living harmoniously within the context of new societies. (p. 74).

According to Modood (2014):

[O]ur most fundamental concept of equal citizenship is that all citizens have the same rights and duties, are treated the same by the state and by each other *qua* citizens and there is no discrimination on grounds such as gender, ethnicity, race, religion, sexuality and so on. (p. 7).

Although Islam is becoming the second religion in many Western countries, the permanent settlement of Muslims, as well as the sheer number of them, is a new experience both for the societies that welcomed them on a temporary basis and the Muslims themselves (Ramadan, 2004). These host societies never thought that these immigrants and their dependants would one day become full citizens. Muslim efforts to retrieve their identity, to belong to Islam and their aspiration to be faithful have only become common in recent decades. Ramadan, speaking intentionally regarding the ‘new presence’ of Muslims in the West, states that

in order to mark a clear difference in nature between the past and the present: immigration and conversion in the West during the twentieth century have given rise to strong Muslim communities made up of millions of souls, more and more of them citizens, which makes it an entirely new situation. (p. 103).

The Muslim presence in America and Europe during the past few decades has tried to develop many solutions to resolve the problems of “belonging”. Muslim communities have become more organized, building mosques, schools and institutions and a lively sense of belonging. In Ramadan’s (2004) view, although the first-generation immigrants try to protect their children’s religious values and identity, their children may be assimilated by local force of circumstances. What has happened here, however, has been the opposite; Islamic practices among the new generation have become more visible.

Since the 1990s, the importance of religion as a symbol of identity among Muslims has been noted in the body of research. Modood et al. (1997) highlighted the significance of religion to the self-identification of South Asian Muslims living in Britain when they reported that nine out of ten Muslim respondents answered that religion was important to the manner in which they led their lives. Muslims widely fear that their identity will be diluted and their communities will be assimilated into the majority culture. They also posed the question in their survey, “How do ethnic minority people think of themselves?” They found that most second generation Caribbean and South Asian respondents were uncomfortable with the idea of being British.

They found it difficult to call themselves “British” because they felt that the majority of white people did not accept them because of their race or cultural background. (p. 331).

Hutnik (1985) studied the importance of religion to the identity of South Asian Muslims. Some 80 per cent of the respondents indicated that their Muslim identity was important. These findings are significant because the study was carried out prior to the 1989 Rushdie affair, which is identified as a key moment in the development of British Muslim identity. Hutnik’s findings have been confirmed by the Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities (1994) where 83 per cent of Pakistani-heritage citizens saw religion as an important self-defining element. Tyrer and Ahmad’s (2006) study on Muslim women at the universities of Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford and London found that they stressed being Muslim when discussing their identities. Sirin and Fine (2008) conducted a study to understand how Muslim youth express their hyphenated Muslim-American identities and found that living between two similar yet sometimes isolated worlds, resulted in students suffering by compromising their identity in their home and school with their friends. In the words of Zine (2004):

Pressures of race and social difference coupled with equally confirmative peer pressure to engage in activities that are un-Islamic, often leads to the loss of Islamic identity and practice. (p. 7).

Islamic schools, according to Merry (2010), provide students with beliefs, values and standards comparable to their home and help students to develop optimistic self-identification and well-being. Zine (2006) agrees with this view and argues that the environment of Islamic schools helps students to understand their identity, others and the world. Islamic schools aim to

[m]ove the realities and experiences of their students from the margins to the centre of the educational focus. They do so by presenting their ancestors’ contributions to knowledge in addition to presenting another view of a good life other than that promoted by the liberal democracies. (Zine, 2006, p. 42).

Muslim students also face challenges about their beliefs, values and daily life (Smith, 2000) in several other ways. Some students develop resistance to cultural assimilation through establishing communities of support within their own schools (Merry, 2010). Others hide religious symbols by concealing their Islamic identity (Moll, 2009) or change Islamic names to Western names (Moghissi et al., 2009), while some Muslims who have grown up in non-practising Muslim families, assimilate and adopt Western societal values (Moghissi et al., 2009). Yet others construct a new Islamic identity by standing in the middle between assimilation and isolation (Gee, 2000). My study explores the views of some Muslim parents in relation to their views towards assimilations and isolation, and how their choice of Islamic schools has protected their children’s identity.

The universities of Sheffield and Leeds conducted another quantitative and qualitative research on young Sheffield-based Somali refugees’ children aged 11-18 in 2004- 2006 by Sporton and Valentine (2007). The study verified the importance of religion to identity with 92 per cent stating that Islam was important for their daily lives. Being Muslim for those children was the most powerful determinant of their identity. According to Sporton and Valentine (2007):

Defining their own identities is important in giving these groups the security to feel they belong to the nation. In addition, Young people worry about claiming a British identity because “British” is implicitly still imagined as a white identity. (p. 1).

The 2007/08 Citizenship Survey included new questions on national identity by presenting a list of five national identities: English; Welsh; Scottish; Irish; British; together with an *Other* category. Respondents were asked which of these national identities they would consider for their national identity and they could choose as they want. Although 12 per cent of Muslims chose English compared with 60 per cent of general population, 65 per cent of Muslims chose British identity compared with 44 per cent of the general population. Approximately three quarters of Muslims, that is 74 per cent, claimed to have a British identity compared with nine in ten people, 92 per cent, in England overall.

These patterns were also reflected in people of other minorities with non-white people being less likely to identify themselves as English than their white British counterparts. Moreover, there was no difference between Muslim men and women or between young and old. Young Muslims (17 per cent) were more likely than older Muslims (10 per cent) to mention an English national identity, perhaps because of the country of birth. The majority of young Muslims born in England might have felt more able than older counterparts born overseas to assert that they were English (Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2010). It might therefore be argued that English is seen as an ethnic identity rather than a national identity. Furthermore, respondents were asked by the Citizenship Survey 2007/08 about the most important aspects of identity. Muslim respondents considered the top 5 most important aspects of their identity as being: family (48%); religion (31%); national identity (4%); education (4%); and ethnic and racial identity (3%) with others selected as most important by less than (3%) per item.

The significance of these conclusions and their relevance to my study will be of much interest and could well be a good foundation for comparison with my own research findings. It would be interesting to see whether those findings echo the views of my study’s participants who share the same background with participants from previous studies.

Opponents of Muslim schools argue that these schools force Muslim children to privilege their religious identity over all other affiliation (Tinker, 2009). Parekh (2006) states that no single identity, whether religious belief, gender, or nationality is adequate in its own right to give a correct, broad and compound view of the world. He sees that having one dominant identity as being obsessive which carries with it some intrinsic risks. According to Tinker (2009), opponents of faith schools believe that,

given the influence of external perceptions, attending a faith school where you are perceived primarily in terms of religious identity is likely to make you focus on that aspect of your identity, which can lead it to become obsessive. (p. 550).

Adapting an obsessive identity can lead to hypothetically dangerous situations as many opponents of Muslim schools see that inspiring children to become more obsessed with the religious identity could lead them to an increase in religious extremism (Tinker, 2009). My study has found, on the contrary, that all Muslim parents want their children to integrate in their society and feel proud of themselves as British Muslim citizens and would encourage their children to avoid any religious extremism.

Some claim that mistaken policies of “multiculturalism” have allowed separate and oppositional ethnic/religious identities to be reinforced at the cost of over-arching and collective national identities which weaken the country (Prins and Salisbury, 2008). In the Youth Identity Research Project which investigated the experiences and understanding of identity, cohesion and ethnicity, young people had to rank forms of identity such as ethnicity, religion, British, English and local/town identity, in order of importance (Thomas 2009). All of the young people of Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin involved in the research saw their Muslim religion as the most important for them. For the vast majority of these respondents, their Islamic identity was not incompatible with British national identity and many were happy to identify themselves as British Muslim or British Asian. Some of these young Muslim Asians were prepared to say that they were “proud to be British”. For Asian young people, Britishness is more positive than Englishness because Britishness is more inclusive.

This could be a function of Britishness being associated with ideas about inclusive citizenship… British means you live in Britain, abiding laws, treating each other respectfully, a citizen of Britain, having rights in Britain. By contrast, “Englishness” is seen more negatively, as it is viewed as being about “being White”. (Thomas, 2009, p. 6).

In addition, for the majority of the young Muslim people, 63 per cent of those identified as Muslim certainly agreed with the statement “I am proud to say that I am British” and only 10 per cent definitely disagreed. Thomas (2009) stressed that Muslim identity in young people of Pakistani/Bangladeshi origin is not observed as being in a battle with British identity. The British identity remains solid and unproblematic for those young Muslim people, but also gives them a ground to negatively critique the morals and lifestyle of non-Muslims. It is important to note that many of my study’s respondents spoke of British identity as playing an integral part of their identity which they expected their children to treat with respect, but none of the participants mentioned the concept of their English identity. This finding may be connected to Thomas’s (2009) findings especially in the inclusive citizenship expressed in the word of “British” which means living in Britain having rights and duties.

Husain and Ashraf (1979) recommend that in order to build a strong Muslim identity through Islamic schools, Islamic knowledge must be included in all Islamic school subjects. Many Muslims see their children under threat in non-faith state schools. They argue that by attending Islamic schools their children are supposedly protected from three key dangers: assimilation, anti-Muslim prejudice and Islamic extremism (Tinker, 2009).

It can be argued that Muslim parents fear extremism as much as assimilation thereby equalising their fears. This view can express Muslim parents’ strategy via Islamic schools in order to control their children and provide a safe environment for all of their children’s needs without risk. Being in Islamic schools may offer a healthier atmosphere for Muslim children, especially if state funded, and will protect their individuality, identity, avoid assimilation, prejudice, bullying from others and be removed from extreme religious behaviour.

Muslim parents and leaders have been concerned with the value of state education in respect of identity. Teaching a non-Islamic curriculum with non-Muslim teachers with non-Muslim pupils will in time lead their children to lose their identity. Bleher (1996) states that, “You send them to school and they come back as enemies who despise you and regard you as a hindrance to ambitions their friends and teachers have put in their heads”. (p. 63).

Although British Muslims are not a homogeneous group, Basit (1997) says that “a collective Muslim identity transcends the regional and sectarian differences when living in a non-Muslim country which is their adopted homeland” (p. 437)*.*

In my study many participants asserted that they wanted their children to have their own identity within their own culture. They saw religion as one of the significant factors which protect their privacy.

Such fears affect decisions about where Muslim parents decide to educate their children. Mustafa (2001) stated that during the last two decades, the degree of Muslim dissatisfaction with the state education system has become noticeable. Unlike their parents, most Muslim pupils in state schools feel confident about their faithfulness to Islam and have no fear about its significance in their lives diminishing and most of the pupils interviewed were very enthusiastic and proud of their Islamic custom. My study focused on the parents’ fears and how that affected their decision and choice of school which they wanted to send their children to as I will explore and explain in the findings and discussion chapter.

### 2.4.9 Culture and Multiculturalism

Other research shows that preserving culture is one of the main reasons why Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools. My study seeks to explore how culture impacts on parents’ decision to send their children to Islamic schools. In this section I will discuss the concept of culture providing definitions and the different views of previous studies which explain how culture influences people’ decisions to send their children to specific schools, e.g. Islamic schools. This is a useful entrance which will provide me with useful insights into what previous research says, and therefore, help me to compare my findings.

### 2.4.9.1 What does Culture Mean?

There have been many attempts to define culture in psychology or in anthropology. However, the important thing is that we have a working definition of culture for our own use. The word “culture” has many definitions and meanings. For example, Edward Burnett (1871/1996) defines culture as:

Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [*sic*] as a member of society. (as cited in Kashima and Gelfand, (2012, pp. 2- 3).

Lewis (2002) states that culture has added more complications than religion in relation to enabling Muslims to integrate themselves into British society. Consequently, British Muslims face the everyday dilemma of contending with the misunderstanding of their faith, Islam, as being seen as *just a religion* or being identified by the ethnicity with Islam which reinforces the Western view that Islam is anathema to their culture.

Ramadan (2004) states that the common principles of Islam and the diverse ways of Muslims’ life led some orientalists and sociologists to speak about Islam, to explain the plurality of cultures. He states that Muslims who emigrated from their original countries were as keen to bring their way of life as much as they were keen to bring their faith. For the first generation, remaining faithful to Islam means continuing their original customs and habits from “back home”.

They tried, without really being aware of it, to continue to be Pakistani Muslims in Britain or the United States, Moroccan or Algerian Muslims in France, Turkish Muslims in Germany, and so on. It is with the emergence of the second and third generations that problems appeared and the questions arose: parents who saw their children losing, or no longer recognizing themselves as part of, their Pakistani, Arab, or Turkish culture seemed to think that they were losing their religious identity at the same time. (p. 216).

The first Muslim generation always combined religion with culture. In other words, if their children are not following their culture they believe them to be losing their religious identity. Ramadan believes that the Muslim presence in the West should revisit the spiritual sources in the light of Western realities. They have to

…[i]ntegrate whatever there is in the culture where they live that does not contradict what they are and what they believe. So, the universal and shared fundamentals of their Islamic identity will put on the trappings of a variety of cultures, which they should not fear or reject as long as they remain aware of the body of principles to which they must remain faithful….More broadly, this process will give birth to what we have called a European and American Islamic culture—both respectful of the universal principles and sustained by the history, traditions, tastes, and styles of various Western countries. (p. 216).

Many Islamic schools have recently developed a new strategy to educate children moving from different cultural backgrounds so that they develop a more British-oriented inter-racial Islam. The Islamia School in London is an example where the school has children from 25 different nationalities. Such Muslim schools are “more related to the British culture of their young pupils and they teach a broader Islam which does not alienate certain minority members of the British Muslims” (Hussain, 2004, p. 321). My study has been conducted in Islamic schools where the students are from a narrower range of different backgrounds, Pakistani, Somali and Arab. Merry (2005b) states that

For those who see Islamic schooling as a viable option, supporters claim that these schools help to: (a) preserve the cultural customs passed down from generation to generation and (b) provide Muslim children with a proper identity consonant with one’s home environment, thereby ensuring a positive sense of self. (p. 374).

In the US, for example, Islamic schools have been established mainly by Muslim immigrants according to their culture and traditions with less recognition of Islamic educational philosophy or the context of the US thereby creating

[l]imited critical discussions about cultural challenges that the students face in the society causing confusions among the students and, therefore, causing a threat that the students use extreme interpretations and actions. (Elbih, 2012, p.170).

### 2.4.9.2 Multiculturalism

Related to culture, multiculturalism has also raised much attention in contemporary society with definitions varying significantly. For the sake of convenience these definitions can be analysed into two distinct categories: culture is used to (a) explain inequalities between different racial/ethnic groups as well as being (b) the solution to address these inequalities.

Firstly, a conservative approach sees “multiculturalism as a description of British society where minority cultures exist alongside a majority culture based on Christian values and rules”.(Wadia and Allwood, 2012, p. 99). In this approach the minority culture has to accept the beliefs and practice of the majority to achieve the social stability and the outcome of this approach is the de-legitimation and assimilation of minority cultures. This approach prevailed in the UK until the mid-1960s (Wadia and Allwood, 2012).

Secondly, and opposed to this, is a liberal approach where non-violent and equal coexistence of different ethno-cultural groups has been established, but where significant roles are reserved for the state classifying a common set of values and rules to be adopted by these groups. Wadia and Allwood (2012) argue that:

It also backs the state’s role in encouraging tolerance, in resolving conflict which may arise from differences and/or in eliminating inequalities based on race, ethnicity and religion. This liberal approach ranges from the minimalist position of favouring the construction of a consensus around common cultural and principles to one which emphasises ‘difference in unity’ and a role for the state in eradicating inequalities and discrimination. (p. 99).

Thirdly, “critical multiculturalism” adopts a radical approach in advocating a transformative political and social agenda as a means of accommodating difference. Multiculturalism emerged as a term in the 1970s in Britain as an early policy focusing on schooling. Modood and Ahmad (2007) argue that:

Multiculturalism means the extension of the school, both in terms of curriculum and as an institution, to include features such as ‘mother tongue’ teaching, black history, Asian dress and – importantly– non- Christian religions and holidays, religious dietary requirements and so on. (p. 188).

Many years of research have been invested in understanding the implications of multicultural and multiculturalism (Jackson, 2004; May, 1999; Parekh, 2000; Rattansi, 1999). The media has interpreted multiculturalism and integration widely as a statement of governmental disapproval towards difference within society and as an appeal for culture assimilation rather than integration (Wadia and Allwood, 2012). Omar (2012) states that

Multiculturalism should bring about incorporating both cultural and religious resources of minority groups, including Muslims to the national fabric. That is to say, rather than camouflaging certain groups’ values as universal and relegating the rest to occasional dances and food exchanges; multiculturalism should accommodate faith communities and their values meaningfully. (p. 26).

Although individual issues have been raised in respect of multiculturalism such as wearing religious symbols, it is only recently that problems with regard to the wearing of symbols such as *hijab* for Muslim girls or wearing a top knot (tying up uncut hair) or turbans for Sikh men have arisen (Jackson and O’Gardy, 2007). The recent climate has seen a change toward Islamic dress which first became apparent in two recent cases:

In 2006, a Muslim girl in Luton sued her school for their refusal to allow her to wear *jelbab* (full length traditional dress, covering the body and face) and which went to the Court of Appeal on the basis that the school was denying the girl’s right to express her religion. The court found that the school had in fact taken enormous pains to plan a uniform policy which valued Muslim beliefs in an inclusive, unthreatening and uncompetitive way. They illustrated that typical Muslim opinion has been accepted by the school’s rules on dress.

A Muslim female bilingual support worker was suspended from her primary school in Dewsbury after she had insisted on wearing *niqab* (veil covering the face except the eyes) in the classroom. The school asked the woman to remove the *niqab* after her colleagues ad found it difficult to understand her during the English lessons. The support worker refused to oblige and was suspended in September 2006. After her suspension she brought a test case under the Employment Equality (Religious and Belief) regulation 2004, which found that she had not been discriminated against either directly or indirectly on religious grounds but had been subjected to conduct which created a threatening, aggressive, embarrassing, degrading or violent environment. She was given compensation for injury to her feelings.

The second case appeared as an apparent hardening of attitudes towards multiculturalism in general and towards Muslims in Britain in particular by the Government. In her speech, Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government recommended an important public debate that ‘multiculturalism may well be a kind of social division’. Shortly afterwards, however, some government ministers questioned the value and limits of multiculturalism, contrasting multiculturalism and integration (Jackson and O’Gardy, 2007).

In this study, the issue of girls wearing religious symbols has been raised by many participants. Many parents see that although state schools allow their daughters to wear *hijab*, wearing *hijab* is still more comfortable in Islamic schools because all girls dress the same way and this might protect girls from bullying and discrimination. This does not limit their success but increases their confidence.

### 2.4.10 Islamic Values and Morals

Muslim scholars consider that moral education is an important internal development for individuals as citizens within their own kingdom of spirit (Al-Attas, 1979).

According to Dabashi (1993 as cited in Shah, 2006b),

religion is not a mere set of moral principles but a way of life, a code of laws, a system encompassing and integrating the political, social, and economic, as well as personal, moral, and spiritual aspects of life. (p. 368).

Muslim communities generally regard themselves as faith communities. A growing consciousness of Islamic teachings and values more generally has created space for Muslim religious schools. These schools and their teachers are tasked not just to teach knowledge but to provide role models for young learners in order to encourage Islamic values and inspire a high engagement with knowledge and positive attitudes pointing towards the “development of the *Ummah* and the society” (Shah, 2006b, p. 368). Interestingly, in my study many participants mentioned that these schools presented teachers and students as role models.

Islamic schools are expected to offer knowledge of Islam and Islamic teachings in order to allow better engagement with faith-related arguments and practices as well as preparing Muslim children to be able to negotiate and reconcile the requests of their faith with their rights and duties as British citizens (Hussain, 2004). UK state schools frequently seem to fail the Muslim community’s expectations in this regard which leads to a perceived need for Islamic schools among increasing numbers of Muslim youth and parents (Shah, 2012).

It could be argued that being a good Muslim does not affect the host society, because if those students from Islamic schools are applying Islamic values they will be good citizens. Being Muslim in this view does not conflict with the wider society’s values because to be a good Muslim following Islamic principles means to treat others courteously, with a sensible approach toward your society and the surrounding people.

Hussain (2007) states that “[t]he good person possesses an integrated and ordered internal unity of physical, emotional and intellectual aspects, governed by the soul as God governs the universe”. (p. 298). In the view of many Muslim parents, which is consistent with the Islamic theorists, Western moral education (Hussain, 2007) is limited by:

rejecting revelation, faith or metaphysical insight as legitimate sources of moral reasoning (and thus implicitly refusing the notion of moral absolutes), which can lead to moral reasoning without wholly unifying principles… (p. 298).

Western theories claim that moral meaning is dialectically derived between individual and society. In contrast, Islamic considerations of Western moral education present noticeably different views on the nature of moral education and the very meaning of individual as illustrated in the following quotation:

From an Islamic perspective, socially derived moral truths cannot replace the authority of divine revelation and inner experience as sources for moral understanding; the moral ideal is constituted by the nurturing and awakening of the spiritual self into a unity of being. What is in critical distinction between Islamic and western thought is how we define the good, and who we actually are. (Hussain, 2007, p. 279).

The objective of moral education from the moral Islamic perspective is the awakening and appropriate positioning of the inner being within a person. Muslim scholars identify,

[a[ moral education [as] one in which the physical, spiritual and psychological elements are stimulated and guided towards good and right action… The real constituents of moral education are not parents, communities or the state, but the person and the soul within the person. (Hussain, 2007, p. 302).

Islamic educators expect the moral codes outlined in the *Qur’an* will always include a social aim and a personal aim. The student in Islamic schools will participate in social conditions amongst good people who have learned about themselves and God. Ethically, the educated Muslim understands that goodness comes from within, while criteria for judgment come from the divine (Rahman, 1982 as cited in Hussain, 2007, p. 303). Current Islamic scholars encourage personal self-realisation as important to individual development and strive to do so in the context of an Islamic environment without raising an identity formation that is built solely from social circumstances.

Studies have claimed that Muslim students have suffered due to differing values between state schools and home (Moll, 2009). In his study of Moroccan migrants to the US, Hermans (2004) found that parents criticised secular schools for teaching their children to exercise boundless freedom, show disrespect to their parents, question authority with less focus on teaching values and morals and respect of adults. They also complained that these schools encouraged their children to question everything their parents did or said which parents found offensive. My study confirms these findings. Many participants were concerned by the type of freedom which state schools offer especially in the area of gender relations. As I also show in my chapter on findings, parents in this study also mentioned the perceived lack of morals, values and disrespect shown to others as motivators which led them to send their children to Islamic schools.

### 2.4.10.1 Are the Values and Beliefs Taught in Islamic Schools Rejected by the General Community?

This question has been debated by many researchers. For example, Halstead (1989) states that there is a deep clash of values between Islam and liberalism with the three main points between Islamic views of education and liberal view being:

1. The need for critical openness;
2. The need for personal and moral autonomy;
3. The need to negotiate a set of agreed values if any common educational system is to be achieved’. (p. 3).

Halstead (1989) argues that:

Practical tolerance is made easier if people understand the group they are tolerating, and Muslims need to make clear how they would present to their pupils not only the beliefs and values of other faiths, but also the values of non-religious world views. What is needed, for example, is for Muslim children to be given an introduction to liberal values, to what liberals believe about autonomy, about critical openness, about indoctrination, about sexual equality and so on. (p. 252).

Halstead asserted that these issues have not yet been addressed by Muslims. It can be argued, however, that before discussing whether those Islamic values taught in Islamic schools are shared by the general community we should ask ourselves why there is an expectation that these values are not being discussed in the general community. And perhaps the question to ask is: are whole society values shared by the minority within the society?

According to Halstead’s (2004) view Islamic education is indoctrinatory. He believes that the concept of Islamic education does not allow the independence of thought and personal autonomy especially in terms of the truth of the faith. Halstead (2004) believes that the main pillars of liberalism are rationality and intellectual freedom. His analysis shows that the Islamic view of education leads to a religion-centred education, in contrast to the liberal education that he regards as rationalistic. Bagheri Noaparast and Khosravi (2006) argue that rationality is involved in all elements of the Islamic concept of Islamic education. They see that there are some differences between the Islamic view of rationality and the liberal view but there is not a sharp contrast between them.

Halstead asserts that finding a solid basis between liberals and Muslims is not possible. That is because Muslims believe that all education is developing religious beliefs whereas liberals believe that it is not the school’s responsibility to strengthen religious beliefs. However, Muslim schools, as other faith schools, have gained very good results and high students’ achievement compared to other schools in the British society. In my view this is because rationality and intellectual freedom are offered in such schools even when they adapt religious features in the way of teaching and learning. Liberals believe that religion should be presented to children without forcing them and the school should respect them as individuals and give them the freedom to make choices. However, in respect of fundamental liberal rights, the practising of religion by Muslims is a moral right and it should be respected in the freedom of the individual. However, the Muslim right to bring up their children within their religion has been rejected by liberals despite it being a social right. Liberals see that bringing up children into their parents’ faith comes into conflict with their rights to be liberated to choose their individual religion and life (Halstead, 1989).

It can be argued that Halstead’s view on liberals and Muslims can be criticised. By looking at the Muslims’ current circumstances in liberal societies we can say that they have found their way within the host societies. The voice of the Muslim community is heard especially in recent times. According to Ramadan (2004):

We are currently living through a veritable silent revolution in Muslim communities in the West: more and more young people and intellectuals are actively looking for a way to live in harmony with their faith while participating in the societies that are their societies, whether they like it or not. French, English, German, Canadian, and American Muslims, women as well as men, are constructing a “Muslim personality” that will soon surprise many of their fellow citizens. (p. 5).

Living in a different society is not to say a person must not interact with the people from that society especially where one has lived in that society for any length of time. Of equal relevance is that in this day and age the world is a small village where everybody can interact with others and maintain his own lifestyle without causing any harm to others who share that society. Ramadan (2004) argues that Muslims in the West:

[a]re drawing the shape of European and American Islam: faithful to the principles of Islam, dressed in European and American cultures, and definitively rooted in Western societies. (p. 5).

Nevertheless, Halstead (1989) concedes that:

Islam and liberalism do in fact have some common ground in their views of education. For example, both are dubious about the educational value of too strong an emphasis on vocational training. Both stress the need for some sort of integrated curriculum, with due attention paid to breadth and balance. Both are anxious to discourage elitism and to promote individual development. (p. 201).

### 2.4.11 Islamic Environment

An Islamic environment is important for Muslim children and parents alike. Islamic schools, as other schools, provide an environment where parents express what they want, explain their concerns and wishes for their children including academic and personal needs. In my study, the Islamic environment was one of the most important motivators which led Muslim parents to choose Islamic schools. I explored their views about the importance of an Islamic environment inside Islamic schools.

Many Muslim immigrants to the UK do not initially understand the education system and are often unable to attend parents’ evenings. Mothers tend not to attend because of the lack of English. However, even when some schools provide bilingual assistants, some parents are still not keen to attend. Fathers who are likely to speak English confidently also tend to not attend because they work in the evening when those events are held (Crozier and Davies, 2007). Theoretically, Islamic schools allow parents to engage more in school life. Merry (2005b) states that

In theory, Islamic schools allow parents to advocate for their children in a manner that is comparable to the ways in which other, mainly middle and upper-class parents, do elsewhere. It is true that Muslim parents are more likely to speak Arabic, Urdu, or Turkish with the school staff and with their children, although a large percentage of Islamic school teachers in Western countries do not speak these languages. (p. 381).

Crozier and Davies (2007) found that some Pakistani-heritage parents articulated the view that the school had differential attitudes towards them as parents of Pakistani heritage, usually predicated on racist and conventional views. Other issues were the school’s ethos and their failure in making parents from such communities feel welcome and comfortable. Parents also felt that their children’s heritage, whether Pakistani or Bangladeshi, was seen as a burden or drain on primary school resources due to their English language needs and that the children’s parents had failed to prepare them appropriately for school. In my study, I found that a significant number of mothers do attend parent-teacher consultation meetings in the Islamic schools. Some of them speak fluent English; others speak only their language with teachers who can speak the same language. That might be because all attendees are females or maybe those mothers felt confident that the teachers were from the same background.

Although schools invest in significant resources in terms of time and effort to contact parents to involve and empower them to take a more active role, such exertions are usually unlikely to succeed. Crozier & Davies (2007) argue that

The research evidence suggests that many of the schools are not sufficiently welcoming to these minority ethnic parents; not sufficiently so at least, to help the parents overcome their own apprehensions about their lack of educational knowledge, levels of English or even how they will be received as ‘Asian’ and Muslim people. The schools have also failed to address racist abuse towards their children. (p. 311).

Muslim parents often consider alternative education such as home-schooling or Islamic schools due to the fear of peer pressure, assimilation and identity loss (Moll, 2009). However, this is not only true about Muslims and faith-based differences it can be said this is a general phenomenon in all types of schools.

### 2.4.12 Community Cohesion

Community cohesion has appeared as an important issue in recent debates. Becoming ignorant of and hostile to other religions is the most usual argument against faith schools in general and Islamic schools in particular (Tinker, 2009). They argue that such schools prevent children from coming into contact with those holding alternative beliefs.

However, in the 2007/8 Citizenship Survey (Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), 2010) Muslims had very positive views about the level of cohesion in their local areas. The majority felt that people in their areas respected ethnic differences and got on well together. They expressed a high feeling of belonging to their neighbourhoods and Britain as their country. Muslim communities also stated high levels of trust in institutions, parliament, council and the police (Department of Communities and Local Government, (DCLG), 2010).

In terms of belonging to the neighbourhood, Muslims were more likely than the general population to feel they strongly belong to their neighbourhood (80 per cent). This increased from 76 per cent in 2005 to 81 per cent in 2007/8. This can be connected to the discussion above on Britishness.

These results are not entirely reflected in other studies. Laurence and Health (2008) found that a various mix of ethnic groups was certainly related to cohesion. However, disadvantaged areas and areas with high crime levels were also negative forecasters of cohesion. Many Muslims live in disadvantaged areas and within a diverse ethnic mix and a large proportion of Muslims live in areas with the characteristics associated with lower cohesion.

According to The Citizenship Survey Muslims were more likely than the general population to report that harassment was a problem in their local areas. Although there were no differences between young and older Muslims, there were differences between men and women in how much harassment was reported. About 24 per cent of Muslim women reported that harassment was a very big problem compared with 17 per cent of Muslim men.

Having explored come of the central issues that influence parents to choose Islamic schools for their children, I will now review some of the literature regarding Islamic education more generally.

## 2.5 Islamic Education

According to Wilds (1959), education was very important in early Muslim societies:

[E]ducating their people in schools was one of the most potent factors in the brilliant and rapid growth of their civilization. (p. 216).

According to Noaparast (2012) Al-Attas’s view of Islamic education involves making an all-round good person and a society composed of such persons but is not simply about producing good citizens:

The end of education in Islam is to produce a good man, and not - as in the case of Western civilization - to produce a good citizen. By ‘good’ in the concept of good man is meant precisely the man *of adab* in the sense here explained as encompassing the spiritual and material life of man. (Al-Attas, 1980,1996a as cited in Noaparast, 2012, p. 151)

According to Hussain (2004), the majority of Muslim scholars have agreed that Islamic education can be based on three terms which originate from three Arabic words. These words specify the meaning of Islamic education in the Islamic sense:

1. *Tarbiya*, which comes from the root *‘raba’* meaning ‘increase’ or ‘nurture’. God says in the Qur’an “And lower into the wing of submission through mercy and say: my lord have mercy on them both as they did nurture me when I was little” (Qur’an, 17. 24).
2. Also used in the Qur’an is *‘talim’* derived from ‘ilm’ or ‘*alama’ and* meaning ‘to know’ or ‘to teach’. This term has been mentioned in the Qur’an “He who taught you the use of the pen, taught man that which he knew not”.(Qur’an, 96, 46). According to this term, the importance of knowledge is an aim of Islamic education.
3. *Tadib,* the root word is *adab* which means the disciplining of the mind, body and soul and teaching of good manners, ethics and politeness derived from the second source of Islamic knowledge, the Prophet Mohammad’s *Sunnah or Way*. It is from the *Hadith* (Prophetic sayings) “My lord educated me, and so made my education most excellent” (Al-Attas, 1979, p. 144). “As Muslim civilization developed, the word took on the sense of high quality of soul, good upbringing, urbanity and courtesy, the two last words referring to manners used in elite company, and behavior befitting a civilized person”. (Douglass and Shaikh, 2004. p. 14).

These three terms fully demonstrate the importance of the three parts of the human existence that Islam upholds: the mind, body and soul. Douglass and Shaikh (2004) state that “Education gives a person the knowledge to recognize the task, the moral foundation to know what to do, and the personal resources to carry out the task”. (p. 14). Overall, *tarbiya* refers to moral education, *talim* refers to knowledge and *tadib* refers to the tradition or custom of manner agreed throughout the generations. Douglass and Shaikh (2004) write that,

Islamically educated persons would combine the aspects of Islamic education described above. They would be well versed in the original sources of Qur'an and Sunnah, as well as the Islamic disciplines that provide the tools for study. In learning about the deen, they would learn to carry out the duties of the faith, and to act according to its principles. Through ethical and moral teaching, an educated person would act in a socially responsible manner, acquire the social graces of civilized life, and would partake of and contribute to the sum of skill and knowledge according to their time. (p. 15).

Hanson (2001) states that “the idea is to create an ethical, moral, spiritual being who is multi-dimensional and who has a direction that is positive and healthy”. (p. 14). Traditional scholars such as Hussain (2007) see “all real education [as] transformative by nature, reforming the heart and soul of the person and thereby changing his or her character and disposition” (p. 301).

Knowledge in Islam is valued, and Islam has had a rich tradition of education dating back over 1300 years (Shamsavary et al., 1993). The question here, though, is which knowledge is valued. In order to answer this question we need to understand the concept of Islam. According to Parker- Jenkins (1995):

Islam is an all-encompassing faith which provides guidance for all aspects of life and is premised on the belief that a Divine Being is responsible for the creation of the universe and all individuals are accountable for their personal conduct. Beyond this, education is seen as a process through which a child’s total personality is developed in preparation for this life and the *Akhirah* or Afterlife and that without belief in the pivotal concept of *Akhirah*... development of the feeling of responsibility and ultimate accountability is unthinkable. (p. 38).

In respect of these three terms of Islamic education, Shah (2012) argues that religion is a way of life; it is a scheme of combination of every facet of life: political, social and economic, personal, moral and spiritual. However, it is not merely a set of moral principles. She also states that *taqwa* is reached through knowledge and by “application of that knowledge to every aspect of life because the highest spiritual, intellectual and moral values are to be practised in this world of matter” (p. 53).

From an Islamic perspective, Shah (2006b) discusses the concept of knowledge. She explains how the effects of knowledge extend further than physical existence. The inter-relationship between God, self and knowledge constitutes a specific philosophy of education. Education is important and valued in Islam as it enables successive generations to acknowledge their relationship with and dependence on God. The key to the Islamic theory of knowledge is that all knowledge is of God in every sense (Shah, 2012).

“If any do deeds of righteousness, be they male or female, and have faith, they will enter paradise” (Qur’an 4:124).

“God will raise in rank those of you who believe, as well as those who are given knowledge” (Qur’an, 49:11)

In respect of the three parts of the human existence that Islam upholds: the mind, body and soul, Al-Attas (1979) considers that “man” in Islam is composed of soul and body: he is at once spirit and matter, possesses spiritual and sensible organs of cognition, such as *qulb*, (heart), *aql (*mind) and faculties relating to physical, intellectual and spiritual vision of knowledge and awareness. Al-Attas (1979) says that the inclusive and incorporated approach to education in Islam strives to produce a good, well-formed person aiming at the balanced growth of the total personality through training man’s soul and body. People in Islam are born in a state of *fitrah* that is the natural proclivity to believe in and submit to God; the basic aim of Islamic education is

[t]he actualization of *fitrah* in all its dimensions is within a social context and it is therefore concerned with the development of the whole person- *jism* (body), *nafs* (mind) and *Ruh* (spirit) - in and for society. Consequently Islamic education is rooted in definite *a priori* principles which provide criteria for critically evaluating society and the individual. (Mohamed, 1991 as cited in Haw, 1998, p. 69)

The education of women and men is fundamental for development. Human beings need education to lead a successful life. In the Arabic language there is no distinction between education, schooling, training and instruction; these words all have the same meaning. Islamic education is:

An education which trains the sensibility of pupils in such a manner that in their approach to all kinds of knowledge they are governed by the deeply felt ethical values of Islam. They are trained and mentally so disciplined that they want to acquire knowledge not merely to satisfy an intellectual curiosity or just for material worldly benefit but to grow up as a rational, righteous being and to bring about the spiritual, moral and physical welfare of their families, their people and mankind. Their attitude derives from a deep faith in God and a wholehearted acceptance of a God-given moral code. (Husain and Ashraf, 1979, p. 1).

In the next section I will consider the concept of single-sex education in general, its history, opponents and advocates, the learning style differences between boys and girls and single-sex education in Islam.

## 2.6 Single- sex Schooling

### 2.6.1 Historical Background

Single-sex education has been revealed as the most important issue by many Muslim educators and parents in the West. Recent research performed largely in Islamic education and Islamic schools has focused on separating genders in schools. This will be reviewed in the following subsections.

Single-sex educational institutions reflect a long history of educational policy and practice which evolved from the original idea that sexes were different in how and what they should learn. The early curriculum was originally divided by society’s construction of the male and the female, with males located in the public field and females in the domestic field (Delamont and Duffin, 1978).

In the nineteenth century, the majority of middle and upper class boys were sent to school; some went to local schools, known as day grammar schools, or private boarding schools. Girls usually had a limited home education as the aim was to prepare them to be good wives and mothers. According to Purvis (1991) there was:

a continuing concern among the upper classes to seclude girls until they came out and were introduced into society and shortly thereafter married and also to provide respectability for women students. (p. 191).

Upper class girls in the UK were generally home educated by a governess and their education was limited to learning certain social skills (Ivinson and Murphy, 2007). Cheltenham Ladies College, opened in 1858 by Miss Beale, was created for the ‘daughters of gentleman’, and was the first public school for girls. Miss Buss established both Camden School and North London Collegiate School as girls’ day schools for the middle and lower strata of the middle classes.

In the latter part of the century more public schools for upper classes were opened. Many such schools offered girls an education which compared favourably to the education of upper class boys but addressed parental worries about the possible negative impact of a masculine curriculum on their future marriage aspiration and health (Ivinson and Murphy, 2007).

Throughout most of the nineteenth century only a minority of working-class children were educated in schools and this included no more than ten per cent of the female population. Types of schools at that time included dame schools (homes run by women for boys and girls); Sunday schools; charity schools; factory schools and schools established by the Church of England or philanthropists and religious dissidents. For girls, reading, spelling, knitting and sewing were adopted as a curriculum. Needlework was regarded as a vital skill which could enhance family incomes. Bible reading was a social requirement (Purvis, 1991).

By the end of the century, the high school curriculum for girls attending them improved in different ways with some schools, for example, studying the same courses as those studied in boys’ schools. Others maintained the inflexible situation of teaching the academic male curriculum including physics while other schools taught a curriculum teaching physiology, hygiene, biology and domestic sciences excluding physics. Although science became compulsory, lessons were different; boys learned the physical sciences while girls studied nature and body science (Ivinson and Murphy, 2007).

The stereotypical view that the best educational provision must be differentiated by gender and class meant that single-sex organisations remained the norm well into the twentieth century (Ivinson and Murphy, 2007).

Education was made compulsory in 1880 and free in 1891. Schools became larger with separate entrances for girls and boys with the curriculum maintained on gendered lines.

Although most British schools after the nineteenth century were single-sex, a small number of schools in rural areas were either mixed or in a single room with one teacher (Leonard, 2006). From the 1920s, elementary schooling (5–10 years) in the United Kingdom started moving towards co-educational schooling (Leonard, 2006).

In the second half of the twentieth century co-educational schools became more desirable after the onset of puberty (secondary age). Dale ( 1971, and 1974) stressed the advantages of mixed education and his views that teaching both sexes together improved boys’ performances because girls work harder were influential. This competition with girls, he argued, would motivate boys. He also thought co-education was socially better for both sexes because it enables them to learn how to live together and such schools are better as they reflect the real world and prepare young people to interact and integrate into society (Dale 1971, 1974).

In England there has been a vast decrease in the number of single-sex state and independent secondary schools, from 44% in 1965 to only 29% of independent schools and 12% of state schools in 2004 (DfES, 2005 in Leonard, 2006). By 2004 only about one in eight of the state secondary schools in England were single-sex; 226 for girls only and 184 for boys only - out of a total of 3,409 (including middle deemed secondary) (DfES, 2004).

In England single-sex schools are likely to be selective. This means it is very difficult if not impossible to draw conclusions about the impact of single sex schooling on educational attainment.

Riondan (2002) argues that co-educational schooling in the US has failed minority groups compared with other groups. He supports separating minority group boys from white boys as well as girls and he sees that minority groups have been drawn into deviant sub-cultures which come to dominate in co-educational schools. His research seems to support the finding that single-sex schooling occasionally benefits pupils form minority and disadvantaged backgrounds (Smithers and Robinson, 2006, p. 21)

Some independent and maintained faith schools such as Catholic and Anglican schools in the United Kingdom, USA and Northern Ireland continue to be single-sex schools. In addition, many Muslim families in the West have expressed the desire to have single-sex schools for their children (Leonard, 2006).

### 2.6.2 Debates about Single-sex and Co-educational Schools

Smithers and Robinson (2006) carried out a comprehensive literature review citing studies from Australia, America, Canada and the United Kingdom which discuss the impact of single-sex schools (and other forms of separate provision) on academic achievement, subject choice/s and personal/ social improvement. They (2006) highlight that the evidence remains uncertain as to the effect of single-sex provision on education or indeed educational achievement. They maintain that “[w]ithout clear general findings, deciding whether to mix or separate the sexes for education has to be a matter of judgment” (p. 31). They state that there has been no study which can maintain control of every other variable to fully assess the single-sex or co-education factors in schools (Smithers and Robinson, 2006). Much of what follows in this section is taken from this review.

Many studies in Europe and the United States have investigated whether single-sex schools might be more effective in encouraging academic achievement. (Datnow and Hubbard, 2002; Mael et al., 2005).

Comprehensivisation in the 1960s transformed most state-funded single-sex schools in the UK to co-education. Concerns were raised in the late 1970s and early 1980s that the reduction of single-sex education in many places in the world, such as the U.S and the U.K, had resulted in unfavourable educational outcomes for girls both in terms of attainment and in terms of subject choices. A demand was voiced for single-sex schooling as being better for girls. There were many stances but the most vocal were feminists who stated that in co-educational schools teachers interacted more with boys than with girls and that boys were called on more frequently than girls. (Salomone, 2006; Sadker and Sadker, 1994). It was claimed that single-sex schooling was conducive to more studious climates that were more immune to the dominant culture (Meal, 1998).

Later in the century, Meal (1998) showed how anti-learning social norms within many schools, particularly among male students, increased in US co-educational schools and single-sex education was proposed as a possible solution to help resolve these problems, particularly within poor and ethnic minority groups. Single-sex schools, it was argued, permit students and parents to make a pro-academic choice to create a strong academic ethos (Riordan, 1990). Relevant to my study is the fact that many of my research participants see single-sex education as being a possible solution to address low achievement in their children. They stressed that being in separate schools gave their children opportunities to reach higher attainment both for boys and for girls. However, for these reasons, it is impossible to conclude whether improved academic attainment is due to the single-sex context or to a pro-academic ethos engendered in the school. And the latter can be present in all types of schools, single-sex and co-educational.

Furthermore, from the 1990s, the gender gap in academic attainment has caused a moral panic with girls achieving higher than boys in Britain and elsewhere has given rise to theories about the differences in the brains of boys and girls with their fundamentally different learning styles. Some have argued that this may account for why both genders may benefit from segregated education. According to these ideas single-sex schooling might help abolish the gender gap and give boys more benefits (Sullivan et al., 2009). Park et al. (2012) states that

The increasing gender gaps in education favouring girls have led to increasing concern about how to increase schooling of boys, and all-boy schools are one possible means that has been advocated. (p. 2).

Single-sex classes in co-educational schools have also been suggested because they can help raise boys’ academic achievements (Warrington and Younger, 2001). Although single-sex classes were established in co-educational schools to encourage the academic achievement of boys, girls may receive less attention. The debates over single-sex schooling in the US and in the UK have invigorated the prospect of public support for single-sex education (Salomone, 2006; Sax, 2005).

In the following sections I will explain three aspects of these schools.

Firstly, single-sex schools are seen as better for some situations. Secondly, some researchers believe co-education is the best way to educate children. And finally, some believe that boys and girls need different ways to learn (Bracey, 2007). However, as stated already, it is difficult to confirm the view that any one of these arrangements is better than the others (Robinson and Smithers, 1999).

### 2.6.3 Arguments in Favour of Single-sex Schools

### 2.6.3.1 Academic Attainment

The proponents of single-sex schooling offer a range of arguments. Their primary concern is an environment which is helpful to better educational achievement and performances (Salomone, 1999; Shah, 2009; Weiner, 1994). However, there is no firm evidence that single-sex schooling directly impacts on educational attainment. Shah (2009) reveals

[i]t is argued that ‘for’ or ‘against’ stances which shape popular literature on single-sex education can be misleading because assessments of single-sex education’s success or failure are linked to multiple factors such as institutional goals and ethos, indicators of success used, historical context and status of school, student selection processes, and others. Historically single-sex schools have been prestigious and private and are held in greater esteem because they generally have selective admission policies to screen the large number of applicants. (p. 197).

In other words, it is almost impossible to disentangle the various factors that contribute to educational attainment.

However, notwithstanding this lack of clear evidence, the idea of a segregated learning environment for both sexes has been revived by supporters of single-sex education (Sax, 2005). As a result, promoting single-sex schools and classrooms is being trialled in the UK. Advocates of single-sex schools and classrooms have provided two reasons for supporting this idea:

1. Distractions usually exhibited by the other sex
2. Different learning styles of both sexes (Reeves, 2006).

The first argument is that boys and girls in co-educational schools are distracted by each other, that they always try to impress one another and that this drives their attention away from individual learning. Vail (2002) says

[the] advantage most often associated with separate schooling of boys and girls is the elimination of distraction. Freed from the worries of impressing the opposite sex, boys and girls can focus on their books (p. 35).

In the US Roirdan (2004) asserts that the fundamental assumption of single-sex schooling is that separate education contributes to high performance by easing conflict, stresses, pressures and enticements. He also asserts that single-sex schooling works for boys and girls, male and female, whites and non-whites with a positive effect among minority groups like black and Hispanic females from low socioeconomic status homes. Many researchers believe that boys from poor families and minority groups in particular are likely to benefit from single-sex education with the more direct guidance they need. These groups of boys improve their level of achievement through improved behaviour where teachers focus on differences in learning style and that girls were just as likely to benefit from single-sex schooling (Guarisco, 2010). Salomone (1999) also lists many theories in favour of single-sex schools and explains how this type of school has a great effect on students deprived historically, deprived minorities, low and working class youth and females. However, some of these studies are to be interpreted with caution inasmuch as their dataset is restricted exclusively to single-sex Catholic High schools in the US. Their findings equally suggest there is no impact on average or higher than average achieving pupils (Smithers and Robinson, 2006, p. 7).

### 2.6.3.2 Subject Choice

According to Grase (2003) and Bryk et al. (1993) (using the same dataset as Riordan) pupils who attend single-sex schools experience positive effects on academic achievement in mathematics, science, reading and writing at the second and final year levels for pupils. Salomone (2006) argues that

Evidence from abroad [suggests] that single-sex schools increase both interest and course-taking not only in math, science and technology among girls, but also in language arts and foreign languages among boys, academic subjects traditionally less favoured by them (pp. 792.793).

It is clear though that, despite the absence of clear evidence, those favouring single-sex education have the perception that students in single-sex environments are high achievers and that the environment offers a liberating experience for young girls which contributes to improved self-concept and wider subject choice (Shah and Conchar, 2009; Smithers and Robinson, 2006). Participants of my study tend to have the same perception.

### 2.6.3.3 Behaviour and Self-Concept

With regard to behaviour and self-concept, Granleese and Joseph (1993) measured self-concept in their study of girls from one single-sex and one mixed school. They found that girls in single-sex school were less critical of their behavioural manner than girls in co-educational schools. This lack of criticism was one of the best predictors of overall self-worth in single-sex education. Other observations include girls having a comfortable attitude, less pressure over their appearance and dressing as they chose. It is interesting to note that participant parents in my study confirmed these views; they felt that their daughters had less anxiety regarding their appearance. However, the very small sample in this study prevents any further generalisation.

Advocates of single-sex education consider that the influences of adolescent culture distract students’ attention and that single-sex education may reduce the effect of this culture on academic learning because pupils focus more on their education rather than on physical attraction and interpersonal relationships (Coleman, 1961; Riordan, 1985).

Many studies (Goodlad, 1984; Lee and Bryk, 1986; Salomone, 2003) observe that students in single-sex schools are more focused on their studies and spend more time on homework and show higher academic achievement than students in co-educational schools. Streitmatter (2002) in his study of American single-sex secondary schools found that girls in such schools had a sense of ownership of their class whereas girls in co-educational schools had no such sense of ownership because of the boys’ dominance. Girls reported that they were confident to ask and answer questions because they were not concerned about classmates’ reaction as is the case in mixed classrooms. The majority of parents in my study agreed that girls in single-sex Islamic schools were not concerned about classmates’ reaction and that they felt more comfortable since they were in a single sex classroom.

Sax (2009) found that women graduates of single-sex high schools had advanced academic engagement and confidence in their mathematics and computer skills. Smithers and Robinson (2006) state that,

[i]n 2005, for example, all of the top ten independent schools were single-sex, nine of them all-girls. Five of the top ten maintained schools were also girls’, with the other places occupied by three boys’ and two mixed. (p. 2).

However, they do not relate that success exclusively to the single-sex system,

But while some very academically successful schools are single-sex, it does not follow that they are successful because they are single-sex. (p. 2).

### 2.6.3.4 Attitudes to and Perceptions about Single-sex Schooling

Many attitudinal studies, which are important but do not, on their own, demonstrate causal consequences for single-sex contexts, have found a preference for single-sex education by both males and females. Shah and Conchar (2009), for example, in their study on single-sex education found that 58.6% adult male respondents and 51.5% women respondents respectively stated that single-sex schooling was very important / important. Male respondents supported single-sex education for girls-only schools while women respondents supported single-sex schooling for boys and girls. Shah and Conchar collected their data under four main headings: education, culture, religion and social. A huge number of respondents argued that single-sex education provides a better environment with more focus on education and complained that with teaching, teachers in mixed sex schools often support one gender in preference to another and also mentioned high achievement and performance. In my study I found that most of the male and female participants preferred single-sex schooling for both boys and girls especially after puberty.

Of more relevance to the findings of this study is that Shah and Conchar (2009) reported that some of their respondents stressed single-sex education as a religious requirement and others felt single-sex education was safer and more secure with a lower risk of sexual attraction. This view has been confirmed in my study with most participants preferring single-sex schooling after puberty for religious reasons which, according to them, states that children should be separated after puberty.

According to Shah and Conchar (2009), the majority of their participants, local community groups and all members of Nottingham City’s Race Achievement Forum, advocated single-sex education and, many respondents – particularly women and young people - presented strong and overt reasons to maintain co-education in order to prepare young people for ‘the real world’.

According to Wills (2007), teachers argue that a positive classroom group attitude to learning has a beneficial influence on their children and that single-sex classes can decrease the negative impact of the opposite sex on children. Differences between boys and girls according to Sax (2008) are best accommodated by single-sex education. He states that “in the co-educational classroom so many of the choices we make are to the advantage of girls, but disadvantage boys”. (p. 1). He also reports that single-sex education is the best way to accommodate boys’ requirements without disadvantaging girls. Dee (2007) reveals that teachers’ dealing with both genders has had a big impact on students. He claims that teacher interaction with students has two aspects: firstly, teachers have a higher expectation of boys than girls especially in maths and science; they often encourage boys to take these subjects. Secondly, teachers interact better with male students than female students in these subjects. Again, it needs to be emphasised that these studies report teacher perceptions and observations. The fact that the evidence for different academic outcomes is so inconclusive means that such perceptions and observations remain particularised and subjective.

### 2.6.3.5 Teaching Approaches

It has also been found that teachers often use different instructional strategies for each gender (Lee, Marks, and Byrd 1994; Valentine, 1998) and that this may have an impact on subject interests and choices. According to Hall and Sandler (1982), the view that considers science and maths as related to male careers leads primary school girls, who were as interested in maths and science as primary school boys, to lose their interest by the time they enter secondary school. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) study (1992) found that girls were more likely than boys to have their capacities in maths and science unobserved. Furthermore, girls were more likely to be recognized as gifted or advanced at a younger age but that due to such a culture, girls were more likely than boys to fall off the gifted track in secondary school due to peer pressure to hide their intelligence (Jenkins, 2006). In co-educational schools, girls felt uncomfortable speaking and received less attention than boys. Girls also received more sex discrimination in co-educational schools which, with other issues, led researchers to conclude that co-educational schooling has negative effects on girls’ attitudes, achievements, enrolment and career choice (Jenkins, 2006). Consequently girls in co-educational schools who compete with boys should be more disadvantaged and discriminated against than girls in single-sex schools. Interestingly, these findings somewhat contradict current patterns of academic performance in secondary schools where girls outperform boys in most subjects. For example, A-level results for 2005 in the UK show girls outperforming boys at the highest grades in nearly all subjects including Maths, Further Maths and Physics (Smithers and Robinson, 2006, p.11).

My study partially confirms these findings in that Muslim parents report that when girls are in their girls-only school atmosphere, they ask questions, speak freely and openly as well as recognising right from wrong. Growing up in this environment ensures that girls have an early opportunity to decide upon what they want to achieve with their lives.

Conversely, a student reaction to the teacher’s gender is another concern in respect of student-teacher interactions. Riordan (1990) states that single-sex girls’ schools tend to employ more female teachers than co-educational schools and that single-sex boys’ schools tend to have more male teachers. Some studies have found that students derive more benefits from same gender teachers. Dee (2007) reveals a huge effect of same gender teachers on students’ performance “Simply put, girls have better educational outcomes when taught by women and boys are better off when taught by men”. (p. 71). These effects might be ascribed to the teacher being seen as a role model for their students (Nixon and Robinson 1999; Riordan 1990) and a positive effect may result out of good management of students’ discipline and classroom order notably for boys (Sullivan et al. 2010). As Park et al. (2012) suggest

[s]tudents in single-sex schools are more likely to have same-gender teachers who possibly can better discipline student behaviours than do teachers of a different gender. We reason that teachers’ management of classroom discipline and order can be even more effective when they deal with only either all boys or all girls (p. 8).

Many of the Muslim parents who participated in my study saw that the teachers in Islamic schools play such a role and that children going to such schools would find support from teachers who are comparable to their parents as well as being of the same gender, cultural and religious background.

Finally, however, Smithers and Robinson (1995) admit that although single-sex schools are at the top of the national schools ranking, such schools are highly selective, tend to recruit pupils from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and are long-established schools with academic traditions.

[No] simple pattern regarding single-sex and co-education therefore emerges... while some schools may be better than others, and while some pupils may do better in a single-sex or mixed environment, there is no general rule. Good schools are good schools. Effectiveness cannot be raised merely by segregating the sexes. (pp. 46.47).

## 2.7 Arguments in Favour of Co-educational Schools

### 2.7.1 Academic Attainment

Generally, educational studies in 1960s and 1970s found that the atmosphere of co-educational schools was much friendlier and more comfortable. Co-education advocates argue that co-educational schools are better for children because they reflect the real world (Guarisco, 2010). They prepare both genders for interaction and integration through societies and reduce sex stereotypes (Dale, 1971, 1974). Robinson and Smithers (1999) argue that co-educational schools are more realistic for everyday life in the following words,

It has been suggested that educating the sexes together is more like real life, and the experience of growing up with the opposite sex makes it easier to move on to the mixed environments of university and employment (pp. 25. 26).

Vail (2002) suggests that “boys and girls must learn to get along together in the world… and separating them will take away that opportunity” (p. 38).

In their study about some single-sex schools becoming co-educational schools Marsh et al. (1989) found that both boys and girls were benefited socially and not to the detriment of academic achievement.

West and Hunter (1993) state that many parents prefer co-educational schools for their daughters because this type of school gives them a good opportunity and better preparation and experience for real life.

Robinson and Smithers (1999) illustrate that, boys who had been in co-educational schools always showed that “being educated alongside girls enabled them to grow up at ease with the opposite sex” (p. 34).

In his study regarding the gender differences in achievement in secondary schools in New Zealand, Harker (2000) point out that the traditional belief that girls do much better in single-sex schools is not determined. His study also shows that there is no evidence of academic advantages of both types of schools. School type as Harker's view is not a significant feature in respect of improving girls’ achievement rank in mathematics or science.

The most important question that should be posed according to Monaco and Gaier (1992) is “whether single-sex education is preferable or more beneficial for women than is co-education; rather, the concern is how each of these settings interact with learning variables to influence achievement behaviours”. (p. 592).

Robinson and Smithers (1999) concluded that

whether the pupils enjoyed or benefited from a single-sex or mixed environment seemed to be very much a personal matter. There were frequent mentions of the competitiveness of girls' schools and the good results they obtained, but there was no support at all for the idea that boys tend to dominate classes. There were some comments about boys being a distraction, but many felt that it was good to grow up together and get to know each other. (p. 40).

### 2.7.2 Behaviour and Self-concept

Dale (1974) reported that in co-educational schooling boys were doing better in mathematics and were less anxious. He believes that co-education helped boys and it did not damage girls. Other advocates claim that co-educational schools may reduce sex stereotypes (Harries, 1986).

Hansot and Tyack (1988) also see that this type of schools is fairer because they give girls the equal rights paralleled to boys. Others claim that girls in single-sex schools have lower aspirations without male classmates.

Jones and Thompson (1981) see that co-educational schools are better in socialising boys and reducing their antisocial behaviour. Kenway and Willis (1986) feel that “when girls are taught separately, then boys’ education in this area is neglected and the problems of their sexist attitudes and behaviour remain” (pp. 21.22).

Oigara (2011) in his comparison study found that girls in mixed schools are more talkative and willing to share ideas and that unlike girls in separate schools, these girls had better communication skills, whereas boys were more confident about themselves in mixed schools with greater career aspiration than girls. Likewise, boys felt good to share their classes with girls as it enabled them to develop a good knowledge of the opposite sex and have good relations with them.

Mendez (2004) is concerned that, “without the collegial relationships boys and girls form in school, they will not develop into men and women who understand and respect one another” (p. 1).

In his 26-year study of grammar schools in England, Dale (1974) concluded that “it has been demonstrated that the average co-educational grammar school is a happier environment for both staff and pupils than the average single-sex school” (p. 273).

Co-educational schooling provides a collegial relationship for both sexes without which they could not grow into men and women who can value and respect each other. Others consider that co-educational schools are fairer than single-sex girls’ schools which have received poorer resources than parallel boys’ schools (Hansot and Tyack, 1988).

Supporters of co-educational schooling see that separating by sex is like separating by race. The National Organisation for Women (NOW) is opposed to single-sex education as they see “so called “separate but equal” policies rarely treat girls equally, often relying on outdated sex-stereotypes about girls’ and boys’ interest and abilities”.(Guarisco, 2010, p.7). NOW fears that, “all boys’ schools increase sexism and exacerbate feeling of superiority toward women”. (p. 8). According to NOW, enhancing interaction between boys and girls in the classroom is the best way to achieve workplace equality in the future (Guarisco, 2010).

Smithers and Robinson (2006) have concluded that excellent single-sex and co-educational schools exist for reasons other than that the sexes are separated or together for their education. As Kommer (2006) states, there are advantages of a co-educational environment such as understanding how the opposite gender feels, thinks, responds and reacts which is the most important aim for gender-friendly classrooms.

Robinson and Smithers (1999) have illustrated that

Thus while it is possible that some girls (or boys), at some stages of their lives, may do better or worse at a single-sex or co-educational school, it is not possible to claim that all girls or boys, under any conditions, and at any time, would do better in one or other type of schooling. (p. 64).

Moreover, Robinson and Smithers (1999) concluded their study by confirming that the social temper maintains to shift toward co-educational schooling where many parents tend to send their children to mixed schools even they were educated in single-sex schools.

For my study co-educational schooling was only deemed acceptable for children in the primary stage. The majority of Muslim parents consider co-educational schools at primary school level to be acceptable and saw no need for separate primary schools but stressed that single-sex schooling was vital for teenagers.

### 2.8 Islam and Single-sex Education

Single-sex educational institutions receive great support from the Muslim community. Shaikh and Kelly’s (1989) study of the educational attitudes of South Asian Muslims from the north of the UK found that Muslim parents, especially fathers, consider single-sex education as the most important thing for their daughters. Mothers on the other hand, consider education itself as important in respect of appropriate employment. Both fathers and mothers view education positively. The findings in my study fall in line with Shaikh and Kelly’s (1989) study.

Parker-Jenkins and Haw (1996) in their study about single-sex Islamic schools interviewed parents, teachers, staff and students in order to investigate patriarchy and understand the relationship between single-sex schools and the status of women in Islam. They found that to manage the behaviour of the female students the staff resorted to a set of patriarchal and authoritarian rules. According to the parents’ opinions, the point of these schools was to maintain Islamic values and identity. The teachers saw schools as means to induct students into an Islamic ethos. Students constantly challenged the patriarchal and authoritarian approach to managing their schools*.* Moreover, female students appeared to oppose the patriarchal order that caused segregation and limit their interaction with their society. However, my study was in contrast with these findings, where most participants valued single-sex education itself because it provides opportunities for their daughters to be educated to a high standard in safety. They did not mention patriarchy or power.

Other parents believed that Muslim students needed to be separated from wider society for their safety. “Safety” here includes protecting girls from un-Islamic behaviours such as drugs, negative male influences and pre-marital sex (Elbih, 2012). In my study, safety was an important motivation that leads participating Muslim parents to send their children to independent single-sex Islamic schools. Parents believe such schools to be safer and to give children more confidence.

Muslims also believe that single-sex schools are a religious requirement. Shah (1998) states that the sex-segregation advocated by some Muslim communities or individuals is a religious requirement which is not supported by religious texts. This has been confirmed in my study where Muslim parent participants believe that in Islam, girls of secondary age are forbidden to be in the same school with boys.

The Qur’an prefers social separation of males and females but makes no specific mention of sex segregation in teaching and learning situations. Shah and Conchar (2009) state that “[s]ex segregation, as defined by the Qur’an, is a part of a particular educative programme for men and women and is linked with the discourses of sex and family in Islam” (p. 199).

The most important aim of such segregation is to create a non-threatening environment to ensure equal participation for males and females in the public and private sectors, thereby facilitating participation and giving equal opportunities for women and men alike. A suitable dress and behaviour code for mixed situations proposed by the Qur’an indirectly negates sex segregation.

The Prophet Mohammed (p.b.u.h) taught women and men together at the same time and in the same mosque in Madina. His wife Ayesha continued to teach men and women in the same mosque (Al-Hibri, 1982; Mernissi, 1991, 1993; Shah and Conchar, 2009). Shah and Conchar (2009) state that “sex-segregated institutions cannot be mandatory in Islam as they are not explicitly validated either by the Qur’an or the Sunnah” (p.199).This is another example of the power and impact of perceptions when it comes down to choosing a suitable school. Here, the perception is that single-sex schooling is a religious requirement that needs to be followed regardless of the social circumstances. That the vast majority of Muslim parents send their children to state-maintained co-educational schools provides a strong contrast to the motivations of the parents in this study.

Islamic notions of sex, sexuality, and morality are another issue in Muslim societies. Sex outside marriage is forbidden in Islam (Al-ghazali, 1995). Single-sex education for girls is the most important requirement for Muslim parents in the UK where different mores to do with sex, social mixing and marriage prevail (Shah, 1998). Some Muslim Pakistani parents, for example, who have settled in Britain, continue to send their daughters to be educated in Pakistan because of the perceived threat to their moral code by co-educational schools. Ali (1996) states that “Asian parents are very protective of their daughters because of their perceptions of English society’s problems with drugs, alcohol, and undue emphasis on sex” (p. 411).

In my study the majority of participants saw that being in co-educational schools increases the risk of sexual relationships and immoral behaviour.

Many studies consider mainly Muslim parents and their daughters’ education. One such study by Afshah (1989) suggests that Muslim parents believe that their daughters’ religious observance is a higher priority than their education. Ahmad (2001) adds that “…Muslim parents have played an instrumental role in encouraging their daughters to succeed both academically and professionally” (p. 143)*.* Hamdan (2006) in her Canadian study of Arab Muslim women concludes that Arab Muslim mothers spend considerable time, energy and resources in educating their children, boys and girls. Fathers also offer significant encouragement for their daughters. Many researchers confirm that Muslim parents encourage their daughters to get good education (Ahmad, 2001; Hamdan, 2006; Khanum, 1995; Wade and Souter, 1994). Parents are basically keen to educate their daughters to enhance their future prospects in terms of their career and marriage. Ahmad (2001) states that

Education and qualifications were seen as a possible ‘back-up’ that assured a certain degree of security against the worst-case scenarios. These concerns were further compounded by parental fears of failing to procure or locate ‘suitable’ husbands for their daughters (p. 144).

According to Ahmad (2001), the economic security of girls was the most important reason to encourage their education. They encourage their daughters into higher education to secure both their future economic as individuals and to maintain their social prestige within their social circles.

Few studies have measured why parents, especially fathers, are “keen to maximize their daughters’ and their own social prestige by encouraging them to succeed academically” (Ahmad, 2001, p. 149). Hamdan (2006) concludes that fathers’ encouragement and family socio-economic states are the keys for university entrance. She finds that the majority of her respondents come from families where parents especially fathers are highly qualified. These findings have been supported earlier in Stromquist’s (1989) study:

It is unclear why wealthier parents favour their daughters’ education. Does the parents’ education render them more egalitarian? Does their economic status allow them to consider education as a consumption item? Or do they see their daughters’ education as a necessary investment to maintain their parents’ social standing? [Research shows] that women are much more dependent than men on the socioeconomic status of their families to gain access to higher education (p. 143)

In contrast, in my study participating parents, both mothers and fathers, often not highly qualified, were still anxious about their children’s’ education. In fact, many participants informed me they were looking for good education and a practical future for their children. This perhaps ties in with more generally observed aspirations of migrant groups who tend to encourage their children to surpass their parents in terms of education and professional success (Rosowsky, 2008).

In the next chapter I am going to describe and explain my research methodology.

# CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

## 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the research methodology, research design, research population and samples, methods of gathering the data and their sources, data analysis, ethical considerations and the conclusions made.

The focus will be on defining and clarifying the methodology of my research study. I begin with looking at the definitions of methodology and method. In my view, research methodology consists of the analysis of, and justification, for the approaches used to address the research questions.

## 3.2 Methodology and Method

### 3.2.1 Methodology

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology (2009) describes methodology as:

The principal concern of methodology is wider philosophy of science issues in social science, and the study of how, in practice, sociologists and others go about their work, how they conduct investigations and assess evidence, how they decide what is true or false. The topics addressed include whether the social sciences are in fact sciences; whether the social scientist needs to understand a sequence of social actions to explain it fully; whether there are laws in the social sciences which can predict as well as explain; whether research can be, or should be, value-free; causal powers, inductive and deductive theory, verifications and falsification; and other problems in the philosophy of knowledge and science. (p. 439).

Sikes contends that the expression methodology itself can be used,

[to] denote the overall approach to a particular research project, to the overarching strategy that is adopted. Thus case study, life history and action research are examples of methodological approaches. (2004, p.16).

According to Silverman:

A methodology refers to the choices we make about cases to study, method of data gathering, forms of data analysing etc. In planning and executing a research study. So our methodology defines how one will go about studying any phenomenon. (2010, p. 110).

However, methodology cannot be right or wrong; it is only more or less useful. Clough and Nutbrown state that,

Trying to produce a definitive definition of methodology as used in the social sciences and to serve the purposes of all researchers is rather like trying to catch water in a net. Different researchers offer slightly differing definitions according to their own training, discipline and purposes. (2002, p. 27).

For my study, methodology will be understood in line with the vision held by Wellington et al. (2005) who say, “Methodology refers to the theory of [generating] knowledge and the activity of considering, reflecting upon and justifying the best methods” (p. 97)*.*

### 3.2.2 Method

On the one hand, “method” refers to the diverse agents that are used to collect data. Cohen et al. (2000) define methods as strategies and approaches used in the process of data collecting. By methods, ‘we mean that range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction” (p. 44).

A method, therefore, is a technique, a tool for doing research, for gathering evidence, and collecting data. Examples include surveys, case study, interviews, focus groups and conversation analysis. Methods according to Silverman are:

... specific research techniques, these include quantitative techniques like statistical correlations, as well as techniques like observation, interviewing and audio-recording. (2010, p. 110).

Furthermore, these techniques also are neither true nor false. Research methods can be based on either qualitative or quantitative methodologies. There are no right or wrong methods, just methods suitable to the research topic and the model with which the researcher is working (Silverman, 2010).

## 3.3 Research Approaches

This study will apply a case-study approach. Eisenhardt (1989) maintains that “case study is a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (p. 534). Case-study design allows for multiple sources of data, including open-ended questions in questionnaires and parents’ interviews. My study includes independent case studies of Muslim parents who send their children to two Islamic schools.

Case studies are organisational in nature (Yin, 1981). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), a case study may be very “simple or complex”*.* They also point out, “the case may be a child or a classroom of children” (p. 236).

Case-study research has become enormously popular in social inquiry. It focuses on a bounded system with which, according to Merriam (1998), “boundedness” can be determined by asking whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed or a limited amount of time for observation. If there is no end (actually or theoretically) to the number of people who could be interviewed or to observation that could be conducted, then the phenomenon is not bounded enough to be a case (pp. 27.28). Adelman et al. (1980) state that “Case study is an umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decision to focus on enquiry around an instance” (p. 48)*.*

My selection of the case-study approach is based on the following rationale: “It provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited timescale” (Bell, 1999, p. 10). According to Cohen and Manion:

Case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit - a child, a clique, a class, a school or a community. The purpose of such observation is to search deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which that unit belongs. (1994, pp. 124.125).

The case study of an organisation may involve observation, discussion, interviewing, visits and the study of written records and documentation. I strongly feel that a case study provides for the use of both qualitative and quantitative procedures in the generation of data. This is repeated by Sturman (1994), cited in Bassey, who says:

Case study is a generic term for the investigation of an individual or group phenomenon. .... the techniques used in the investigation may be varied, and may include both qualitative and quantitative approaches. (1999, p. 26).

Bell (1999) holds similar views; she states that “though observation and interviews are most frequently used in case study, no method is excluded” (p. 10). This view is further supported by Merriam who asserts:

Unlike experimental, survey or historical research, case study does not claim any particular methods of data collection or data analysis: any and all methods of gathering data from testing to interviewing can be used in a case study. (1988, p. 10).

According to Yin (2003), different studies lead to different research approaches which need different ways to gather and analyse experiential evidence. And each approach has its own advantages and disadvantages. Although each approach has its individual features, there are huge overlaps among them.

Yin (2009) explains that the researcher using the method of case study needs to know how this approach is different from other research methods. He also recommends the following three conditions to make our choice of a unique method: (a) the type of research question posed, (b) the researcher’s control of behavioural events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. He displays these three conditions with relation to various research methods in a table as follows:

**Table 4: Relevant situations for different research methods adapted from Yin (2003, p. 5).**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Method** | **Form of question** | **Requires control of behavioural events?** | **Focuses on contemporary events?** |
| Experiment | How, Why? | Yes | Yes |
| Survey | Who, What, Where, How many, How much? | No | Yes |
| Archival Analysis | Who, What, Where, How many, How much? | No | Yes – No |
| History | How, Why? | No | No |
| Case Study | How, Why? | No | Yes |

The use of case study is challenging for three reasons: generalisation, validity and sampling. The problem of generalising from a study of one case study is summed up by Bogdan and Biklen:

Purposely choosing the unusual or just falling into a study leaves the question of generalizability up in the air. Where does the sitting fit in the spectrum of human events? The question is not answered by the selection itself, but has to be explored as part of the study. The researcher has to determine what it is he or she is studying: that is, of what is a case? (Bogdan and Biklen 1982, as cited in Wellington, 2000, pp. 97. 98).

Denscombe (2007) makes the point that “the extent to which findings from the case study can be generalised to other examples in the class depends on how far the case-study sample is similar to others of its type” (pp. 36. 37).

My case study is based on a sample of Muslim parents who have chosen single-sex secondary Islamic schools for their children. As stated in the introductory chapter, these schools are self-funded Islamic schools.

The first case study is based on a girls’ school authorised by Ofsted and established in 1996 for pupils between 12 to 16 years old. It is an independent faith school which teaches religious and secular subjects.

The second case study is a self-funded single-sex Islamic school for boys established in 2002, also authorised by Ofsted for boys aged 11 to 16 years old. It has also recently established a section in a separate building for girls aged from 11 to 14 years old. It also offers religious and secular subjects.

My study is an intrinsic case study and generalisability is not an issue in qualitative research, which is merely descriptive. Intrinsic case study is interesting in all its peculiarity and ordinariness, but it is not essential to generalise beyond a single case (Stake, 1995). However, Mason (1996) claims that qualitative researchers should plan to create explanations which have a wider resonance and are in some way generalisable, and they should be fulfilled by producing accounts which are particular to the experiential example they have studied. My study focuses on the debate over single-sex Muslim schools in the UK. It does not claim to be generalisable to other national contexts or to other kinds of faith schools; it is an intrinsic case study. Generalisability could be considered by extrapolating the accounts provided by the interviewees to other stakeholders, whereas the accounts provided by single stakeholder groups may hold diverse views. The variety of arguments used by the interviewees is argued to be representative of the broader extent of opinions held by those involved in the discussion.

In conclusion, it is important to say that case study is the most appropriate method for my study. This type of methodology is the best approach to deal with a complex setting involving gender, cultural, and religious issues. It focuses on a bounded system where there is a limit to the number of people who will be interviewed. The case-study approach assists in a better understanding of the real-life situation, as Denscombe writes:

The case study approach works best when the researcher wants to investigate an issue in depth and provide an explanation that can cope with the complexity and subtlety of real life situations (2007, p. 38).

Furthermore, I prefer the case-study method since I pose questions beginning with “how” and “why”. According to Yin, case-study design is used when

... how or why questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. (2003, p. 1).

## 3.4 Research Procedures

The research procedures employed in this study were determined by the aims of the research. For gathering data and producing analysis of parents’ types of motivation, it was essential to observe the opinions of the diverse actors and bodies in substantial depth. As a result, it was concluded that a qualitative approach would be most appropriate. The particular methods were of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. I consider it appropriate to use questionnaire and interview methods in order to identify the Muslim parents’ motivation for sending their children to Islamic schools. My findings will frame my thinking about why they preferred these schools, especially at the secondary stage.

### 3.4.1 Questionnaire

According to Cohen et al. (2000), the questionnaire is an effective instrument for gathering data in most educational research exercises. In addition, with a well-designed and organised questionnaire, the researcher can investigate the relationships that may be established between the various elements within the research. Although my study does not seek to make matters generalisable, Miller remarks:

If the questionnaire/interview schedule is being used on a survey that has a valid sample design, it is possible to make reliable generalisations from survey figures (sample estimations) to the whole population (population parameters). (2003, p. 253).

There are two types of questions in a questionnaire: the open-ended questions and the closed-ended questions. With open-ended questions, a respondent can answer in as much detail as he/she wants without prompting, while closed questions allow limited options for the respondents to select. However, open-ended questions may sometimes bring out data that is difficult to recognise or tabulate. I used a questionnaire believing it is a fitting means of obtaining information about details, facts, feelings, attitudes and opinions. Respondents can be anonymous, especially when answering sensitive questions (Turney and Robb, 1971).

A questionnaire has to be clear, instantly recognisable, and with straightforward language and words, including closed and open-ended questions which will be used to obtain the qualitative data, in addition to simple explanations, examples and definitions. Cohen et al. (2000) recommend that a researcher needs to make every effort to keep the questionnaire as brief as possible by controlling the range of the questions to essential issues linked to the research, keeping away from any preventable detail or non-essential topics.

The use of the questionnaire made it easier for me to establish information from a large number of parents within a short time, when compared with interviews. In a questionnaire, the interviewer’s effect can be reduced, since there is no interviewer present when a self-completion questionnaire is being completed.

Bryman states:

It has been suggested that such characteristics as ethnicity, gender, and the social background of interviewers may combine to bias the answers that respondents provide (2004, p. 133)*.*

A questionnaire is suitable because it requires little time to administer and permits the respondents to remain anonymous to the researcher. However, a questionnaire has a number of disadvantages; for example, the large set of unknown respondents affect self-completion questionnaires more than other forms of data collection and response rates can be very variable (Mullen and Spurgeon, 2000). Also, there is no guarantee that all respondents will answer the questions themselves or that they will be strictly truthful in replying to the questions in it. In addition, the respondents may not complete all the questions or even any of the questionnaires at all (Turney and Robb, 1971). Bryman (2004) states that non-response is a considerable issue which could essentially affect and limit the generalisability of findings from any study using questionnaires as a main data collection tool. No one is present to help respondents if they are facing complications in answering a question or to probe them to elaborate an answer.

The main purpose of my questionnaire is to offer a general overview of the understanding of Muslim parents’ feelings about single-sex Islamic schools in England, their philosophies, strategies, aims and why parents chose these schools. The questionnaire for the respondents covered the following areas: the parents’ motivations for choosing such faith schools; the parents’ attitude towards single-sex or co-educational Muslim schools; and the motivations of choosing single-sex schools for their daughters, especially after puberty.

### 3.4.2 Interview

Interview is the most common method employed in educational research. Gray states:

If the objective of research, for example, is largely exploratory, involving, say, the examination of feelings or attitudes, then interviews may be the best approach. (2004, p. 214).

Interviews are more than just a conversation. They involve “a set of assumptions and understandings about the situation which are not normally associated with a casual conversation” (Denscombe, 2007, p. 173). There are many types of interviews, such as structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. According to Cohen and Manion (1994), interviews are a conversation directed by an interviewer to a respondent with the particular objective of gathering data appropriate to the study. Interviews are widely used in educational studies because of many advantages. These advantages are of increased flexibility: they enable the researcher to explain any confusion, allow the researcher to go into more depth and to test the boundaries of respondents’ knowledge, and they permit the researcher to find a picture of what the respondent really believes (Cohen and Manion, 1994). According to Gray:

Interviews are also preferable to questionnaires where questions are either open-ended or complex, or where the logical order of questions is difficult to predetermine. (2004, p. 214)*.*

Moreover, interviews are useful when some people prefer talking rather than filling in questionnaires, because interviews allow them to reflect on events without having to commit themselves in writing (Gray, 2004).

In my study, I have used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to supplement the questionnaire data and to permit probing for further information as necessary. As Wellington (2000) has revealed, the interview is “the most rewarding and potentially the most informative way of carrying out a small scale study” (p. 21). I have used one-to-one interviews with parents because it was easy to arrange where only two people’s diaries needed to coincide, and the opinions and ideas expressed throughout the interview stem from the one interviewee. This means the researcher can locate specific ideas with specific people, as Borg and Gall state:

The main advantage of the interview over the mailed questionnaire for this type of data collection is that the interviewer is likely to get responses from the persons in the sample selected and will get fewer ‘don't know’ and unusable responses than would occur on a questionnaire. (1989, p. 442).

I chose to interview because it enables me to “reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible, such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes” (Perakyla, 2005, p. 869). The main advantage of the interview is that it offers a good chance to question aspects of the research investigation and thus allows a greater depth of information. Also, it makes it possible for the researcher to gather data information in relation to the feelings and emotions of individuals (Turney and Robb, 1971). Furthermore, I have chosen the interview because of my epistemological hypothesis that knowledge can be acquired through collection and analysis of people’s subjective accounts. However, the main disadvantage of the one-to-one interview is that it limits the number of opinions and views available to the researcher (Denscombe, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews are non-standardised and they are often used in qualitative analysis. In this type of interview the researcher has issues and questions that need to be covered, but may not be in the same interview. Also, the questions may change depending on the direction of the interview, and sometimes questions are anticipated at the beginning of the interview (Denscombe, 2007). The interview is extremely adjustable and flexible. “A skilled, experienced, and practised interviewer can search responses and investigate feelings, motives, experiences, and attitudes which no other exploratory technique can reach” (Verma and Mallick, 1999, p. 128). This point has been explained by Cohen and Manion:

The interview may serve three purposes. First, it may be used as the principal means of gathering information, having direct bearing on the research objectives. Second, it may be used to test hypotheses or to suggest new ones, or as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships. And thirdly, the interview may be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking. (1994, p. 234).

However, because of the advantages and disadvantages of both questionnaire and interview, I decided to use both of them to complement each other.

The interviewees were extrapolated through the use of a purposive sampling strategy. Mason defined it as:

Selecting group or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position… and most importantly the explanation or account which you are developing. (Mason, 1993, as cited in Silverman, 2000, p. 93)'.

Arcury and Quandt also state:

Purposive sampling is also called theoretical sampling to indicate that, although informants are not randomly selected, their selection is guided by emergent theory. When a purposive sample is used, it must be justified by the research design rather than simply declaring the sample purposive after the fact. (1998, p. 67).

My research is an investigation into the views of Muslim parents towards Islamic schools. Interviewees were selected because they related to my research questions and contributed to the overall aims of the study. Purposive sampling also presents flexibility because it can be applied during the course of the research without restriction to the research design period. This means that a researcher can explore any new factors which emerge during the data collection course (Silverman, 2000). Using purposive sampling not only justifies the selection of interviewees because of their relevance to the research aims, but also presents the freedom to choose participants throughout the research process. In terms of the various viewpoints which UK Muslim parents have in relation to Islamic schools I interviewed Muslim parents from different ethnic backgrounds and educational and economic levels. While it is not possible to guarantee that the responses of Muslim parents’ interviews are representative of the views of all Muslim parents in the UK, I would say that at the very least it gives an overview of a minority of Muslim parents who choose this type of school for their children.

### 3.4.3 Interview Translation

Although I conducted my interviews in the English language, there was one interview conducted in Arabic which is my first language and that of my interviewee. The respondent spoke English competently but on occasion could not understand some of my questions so I was obliged to translate these questions for her. In fact when I arranged the appointment with her she did not mention the limitations of her English language. Birbili (2000) states that

[A]n English-speaking researcher might conduct an interview in a language other than English; a researcher interviews in her primary language which is not English; researcher and participants are ‘fully and fluently bilingual - they slip between the two languages during the interview.

Filep (2009) does not see the “mixing of languages” during interviews “as a problem, but rather as a method that supports the communication process” (p. 64). From his experience, switching from one language to another is a natural fact. He states that “in one of my interviews the respondent and I switched from French to Italian and back several times, since he could explain certain issues better in one or the other language (p. 64)”.

Translation is “inextricably bound to the socio-cultural positioning of the researcher, a positioning, whether intended or ascribed, that will also give a meaning to the dual translator/researcher role” (Temple & Young, 2004, p. 168). Translation starts when the researcher decides to conduct a study across cultures. Duranti (1997) suggests that transliterating spoken words into text is more than just writing; it is a practice or technique for the “fixing on paper of fleeting events” (p. 27).

The researcher’s position and point of view are influenced by his or her relationship with the participants. As I mentioned before, when I made the appointment with my participant she did not mention that she spoke weak English. When we started our conversation in English, she understood what I said but after a few questions she interrupted the conversation in Arabic just to say that she could not understand the question. At that time I realised that it might be better to conduct my interview with her in Arabic. Although she understood most of my questions, I decided to speak in her native language to make sure she understood what I meant and to be sure that I had understood her point of view clearly.

In respect of my translation journey, the most important question was whether it was reasonable to use a literal translation or free translation of the interviewee’s text. According to Birbili (2000) “a literal translation (word-by-word) could perhaps be seen as doing more justice to what participants have said and make one’s readers understand the foreign mentality better”. At the same time, however, such practice can decrease the readability of the text, which in turn can test readers’ patience and even their ability to understand “what is going on”. However, when creating quotations that “read well” (Filep, 2009, p. 67) the researcher has to be conscious that misapprehensions are possible. This is unlike doing a literal translation, where the reader can interpret the literal text on his or her own. On the other hand, Filep (2009) suggests that “a “readable” quotation, created by changing the structure and by adding missing fragments, would at least make the quote more easily understood by those who are not familiar with the context” (p.67). For that reason, in my interview translation I used a “free” translation because it seemed more appropriate.

Using Arabic as the language of my research in this interview would have meant locating myself as an “insider”. Filep (2009) states that “when the researcher is perceived as a “community insider”, it is ... more likely that people would readily reveal information that they would not have disclosed to outsiders” (p. 63). Conducting interviews in Arabic, especially with the Arab interviewee, I was frequently regarded as an “insider” with knowledge about sociocultural practices and with experience of higher education procedures. Mainly in this interview, the use of a confident language speaks for itself and since I trusted my interviewee to achieve my aims, I had to make sure that I did not isolate anyone with my approach. Also, though using only the national language would have shortened my translation problems, it would also have meant distancing myself from the participants’ community, thus not achieving my goals. I also realised that using Arabic language in this interview would have meant that the participant’s language capabilities might have affected her participation in the research. Baumgartner (2012) states that in the literature when the research participants use their first language they deliver their “best” explanations especially with researchers who share their cultural and social characteristics.

The objective of translation is to reach equivalence of meaning between two different languages. Regmi et al. (2010) state that the best model of translation is Brislin’s (1970) model of translation which suggests,

[A]t least two bilingual people who translate the qualitative research texts, that is, field notes or interview transcripts from the source language (non-English) into the target language (English).This prosses is often called forward-translation. Another bilingual person, according to Brislin (1970, 1980), who is also involved in the translation process will back-translate the documents from the target language to their source language, and finally both versions will be compared to check accuracy and equivalence. Any discrepancies that have occurred during the process are then negotiated between the two bilingual translators” (p. 20).

As Brislin (1970, 1980) suggested, “a good practice for translation is to employ at least two competent bilingual translators who might be familiar with the research, one to translate forward and another to translate back to the original language without having seen the original text” (as cited in Regmi et al., 2010, p. 21).

It can be argued that in my translation case my interview was not fully in the Arabic language. Some of the interview questions were in the interviewee’s mother language. I did the translation myself and I translated forward to English and translated back to Arabic and tried my best to secure equivalence. For more reliability, a friend of mine who is working as a translator checked and rechecked my translation.

Being a researcher and translator takes more effort because some factors might influence the translation, an issue which makes me more aware of my research practices. The translation procedure, however, typically takes time and effort and the researcher needs to be conscious of that in order to avoid many problems which could be caused (Birlibi, 2000).

Regmi et al. (2010) advises researchers how to save their time and entail less translating. First of all, they should transcribe the interviews conducted in an original source language word for word (verbatim), “including pauses, emotional expressions, and annotations in the same language. Then each transcript should be translated into the target language (English). Secondly, only the key themes or issues that emerge in the process of translation are transcribed” (p.p. 20-21). They have recommended that to add more reliability to research findings, researchers should check and recheck transcripts against the translated interpretations during analysis and synthesis.

Halai (2007) suggests a new strategy that the researcher can use for translation: first of all, checking whether the source words have any equivalent in English; if that is the case, the researcher should adopt English words or phrases in translating the selected interviews. Secondly, using quotes when the source words or phrases either do not have a direct equivalent or are difficult to translate or interpret. In my research I checked carefully the equivalent words in English. However, when I couldn’t find the directly equivalent words I used quotes.

As I am not a native English speaker, I had to apply my previous knowledge and awareness of cultural and linguistic differences in order to improve the efficiency of communication when it comes to communicating using the English language. Even though I speak two languages, I found myself obligated to make adjustments in the interview to make sure that there was a mutual understanding between me and the person I was interviewing and my audiences.

Vulliamy (1990) states that “in those cases where the researcher and the translator are the same person the quality of translation is influenced by factors such as: the autobiography of the researcher-translator; the researcher’s knowledge of the language and the culture of the people under study and the researcher’s fluency in the language of the write-up” (Vulliamy, 1990 as cited in Birlibi, 2000).

As a native Arabic speaker and with English as my second language, conducting the dual role of researcher and translator made the processes of translation difficult. For example, when I was using “co-educational schools” my participant found difficulty in understanding the word whereas when I replaced it with “mixed schools” she understood it easily. That might be because ‘co-education’ is a more formal word or because she had never heard it before. According to Temple and Edwards (2002), the same words can theoretically mean different things in different cultural contexts. For example, my participant used an Arabic word (‘basic education’) when she was talking about her children’s education. In this situation, the word “basic education” comprises primary education (the first stage of basic education) and lower secondary education (the second stage) especially in developing countries. In the British education system primary schools is until year six and lower secondary schools which start from year seven to year nine. If you try to translate the word “basic” you should mention the difference between the meaning that my participant meant and the regular meaning of the primary and secondary education in Britain. When she was talking about secondary school she meant high school which starts from year ten. As I was from the same background I understood her points regarding her children’s education. She was worried about her children when they were in the first stage of secondary school more than in the second stage of high school. Filep (2009) states that,

most countries and regions have an equivalent in international languages. Consequently, when the use of specific terms and names differs from one language or cultural context to another, one should know these terms or local names in different languages, and be able to use them in the right context – in doing so, not only can “communication problems” or even conflictual (interview) situations be avoided, but also the positioning of the interviewer can sometimes be “neutralized” (p.64).

It is important to mention that my interviewee knew that I would also understand why she used an Arabic word and what that word meant, so she didn’t need to explain it. The mixing of languages helped the process of communication as we were both aware of the meaning; if she had preferred to explain in English it would have been a longer dialogue. During the interview my position as a researcher was continually changing between an “insider” and an “outsider” depending on which topic we were discussing. I was assumed to have knowledge about the language my participant was speaking.

Arranging bilingual data for analysis is a part of the research methodology and according to Halai (2007) when the researcher translates bilingual data they must consider the cultural and language issues involved because it transfers the meaning from one language for one social group to another language for another social group.

“Since interviews are not just words spoken at a certain time in response to a social situation, they are embedded in the culture of the place, hence, when translating one must keep the target social group/reader in mind”. (Halai, 2007. p. 345). For me, there was no strong need to translate for the culture because I belonged to a similar culture as my participant. However, the researcher always needs to learn how to listen to her/his participants before they try to understand the story of their lives. Understanding participants’ life stories is very important to make sense of what the participant means. “Because life stories are embedded in particular contexts, when one translates a text or a piece of interview transcript there is a need to narrate a life story in such a way that it makes sense” (Fathi, 2013, p. 60). Fathi asserts that “making sense requires that a great deal of attention be given to individual biographies, the context these stories are narrated in, and the intellectual auto/biography of the interpreter/researcher” (p. 61). Baker (2005) advises that translators’ behaviours are motivated by the stories they believe in and procedures in which they are surrounded. Brannlund et al. (2013) state that “this approach thus situates the translator in the heart of the cross-cultural research and contests the idea of a neutral linguist-researcher who is set in-between the cultures” (p. 74).

In her view, Fathi (2013) states that “the best possible way that we can make the text/story make sense is through connecting the cultural nodes between our participants, ourselves and our audiences” (p. 60). From my experience I agree that "the processes of understanding a different culture and understanding new meanings used and imported into languages need to be given attention in the wider political and cultural context of the societies we are living in” (Fathi, 2013. p. 66). In respect of understanding, I experienced that with my participant especially when she was talking about her views regarding the presence of Islamic schools in Britain. She thought that being in an Islamic school is normal because there had been no problem finding such a school. When she arrived in Britain, she tried to find an Islamic school for her children but at that time there were no Islamic schools which disappointed her. At that moment in the interview I asked her why she was disappointed. Her point of view was based on the fact that the Muslim community had been established for a long time. Therefore, they should have had the right to create their own schools. Understanding different cultures is a key point, and as a researcher I understood her view and I tried to convey it to the readers. Fathi (2013) states that “making sense for migrants’ lives means understanding their positionalities and their situated biographies since migrants want their stories to be understood. “Making sense” in a multilingual research context entails referencing both contexts” (p. 60). It is very important to the researcher to understand his/her participants’ choice of words and the ways in which they are presented. Also he/she should keep the English-speaking reader in mind and mediate between the two cultures and languages and the points of outlined meanings in order to fit in with meaning-making systems in Western academia (Fathi, 2013).

Birbili (2000) argues that ‘[i]n cases of international assessments or cross-cultural research test items, questionnaires or interview schedules are translated from English into the language of different countries and vice versa’. I tried to make it clear and understandable for the general reader, in that as Birbili (2000) states, ‘researchers need to keep in mind that translation-related decisions have a direct impact on the validity of the research and its report’. It can be argued that in my research the translation section was not a big issue. However, generally, I feel my decision to conduct the interview in the mother languages used by the participant was the best decision and led to richer interview information.

## 3.5 The Demographic Data

This section describes the participants in terms of their ethnicity, gender, educational level and socioeconomic situation.

### 3.5.1 Who is Involved?

The data consist of the analysis of questionnaires and transcribed texts from individual interviews that were carried out with Muslim parents. The total number of participants was 39. I used questionnaires and interviews based on ethnicity and gender including:

* Pakistani-origin women and men.
* Somali women.
* Arab women.

The interview participants included 8 Pakistani parents, including 2 fathers, 4 mothers, and 1 parental couple; 1 Yemeni mother who spoke Arabic (I translated her interview) and 4 Somali mothers. For the questionnaire, most participants were of Pakistani origin. The general number was 11 participants having daughters and 4 participants having sons in both Islamic schools.

I explored the demographic characteristics of Muslim parents who participated in my study by asking parents in interview and questionnaire, “How would you describe yourself?” Parents described themselves from diverse viewpoints such as education, ethnicity, length of residency in the UK and financial situation.

In respect of education, most of my study participants, especially mothers, had been educated to high school level. They had then got married, with some being teachers in the case study schools and holding bachelor degrees, and one of the mothers was a doctor. Fathers were generally more educated with some holding bachelor or masters’ degrees. As regards ethnicity, the majority of participants were of Pakistani heritage, while others were Somali and Arab.

Although I did not ask questions regarding parents’ income levels, most participants were middle-class which I deduced from the fact that their houses were situated primarily in middle-class areas.

All parents in the study had been in the UK for a number of years. Some were born here while others had lived here for well over 40 years. Conversely, others had only been in the UK for 3 to 6 years. Some of my participants were second and third generation UK citizens of Muslim migrants, while others had come to Britain quite recently. In the literature review chapter, I make reference to the settlement pattern of Muslims in the UK.

Furthermore, in the interviews most participants were women. Women were keener to be interviewed by me than men. I asked some of them to invite their husbands to join us but the husbands generally declined. This was likely due to the researcher being a female. This view might be also in accordance with Muslim traditions, customs and religious issues concerning the relationship between men and non-related women. Allah the Glorified says: And when you ask for anything you want, ask them from behind a screen that is purer for your hearts and for their hearts (Al Qur’an-Al-Ahzab: 53).

On the other hand, one Pakistani lady gave me her husband’s telephone number and he was highly cooperative. His interview was one of the longest interviews I carried out. He had higher educational qualifications; he was an MA student in Educational Studies. Another important interview was conducted with the Head teacher of the boys’ school.

However, there was a greater spread of gender in the questionnaire. The total number was 25, including the same number of men and women: 11 mothers and 11 fathers, with 3 men classifying themselves as guardians. I thought that fathers would be more willing to fill in the questionnaire because they had more time than the mothers and would prefer not to meet face to face with me.

Out of those parents who responded, 16 had daughters in an Islamic school, 4 had sons, and 5 had both boys and girls in both Islamic schools.

Halstead (1992) claims that to have a deeper understanding of Muslim parents’ opinion in relation to their children’s education, we should aim to explore the views of Britain’s Muslim community leaders and educated Muslims. He considers the first Muslim generation in Britain as ill-informed of the British educational system and their poor level of English prevents them forming and expressing their opinions. He also notes that the first generations of Muslim parents were either less educated or uneducated and that, in the main, it is the educated classes who happily agree to provide their opinion because, as Halstead sees it, there is a habitual admiration of authority in Islam.

This lack of basic information means that a questionnaire presented to a randomly selected sample of Muslim parents will not necessarily reflect the views of the entire Muslim community or reflect the depth and range of responses from the educated and intellectual members of the community to the beliefs and values that lie behind the British educational system. What is more, partly because of the traditional respect for authority in Islam, and partly because much less emphasis is placed on the free expression of opinion, especially on religious matters, in Islam than in the West, the less educated parents who are first-generation immigrants are very happy to follow the lead of, and accept the opinions of, their more educated, more socially active co-religionists. (p. 45).

At the very least research into Muslim attitudes must take account of the opinions of educated parents, Muslim scholars, community leaders and teachers, even though these may form only a tiny percentage of the whole community, as well as those of ordinary parents. (p. 45).

It can be argued that, from my experience with my participants, although many Muslim parents, in my study were less educated, they showed more care for their children’s education due to their own lack of education. The first and second Muslim generation learned the lessons of life without qualifications. That feeling makes them very concerned about their children’s education. Moreover, all my participants were from the second and third generations. Many participating parents mentioned these issues and showed that they know exactly what they want. And they engage with British education system. Many mothers who had participated in my study were looking for the best type of education and may be that is why they chose single-sex Islamic schools which, in their view, offer the best chance for their children to attain good achievement in a good environment and values.

Moreover, Halstead’s views regarding community leaders can also be contested. Who are the leaders? Muslim communities are not linguistically, nationally, or even religiously homogeneous. It can be perhaps asserted that there is no one individual or group of individuals who can be seen to lead the Muslim communities, particular in the context of the UK.

## 3.6 Research Participants

My study is a qualitative study which involves in-depth discussion of the phenomenon of Islamic schools. The phenomenon of interest is the fact that more Muslim parents are registering their children in full-time Muslim schools. My study focuses on the motivation of Muslim parents for sending their children to these schools. The case study emphasises an approach that will examine the phenomenon from the perspective of the parents. My case study was of some Muslim parents who were sending their children to both Islamic schools despite there being state schools in their area.

My study investigates the reasons and motivations for Muslim parents choosing such schools for their children. The bounded units selected for this particular phenomenon were some Muslim parents in two Islamic schools in a city of the North of England. The justification behind my choice of these two schools can be explained as follows. Firstly, these schools are located within easy reach of the researcher, making it easy for me to reach the schools at any time. Secondly, these schools are the only two Islamic schools in the city which are registered with Ofsted.

Although breadth is a key strength of a PhD study, achieving that breadth in my case was impossible because of the limitations of time and resources. It is also the case that not all my participants were equally available in conditions of the time and commitment.

Many strategies were used to select the participants. For example, the Islamic schools were identified first by using the Internet. The researcher started with key words in the search to find out more about these schools. Furthermore, individual suggestions played an important factor in the identification of other participants, as some interviewees informed me of other parents whom I could interview. The third source was the Muslim Directory in which I found lists of Islamic schools, charities, business bodies, and services in the UK. In addition, the DfES was also helpful for finding the statistics of Muslim pupils and schools in Britain.

Parents were almost all contacted through the questionnaire. I put a note at the end of each questionnaire informing them that I would like to conduct interviews as a second part of the study, and asking for volunteers to participate. They were asked to write their phone number so that I could contact them myself. Other interviewees were contacted through the parents who put their numbers at the end of the questionnaire. I asked them at the end of the interviews whether it would be possible to speak to other parents who also sent their children to these schools. There were diverse reactions to this request. Some of them called their friends directly and encouraged them to take part in the interview with me. Others went to their neighbours who had children at the same school and arranged an appointment for me with them. All other parents were contacted through the schools’ Head Teachers. They also reacted in different ways.

### 3.6.1 School A

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I contacted the girls’ school A firstly by sending an email message and then by calling the Head Teacher of that school. I introduced myself to the Head Teacher and asked for a permission to visit her school. I introduced my research topic to her and explained what I intended to do. On the day, I could not find the school at first but then I asked some of the local people about it. I finally found the school and as I was walking into the main yard, there were many girls. Some of the girls were taking their lunch while others were playing around as in any other normal school. They were wearing the same uniform, which was white and black. It appeared to me as a traditional Pakistani custom, with *hijab*. I asked one of them about the Head Teacher’s room. She was very kind to take me to the second floor where the Head Teacher’s office was. The Head Teacher was very cooperative and welcoming. We introduced ourselves to each other. I explained to her the aims and objectives of my study. She informed me that she would be happy to offer me any help I might need to carry out my research. She offered to collect the questionnaire from the girls and call me when it was ready.

I first piloted my questionnaire and then conducted the main one a month later. In the main study, I prepared about 60 copies of the questionnaire with copies of the consent forms and participant information sheets. Every copy of the questionnaire had one copy of the information sheet and two copies of the consent form with my signature on them. I put a short note at the end of the consent forms asking my participants to sign both forms, keeping one for themselves and returning the other one to me through their daughters. I spent a long time waiting for their responses. After approximately two weeks (the period which I put on the questionnaire to receive them back), I called the Head Teacher to ask if she had received any copies of the questionnaires from the parents. She told me that had received 12 copies. This was disappointing to me. I asked her to remind the girls to return the questionnaire. I waited for two more weeks and then went to school. Unfortunately the number of the completed copies of the questionnaire was still 12. At that visit I asked the Head Teacher if she could help me to identify some interviewees. In fact, she advised me to speak to one of the teachers who was working in the school as she knew many Somali parents and would be able to arrange meetings with some of them. The Head Teacher also informed me of the possibility to attend the parents’ evening where I could meet many parents. It was a great offer of help. I attended that evening and spoke to some of the parents. I explained the focus of my study and how I intended to collect my data. I managed to take contact numbers of several parents who showed interest in my research and agreed to participate. Furthermore, the female teacher who was suggested by the Head Teacher was very cooperative indeed. She helped me by persuading many parents to take part in the study and by explaining the research aims and assuring them that their participation would be absolutely safe. That was a very important step for conducting my interviews. Two weeks later, I managed to interview all of the parents who gave me their contact numbers.

Out of the early 12 copies of the questionnaire I received, only one parent wrote her number for an interview. I called her and arranged an appointment. On the day of the appointment, I drove to her house and as soon as I arrived I phoned her to let her know that I had arrived but there was no response. I thought she might have gone to pick up her child from school so I waited for her. I spent about an hour waiting for her and then saw an elderly man entering her house. I left my car and knocked at the door. The man opened the door and shouted at me. I told him that I had an appointment with his wife (or daughter). He told me nobody was in the house. I tried to explain who I was and what I wanted and wrote a note to let my participant know that I had called. The man refused to take the note and asked me to leave. Simply, he chased me away. I thought they didn’t want to give out any information about their daughter or what they thought about the education system.

### 3.6.2 School B

During this time, I was also in contact with School B, the boys’ school. In fact, at the beginning, I found it a little difficult to contact this school. I sent several emails to the Head Teacher but there was no response for a long time. After that I called them. They asked me to send them an abstract of my research and to explain the aims and objectives. I waited for their response for a long time. I sent an email to my supervisor explaining the situation. I asked him to call or send an email to the Head Teacher. After a period of time, they sent me an email informing me that they had prepared an appointment for me to meet the Head Teacher. I went to the school and met him. He was polite and cooperative. He asked me to bring my questionnaire and explained that he would send it to the parents through their children. He informed me that their school was a single-sex school, but they had both boys and girls studying in separate classrooms. The school was divided into two separate sections gender-wise. In fact, for my first visit to that school, I used the main entrance, which happened to be the boys’ section. The man who welcomed me was surprised, as I had entered the wrong section. He did not tell me I was in the wrong section but I felt he wanted me to go to the girls’ section. There were two types of students in that school: boarding students and day students. I chose the day students. On my first visit, I didn’t see the girls’ category because I went to the Head Teacher’s room, which was in the main building of the school, but when I went to pick up my questionnaire, I went to the girls’ section.

I received only a small number of completed questionnaires. I asked the Head Teacher if he had any idea why the number was so small. He said that the parents might not have understood my topic. I asked him if he could help me find some parents who could agree to take part in the interview part of my research. I spent a long time waiting for his response. I finally received an email from the Head Teacher informing that he had found one parent who agreed to be interviewed. That parent was an employee of the school. So I interviewed him. In fact, he was quite helpful. The Head Teacher himself was one of the parents whom I also interviewed. The interview with him was also very informative.

In fact, finding families who have boys attending Islamic school was more difficult than finding families who had girls. It could be that it was easier for me to get in touch with mothers in and outside schools than it was with fathers. It also could be the fact that there are simply more girls than boys attending Islamic schools. Attending the parents evening was also another useful event and a good opportunity to meet my participants and finalise my data collection stage.

## 3.7 Carrying out the Field Work

In most cases, there were no difficulties in ensuring that the participants understood my position, my status and my research. I explained that I was doing this research for a PhD at the university. This was met with great respect from parents of children in both schools. My appearance as a Muslim lady wearing a *hijab*, just like any one of them, also gave them confidence in me.

I developed a questionnaire schedule and contacted parents in both schools. My main questions were the same in all interviews but I had to change the wording and sequence of some of the questions to suit individual interviewees.

During the interviews I asked direct questions. The location of the interviews was also very important. The participants needed to feel as much at ease as possible. All of my interviewees were interviewed in their homes. This made sure they were comfortable and relaxed. Furthermore, all participants agreed to be recorded, though their reactions were varied. Although many of them appeared not to be bothered with the voice recorder, others were nervous. I was eager to reassure my participants that all recordings would be destroyed after being transcribed and that nobody except me would have access to them. All interviews were transcribed right after the interviews. This was very useful as it enabled me to recall the content of the interviews.

Most of the interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour 44 minutes; most interviews were about 50 minutes long. The parents in these interviews were keen to continue talking after the official part of the interview had finished. Some of them were interested in learning more about me, my family and even my country. Moreover, some of my interview participants did not fill in the questionnaire when it was first sent with their children but they did that later and sent it back to the school with their children for me to pick up.

## 3.8 Pilot Study

I carried out a pilot study in order to examine the tools and procedures employed in my research. Oppenheim notes that a pilot study:

... can help us not only with wording of questions but also with procedural matters such as the design of letters of introduction (as from whom it should come), the ordering of question sequences and the reduction of non-response rates. (1992, p. 47).

I conducted a pilot study in School A of the questionnaire with 20 parents and the interviews with 2 parents. I was able to make some changes as a result of the pilot study, including adding some questions to elicit information about the participants’ background, beliefs and views about their children’s future.

The initial response rate of the questionnaire was very low: only 3 out of 20, which was disappointing. I discussed this with my supervisor and we realised that one reason could be due to the use of the English language and that I may need to translate my questionnaire into other languages like Urdu, Somali and Arabic, which were the native languages of the Muslim students in those schools. However, when I asked the Head Teachers in both schools about the language they usually use to contact the parents, they informed me that they used English and that most parents read and write English. Also, the Head Teacher of School A told me that it wasn’t much to do with the language, as the students don’t always respond the first time and they needed to be reminded many times.

In order to obtain honest and valid responses in my pilot interviews, these were all conducted at the parents’ homes, an environment in which I thought they would be comfortable and relaxed. They were in their own territory. There were semi-structured interviews and I sometimes posed questions according to the interviewees’ answers. Moreover, all parents who participated in the pilot study were not included in the main study.

## 3.9 Ethical Considerations

The Belmont Report, created in 1979 by the National Commission, identifies three core principles for the ethical conduct of research:

Respect of person: Participant welfare should always take precedence over the interests of science or society. Participants should be treated with courtesy and respect, and they should enter into research voluntary and with adequate information.

Benefice: Researchers should strive to maximize the benefits of the research for wider society, and to minimize the potential risks to research participants.

Justice: Researchers should ensure that research procedures are administered in a fair, non-exploitative, and well-considered manner (1979, p. 63).

These principles lead to five important considerations: informed consent; self-determination; minimisation of harm; anonymity; and confidentiality. Although ethics is connected to morals, they are different. In making a division between ethics and morals, Pring (2000) notes that though ethics are ‘the philosophical enquiry into the basis of morals or moral judgement’, morals comprise “a concern with what is the right or wrong thing to do” (p. 142)*.* Sieber (1993) states that “ethics has to do with the application of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others*,* to promote the good, to be respectful and to be fair” (Sieber, 1993, as cited in Sikes, 2004, p. 25).

My research conforms to the University Of Sheffield Department Of Educational Studies’ ethical review procedures. Moreover, I have identified the importance of having principles of respect for my research participants, the principle of appropriate attitude in the conduct approach of research, principles of honesty to myself, to the data and to the research report. According to Fontana and Frey (2005) and Lodico et al. (2006), researchers should adhere to three main ethical considerations. These are: (i) informed consent, (ii) protection from harm and (iii) ensuring confidentiality.

I used informed consent forms for individual participants by providing them with the necessary information, including any unforeseeable risk or inconvenience that the participants might encounter. Hennink et al., state:

Individuals should be provided with sufficient information about the research in a format that is comprehensible to them, and make a voluntary decision to participate in a research study. (2011, p. 63).

This view has been confirmed by Newby (2010): “Consent is more than signature on a form. We must be sure that people understand in what they are participating” (p. 357).

In respect of these observations, I prepared a detailed information sheet and participant consent form, and gave them to the participants before engaging in the study. I explained the details of the research to the parents as I was conscious that my research participants might conceive the idea of being under investigation and consequently subject themselves to working under pressure which could be stressful. Israel and Hay argue:

In social sciences, research harm is generally more likely to involve psychological distress, discomfort, social disadvantage, invasion of privacy or infringement of rights than physical injury. (2006, p. 96).

Moreover, I only engaged the respondents who voluntarily gave their consent to participate in my research. I stated clearly in the consent form that participation in the study was voluntary, and participants had the right to refuse or withdraw at any time without any negative impact. I made sure that my participants had understood the aims of the study and that there were no implications for them in any way in the study. I also kept to the ethical considerations for the security of participants’ dignity.

Confidentiality was strictly observed. Real names of participants were not publicised in any part of the research. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants. Recording was carried out with participants’ consent and a guarantee was given to participants that no third party other than the project supervisor and examiners would have access to it without the participant’s written consent. Any audio recording used to gather information was destroyed after completion of the study. Hennink et al., argue:

In qualitative research it is difficult to assure complete confidentiality because researchers report the study findings and ... quotations are often included in these reports. However, although complete confidentiality cannot be ensured ... qualitative researchers can restrict who listens to the recording of the interviews. (2011, p. 71).

I have made every effort to accomplish these goals. Names of participants were not used in any documents, all recordings and transcripts were kept securely, and codes were used on all records to hide the identity of the participants.

## 3.10 Researcher Reflexivity

In qualitative research reflexivity is an important issue for qualitative researchers. Gilgun (2010) states that researchers would do well to consider becoming reflexive in three general areas: the topics they wish to investigate; the perspectives and experiences of the persons with whom they wish to do the research; and the audiences to whom the research findings will be directed.

Furthermore, Gilgun (2010) observes that being reflexive in these areas improves the researcher’s responsibility, not only to the scholar communities who are part of our audiences but to other audiences as well. Our own experiences and perspectives influence every aspect of the research we do. Creating awareness is an open and honest approach to doing and reporting research.

It is obvious that the collected data is always affected by the researcher who collects it. All researchers, no matter which methods and perspectives they use, must be reflexive if their research is to be useful (Gilgun, 2010). A researcher’s personality can influence all points of research, starting from the very first interviewee, through all the responses received, until finally the interpretation of those responses. This influence could be identified as use of reflexivity. Ahren (1999) states that a researcher cannot put his or her personal feelings and beliefs about his or her research aside. Furthermore, he or she can incorporate reflexivity within every stage of the research procedure. These include questioning taken for granted assumptions connected with gender, age, and socio-economic status. Also, a researcher should consider where the power lies, and where he/she belongs in that power hierarchy; recognition of any feeling may indicate a lack of neutrality and reflection during the analysis and writing up of data.

In qualitative research the subjectivity of the researcher should be considered. Marriam (1998) states that the researcher is the main investment of data collection and analysis. As a result the research findings might be influenced by the researcher’s views. Although the researcher should be aware and sensitive of bias, it is impossible to avoid the influences of preconception from qualitative research. Marriam (1998) states that

Because the primary instrument in qualitative research is human, all observations and analysis are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values, and perspective. It might be recalled that one of the philosophical assumptions underlying this type of research is that reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality. The researcher thus brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other peoples’ constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. The final product of this type of researcher of others’ views filtered through his or her own. (pp. 22. 23)

For my study the impact of beliefs and values should be measured cautiously. Firstly, I was not implanted inside the context of the study. I am not a practitioner in such schools although I am a teacher who has been involved at this stage of education during my working life. Secondly, although I have four children all of them of school age, I do not send them to Islamic schools. Since our arrival in England they have been at different stages in state schools. My children attend an Arab Libyan School at the weekend which offers all subjects including the Arabic language and religious subjects which makes me feel secure regarding their local language and identity. Thirdly, even if I wanted them to attend Islamic schools, my financial situation and the school fees prevent me from sending them to such schools.

As a researcher I have taken steps to reduce researcher bias in my study as much as possible:

1. I transcribed all interviews verbatim to eliminate misinterpretation of data.
2. I have included a very large number of quotes in the findings chapter to give parents plenty of space without interpreting their opinions and reporting them in my own words.
3. I have coded and categorised all interviews and questions in themes.

On the other hand, being a Muslim lady might have impact on my work. A strong personal belief system should not affect the findings of the work but it might happen, in the way questions are posed. I did my best to ensure that I asked questions in order to give interviewees the freedom to answer in their own way without dominance. My interview questions varied to reflect the interviewee situation.

In this section I will reflect on how I, as a Muslim female researcher in my early forties, may have affected the findings of my research. Firstly, I will consider the complex nature of the power dynamics presented in my interviews. When I conducted the interviews with Muslim parents, I felt myself as an influential participant in the interaction for a number of reasons. First of all, many parents viewed me as a more knowledgeable person who knew everything about issues related to Islamic schools, and that I might have helped them to improve the schools in their areas. Secondly, many parents were anxious about being interviewed as that interview was their first experience of one, while I had conducted interviews before, and so I had an idea of what to expect, which positioned me in a superior knowledge relationship again. However, I was dependent on parents in research interviews and the questionnaire process, which gave them a significant power also, as Rhodes (1994) states that the power relationships between the researcher and the researched are never unidirectional. On the other hand, my position as a Muslim female researcher created a good impression with my participants, most of whom were Muslim mothers. It was easy for me to keep in touch with interviewees, especially when I met them at the parents evening. This point leads us to cross-cultural research or insider and outsider positioning of the researcher.

“Insider-outsider” might simply mean being heterogeneous, such as black or white, male or female categories themselves (Shah, 2004). We are all insiders and outsiders in different ways and settings. Even members of the same speech and cultural community are differentiated by other equally important characteristics that make the researcher both an insider as well as an outsider (Foster, 1994). I saw myself as the outside researcher without a deep involvement in the schools which limits the strength of a qualitative case study by providing less insider information and perspectives. At the same time it gave me more capacity to see outside information. I also saw myself as an insider researcher because I was familiar with such schools.

Furthermore, from my experience in this research, I found that being an insider-researcher, who understands the interviewees’ culture, has great significance at all stages of interviewing. As Shah says:

[A] social insider is better positioned as a researcher because of her/his knowledge of the relevant patterns of social interaction required for gaining access and making meaning. The argument does not ignore the critique that nearness can ‘blunt criticality’ (Haw, 1998) and can blind the insider-researcher to the familiar and taken for granted phenomena. (2004, p. 556).

## 3.11 Preparing Data for Analysis

Once I had completed my data collection, I began to think importantly about how to organise that amount of data. I had about 25 completed questionnaires, and a large body of interview data: about 14 transcriptions, each between 8 to 19 pages long. I began by coding my data into themes. I analysed data by using ‘Thematic Analysis’. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns [themes] within data” (p. 79). Some of the themes I used in my analysis were identified in advance in the interview questions, while others emerged during the interviews and were not captured in the original questions.

This is qualitative research; and an interpretational analysis was conducted on the data. Interpretational analysis entails “examining case study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomenon being studied” (Gall et al. 1996, p. 562). In my study statements made by parents in the questionnaire and interview discussions were observed closely in order to classify the Muslim parents’ motivations for sending their children, boys and girls, to Islamic schools. I have prepared and analysed my interview and questionnaire data following the outline by Boyatzis (1998). In brief, each interview was transcribed verbatim; I omitted interjection words like ‘um’ and ‘uh’, some repetitions, and personal names during transcription. I read and re-read each transcript, highlighting all quotes that appeared to be information-rich. I excluded the purely social or unimportant comments and irrelevant statements.

I used NVivo computer software to aid my qualitative analysis. NVivo helped me to manage and interrogate all data as the information was on the computer and it forced me to store the analytic events undertaken, which helped to make sure those categories were used constantly. By helping to slow down the analytical procedure, it ensures that the patterns reported actually happen throughout the data rather than just in particular examples, ensuring the reliability of the analysis (Fielding and Lee, 1998). Also, I explored suitable quotes that related to the topic directly. I analysed my data manually and electronically using NVivo 9 software. According to Lacey and Luff:

In common with most software, analysis packages are a tool that can aid the researcher, but they cannot replace the human element! A package cannot ‘do’ the analysis, because it lacks the capacity to think, reflect and analyse. Computer-aided analysis can be deceptively easy – coding and searching, for instance, is quick and satisfying, but it is then possible to keep the analysis at a superficial level, without the deep engagement with the data that is a hallmark of good qualitative research. (2001, p. 35).

Questionnaire data was written in Excel then exported to NVivo. Also I transcribed all of the interviews and exported them to NVivo. Themes were identified within the data and codes were made for all themes. NVivo helped me to create electronic folders for each of those codes.

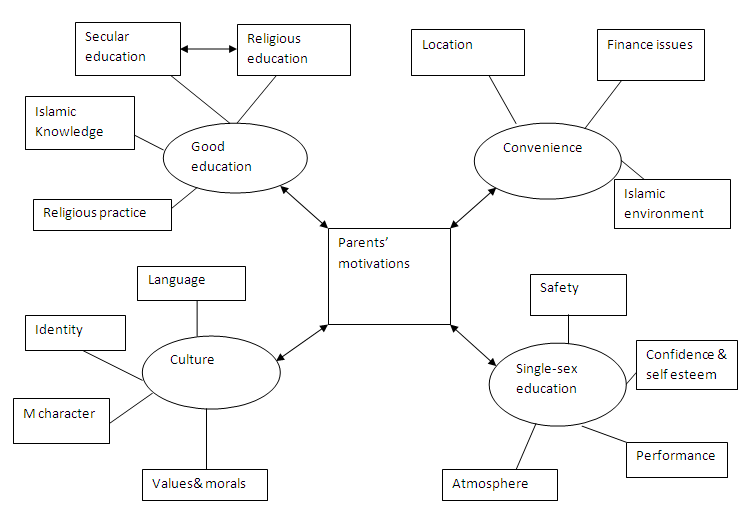
When I was working through the transcription, the number of codes increased and some of codes were counting more data than others. I expanded and compared all data within single code to produce sub-codes to accommodate differences. Then I merged them together in order to reduce the total number of codes. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) report that “the coding is a procedure for organizing the text of transcripts, and discovering patterns within that organizational structure” (pp. 31.32). In this respect, Miles and Huberman (1994) state that “codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56)*.* In other words, the use of coding enables researchers to recognise and discover patterns that are hard to see directly in the huge amount of texts that researchers are faced with when they start analysing their transcripts, and then they can develop theories from these patterns (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). Consequently, the data obtained in my study was analysed following these code procedures in order to arrive at general conclusions.

The responses to the questionnaire and the interviews were analysed independently, as well as in combination with each other, for triangulating the data. The data from both the questionnaire and the interviews were similar and supported each other powerfully. Very little difference was found between the results of the questionnaire and interviews and all results described in the findings section reflect the combined data.

Quotations are included throughout the discussion to share more understanding of the parents’ perceptions. Parents’ voices and opinions are included, and although English is the second language for all parents, parents’ comments and responses are quoted literally. Parents’ voices and opinions are included importantly in spite of their English expertise.

I have done my best to select quotes that are comprehensible. Also, any unfamiliar words appearing in some parents’ quotations have been explained. Every result that is presented here reflected the combined data.

At the beginning I selected codes to enable referencing. I sorted the information in a thematic way. I developed categories. For example, the preliminary category called ‘good education’ was created and included quotes such as ‘religious education and secular education’, ‘Islamic knowledge’, ‘practising religion inside schools’. I identified 15 thematic categories, including huge amounts of references and quotations from 14 interviews. I used the same framework for the questionnaire data. I compiled all codes and categories before analysing them. All categories are presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: The Primary Analysis.**

The common key themes were used as a basis for discussion. These thematic categories produced the common themes from the case-study data and identified the Muslim parents’ motivations for sending their children to Islamic schools.

## 3.12 Reliability and Validity

The validity of qualitative research is very important and in order to avoid any unease about the validity of qualitative research, it is essential that the data is analysed seriously, and the process undertaken is systematic and open to scrutiny.

Furthermore, Verma and Mallick (1999) state that “reliability refers to the extent to which a test or technique functions consistently and accurately by yielding the same results” (p. 202)*.*

Quality is the most important test of any qualitative study. If we want to understand the situation that would otherwise be unknowable or confusing, a good qualitative study can help us. According to Patton (2001), validity and reliability are two issues which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. Even though some qualitative researchers have discussed that validity is not relevant to qualitative research, they have realised the need for some kind of qualifying check or evaluation for their research. For example, Creswell and Miller (2000) recommend that the validity is affected by the researcher’s view of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption. As a result, many concepts of validity have been improved and have often produced or adopted what they believe to be more appropriate terms, such as, quality, rigour and trustworthiness (Davies and Dodd, 2002; Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001).

Furthermore, Silverman (1993) states that the findings of a qualitative researcher are based on their entire data, not just on a few well-selected examples which support their arguments. According to Bryman (1988), “there is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach to the use of data in relation to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research”. (p. 77). He claims that the employ of snippets from unstructured interviews “as proof to maintain an analytic argument leaves a feeling of “disquiet” as the representativeness of these fragments is often left unchallenged” (p. 77).

Stake argues that participants should:

... play a major role directing as well as acting in case study research. They should be asked to examine rough drafts of the researcher’s work and to provide alternative language critical observations or interpretations. (1995, p. 115).

Participants’ validation enhances credibility of the data collection (Borg, 2006; Silverman, 2010). To validate my interview data, as soon as I finished the first draft of an interview account, I sent it back to interviewees to solicit their views about the findings and interpretation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Merriam, 1988). “Member-checking’ is a technique which is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be ‘the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 134).

Member-checking is an approach which involves taking data, analyses, interpretations and conclusions back to the participants so that they can critique the accuracy and credibility of the accounts. For validation purposes, I emailed the interview transcriptions to all parents except one, who said she knew what she said and did not want to read it again. I asked those parents if they wanted to read their interviews and give me their feedback. I was interested to know their views. They agreed to have a look at the interview accounts and some of them provided some feedback. Although I sent interviews back to the parents, reading those interviews and writing comments on them was voluntary. I did not give any specific date to receive the feedback to keep from putting any pressure on them. About 70 per cent of participants agreed to have a look at the accounts after the first email, but only 50 per cent of them sent me feedback, which ranged from simple and straightforward statements such as ‘it is fine’ or ‘ok’ to minor corrections of content. No additional data was generated.

## 3.13 Conclusion

Listening to the Muslim parents who have children in Islamic schools was the primary objective of the study. That objective was achieved by sending a questionnaire through the Islamic schools to parents who had children in those schools and conducting interviews with parents who agreed to take part in this study. Systematic analysis was used to analyse all responses in order to reach valid and reliable accounts of the opinions held by parents involved in the Islamic schools. The findings are detailed in the following chapter, which is related to the research objectives outlined below:

* Describe the background of single-sex Islamic schools, their philosophy, their aims and the issues they give rise to in UK society at the beginning of the twenty-first century.
* Identify how some Muslim parents feel about single-sex Islamic schools including their motivations for sending their children to these schools.

The next chapter discusses the findings of the research.

# CHAPTER 4

# THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

# 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive description of my research findings and discussions. I have divided my findings into sections where each section corresponds to my research questions as appropriate:

1. Why do some Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools?
2. Why do some Muslim parents prefer single-sex Islamic schools for their children?
3. According to some Muslim parents, how does single-sex Islamic education influence their children’s behaviour?
4. According to some Muslim parents, how does single-sex education benefit their children’s academic performance?

All sections have sub-titles, themes and topics derived from my data thereby providing a platform in order to present participant opinion by exploring their views, notions, feelings and suggestions. This is supplemented by my interpretations of procedures, short comments, critical discussion and explanations of direct quotations of participant views.

All quotes from my transcripts are referenced by codes which enable the reader to recognise the category of respondents. References with PI and # signify “parents’ interviews”, PQ and # signify “parents’ questionnaires” while RE signifies “the researcher”.

In the following sections, the range of data described in Chapter Three derived from interviews and questionnaires, is organised using similar themes, and presented under the following key themes:

1. A “good education”.
2. Identity and culture.
3. Single-sex schooling.

As mentioned in my Methodology, I coded my data into themes and analysed data, using ‘Thematic Analysis’. Some of the themes used in my analysis emerged from the questionnaire, interview prompts and questions, while other themes appeared during interviews but were not captured in the original interview questions. Statements made by parents in the questionnaire and interview discussions were analysed carefully in order to classify Muslim parents’ motivations for sending their children to single-sex Islamic schools. Questionnaire and interview responses were analysed independently and in combination with each other.

Questionnaire and interview data were similar and strongly supportive of each other with very little difference between questionnaire and interview results. All results in this section reflect the combined data. I identified 15 thematic categories.

The combined parents’ responses from the questionnaire and interviews fell into three categories (see Table 4). ‘*Religious education’* was the most widespread reason cited by 19 participants. ‘*Identity and culture’* was the second most important motivational factor cited by 11 participants and finally ‘*Single-sex education’* was also cited by 9 people. While these were the three most important motivations cited by parents, there were other motivations revealed by some participants. These motivations, including other sub-motivations, will be discussed in the following sections. Table 4 below shows the categories arising from participants’ combined questionnaire and interview responses:

**Table 5: The Categories and the Participants’ Combined Questionnaire and Interview Responses.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Most important motivations** | **Number of participants** |
| Good education | 19 |
| Identity and culture | 11 |
| Single-sex schooling | 9 |
| **Total** | **39** |

This chapter is divided into five main sections:

1. Section One describes participants’ general views on primary and secondary educational stages and parents’ aspirations.
2. Section Two describes a “good education” as the first motivation (see a. above) which Muslim parents adopt for sending their children to Islamic schools with four themes arising out of the data: religious education; religious and secular education; Islamic knowledge; and religious practice.
3. Section Three which relates to parents’ views about identity and culture as the second motivation (see b. above) is divided into four themes: Islamic identity; culture; values and morals; and Islamic environment.
4. Section Four explores the third motivation (see c. above) regarding parents’ views of single-sex schooling, its suitability for children by exploring religious, cultural and behavioural reasons; their opinion on safety, atmosphere, confidence and self-esteem and their children’s performance.
5. Finally, Section Five concludes the chapter with the key issues gathered from the data presented.

## 4.2 Parents’ General Views on State Education and Islamic Education

### 4.2.1 Primary State Schools

This section describes participants’ views on primary and secondary educational stages and parents’ aspirations and outcomes they want for their children. In the first instance, I identify parents’ *choice* of school. Choice is “an optimal decision-making process made after considering relevant factors and forecasting the benefits and needs that a certain product can give or solve” (Hawkins et al., 2007, as cited in Dahari and Ya, 2011, p. 116). Parekh (2000) highlights the political element of schooling in relation to educating future citizens and suggests that children are citizens, human beings, and members of pertinent cultural communities, and their parents and cultural community have a crucial role in their education.

Although there may be conflict between the children’s rights and parental rights, faith schools reflect the parental desire to retain some of their Muslim heritage for their children. All parents in this study considered it very important to choose their children’s educational provision carefully from pre-school stage until university.

According to MacMullen (2007), parents who want religious schools for their children may believe their religious values, principles and their children’s spiritual life are on the line. While the state may be concerned that such schools could destroy the unity of the society, conversely, liberals might fear religious schools indoctrinate their pupils and thereby reduce them to victims incapable of logically endorsing, modifying or refusing the lifestyle taught in such schools. He states that “religious schools are central to the upbringing certain parents seek to give their children, but they may also pose a threat both to the civic health of the state and to the embryonic autonomy of children” (p. 2).

It can be argued that religious values and principles are the most important reasons even for Muslim parents who accept their children to be in primary state schools which might pose questions about their motivations. In other words, although such religious values are significant for Muslim parents, they still feel happy for their children to attend primary stage state schools. This may mean that although they want to protect their children at a vulnerable age they do not want to reject, isolate or divide them from society or destroy the community cohesion by being in state schools with other children from different backgrounds and ethnicity in the primary stage. In my study most parents agreed with sending their children to public primary schools which were felt to be safe and reasonable for their children, between the ages of 5 to 11.

PI03: My daughter was in a regular nursery school and then went to a state primary school as there were no Muslim schools in our area for Muslim girls. Later on when she grew up, I sent her to a Muslim secondary school because I wanted her to be in an Islamic environment which is less important when she was at primary school age.

This participant had no problem with her daughter being in a state primary school while she was still young (below 11 years old). Another participant claimed she accepted a place at a primary state school for her daughter, but objected to her daughter having a state secondary school education due to the problems with this system.

PI07: Many problems exist in secondary schools. There are significantly fewer problems with primary schools. It is hard to send our daughters to state [secondary] schools.

Some participants said, however, that studying in a primary state school gave their children confidence as they developed school friends from earliest years. In their study which examined UK Muslim women’s attitudes and values regarding their daughters’ education, Osler and Hussain (1995) found that those mothers whose daughters attended the state primary school felt that their children were exposed to different values at school than at home, but were generally confident that state school education would not harm their daughters, in the belief that the strength of home and broader Muslim community influences were stronger. Osler and Hussain also state:

The mothers acknowledged that many values were common to home and school and the emphasis which the school placed on honesty and telling the truth, sharing, loving, and caring for others in the community, was both recognised and welcomed (1995, p. 336).

PI013: My children felt confident and dealt with their society effectively having been in primary state schools with many other friends from diverse backgrounds.

This view, however, seems to conflict with the idea that being in a separate school isolates children from wider society by stating that the parents feel comfortable and confident in state schools. This, therefore, shows there are other issues regarding the type of education chosen for their children. Muslim families face many problems regarding their children’s education including the state school curricula such as sex-education, mixed classes and misrepresentations of Islam. Some Muslim parents seek to find an alternative solution. Although some Muslim parents struggle to give their children an alternative education to state schools, at the same time, they are worried that alternative schools may isolate their children, reduce their secular knowledge and the important experiences of participating in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society.

On the other hand, although many parents send their children to state primary schools and had no concerns with this, some parents wished there were Islamic primary schools:

PI02: There were no primary Islamic schools available. We had separate secondary Islamic schools for girls and boys. As there were no Muslim primary schools in our area, children went to a mainstream school and then to an Islamic secondary school.

According to this participant, some parents wished to have both primary and secondary stage Islamic schools and she seemed dismayed at the prospect of her children studying in state schools, but without Islamic primary schools in their residential area, they had no choice.

Another parent who supported primary state schools said that an Islamic primary school would be preferable if she could find one, but would only consider Islamic secondary schooling for her children’s secondary stage of education:

PI013: I agree with primary schools but if I found Islamic schools at the primary stage, I would prefer this for my children. When they reach the secondary stage, I will only consider Islamic schools for them.

When some parents first arrived in the UK, they were dismayed to learn that they were unable to find any primary Islamic schools.

PI012: I felt dismayed for being unable to find a primary school for my children especially when we first arrived here. My elder boy was 11 years old, the second was 8 years old and my daughter was 10 years old. We sent all of them to state schools.

When I asked her to explain the reason she had expected to find such Islamic schools on arrival with her family, she said that their community had been established in Britain for many years and she thought they had their own schools to meet their children’s educational needs. However, the Muslim minority struggled to obtain Voluntary Aided status even after the Education Acts of the 1980s and the 1990s.

For the past two centuries in England and Wales, it has been possible for religious minorities to establish their own schools and seek official recognition and public funding. The 1994 Education Act codified those actions, particularly in the definition of a category of Voluntary Aided schools (Hewer, 2001).

Some participants had tried to establish a primary Islamic school when their children were at the primary stage.

PI08: When our children were at a primary school age, I took them to a primary state school, but we wanted to see if we could start a Muslim primary school ourselves. We tried to find two or three different places but we lost two or three years for nothing. It was very difficult.

This participant had worked hard to establish an Islamic primary school in his area, but like many parents, found the financial issues as being the major obstacle which prevented them from establishing their own Islamic schools. Hewer (2001) states that “typically small schools were established in homes, mosques and similar buildings by a group of concerned parents and community leaders”. (p. 518). These schools then required registration with the DfES, which in turn led to specialised examination and advice. These schools are low-fee schools in poorer quality buildings with a lack of facilities common to mainstream schools (Walford, 2004). These schools rely on financial support, and the financial insecurity is the main reason for these deficiencies (Meer, 2009).

This brings up the issue about the motivating forces affecting these parents to find other schools even though state schools exist in their area. This might relate to many reasons raised in the foregoing literature review. It could also lead to some parents considering state-funded Muslim schools as a solution that might satisfy both sides; Muslim parents and the state whereby Muslim parents feel secure that their children’s heritage and identity are being safeguarded with the state being guaranteed the unity of society.

This section has described parents’ views about primary state schools with the majority satisfied with primary state schools for their children. The following section describes Muslim parents’ view about secondary state schools.

### Secondary State Schools

The most common issue in my research was Muslim parents’ demand for Islamic secondary schools for their children.

It would be fair to say that all of the participants wanted to send their children to Islamic secondary schools for: a) religious, b) cultural, and c) moral reasons.

Recent studies, for example McKinney (2004) and Schofield (2004), have demonstrated that in order to ensure the continuity of the community and uphold moral values, the Muslim community still feels the need to educate their children separately, even if their communities are well established in the host society, because “most immigrants have experienced Western society as irreligious and immoral” (Hurst, 2000, p. 92).

The lack of appropriate religious education is cited by many parents as a critical issue when choosing secondary Islamic schools for their children who have completed state primary schooling:

PI013: They are good but they don’t teach our religion and there are mixed classes.

The majority of parents in this study considered it their responsibility to find a religious environment for their male and female children on reaching puberty.

PI010: I am happy with my kids. It is our responsibility as Muslim parents to prepare our children by giving them Islamic knowledge who will not otherwise know how to plan for their future. If they reach adulthood in a good way and know their thinking for now … we are strangers in this country and in this world. As Muslims we need to prepare for *Akhirah*[[2]](#footnote-2) by choosing Islamic education for ourselves and our children.

Muslim parents have had several drivers for establishing Islamic schools (AMSS, 2004; Hewer, 2001; Meer, 2009, 2007). Hewer (2001) describes these as:

1. Education in an Islamic environment.

b) Training for perspective religious leaders.

c) A safe environment for girls.

d) Higher standards of anticipation and achievements for Muslim pupils.

Parents participating in my study, however, chose Islamic schools for different reasons. The following quotation is one participant’s view when I asked her how she reached her decision to choose a secondary Islamic school:

PI09: Initially my son went two years before his sister who followed him. As my children were born in a European country and were in a state primary school, I thought their Islamic knowledge and education of our culture were insufficient because they were given insufficient information about Islam. Although their school may provide some Islamic education, I considered it inadequate.

In the opinion of my participants, parents are responsible for taking care of their children in the age range of 11 to 16, which is widely viewed as a risky period by Muslim parents because they believe that the child is unstable and can easily go astray. Waddy (1982) stresses that teaching religion to children is considered as one of the most important features of family life and the main responsibility of parents. Parents were keen to be close to children of this age to secure their child’s future while still young:

PI09: State schools are good but I dislike many things. Children try everything earlier. They have too much freedom and some children can easily go off course. The teenage years are a dangerous stage of life. I think children in the 11–16 age range are in a special time of their life, when parents need to be far more protective. By the time a child reaches 16 they are usually calmer and learn things in the right way.

Parents took this age range seriously and thought that protecting their adolescent children is the parents’ critical responsibility. Such parents felt that placing their children in state primary schools was fine while they were still young, but moving their children to an Islamic school at the secondary stage was a concern to them. Muslims also argue that there are applicable differences between boys and girls in their physical, emotional and mental development, particularly from the age of about 11 (Halstead, 1991).

By the time the children are 16, these parents think of their children as adults who can decide what they want to do, having reached an age at which they can understand issues more realistically. Thus many parents felt that it was acceptable to send their children back to state schools, when they reached 16:

PI011: They went to an Islamic secondary school straight from a state primary school while still at a young and dangerous age, but when they reach 16, they could go back to state schools or university.

Parents also believed they should protect their young children with a solid Islamic religious and secular education to achieve better results (see, for example, Hewer, 2001) until the age of 18, by which time they are capable of deciding their future direction.

PI014: I am giving my children the opportunity to gain religious and secular education. As long as they have a strong foundation, by the time they are 18 they are adults and can take their own decisions and choose to be a doctor or become scholar. Parents provide their children with everything until they reach 18, but before that a child is too young and cannot make decisions. Children need guidelines and boundaries for protection until they are older and ready to make decisions.

Most participants had a different experience when choosing Islamic schools for their children. In one participant’s view, being in state schools was acceptable but not reasonable:

PI012: Although my twins went to a state primary school we were unhappy with this option, so we sent them to an Islamic secondary school as soon as possible.

While many knew of those schools because they also went to such schools when they were young, others relied on the recommendations of their friends. However, other parents were minded to send their children to an Islamic secondary school from birth:

PI06: As a mum, when my daughter was born, I thought about what I could do for her, the type of education she would receive and whether I could send her to school as I needed her to be in an Islamic atmosphere. I felt the same when my sons were born but felt unsure, however, when my daughter was born. I felt far more passionate about giving her Islamic education.

Other parents, who planned to send their children to Islamic primary schools from the early years, also simultaneously tried to find places for their children in state secondary schools to secure one of those places:

PI01: I can say that from year 3 or year 4 I planned to send my daughter to an Islamic school but as I was unsure whether the Islamic school would offer her a place, I also applied and secured a place for her in a secondary state school. She took the test for the Islamic school which she passed and, *Alhamdu Lellah,*[[3]](#footnote-3) both schools offered her a place.

It can be argued, according to this view, that the Muslim parents’ strategy of choosing Islamic schools for their children gives us a clear insight into the positive way in which these parents think about their children’s future. Although they want to find an Islamic school, they also want to secure places in state schools for their children, therefore demonstrating that they care about their children’s education. Although being in an Islamic school is important, at the same time there are also other choices. Securing places to learn and receive an education is vitally important even where this education is in a state school. From this, we can appreciate the Muslim parents’ seriousness regarding their children’s education and, despite their preference for an Islamic school education, this does not preclude the general education system offered in state schools.

Other parents who were keen to plan their children’s future also shared this view.

PI04: Essentially, I started to plan for my daughter from primary school. In fact I started to plan my daughter’s life and schooling when I learned about her interests. I decided that until she was 10 years old, she would go to the ordinary mixed primary school and attend Islamic secondary school afterward.

Another parent was waiting to send her children to an Islamic secondary school and had registered their names at Year Five just to guarantee their places.

PI02: When they were in primary school, I think in Year Five, perhaps aged 10, I registered their names at the Islamic secondary school because I wanted to secure a place for them until they grew up.

Some parents knew certain Islamic secondary schools and it was based on their friends’ recommendation that they send their children to such schools. In their view, they knew what was best for their children and they decided and informed their children of that decision.

PI07: They started studying in Islamic schools at secondary stage but they were in primary state school. We knew of Islamic schools which some friends had recommended to us. We decided what the best was for our daughters, made decisions, and then informed them that we have chosen an Islamic school for them.

While some parents were influenced by their friends regarding studying in Islamic schools, other parents who had studied at such schools had their own experiences, which had a major impact on their decision to send their children to Islamic schools.

PI04: I myself went to an Islamic school and experienced the Islamic atmosphere and environment which influenced me to send my daughter to an Islamic school.

Another participant’s experience of Islamic schools encouraged her to send her daughter to these schools. She was proud of her Islamic upbringing and wanted her daughter to have the experience of being in such a school.

PI05: Having gone to an Islamic school, I had a highly positive experience. I knew that if I had gone to a non-Islamic girls-only state school, I would not have turned out as I did; I would not have had the same self-respect for myself as I now have, which is the reason I want my daughter to attend such schools.

The parents whom I quote below informed me that their daughter insisted on going to an Islamic school, which was quite an unexpected turn of events, because they had not known how to persuade her to join an Islamic school:

PI06: I always pray for my children to be good Muslims and role models for other Muslims. Last Ramadan, my daughter started high school and during the six-week summer holiday she suddenly decided that she would not go back to her school and wanted to go to an Islamic school. My husband and I asked what had happened, whether someone had been bullying her, as we would complain. She said everything was fine but would only consider an Islamic school. I was angry and said we would consider this after our holiday. She seemed agreeable and added that after completing an Internet search she had found schools in London and Nottingham, but both were far away and the fees were high. I agreed to discuss this with *baba*[[4]](#footnote-4). During Ramadan, she asked repeatedly which school she would attend and I prayed for her in my heart. We discussed it with my husband. Although the idea was her initiative, it was like a dream becoming a reality. The summer holiday had passed and she was due to start high school again. As we are very close, she reiterated that she would not go back to the state school, to which I replied that we would see what happened.

While the parents were thinking about their daughter’s inquiry regarding Islamic schools, they were questioning whether their choice was the best. Although the mother was happy, she could not take action until she was sure that action would be the right choice for her daughter who took the first step of her journey to find a suitable school:

PI06: My daughter responded by going to the computer, found the school’s number and informed me that she had the number for me to call now. It was eight o’clock so I said they would close. She entreated me to try. I thought nobody from the institution would answer at that late hour and so I agreed, to keep her happy. When she dialled the number somebody responded: ‘*Assalamu Alyakum*’. Not having expected anyone to answer, I was nervous and in confusion, I asked to speak in Urdu and explained that my daughter wanted to attend this school. They wanted my daughter’s full details and to my surprise they accepted her for a trial period the next day! My daughter was jumping up with excitement – *Alhamdu lellah*. Allah helped me. In this country we cannot force them because everything should go as they want. Although I am from Pakistan, I do not force my children to do anything. I just teach them right from wrong. My husband and I were both surprised, nervous and everything together. He asked how we could send her to another school; but people do change schools for many reasons. She will be happy and we can see how this two-week trial will go. I reiterated that it was a two-week trial to which our daughter agreed to be a good girl and try the school.

Regarding the previous participant, school location is an important issue when choosing schools. However, she still stressed that they - she and her husband - preferred these schools even though they were far away from their homes.

PI06: I was a bit scared because of many things. The first thing was my husband usually takes the children to school because all of them go to the same school. The second thing: they have to get up early as well so we need two cars; one goes to the Islamic school and one to the other school. Even these difficulties, I say, no problem, for us we have to be ready for our children to reach their religious needs.

Alston (1985, as cited in West and Varlaam, 1991) who studied the views of parents of pupils in their last year of primary school found that 65 per cent of participating parents said the school was close to home, or easily accessible. However, West and Varlaam (1991) found that the school’s proximity to home and the ease of access were not perceived as being as important when a choice of secondary school was made.

In my study, participating Muslim parents preferred living in an area where the school is near the home, which is very important for them because it is easy to reach the school all year round. In general the majority of parents said they were satisfied with the school’s location. The existence of Islamic schools in the area had a major impact on participating Muslim parents.

PI03: We live nearby and the school has been in our area, which made it a very easy decision.

The location of Islamic schools has positive and negative influences in that Muslims often choose to live in large communities which can isolate them from other communities. From a positive perspective, being in a Muslim community makes it easier for Muslim parents to send their children to easily accessible local schools. Islamic schools are usually in the centre of Muslim communities which are typically far removed from other communities which restricts the registration of people from other religions and ethnic minorities. In other words even if non-Muslims, for example, wanted to send their children to Islamic schools their homes are too far away and they are compelled to choose schools nearer to their homes. Even Muslim families who want to send their children to Islamic schools but live too far away, send their children to other faith or state schools. This problem can be resolved if Islamic schools were set up and funded by the state in the same way as faith schools outside Muslim communities which would therefore allow others the opportunity to register at Islamic schools if required. The current government claims that free schools help children to achieve what they want through the programme that is offered in such schools and might not be offered in other schools. Free schools are all-ability state-funded schools set up in response to what local people say they want and need in order to improve education for children in their community (DfES, 2013).

Others saw Islamic schools were well located in their area and within easy walking distance.

PQ09: The standard of Islamic schools in terms of location is all right because it is not far away from our house.

PQ07: The location of the school is not far from my house.

PQ06: School’s location is suitable; the school is on my road.

PQ02: It is not too far; it is within walking distance.

To sum up, being in an Islamic school is to an extent determined by a child’s age. Muslim parents who participated in my study are not worried about the primary stage of educational provision and so may prefer state schools at this stage for reasons such as confidence building and forming good relations with wider society. In the secondary stage, however, most of my participants prefer Islamic schools and prepared their children from the primary stage to attend Islamic schools in order to avoid what they considered unacceptable situations. In participating Muslim parents’ opinion school’s location made school choice easier. However, for some of them, living far away from schools does not affect their decision regarding sending their children to Islamic schools.

### Children’s Opinions

Generally speaking, most of the participants had sought their children’s opinion of Islamic schools before enrolment. Securing the child’s agreement for admission to the school is critical. Parents informed me that their children were in state primary schools and after having decided to send them to Islamic schools they asked their children for their views in order to feel comfortable about their decision. According to Ceglowski (2007) some parents argue that the child’s opinion of school should be considered even when choosing pre-school, since children have the right to express their opinions to advance the situation in which parents place them.

It is important for parents to place their children where they will be happy. Most parents said they had explained the importance of this to their children and sought their opinion. Some parents asserted, however, that they would not send their children to an Islamic school if they believed their children were unhappy with this decision.

PI09: Certainly you cannot send the child without asking his opinion and securing his permission. You have to explain and tell them where they are going. I have explained our plans, asked their permission and they agreed.

PQ016: Of course, yes, because if she was unhappy I would not have sent her [to an Islamic secondary school].

Some parents considered it to be freedom of choice and would not force their children to enrol at an Islamic secondary school against their will. Parents stressed that allowing children to choose would enhance their achievements.

PQ010: I do not want to force them because our religion does not force people. I wanted their opinion. And if that is what they want to do, they will do better.

It can be argued that opponents to faith schools in general and Islamic schools in particular might see such a focus on the parents’ rights in preference to the child’s right as directing their children’s opinion and indoctrinating their thinking, a view contradicted by views expressed by participating parents. Most of my participants were comfortable regarding their children’s education. They tried to give their children a choice about the type of school they wanted in order to ensure their children were in a situation which protects their rights and gives them freedom of choice.

Conversely, some parents, believing that faith schools protect their children’s identity, culture and religion took decisions without involving their children. This point complements other studies (Short, 2002; Parker-Jenkins, 2002; Valins, 2003) which reveal that faith schools help children to develop a sense of belonging and identity, which helps them to improve their confidence and self-esteem to reach their full potential.

PI011: It was my decision. I have three children and I need to safeguard their education, national and religious education. It was my choice. I am happy with that decision because I know that when I die my children will protect their future identity and religious beliefs as Somali Muslims. I will not return to my country so I want my children to protect their privacy.

Some of parents explained that they had not consulted their children before sending them to Islamic schools because they had their own opinions of state schools, which they felt were unsuitable and disadvantageous for their children at the secondary stage.

PI08: I thought of my children as kids who would not comprehend the rationale for our decisions at that stage. The reason I sent them to an Islamic school at that time and which I think they would have difficulty in understanding … was that, having experienced the state school system, I had first-hand experience of it and knew what it was like. Although I know secondary state schools have some benefits, I also know their weaknesses. My initial thoughts as a parent were that we would actualise something that state schools had aimed to achieve. I also thought we could avoid or reduce the difficulties of mainstream schools.

Other parents believed that they knew what was best for their children and did not see the need to involve them.

PQ03: I know what is best for them, I want them to learn about Islam and when they go to Islamic schools they will understand.

These views also lead us to the discussion concerning parents and children rights. It might be leading us to ask: Does this mean that sending Muslim children to Islamic school is a form of child abuse? According to this view, parents are leading their children to follow their experiences and beliefs without taking account of their own opinions and concerns. Halstead (1989) states that with regard to the liberal view “parents have no right in principle to make any fundamental decisions about the education or upbringing of their own children”. (p. 98). However, Halstead also states that balancing children’s rights against parents’ rights is important and there is no need to assume that children rights are constantly absolute. He suggests that a hypothetical social contract should be made to recognise the relationship between parents, children and the state:

'The biological parents are appointed trustees of the child; the trusteeship demands that they make decisions in the best interests of the child and that those decisions are not against the public interest; in return, they are allowed to determine the course of their family life without undue interference from the state, except in so far as such interference may be required to prepare the children for citizenship' (pp. 101.102).

Halstead also believes the state has the right to protect children where their biological parents fail to act in the child’s best interests such as in cases of child abuse, or where those parents are acting in conflict with public interest. But at the same time as he states that:

Parents are free to send their children to the school of their choice unless it can be shown that it is against either their children's interests or the public interest for them to do so. Thus parents are not barred in principle from making fundamental decisions about the education or upbringing of their own children, unless those decisions conflict with either their children’s own interests or the public interest. (p. 102).

It can be argued that the parents’ responsibility for their children’s life in their early years is not debatable; it is important and appreciated especially at such an age. Children who are surrounded by their parents’ care are not adversely affected. In other words, merely attending Islamic schools is not to imply that it affects children’s autonomy, thinking capability and understanding. Although Islamic schools encourage the religious thinking of Muslim children, parents also believe they encourage practical and autonomous thinking. In this view, being a religious person does not mean you don’t have freedom of thought.

Still other parents saw no need to ask their children because these families had traditionally sent their children, especially girls, to Islamic schools for many generations. Connected with this, Osler and Hussain (1995) reveal that opponents of Islamic schools have focused on the limited opportunities and outlooks that such schools offer girls, while rarely canvassing the views of Muslim girls and women. Haw (1994) considers that there are honest concerns among those from within the Muslim tradition and beyond that Islamic schools limit girls’ prospects. Notwithstanding this concern, such schools are currently under-researched in respect of the equal rights of girls. In respect of Islamic schools for girls, Halstead states:

Feminists, it is claimed, see such schools as a means of countering a bias towards males and encouraging women to respect other women in an atmosphere free from male domination and harassment, whereas the Muslims seek to use them as a means of perpetuating traditional views of a woman's role in society. (1991, p. 263).

A participant’s opinion was:

PI05: I think there was no need to ask my daughters because they knew that my family traditionally sent our daughters to Islamic girls’ schools.

On this point, being in Islamic schools might maintain classical views regarding Muslim women in Muslim society but it can also be seen as a solution for issues such as bullying, bad behaviour and sexual relations. It can also be argued that Muslim schools encourage girls to continue their studies especially after puberty, a time parents worry for their daughters’ safety. Such a view claims that such schools offer a good solution for educating and guaranteeing the education of those girls whose parents object to their daughters attending mixed state schools and who may well send them to their home country. My opinion from listening to parents is that they prefer their daughters to attend Islamic schools rather than stay at home or go abroad. Moreover, Islamic schools for girls have gained very good results for several years which reflect well on the level of education offered in these schools while also creating a good impression in relation to Muslim girls’ educational situation.

Although other parents knew their children would not like to go to an Islamic school, they still send them

PQ07: [Now] I feel my daughter disagrees and [would like to] follow her friends in the primary school.

### Aspirations for Children

In respect of Muslim parents’ motivations, I asked participating parents to describe the sort of child they wanted. I received a diverse range of responses. Although Muslim parents did their best to provide for and enable their children to develop, I can say that generally they wanted their children to turn out with good values, highly educated, as worthy people, responsible citizens and respectable people.

PI03: My main purpose is to ensure that my daughter is a righteous person with good values and compassion. She does not need to be ashamed of who she is; she needs to accept herself and be proud of herself as a good religious person, smart, sensitive, somebody who cares and thinks of others.

PI010: Good Muslim, good human being, and good for our society – and if they can do this they can get everything.

Although it can be argued Muslim parents want their children to be good people, the question here is what does being ‘a good child’ mean, and whether this is an acceptable definition for those children who have been sent to Islamic schools. In other words, what evidence exists to show that children were happy to comply with their parents plans for them? This argument leads us again to consider the child’s right to autonomy and how they can decide their plans while parents have mapped out their future. It can be said that most of the parents who participated in my study asked their children before sending them to Islamic schools which may therefore mean that these children were given an opportunity to choose. In my opinion, it is reasonable for them to think about the outcomes they want for their children because all parents regardless of whether or not they are Muslim, seek to foster values or may dream about how they want their children to develop.

Education is a critical issue for all participants. In particular, this group of parents wanted to see their children educated because they perceived education as the key to self-respect. This is in line with of Dewey’s educational thesis which states, “Education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform. Yet, only progressive education leads to social progress and reform” (Hamdan, 2006, p. 58). Moreover, education leads to more progress. According to Bruner:

Educational process transmits to the individual some part of the accumulation of knowledge, style, and values that constitutes the culture of a people. … education must also seek to develop the processes of intelligence so that the individual is capable of going beyond the cultural ways of his [her] social world, able to innovate in however modest away so that he [she] can create an interior culture of his [her] own … Education must not confuse the child with the adult and must recognize that the transition to adulthood involves an introduction to new realms of experience. (Bruner, 1962, as cited in Hamdan, 2006, p. 58).

However, they also wanted their children to receive both a religious and a secular education.

PI04: Firstly, I want her to be educated. I think education is essential for children. An educated person is also a respected person, so first and foremost, I want them to be well educated as well as knowing about their Islamic religion to ensure that education does not cross the limit of what is not allowed.

Parents also strongly assert the need to protect their children’s religious beliefs and values, and become positive members in their society.

PI013: I would like to see my children having good religious background, well-qualified and making a valuable contribution to our society.

In this regard, traditions and values also play an important part. Parents like to see their children practise their tradition, values, and to protect their identity to show respect for their parents and society (see, for example, Hermans, 2004; Hewer, 2001).

PI012: I would like them to be good people who respect our traditions, values, and also good children who respect their parents, identity and society.

This section has provided background information of the participants’ views and opinions of primary and secondary schools, factors that influenced their decision to send their children to Islamic schools and how they wanted their children to develop.

The following section discusses the first motivation of Muslim parents regarding their children education.

## Good Education

A ‘good education’ is usually accepted as the most essential motivation for all parents, regardless of their faith and background. In this study all parents stressed that obtaining a ‘good education’ was the most vital reason for sending their children to an Islamic school. However, what is seen as a good Islamic education does not necessarily coincide with what is considered to be a good Western liberal education. McCreery et al. (2007) state that “within a Muslim school, therefore, children can be educated about the world from an Islamic perspective rather than a Western liberal one”. (p. 211). It is, therefore, worth considering:

1. The meaning of a ‘good education’
2. The yardstick Muslim parents use to measure the education their children receive as being good
3. How they decide on the balance between religious and secular education for their children’s education

In the next section I aim to evaluate the views of my participants in this respect.

Muslims focusing on Allah and the Qur’an is the start of the study. In this regard, Hewer (2001) writes that the Muslim teacher’s starting point for devising any curriculum is the Qur’an’s perspective on a subject. According to Coles (2004) “[i]ts overarching goal is attuned to faith in action which in its turn continually leads Muslims to remember God”. (p. 44). For Muslims then, the ultimate goal is ‘to seek God’s satisfaction through knowledge’ (*ilm*). Muslims see no difference between religious knowledge and other knowledge; all is knowledge of Allah: “The search for knowledge can be seen as an act of piety, as equivalent to prayer” (Coles, 2004, p. 44). McCreery et al. (2007) argue that Muslim parents are just like any other parents who want the best education for their children. Being a good Muslim means that education is the most important part of your life, and is, as Parker-Jenkins (2002) notes, a “driving force in Muslim communities” (p. 287).

A common belief of participants is that Islamic schools offer a high standard of education, so that their pupils are prepared to travel from other cities every day. According to Shah, Muslim schools are more likely to want to improve knowledge with respect to religion and its teachings:

Islamic schools are anticipated to provide some knowledge of Islam and Islamic teachings enabling better engagement with faith-related debates and practices as well as preparing Muslim children to be able to negotiate and reconcile the requirements of their faith with their rights and responsibilities as British citizens. (2012, p. 56).

In like manner, the following participant believes:

PI014: I want my children to have a high standard of education. I know these schools teach children from different backgrounds … and I want my children to have the best possible education. As we travel from Nottingham daily, it is hard work but, *alhamdu lellah*, Islamic education merits this work.

It can be argued that participating Muslim parents believe that the best education they can give their children is an Islamic school education. Although they regard this education as being of the highest standard, the question here is the basis upon which they decide that the education is of a high standard and best for their children.

In general it is problematic to decide on what constitutes the best education because it varies according to the situation, country and educational outcomes. My participants, however, differ with regard to their views in relation to their children. At the same time they aspire to find the best path for their children. Although they asserted that religious education is very important, they also emphasised the value of secular education in order to secure the future for their children.

It is important to mention here that the word ‘educational’ is understood in different ways by Muslim parents with some using ‘education’, while others use ‘knowledge’. They also distinguished between Islamic and secular education, perhaps to explain the philosophy underlying the establishment of their own schools. In other words, according to the perspective of my participants, being in Islamic schools is the most effective way for them to offer a religious and secular education while also guaranteeing that their children’s education reflects their parents’ religion and culture.

As can be seen, the participating Muslim parents’ regard a ‘good education’ to include:

a) Religious and secular education – for example, Meer (2007) states that Islamic schools appear to be doing reasonably well while delivering ‘secular’ and ‘Islamic’ education.

b) Islamic knowledge – where the aim of Islamic education is to provide Muslims with knowledge to build their faith and take transformative actions to change their lives according to Allah’s instructions as a proof of their faith (Al-Ghazali, 2005).

c) Religious practice – Halstead (1992) argues that a specific area of Muslim concern regarding the state school curriculum is religious education for religious practice. Both Hurst (2000) and Hewer (2001) note that attempts are being made to adapt school structures to accommodate Muslim pupils’ religious requirements by providing, for example, prayer rooms.

c) Arabic language – Rosowsky (2008) states that the classical Arabic of the Qur’an is very important for Muslim communities, because it is essential to read and write the Holy Qur’an.

### 4.3.1 Religious Education

The most common response cited by the majority of participants in the combined data was that of ‘religious education’. Participants had common views for choosing these schools:

PI07: I have sent my daughters to an Islamic school to receive good education and critically, good religious education.

PQ010: As a Muslim, I want my children to go to an Islamic school to receive good religious education.

The most important response from parents of this study was that their children received a good religious education. This response confirms Halstead’s (1992) view who argues that an exact area of Muslim concern regarding the state school curriculum is religious education, because for the Muslim:

Religion is not a mere set of moral principles but a way of life, a code of laws, a system encompassing and integrating the political, social, and economic, as well as personal, moral, and spiritual aspects of life.(Dabashi, 1993 as cited in Shah, 2006b, p. 368).

All participating Muslim parents wanted their children to receive a good religious education, which was their primary motivation. They considered their children might receive a good education in state schools, but still felt the need for their children to receive a good religious education.

PI012: A sound religious education is more important than just having good secular education. I have therefore sent my children to Islamic school rather than the state secondary school. As a result, I feel my children have had excellent Islamic education and sometimes teach me things I haven’t previously known.

In this regard, the issue to consider is whether the Muslim parent sends their children to Islamic schools to satisfy the needs and interests of their children or the parents’ needs and interests. In other words, do Muslim children benefit by being in such schools or is it rather that their parents want them to be religious people and want them to learn everything regarding Islam in order to then transfer that knowledge to the parents who had little scope to learn about their religion in their childhood?

This also poses another question regarding the child’s choices and rights. In respect of the previous view, a participant was talking about her feelings rather than her child’s. She asserted that her children had an excellent religious education and were sometimes able to teach her. It can be argued that Muslim parents who participated in this study believe that where the child had a good religious education they also had a quality education. This satisfies their concerns regarding their children’s education because, as previously stated, Islam is a way of life as well as a religion.

Others perceived that education was important and that children deserved a good religious and secular education, and that going to an Islamic school created that opportunity without the need to attend state schools.

Another participant reported that her attempt to teach her son about his religion had failed. She felt her daughters, who both attended Islamic school, learned far better than her son, due to the atmosphere of their Islamic school. In the same way, when a group of Muslim parents in Birmingham started their own primary Islamic school (Al-Furqan School) for the first year, it was only for girls, i.e. those girls who were home-schooled. But in the second year the school started to take boys as well as girls. Parents believe that “their sons should also be able to benefit from what they perceived to be a high level of general schooling as well as the Islamic ethos of the school” (Walford, 2004, p. 218). This mother believed her children would not be religious if they did not go to Islamic schools.

PI02: I don’t think those girls who go to state schools can be genuinely religious. They might not know about religion and are likely to be confused, which I observed when I tried to teach my son Islamic and Qur’anic lessons; I can feel a difference in his attitude to Islam.

Based on this participant’s views, it can be argued that:

(a) We can take this view as reflecting the views of some parents with experience of faith and state schools. In other words this parent gives us an overview of the minority of the Muslim parents’ opinion in respect of religious and secular schools. She has different experiences: one with her son and another with her daughters. On the issue of her son’s public school education she held the view that he had lacked a religious education compared to her daughters who have had a strong religious education. She has been worried about her son’s religious attitude and wished he was receiving a good religious education in an Islamic school. She feels comfortable with her daughters’ religious attitude.

(b) We also can see how some Muslim parents feel about their sons and daughters. Although they want both genders to be educated in Islamic schools they remain concerned by their culture and financial situation. It is clear that these Muslim parents are always concerned for their daughters’ safety because of their culture and tradition which places far greater emphasis on the girl’s honour and reputation. Their choice of school might also affect their financial situation where they may be unable to pay school fees for both their sons and daughters. Consequently they are forced to prioritise sending their daughters to Islamic schools to develop their cultural and religious beliefs. In my opinion this view gives an overview of the philosophy for those Muslim parents who participated in my study in relation to their children’s education. In order to avoid such issues, state funded Islamic schools may be an alternative solution for the education of Muslim children regardless of their gender.

In respect of schools’ fees, some Muslim parents prefer an Islamic school even when they have difficulties paying tuition fees. However, most of my participants said that Islamic schools’ fees were reasonable for them. The following participant’s view illustrates that the most important thing is to protect her children from bad influences and she would be ready to spend the money for that purpose.

PI011: As a Somali lady, I always care about my kids in the same way as any parent. Some of my neighbours ask why I waste my money on such schools when there are state schools where everything is free. My children are the most important thing in my life and I am more than happy to spend my money in order to protect them from drugs, bullying, and the many other undesirable practices of state schooling.

Many participants spoke about friends who were worried by state education but could not afford to send their children to Islamic schools due to high tuition fees. This might be the reason many parents cannot send their children to independent Islamic schools even they would like to, and send them to state schools because compulsory education is free for primary and secondary stage in this country. In my study, Muslim parents’ socio-economic situation has been mentioned by some participating parents, who were insisting on sending their children to an Islamic school, even though they are struggling with the school’s fees.

Opponents of Islamic schools see that there is only a small number of Muslims in the West who send their children to these schools and this indicates that such schools are unpopular and are therefore unsuccessful. In my view, many Muslim parents would send their children to state-funded Islamic community schools, if they existed, especially where they offer secular and religious education. The financial difficulties facing many Muslim parents force them to send their children to state schools with free education. Tinker (2006) states that many Muslim parents have not considered sending their children to Islamic schools because they assumed that they would not be able to afford the school’s fees. Although many Islamic schools try to lower the school’s fees to accommodate parents on lower incomes, most parents are still unable to pay. Tinker sees that many of her participants stressed that they would send their children to Islamic schools if they could afford the fees. She (2006) asserted that

The cost of the fees at independent Muslim schools, while lower than many non-Muslim private schools, is prohibitively high for the majority of Muslim parents. This therefore affects their decision as to whether to send their child to a Muslim school because, unless they live close to one of the few state funded Muslim schools, many do not have the option to send their child to a Muslim school. (p. 156).

In the following participant’s case, she regards her children as her investment and that being in an Islamic environment is far more important than any other business. Losing children would be the big loss.

PI10: Although many communities are still sending their children to state school, I have met many parents who are very worried about their children. Muslim parents cannot send their children to Islamic schools without money and most parents cannot afford the fees. I think our children are our best investment and I think it is an error of judgement to think we must invest our money to develop another business because our future and our investments are in our children. We are losers if we make business and property deals but lose our children.

The early post-war research on educational inequalities found that ‘children from middle class homes were more likely to succeed at school’ because their domestic sphere offered them an environment contributing to learning. On the other hand, working-class homes lacked these essential characteristics, mainly if one parent was unemployed (Abbas, 2002). According to Schmid (2001), Asian American students’ performances are encouraged by their socio-economic status. Schmid argues that the parents’ socio-economic status has affective and positive influences on children’s achievement. Children with better-educated parents, who make more money, have higher status-jobs, and live in two-parent families, tend to gain a higher level of education. Generally, families’ capability to invest in their children’s education is limited by their economic, social and human capital resources. Portes and Macleod (1996) in their study of the second generation of Mexican, Haitian, Vietnamese and Cuban students in California and Florida states that students were heavily influenced by their parents socio-economic status and by the socio-economic level of their schools. In my experience with participating Muslim parents in this study, they want their children to have a good quality education with high standard of religious studies and values. Their financial circumstances could make it impossible for them to offer such an education. Although facing difficulties, they send their children to private Islamic schools and have paid for tuition in order to safeguard their children’s future. It could be argued that the state should deal with citizens in an equal way and treat their needs similarly by making every effort to support everyone in key areas of life.

Furthermore, for the next parent, higher education is less important than religious education. She prefers Islamic schools and considers religious education as better for her children, although they can receive both secular and religious education, which is of paramount importance to her.

PI012: I hope my children will know their religion. I want them to be good Muslims. Higher education is unnecessary. Although religious education is paramount, they must also receive a good secular education.

It is vital to mention that this opinion was not representative of my participants’ views who generally tended to be cautious about the future of their children and asserted that they wanted a secure and good future for their children hence their concern regarding secular education. Most parents were, however, happy for their children to revert to a state education after 16 and would encourage their children to enter universities in order to continue their education.

Muslim parents used different expressions for religious education. They would say ‘religious education’ but they also used other words such as “right” and “wrong” way or “halal” and “haram” which means acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Those parents adapted Islam as a way of life whereby a Muslim follows Islamic principles in every detail of their life.

Although many parents mentioned religious education in general, some parents cited learning Islamic concepts in a right and wrong way. They wanted their children to know what is and is not suitable in Islam. Muslim parents regard Islam as their path of life rather than merely a religion. Carolan et al. (2000) suggest that “Islam is not just a part of life, practised on certain days, but a way of life, practised from moment to moment. Religious rules and beliefs guided all aspects of life” (p. 76).

They – the participant parents – follow Islam’s rules in detail and want to ensure that their children conduct themselves in an acceptable way in accord with Islam. The next participant asserted that Islam is a way of life as well as a religion; whatever people do, they have to see whether Islam permits it.

PQ04: As Muslims, we need to know the right and wrong about religion.

Some participants used the Arabic terms *Halal* (‘permitted’) and *Haram* (‘forbidden’) in order to say what is right and wrong; it is very important to know their religion’s rules. The word *halal* refers to everything that is measured, allowable, and lawful under religion while *haram* refers to what is prohibited and punishable according to Islamic rules. According to Aljallad (2008) the word *halal* is derived from *Halla*: “to be or become lawful, legal, illicit, legitimate, permissible, permitted, allowable, allowed, admissible, un-prohibited, and unforbidden” (p. 79). In Western countries, the word is typically used in the situation of just Muslim food laws, particularly where meat and poultry are concerned, whereas, in Arabic, it refers to acceptable behaviour, language, costume, conduct, manner, and dietary rules. Every aspect of life is regulated in a Muslim’s life by Islamic rule; consequently, “the *Halal*-*Haram* distinction applies to almost everything and Muslims make sure they understand what is what since saying or doing *al-Halal* will lead to Paradise and *al-Haram* to ‘Hell’” (Aljallad, 2008, p. 79). In contrast, the word *haram* is derived from the verb *Harrama*, which means “to forbid, prohibit, interdict, proscribe, ban, bar, outlaw, declare unlawful, to taboo, make illegal. Haram refers to any forbidden pattern of behaviour, speech, dress, conduct, and manner under Islamic law” (Aljallad, 2008, p. 80). It also includes the unlawful consumption of food or beverage.

PQ07: In Islamic schools, my daughters can learn everything from good behaviour, to haram and halal and how to follow the rules of Islam.

Muslim parents also appreciate learning from an early age to protect their children’s religious beliefs. They believe that if their children learn while they are still young, the Islamic tenets would be so deeply rooted at the core of their activities, that they are most unlikely to forget these values when they reach maturity.

One mother asserted that to learn and practise religion from a young age was vital for children as it enabled them to develop their knowledge:

PI01: Children who grow up learning who they are and how to practise their religion also respect other religions. To be honest, you have to show that you care and build this as soon as the child is born.

In this context (religious education), the parents’ experiences have had a major influence on their lives as well as impacting on the lives of their children’s life and schooling.

Muslim parents’ experiences are affected by their choice of schooling. For example, a lack of religious knowledge might focus their thinking with regard to their children’s education. We can say that when people feel they are deficient in some aspects of their life, they then try to avoid those areas and may even rectify these issues when raising their own children. In my opinion, Muslim parents who participated in my study had such experiences and aimed to give their children these experiences which can be seen clearly in the following participant statement. The Head Teacher of School B illustrated this point by drawing on his experience as a child. Talking of his generation, he explained how they struggled to gain Islamic knowledge due to their inability to understand Urdu and their teachers’ poor skills of English, which adversely affected their Islamic knowledge.

PI014: I have been through the new Islamic school system which my generation called “the lost generation”. We didn’t experience Islam much. Religious scholars couldn’t talk or relate to us in English so they used Urdu, understand English as our first language and we were born here in the UK which is our country, so it was difficult for us to understand external teachers. We therefore missed out on our Islamic education. Our villages back home had little education, which made it hard for us as children to learn about Islam.

This also provides a clear picture regarding the Muslim child’s confusion regarding their reality on life, religious and cultural background. They are trapped between two lives; one within their family and the other in their surrounding society. It can be argued that all these problems have affected Muslim parents’ choice for their children’s schooling which might also affect the children in some way. In my view, Muslim parents try to find a solution to life’s duality and learning by establishing Islamic schools. They establish these schools to address religious and secular education in order to offer a balanced and healthy environment. English is used as the main language for the majority of subjects including, for example, religious subjects in addition to local languages such as Arabic, Urdu.

The next participant is using personal experience to ensure his children avoid having the same experiences. Offering national and religious education is important for him, especially in the early years. He believes Islam is the path for life and his children should be educated in that path from childhood, with instructions and every small detail. He also believes that when children are growing up with Islamic instruction from an early age it makes these instructions feel more inherently natural to them.

PI014: My experience drove me to educate my children to learn the national and religious curriculum at an early age because I believe Islam is the focus for everyone in this world. Islam is a complete way of life and teaching children at an early age is best because when they grow older it would become a second nature. Sometimes, for example, we think twice about something, or take off the left-foot shoe first or put on the right-foot shoe first, whereas children who start young find it as natural to them.

From my perspective, the foregoing participant’s view could have developed from the situation affecting parents on settling in post-war Britain, when manual workers were required to rebuild the country and overseas workers from the Commonwealth, in particular, were invited. Statistics for temporary workers were distorted in the mid-1960s by immigration laws which encouraged such workers to bring over their families and make a stable home in the UK (Hewer, 2001). Muslims, among others, found a way to Britain through commerce, trade, services and education. The socio-economic situation might affect the children’s education, as their parents prioritised a secure financial future by working at sea or other jobs rather than their educational future.

### 4.3.1.1 Learning about other Religions

Although learning about Islam and culture is the main reason to choose an Islamic school, parents wish to give their children the opportunity to learn about other religions.

Reflecting a diverse multicultural society, both schools in my study offered children the chance to learn about other religions (see, for example, Osler and Hussain, 1995; Jackson and O’Crady, 2007). Insofar as they want to protect their culture and identity, they have to adapt to others and accept them as they are.

PI04: I think the most important motivator that led me to send my daughter to an Islamic school was to ensure she learned about our religion, the culture we live in, the society we come from and our origins. I am committed to education because when I went to Islamic school I learned about other religions as well as Islam, so she would learn about her limitations, her religion and other religions.

This participant had previously experienced going to an Islamic school and wanted her daughter to have a good knowledge of Islam and other religions as well as knowing her rights and limits within Islam. It can be argued that when Islamic schools offer other religious subjects in their curriculum they are offering their pupils a good opportunity to integrate into society. Those children are living in a multicultural society and should know how others who share their society think, act and live. The opponents of Islamic schools in particular and faith schools in general (see for example, Kymlicka, 1999; Judge, 2001) accuse such schools as being socially divisive. They assert that these schools destroy societal cohesion, though from my study it is possible to say that teaching other religions in addition to Islam gives a clear picture of the Islamic schools’ philosophy towards unity and cohesion of wider society.

Respecting other religions by understanding your own religion is another motivation. Muslim parents recognise that having a good knowledge of their own religion in mixed society ensures their children are more likely to respect people of other religions. According to another participant, learning other religions is valued, and living in a mixed society requires knowing how other people in society think. This parent explains that she sent her daughter to an Islamic school because an understanding of her own religion would also lead her to respect other religions.

PQ010: As we live in a mixed society alongside many other religions, I want my children to know about their religion so that they also respect other religions, yet be [on] the Islamic way to follow God’s rules and be on the right path.

Parents also revealed that choosing Islamic schools for a good education is not an exception. Christian parents also choose to send their children to faith schools in order to ensure their children receive good education and high achievement (see, for example, McCreery, 2007; Parker-Jenkins, 2004; Grace, 2003; Valins, 2003).

PI09: My children are growing with their religious and cultural values. It is not just in my religion. Christian people also prefer to send their children to faith schools to receive good education.

In summary, the common response cited by participating Muslim parents was to receive a “good education”. Although the key driver for most parents is to ensure their children receive good religious education, others cited learning Islamic concepts about the permitted (halal) and forbidden (haram) ways. They want their children to know what is suitable in Islam and in life. Parents also appreciate early-age learning in order to safeguard their children’s religious beliefs. Parents mentioned learning about other religions where they could see that Islamic schools offer their children the opportunity to learn about other religions while protecting their culture and identity. Parents pointed out that choosing Islamic schools is not just confined to Muslim parents, and added that Christian parents also choose to send their children to faith schools. Parents also believe that understanding and having a good knowledge of one’s religion mean respecting other religions in a mixed society.

### Religious and Secular Education

Although ‘religious education’ was the most important motivation for parents, another critical issue that most participants asserted was the good quality of national curriculum teaching.

In the view of these parents, their children should learn secular and religious education at the same time. Most parents added that they chose an Islamic school for their children because they were taught religious education without losing out on the national curriculum. Meer (2007) states that Islamic schools appear to be doing well in meeting some of the challenges that Muslim children face while delivering both ‘“secular” and “Islamic” education’.

A commonly held view of many respondents is encapsulated by these parents:

PQ07: I want my daughter to have religious education as well as maths, English and other curriculum subjects.

PI013: My most important priority is religious education but they can also take other subjects to achieve a high status in their education, while practising their religion.

Muslim parents prefer Islamic schools primarily because they offer a combination of the national curriculum and an Islamic religious curriculum.

PQ09: I prefer these types of schools because they provide my children with education similar to that of the state schools, and give my children a chance to learn about their own religion in a greater depth.

In fact many participants informed me they were looking for a good educational and practical future, and would be proud of their children if they got very high grades at GSCE.

PI03: The most important thing for me is that she receives good Islamic and secular education, including her GSCE. … It is easy in this school as they do both.

The benefits of religious education combined with the national curriculum have encouraged Muslim parents to send their children to Islamic schools, which they consider to provide all aspects of education and secure the future of their children. They agreed that state schools would give their children a good secular education but would fail in the provision of religious education, which is what mattered most to the parents.

PI07: I hoped they would gain religious and national education and that by sending them to state school their education would not be at the expense of their Islamic religious education.

PI011: I have three children and like to keep their education secular and religious education.

This may pose the question regarding the Muslim parent’s motivation for sending their children to Islamic schools: What if the state schools provide the religious education which those parents need? Does it affect their choice? For myself, I think the state should take these issues into consideration in order to avoid the many problems which may be caused in particular issues such as indoctrination, lack of autonomy and socially divisive practices as mentioned by opponents of Islamic schools (see for example, Halstead and McLaughlin, 2005).

Muslim parents accepted the Islamic schools’ educational strategy after they had seen that these schools offered their children the same opportunities, activities and programmes as those of the state schools, which made them feel confident that their children would be good people through the type of education offered. It can be argued here, for example, that if we want to understand the Muslim parents’ strategy of choosing Islamic schools we need to understand how these schools are dealing with the educational needs of Muslim children. For myself, such schools might offer an education to satisfy parents because such establishments reflect secular and religious education. Parents are seeking a secure future by preparing their children to be an effective member of society from a scientific and religious perspective.

PI010: I am very happy that my children are happy here. Of the many activities they have to do: national curriculum, Islamic and library education, they read a lot … will make them good people.

PI05: Well, firstly, I wanted them to be really good Muslims to enhance their *deen* [faith] and make themselves better people and then, obviously, go to school to achieve good grades.

Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools not only to gain a rounded Islamic and secular education, but to compensate for themselves as parents who did not finish their own education. This mother felt sorry for herself, and wanted to ensure that her children have a good future because she herself had failed to finish her education. Bhatti (2011) mentioned this issue in her study about the experiences of Muslim students attending secondary schools. An elite university in England also found that some of the young people whose parents had either not received formal education or who had not been educated in Britain welcomed the new life-chances offered by the British education system. According to Rosowsky (2008) most Muslim parents in his study had a very positive attitude toward their children’s education in state schools. However, when arriving in the 60s and 70s, their experiences compared negatively with their children’s experiences. In general, children have achieved more educationally than their parents did.

PI013: I deeply regret having failed to finish my education and I would like to see my children have the highest qualifications. They can do this by knowing more about their religion, culture and identity, which will give them more confidence and encourage them to continue working to achieve a bright future.

It can be argued that the Muslim parents’ lack of educational effectiveness has affected the status of their children’s education. I have touched on this via the participants’ views, especially with regard to mothers who never completed their education, which links to the motivations of Muslim parents’ wanting their children to attend Islamic schools. They believe that the best choice for their children is to offer the best chance to continue their education in a safe environment with high quality religious and secular education. This finding also changes the traditional research dynamic where researchers tend to obtain information from the leaders and more highly educated people in Muslim communities (see for example, Halstead, 1992).

The high educational standard of the national curriculum has been mentioned as important in Islamic schools. Muslim parents stressed that their children should learn secular and religious education at the same time. Most parents added that they chose Islamic schools for their children because they were taught religious education in addition to the national curriculum. Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools to enjoy all the benefits of a religious education with the national curriculum and to feel secure about their children’s future.

### Islamic Knowledge

While Muslim parents want their children to have religious education, they also want them to have better Islamic knowledge (Sarwar, 1994; Al-Attas, 1979).

PI014: I am giving my children the opportunity to receive Islamic and secular education to ensure that, at a later stage, they wouldn’t say I failed to give them the opportunity to gain that knowledge.

According to Muslim parents, they send their children to Islamic schools to give them a good opportunity and to satisfy their responsibility to protect their children. Such parents are carrying out their responsibilities by giving their children the opportunity to learn their religion thoroughly, and to avoid their children’s blame for having failed to fulfil their parental responsibility to open up Islamic knowledge, which is important for children. In that context, Merry (2010) points out that the role of Islamic schools is to provide a basic Islamic education to teach Muslims how to worship Allah.

The main question here is whether there is a difference between Islamic education and Islamic knowledge. Although there is no fundamental difference we can say in some way that Islamic knowledge is deeper than Islamic education. As stated in the literature review, Islamic education is evidenced by three terms: *tarbiya* referring to moral education; *taalim* relates to knowledge; and *tadib* cites the tradition or custom of manner accepted through the generations (Douglass and Shaikh, 2004). These terms lead us to the body, mind and soul in connection to human existence in Islam. Being a knowledgeable person ‘*aalim*’ in Islam means you know about all aspects of the Islamic pillars, principles, morals, and concepts.

Moore (2006) adds that, to date, no American Islamic school has successfully designed an authorised curriculum that combines Islamic knowledge with the state’s educational principles for teachers to follow easily, because of limited time, resources, and the difficulty in finding teachers with the requisite knowledge and experience to build such a curriculum.

Some parents feel utterly ashamed and unsatisfied by the fact that they did not receive enough Islamic tuition in their own life time, and this has motivated them to give their children the essential Islamic tuition to prevent similar experiences:

PI04: I sent my daughter to an Islamic school so that she becomes a good Muslim. I want to ensure that she is never in the same situation as mine. I feel deep shame that I lack knowledge. Sometimes my children ask me about Islam and I cannot answer their questions. Sometimes I want to cry or scream because I don’t have the, exact, answer.

Islamic knowledge, therefore, is a serious issue for this parent and is a view shared by many other respondents. This mother, like many other participants, wants her daughter to receive sound Islamic knowledge to prevent the same lack of knowledge she experienced, perhaps due to family tradition or her home country’s culture. She also stressed that Islamic knowledge will enable her daughter to feel more confident, acknowledge life’s diversity and achieve wisdom. In this way Al-Attas (1997) mentioned that comprehension and an integrated approach to education in Islam is focused towards the “balanced growth of the total personality … through training “Man’s” spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses … such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality” (Al-Attas, 1997, as cited in Sabki and Hardaker, 2012, p. 5). In addition, seeking knowledge is a key factor for a prosperous future that is beneficial to society. In this participant’s view, her daughter will teach the next generations and convey her knowledge, which will make that knowledge valuable. Knowledge is a right for both male and female, as in this respondent’s view:

PI04: I want her to be able to answer any question which she might be asked. I was born in Pakistan and my family was very religious. I got married when I was 15. When I thought of anything at that age, my father said it wasn’t religion. I want my daughter to have more confidence when she does things. She goes to an Islamic school and will learn the correct Islamic way, how to do things in the right way. She will also teach the next generation. We need people like her to teach women in this country. We need women and men as well.

Knowledge is appreciated and respected in Islam. Shamsavary et al. (1993) state that knowledge in Islam is highly valued and Islam has had a wealthy tradition of education dating back over 1300 years. Learning is *fard* (obligatory) and Islam’s first centre of learning was the mosque, where distribution of knowledge for men and women was taught initially by the Prophet himself (Shah, 2012). Muslim parents feel it is their responsibility to convey that knowledge to their children. Parents are responsible for giving their children the source of knowledge and education on the instructions of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). The respondent below asserted education as a right for both men and women in both *deen* (faith or religious) and *dunia* (worldly knowledge)*.*

PI04: This is our responsibility. It is important that we learn properly and know exactly what our children are learning at schools. I pray for everyone who does not follow what their children are learning due to their lack of knowledge. The Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) said that both men and women are to learn, even if they had to travel as far as China to acquire knowledge. Also He (p.b.u.h.) did not mention only *deen* (faith or religious) knowledge or *dunia* (worldly knowledge); He mentioned both of them.

To sum up, Islamic knowledge is an important motivation that led Muslim parents to choose Islamic schools. They stressed that Islamic knowledge is very important to satisfy their responsibility to protect their children.

### Religious Practice

Parents were also keen to combine theoretical teaching with the knowledge of practical ways, such as praying at the correct time, reading the Qur’an, and fasting during Ramadan. Many Muslim students see Islamic schools as offering another educational space to practise their religion openly without feeling they are being marginalised (Zine, 2006). Hewer (2001) states that the educational aims of faith schools are in line with their faith traditions and the daily practices of those schools will reflect the patterns of children’s life at home. Coupling the child’s knowledge of Islam with practice is critical for Muslim parents, when choosing an Islamic school for their children to learn and apply Islamic teachings in their daily lives as learning is more efficient and effective through observation and practical experience:

PI011: I am happy for my children to be in an Islamic school because they pray at all times and are also being educated. This is crucial to me, because when they learn and practise what they learn, their learning is far more effective and they will never forget their religious practices. As importantly I want them to be good human beings and good people of this country.

PI03: I wanted her to be in an Islamic school with other girls doing everything, praying five times a day, learning about history, Prophet’s (p.b.u.h.) *Seerah*, [[5]](#footnote-5)*Hadith*,[[6]](#footnote-6) our history, and learning the practicalities of Islam.

Practising religion is an important objective for parents. The view in the following comment demonstrates that a successful child is the one who can gain *deen* and *dunya*. *Dunya* means to try to make every effort to be successful in this life by having high qualifications and a good career, whereas *deen* means a Muslim who follows his religious instructions and fulfils the theoretical and practical requirement for the afterlife (*akhirah*).

PI08: As any parent, I want my children to be successful and gain part of *dunya*, such as good jobs and careers. I also want them to be good Muslims, respecting us as their parents; doing their basic *faraed*, which I think is what any Muslim parents want for their children.

Praying on time is vital for Muslim parents. They feel satisfied when Muslim schools help their children pray on time. Muslim parents always talk of prayer-time as the most critical issue missing in state schools. Being in an Islamic school gives children a major opportunity to find answers to questions they may face during the day, without having to wait until they go to the mosque in the evening as they used to do before attending Islamic schools.

PI014: *Alhamdu lellah*, he prays five times a day without distraction in a safe and secure environment. And we know he is on hand with any question that he needs to ask without having to wait to go to the mosque in the evening, as is the case in state schools.

Wearing *hijab* is another major issue for Muslim parents, who stress that wearing *hijab* is problematic for their daughters attending state schools. Central to Western objections and in opposition to *hijab* is the concept of the ‘liberated woman’ (Williamson and Khiabany, 2010). To date, the right of wearing *hijab* has never been a topic of legislation in Britain. Although the state school policy on uniforms does allow Muslim girls to wear *hijab* and shalwar kameez, this has not prevented the continued debates about the integration of Muslims into mainstream British culture, centring on ‘the veil’ as a symbol of isolation (Haw, 2009). Elbih (2012) states that a major reason why Islamic schools were established was to protect Muslim female students, and this view is built on socially constructed standards that consider the honour of females as being part of the family and community honour. However, *hijab*, from the majority of Muslim women’s standpoint, represents a considerable recognition as Muslims and an expression of faith (Haddad et al. 2006).

PI01: For safety, culture and practice of their religion, it could be difficult to wear *hijab* in state schools, especially the long *hijab*, and could be difficult for her to practise many things. The important thing for me was prayer. I always had in mind how she could find somewhere to pray. There is a Prayer Room in the state school but children make fun of you. My son keeps complaining that in order to pray he misses dinner, so I want to avoid that situation for my daughter. So I chose an Islamic school as being better for her education and culture.

### The Arabic Language

In the curricula of Islamic schools, in the UK, the Arabic language is important. Because Arabic is the language of the Holy Qur’an, every Muslim has to learn how to read, and sometimes write the Qur’an. The majority of children in both the case-study Islamic schools in my study do not speak Arabic at home, so have to be taught it in order to be able to read the Qur’an. This applies even to Arabic-speaking children (Walford, 2004). For the Muslim participants in my study, the Arabic language is considered as essential for education because it is the language of the Qur’an. Parents send their children to Islamic schools in order to learn Arabic and to ensure that the Qur’an is read and understood correctly.

PQ04: I prefer Islamic schools, because they teach the Qur’an, [the] Prophet Muhammad’s message, Arabic language and Islamic history.

Some participants are aware of the possibility of learning both Arabic and their community or heritage language, such as Urdu, in supplementary schools, which are often established in homes and mosques in the evening (Khan-Cheema, 1996). Rosowsky states that classical Arabic of the Qur’an is very important for Muslim communities.

The primacy of Arabic in Islamic liturgical literacy is self-evident. The tradition of insisting on the use of Arabic in prayer and other ritualised practices ensures that all Muslims are initiated into the written code of Qur’anic Arabic. Even if a Muslim never reads The Qur’an, he or she will only ever be able to perform prayer in Arabic. (2008, p. 215).

Hewitt (1996) states that Islamic schools offer pupils solid foundation in their faith through courses of studying the Qur’an, Hadith, Islamic History, Urdu and the Arabic language. In respect of the importance of reading the Qur’an and learning the Arabic language, the following participant noted:

PI09: They may take in little religious education in that school [state school] which is not enough. I am a religious person and my children used to go to an afternoon supplementary school to learn Qur’an, Arabic together with other subjects shared with other schools.

### Summary

The foregoing section explored and analysed the motivations of parents for sending children to Islamic schools. These focused on ‘good education’, which includes religious and secular education, Islamic knowledge, religious practice and Arabic language. Muslim parents stated receiving good Islamic education as being the most important motivation for sending their children to Islamic schools, because they want their children to know what they should and should not do in their religion. However, parents equally stressed that their children need to have access to both a secular and a religious education. For this reason, parents choose Islamic schools which teach religious education without losing out on secular education. Parents want both types of education for their children. Out of a sense of responsibility to their children, parents are also keen to provide their children with an Islamic education and Islamic knowledge. Combining the child’s Islamic knowledge with Islamic practice is important for Muslim parents. Finally, Muslim parents stressed that learning the Arabic language will support their children’s education by reading and writing the Holy Qur’an. Choosing an Islamic school so that their children can learn and apply Islamic teachings in their daily lives is more effective through observation and practical experience.

The next section explores the motivations of identity and culture and explores Muslim identity, culture, values and morals, and the Islamic environment.

## Identity and Culture

As discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, many researchers have addressed major areas such as identity and culture, the second motivation of Muslim parents’ to send their children to Islamic schools (Hutnik, 1985; Modood et al. 1997; Sporton and Valentine, 2007; Tyrer and Ahmad, 2006; Zine, 2004). Morals and values are vital preferences in connection with these motivations which the parents require of Islamic schools due to their perceived effectiveness in teaching good learning values and behaviours. In addition, being in an Islamic environment is very important where Muslim children can deal and find their individual needs.

### 4.4.1 Islamic Identity

According to the participating Muslim parents, Islamic identity is special and their views are that being in Islamic schools is the best way to protect their children’s identity. Some issues are:

1. How might participants’ views give an insight into the way Muslims feel in connection with their position in their host society?
2. Do Muslims still feel they are strangers despite having settled in the UK for a long time?
3. Is there a lack of respect towards Muslims?
4. And does this lack of respect push Muslims to segregate themselves from their wider society through their own institutions such as Islamic schools?
5. It may also raise questions as to whether the Muslim identity is different and has a special place in the western world.

It is vital to address such issues, in order to have a full picture of the Muslim situation and circumstances.

As stated in the literature review, Islamic identity is vital for Muslim parents because they believe Islamic schools help their children develop a sense of identity and belonging, through teaching them about their religion. On this point, McCreery (2007) states that “the religious nature of the school would be instrumental in securing both the child’s individual identity plus his/her place within society as a whole” (p. 207). Many Muslims believe that Islamic schools are the best environment to support Muslim identity. Muslims maintain that such schools are not proposed in order to separate from wider society, but to protect their Islamic identity (Parker-Jenkins, 2002).

Muslim parents who advocate Islamic schools expect such schools to fill the gap for Muslim children by presenting Islamic knowledge.

PQ09: Muslim schools develop a sense of identity and belonging in children by helping them to realise in a far more detailed and complex way about their religion. By being with other children, they feel more comfortable with people from a similar background.

Shah (2012) confirms this idea when she suggests that Islamic schools offer knowledge of Islamic civilisation, history, literature, languages and arts as well as refining students in Islamic values and morals and encouraging an intelligence of Muslim identity at a time of political attention, social polarisation, and economic marginalisation. Offering such diverse aspects brings us to my aforementioned concepts whereby Muslim parents consider education and knowledge are synonymous with their aim of protecting the special identity which seems to be an important motivation for Muslim parents. Simultaneously, Muslims work to protect themselves by safeguarding their identity and sense of security vis-à-vis their privacy in their host society. As Merry suggests, the strong sense of identity that has traditional roots and finds support in Muslim communities can be a magnificent resource for fighting discrimination, stereotyping and maltreatment (Merry, 2010).

Muslim parents want their children to have an effective, genuine identity and to be proud of being Muslim. Muslim parents stressed that, as British citizens, they have equal rights to other citizens and as such are entitled to be treated with respect for their religious beliefs. Ansari (2004) states that schooling is “a major area of struggle for equality of opportunity and assertion of identity” (p. 298). According to Marshall, there are three features of citizenship: civil; political; and social:

The civil element comprises rights necessary for individual freedom, including personal liberty and freedom of speech, the right to justice and the right to own property; the political element refers to enfranchisement and the right to vote; and the social element pertains to economic welfare and security. (Marshall, 1997, as cited in Basit, 2009, p. 742).

This point is reflected in my study too when I found that participating parents stressed their right to be a part of the wider society. “The onus is then placed upon the State to accommodate Muslim communities, parents and children as they have other faiths” (Meer, 2009, p. 284).

PI02: Although we are British we are different from other religions. Christians have their religion. Sikhs are also different with their own religious beliefs and identity. We also have our religion and identity which we expect society to treat with respect.

On their first arriving in the West, it could be argued that the Muslim experience influenced the perceptions Muslims held in relation to their place in society. Ramadan (2004) states that on the arrival of the first generation of immigrants to Western countries little respect was shown for Islamic morality, traditions, rules and principles. We can say there was a silent conflict between immigrants’ values and Western cultural life. “The prohibition of alcohol and interest was not recognized at all, and everything, or almost everything, seemed to be allowed in the name of freedom”. (p. 217). Ramadan concludes that as a result of this situation, a “first and very natural reaction was to isolate themselves, either as individuals, as families, or as communities when they were able to organize themselves in a given place”. (p. 217). He argues that the need for isolation has remained and as younger generations have had more contact with wider society, the stereotype is that “it became necessary to ‘prohibit.’ Everything that seemed more or less characteristic of the West in manners or style was considered dangerous, even unhealthy, and people contrived to forbid or avoid it as much as possible” (p. 217).

Ramadan (2004) states that Muslims in the west face some difficulties “with people who confuse ‘separation’ and ‘conflict’ or ‘mutual rejection’ and project onto the secular space a militant ideology opposed to any form of religious expression”. (p. 146). He argues that the fear of causing religious clashes in the West with certain radical views leads to views which state that:

[I]n order to be completely ‘integrated,’ people should not express their faith at all and should become religiously invisible: any reference to Islam should completely disappear from the public arena, ‘Islamic’ associations should not be so called, and essentially the exercise of one’s citizenship should never be inspired by religious convictions. (p.146).

Participating Muslim parents have been affected in some way by such issues. Firstly, second and even third generations still share the same view of their identity and I believe they therefore advocate for Islamic schools. They want such schools in order to feel their children are being educated in their environment and will avoid relations with that part of society which could have an adverse effect on their identity, values and morals. They stressed, however, that they aspire to protect their Islamic identity and related privacy as part of their British citizenship rather than rejecting the wider society.

The following responses illustrate how Islamic schools educate children about their religion, culture, rights and duties as British citizens to develop their identity. Islamic schools give children extra tuition in a safe and protected learning environment.

PI013: Islamic schools facilitate my kids’ identity because they teach them about their religion, culture duties and rights as British citizens. These schools protect my children when they learn religious education in a safe and healthy environment, which enables our children to feel the same as other children in state schools.

PI07: They enhance the child’s identity, know what children need to know and encourage them to live their heritage. I feel my daughters have good knowledge of who they are and how to behave as British citizens and Muslim Somali.

Retaining an Islamic identity and a British identity, as the previous participant said is a central issue for Muslim parents, who believe that Islamic schools encourage their children, to feel proud of themselves and of their identity as Muslims. For Muslims, belonging to Britain means different things to different people. Modood (2011) argues that “a sense of belonging is dependent on how others perceive and treat you, not just as an individual but also as a member of a racial group or ethno-religious community” (pp. 2.3).

It is noteworthy that Muslim parents want to integrate into the host society in their own way, that is, as citizens who retain their Islamic heritage and identity. Participating parents touch on the philosophical thought process notably when talking of their children’s behaviour in relation to their Muslim and British identities. In my view such thinking may indicate the way in which Muslim parents want to perceive their children as ideal citizens, proud of their Muslim heritage and confident of being British.

Maxwell (2006), drawing on The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) Survey (1999), states that when people construct their British identity, a range of characteristics are identified: cultural habits and behaviour; language; geography; symbols; people’s values and attitudes; citizenship; and achievements. The same survey suggests that although religion and ethnicity are important for Muslim and South Asian identity, many respondents did not feel any conflict with feeling British. For me, I agree with Maxwell when he sees that “a better understanding of British identification among Muslims and South Asians would focus on the complex ways in which individuals balance ethnic, religious, and mainstream networks and ideologies” (p. 5).

Song (2012) explains that the specificity of ethnic backgrounds might be less invested in and essential for the second-generation British Muslims, for example, whether someone is Bengali or Pakistani. Though ethnically precise ties and relationships can remain vital in certain ways and contexts, these are now less significant to British-born South Asian Muslims than they were for their immigrant parents.

Belonging to Britain also empowers Muslims to retain their values and morals, yet develop in areas which are unusual for their culture, such as working in the police force.

PI02: Girls in Islamic schools are proud of their attire. They are keen, enthusiastic and focused on achieving their goals to improve society such as being a teacher, doctor, or some girls are even thinking of working in the police. The key priority for our children is that they keep their identity and morally prepared to enter society knowing that we are different: we are Muslim.

The foregoing participant describes the general character of Muslim girls in Islamic schools. As with other girls, they are proud of themselves as Muslims. Their attire is a source of their pride, without feeling any embarrassment for their appearance because they know they are Muslims. From the participant’s perspective, those girls have high aspirations for themselves and their society by putting the best back into society by being doctors, teachers, or even police officers. Serving as a police officer is rare in the Muslim community, which may break the community’s social conventions but they choose to do so because they feel their duty towards their society is warranted. Keeping one’s identity is the primary aim for parents and their children. A special identity with Islamic morals and values prepares children to enter the wider society. Parents believe that it will be more beneficial to wider society for their children to have an Islamic identity and ethos. Muslim parents may well perceive this as an attempt for their children to integrate into society on their own terms with their aim to be good citizens which could be at variance with cultural values. The critical issue here seems to be religious principles and individual identity; I believe it is true to say they accept anything compatible with their values and beliefs.

Crucially, parents take account of their own mortality and have chosen schools they consider will safeguard their children’s culture and identity.

PI011: It was my decision. I have three children and I want to protect their national and religious education. I am happy with that decision because I can ensure that after I die I will feel confident that my children will safeguard their Somali identity and Muslim religion. Although I will not return to my country, I want my children to protect their privacy.

It is recognised that many people oppose Islamic schools on the basis that they indoctrinate Muslim children by transplanting parental and community expectations without reference to their children’s wishes. The foregoing participant affirmed that she had decided to send her children to Islamic schools. Here, I believe the mother is keen to protect her children’s religious values and identity from adverse local influences, perhaps due to others’ experiences, so that she can prevent any harm befalling them. It also indicates that Muslims plan to remain in the UK and build their own communities in society under the auspices of their personal identity and religious beliefs.

Building one’s own character is part of an individual identity. Many participants informed me that they have individual characters which they have to protect. Participating Muslim parents see that Islamic schools offer a particular education that helps their children to produce their own personality. This improves self-confidence, creates an opportunity to build their own world and use their mind without feeling coerced by parents and teachers (Merry, 2010; Zine, 2006). The following participant saw that Islamic schools help children to create their own character without forcing by others:

PI06: Children who go to Islamic school learn everything they need to build their character without being influenced by others. They are taught to listen to their parents, teachers, and everyone else, and to use their mind.

Satisfaction and feeling comfortable in one’s own identity is important for participating Muslim parents who feel that Islamic schools ensure that their children appreciate themselves by knowing who they are and how their unique identity is special. In the view expressed below, *hijab* is a concern for the parent who wants her daughter to feel self-respect and to know the reason for wearing it. The school gave her daughter knowledge of her Muslim identity so that she would not feel ashamed of wearing *hijab*.

PI012: Yes, I am sure my children feel more satisfied with themselves as Muslims and proud of their identity, because they accept their character as Muslims. For example, my daughter wears *hijab* and feels like ‘this is me and this is my religion’, so why would she need to feel ashamed.

Wearing *hijab* and *niqab* does not mean that people, especially girls, are timid people. Society as a whole has many stereotypes existing about Muslim communities, especially relating to women’s situation in their community, such as, for example:

Muslim girls and women are passive and docile, stifled by oppressive dress and other customs; Muslim men are domineering and uncompromising; relationships between the generations are marked by constant conflict and that Muslim girls may frequently find themselves torn between two conflicting cultures. (Halstead, 1991, p. 272).

Over time, this view has changed. Ramadan (2004) states that

Many women in the West now indicate their right to be respected for their faith by wearing the headscarf and visible signs of the modesty to show their faithfulness to Islamic rules. This compliance does not preclude them from enjoying Western style clothing, tastes and colour. They are engaged in a liberation movement within and through Islam in order to promote an “Islamic feminism” which is hardly an uncritical acceptance of fashions and behaviour of their Western fellow-citizens. (p.142).

Many aspects of the Muslim woman’s character traits are debatable and stem from public argument rather than academic research. The stereotypical view of Muslim women can be ascribed to the media which influences the Muslim woman’s appearance and role in her society. Ramadan (2004) argues that “the visibility of women, and their voices, which are increasingly heard, should eventually change these images and, one hopes, propose another model of a modern, autonomous, Western, and profoundly Muslim woman”. (p. 142).

There is a view that girls are disadvantaged and need to be educated with the right to decide how to develop, for example, going to university. In this case, the participant asserted that Islamic schools must make a concerted effort to establish new strategies within these schools in the UK. Muslim girls’ costume does not make them unable to think independently, was the participant’s view.

PI08: If you feel a teacher’s role is to give children confidence, so when they go out they are confident people, it does not matter if they are wearing *niqab* or not. Just because a girl or woman wears *niqa*b is not to say they are incapable of independent thought, which might appear to be the case. I fail to understand why women speak in a low voice, cannot be educated and speak when wearing a *niqab*? We do ourselves injustice when others attack our women and allege they are being coerced into wearing the *niqab.*

This participant’s criticisms of the Islamic schools strategy for Muslim girls should give them a sense of confidence in learning how to be Muslim in their appearance. He also believes that Muslim communities’ strategy of affirming the stereotype of Muslim women as unthinking members creates a poor setup for Muslim women in their host society.

For myself, I believe the situation of the Muslim girls in these schools needs to be modernized. School policy makers also need to bear in mind that they operate in a different society and need to give due regard to adopting a practical operational approach for Islamic schools to function effectively in Western society in order to encourage others to accept the need for such schools; the most important opposition to these schools are the girls’ position which are suspected as limiting girls’ performances to prepare them for a lifetime as a housewife and unemployed members of society.

He also believed that Islamic schools should inspire Muslim girls and give them good opportunities to avoid some disadvantages. Encouraging Islamic schools to develop their goals toward Muslim girls will enhance their self-assurance and give them the power to live confidently in their society.

PI08: They make believe there is some substance because some women cannot speak any English having resided in the UK for 30 years, compounded when she is unable to discuss or understand the system. We need to devise viable goals for Muslim schools in order to develop and create meaningful opportunities for our girls. In this year, we have 20 or 30 girls who will be confident of their abilities and could go to university should they wish to do so. Whatever those girls’ aspirations, they should do so with confidence and should be a source of inspiration to us.

From this, I contend that there are limitations of some Islamic schools in relation to the situation affecting Muslim girls. Although the participant raises an issue which has no direct bearing on Islamic schools, I think he refers to Muslim women’s poor English language skills and comprehension of the country’s system. He reiterates that such schools should develop a strategic plan to prevent Muslim women experiencing the same difficulties in the future. Learning lessons from previous Muslim experiences is crucial for Muslim communities to develop school strategies and advance their educational, social and religious features systematically.

The majority of parents consider identity as a major issue relating to their lives which has a major impact on their children. With these factors, young Muslim people are beginning to refashion their identity. Electing precise forms of identifi­cation has therefore to be understood in terms of positionality in a complicated civil society rather than as a form of traditional affiliation (Thomas and Sanderson, 2011), for example, learning Arabic language as a part of these schools’ curriculum.

The possibility of conflict between Islamic and British identity has been raised. Some participants say that being a Muslim is not to say, ‘We are not British.’ The participants emphasise that being a British citizen means you might be Muslim or any other identity. According to some respondents, the traditional way of thinking about Muslim and British should be changed. Participant PI08, for example, said that he changed his understanding when he found that there was no clash between the local identity as Pakistani or Somali, and the whole British identity in an Islamic vision.

PI08: At the present time, identity is a major idea with an equally important discussion and an interesting area that raises many equally interesting issues. We can talk about identity all day. I have changed my views on issues raised based on personal experience, reading and other sources. I am British, but that is not our identity. Our identity is Pakistani or Arab or Somali or another nationality. Recently I discovered this is Islamically incorrect, because the Muslim’s boundary identity is as a Muslim.

Song (2012) in her study finds that there was no necessary conflict between being Muslim and British, even when some respondents reported that their faith was more significant than anything else. However the importance of their faith was not seen as compromising their loyalty to Britain.

PI08 also stressed that we need to integrate into British society as British citizens, because as part of the court ceremony, newly naturalised British citizens sign a statement attesting to their legally recognised citizenship. He encouraged Muslim communities to integrate without fear of assimilation. Protecting culture and religion does not mean that there is any need to fear being British citizens. The classical view of British citizens in Muslim communities’ understanding may affect the Muslims’ way of thinking about British citizen identity.

PI08: There is also the British identity, because we are also British with a British passport which makes us British citizens, or at least British passport holders. At the court ceremony we must sign a declaration to state that we are British which is technically and legally correct. I therefore fail to understand the notion of being afraid to be British. It is unreasonable to say we are not British because we don’t drink, because many British people do not drink and I also know many people who do not drink.

Identity, according to this participant, can have two dimensions: the ‘legal’ sense of identity, which is represented by the ownership of a certain nationality and the formal declaration which takes place at the court ceremony; and the ‘personal’ sense of identity, which is largely based on the person’s culture views, behaviour and experiences.

This view reflects Thomas and Sanderson’s view when they argue:

The religious identity seen by all Muslim young people was being used by a minority to judge and categorize others, with terms such as *‘drunkenness’* and *‘godless’* In a recent survey/exercise, Muslim young people were asked to characterise their non-Muslim peers. They replied by using labels such as ‘white’, ‘shameless’ and so on. The strong faith affiliation of Muslim young people led some of them to contrast their pride in this aspect of their culture with a perceived deracination of the majority community: I don’t understand their tradition– they haven’t really got one, they haven’t got a background. (2011, p. 1034).

All Islamic schools are expected to introduce a citizenship course to educate students on how to be a British citizen and their role in society. This is in accordance with national guidelines on citizenship education, as summarised in The Crick Report (1998) which contains three main strands: a) Social and moral responsibility, b) Community involvement, and c) Political literacy.

According to Hemming (2011), religion and faith, rather than ethnicity and culture, come to the fore in discussions regarding citizenship and multicultural citizenship. Islamic schools were established for parents who feel their children are trapped in a ‘culture clash’, perceiving that State schools and educational policy conflicts with their way of life. This parent said that Islamic schools should teach their children the importance of recognising and being proud of their identity as British Pakistani Muslims:

PI05: [The] school also teaches British curriculum requirements, which are the main way they learn how to be a better British citizen. As they are Muslim, Pakistani and British, it joins them together. So I hope they regard themselves as British Pakistani Muslims rather than just a Muslim or Pakistani or British.

According to the above participant, the issue of multiple identity occurs where Muslims have two identities and are trapped between them. Being a Muslim and British could cause many Muslims feel this conflict for reasons such as gender, religion, nationality and social position. Omar (2012) suggests that “from the minute that we come into this world, we are subject to multiple identities, and with the exception of a few physical characteristics that we are born with, our identities continue to be ever incomplete and open to modification or expansion” (p. 21).

Bectovic (2011) argues that the key to understanding Muslim identity is thoughtful interaction, but that we are unable to understand interaction without considering political developments in relevant European countries. Muslims who live and experience a secular life in a multicultural society have difficulty regardless of whether or not they have a good social and educational upbringing. Establishing an integration policy would ensure the entire process of integration is fruitful and validates a sympathetic response to migrant issues with the best construction for their integration. He also believes that:

Conversely, an aggressive assimilation policy will probably have a negative effect on those Muslims who want to be a part of society especially in a negative political climate marked by a hostile attitude towards Muslims rather than that of a challenge, where the relationships between migrants (including their organizations) and the State are not institutionalized. (p. 1121).

However, the following parent’s view suggests Islamic schools can put more effort into a clearer education on identity-related issues for their children in order to practise citizenship effectively. He mentioned several projects that teach children identity as a topic:

PI08: Some Muslim schools think more can be done with identity. When citizenship was introduced, it was compulsory and the Islamic schools objected to the syllabus. The ICE[[7]](#footnote-7) project, however, is a good initiative because the syllabus includes modules on citizenship and multiculturalism in an Islamic context, including the Medina Treaty to show that Islam included Jews and Christians. Although I like that concept I think most of these schools are conservative.

Efforts of Islamic schools should be supported by the state in order to establish a more effective strategy to enable minorities to interact with society. The good reputation which Islamic schools have achieved with Muslims attending these schools could create an outstanding opportunity for the state to inspire community cohesion. In other words, the state and schools could combine forces to develop greater integration with minority communities. According to Bectovic (2011) “a major challenge for Muslims has to do with the expectations of the surrounding community. They must reflect both their original culture and the new culture they are becoming part of” (p. 1129).

The view below understands citizenship in an Islamic context where everyone is involved in their society, which, from a Muslim perspective, means to be an effective and constructive member of society.

PI014: The way we teach citizenship in State schools is different to the way citizenship is taught in Islamic schools, which focuses on caring for your neighbours whether they are Muslim or non-Muslims. Looking after the environment is also part of Islamic citizenship teachings started from 1000 years ago. We give children sound knowledge and understanding of their Islamic identity and this is their country. Although Islam is their first priority, other people must not be forced to accept your beliefs.

As with the previous view, Islamic schools have been founded to establish effective members of society. In his view these schools teach their pupils to be useful members for themselves, their families, neighbours and environment. These schools also teach children to be proud of their identity yet give other people the freedom to choose their own religious outlook. Bectovic (2011) states that

Being confronted with new challenges such as secular society and minority status, Muslims are becoming more aware of the need for reinterpretation of Islam and the adoption of new organizational forms. It is a process which has two main aspects: the interpretation of Islam and its practical use. (p. 1128).

On asking the next participant how to develop a sense of identity and belonging in Muslim schools, he considered that they could do far more to develop identity and belonging.

RS: How do Muslim schools help children develop a sense of identity and belonging?

PI08: From my experience of Muslim schools, I think they have a long way to go in order to operate at that level. In fact I think they probably do the exact opposite.

Participating Muslim parents see belonging to this country as valuable and a correlation always exists between identity and belonging. Parents are saying that in order to be a British citizen you must belong to this country and be part of an effective community. This can be connected to discussions of Britishness and confirms perhaps that Britishness is more inclusive. Belonging to one’s society means that he/she is being treated correctly. It is also an overview of the Muslim understanding of being a good British citizen and being treated as a full citizen with full rights and without discrimination regarding ethnicity, colour or religion. It is worth stating that the Muslim parents who participated in my study were proud of their British identity, are happy to be British citizens as a condition of being Muslim British citizens and that although Muslims are sensitive to the needs of being British citizens, they are also proud of their British citizenship which is more inclusive and is acceptable to them more than being only Muslims.

### 4.4.1.1 Identity and Interaction

An interesting quotation from a participant, whom I asked whether the Muslim communities’ interaction strategy should change or remain unchanged, responded differently to other participants, in that he thought Muslim communities should be more organised, interact in society, and think about their interaction in the society in which they live. If they want to make their mark, they must also interact and education is the only viable route to achieve this objective. Jafri and Fatah state:

Most Muslim parents wish their children to grow and become educated in a climate of diversity, where they can learn to respect and understand the faiths of others, while being exemplary ambassadors of Islam and peace, Muslims do not believe in segregation and ghettoisation of their communities. (2003, p. 17).

Participant PI08 also believed that through education and more interaction in society Muslim communities will have far more opportunities to change their standing and outlook in life. The participant believes that Muslim communities should learn from, for example, the Jewish community. He thought that the Jewish community established their position in the West a long time ago (see, for example Miller, 2001). They pursued their strategy through education roles and they achieved state funding long before the Muslim community achieved the first state-funded school. He insisted that Muslims needed to learn the lessons learned by the Jewish community to save time and achieve their aims.

PI08: The organised approach, quality and standards found in Jewish schools pose questions as to how they have achieved these goals. I think the Jewish community has achieved such high standards because they have been established here in the UK for over 200 years ... As a community they have learned hard lessons which we need to evaluate and learn from that experience.

The same participant argues that the Muslim community needs to think carefully about their situation, about what they want and their position in British society. As the Muslim community is one of the biggest communities in Britain, it should know that UK society is the Muslims’ society, having chosen to settle here and put their stamp on their host society. As the Muslims’ current society, they have to interact and integrate within their new society.

PI08: Muslims are still in a product or mode without thinking. We need to take stock, reflect on our current situation, identify and evaluate the steps we need to take to move forward in a constructive way to reflect our societal needs. As things stand, we live in the past; I think it is a big concern and that we are a nation of big communities. We are here to stay so we need to leave our mark in this country in order to identify our goal and achieve this objective.

From this participant’s view, the Muslim community should take action in relation to their UK presence:

1. Learn from the experience of others in their society to benefit from their success and failure. In my opinion this is the speedier way for the Muslim community to achieve their aims, establish their credentials and attain good standing in society.
2. Consider their current position, role in society and take appropriate measures to build a solid and well integrated foundation. Muslims should overturn their thinking of how to be a British citizen with a Muslim ethnicity.

In my view, the Muslim position in British society should be established and determined by the current trend towards globalisation. It is well known that our world is changing and we should all be at the vanguard of such changes. In the same way as others, Muslims should act cautiously with regard to their needs and aspirations by developing a new strategy to make their mark as an effective British minority.

In order to have an influential position, according to this participant’s view, Muslim communities need to improve their education and knowledge. Elbih (2012) states:

The purpose of Islamic education is to provide Muslims with the knowledge required to build their faith and to help them take transformative actions to change their lives according to what Allah has prescribed in these revelations as a form of worship and a proof of their faith. To become transformative, Islamic education should incorporate a critical analysis of global conditions and use this knowledge to produce transformative action. (pp. 166.168).

PI08 also asserted that Muslims need more education to establish their position inside the British society. The classical vision of Muslims always mentions ‘back home’ as the main focus of their life. They feel their homeland and village to be the best place for them. This participant encourages Muslim communities to live their lives, to invest their money here in British society in order to be an effective community.

As he was the only participant who mentioned this concept of the classical vision of migrants, ‘back home’, in British society, I am unable to generalise on this view since it is his personal view and might conflict with the views of other parents, although it could be more widely held.

PI08: In particular we need to be in an influential position in relation to extra education, which they fail to do here. The majority of Muslims often mention what they have done back home and that they will do things for back home. When we think of back home, we will not spend our money here as we will save it to send back home without investing it here.

He takes the view that Muslim parents should think of their position in society and know that they are in a non-Muslim society where they must interact, but without losing their unique identity and culture. He contends that they can adapt to live as citizens of this country where it is acceptable to interact with society:

PI08: Although I know some people disagree with me, but broadly speaking, I believe it is impossible to escape your religion or that we live in a multicultural, non-Muslim society. As Muslims, we live in a non-Muslim country where we must retain our Muslim identity, yet interact, without forgetting our Islamic origin. Muslims will not come to harm by making this country a place for Muslims. On our arrival we spoke English which was a major influence on the level of our Britishness.

This participant, in his late thirties, has a view which indicates the thinking of the younger Muslim generation on the status of British Muslim society. A British Pakistani Muslim, he was only two years old on arriving in British society. Educated in state primary and secondary schools, he then went on to university. From a conservative Pakistani family, they sent him to mosque from early childhood to memorise the Qur’an, Sunnah, learn Islamic principles living life in parallel and is a successful person. Specifically, this participant considers the Muslim position in society with due care and believes they should interact effectively while retaining their Islamic identity, a view which is manifestly apparent in his plans for his daughters’ education who go to Islamic schools, yet are also encouraged to continue their education at university.

I sought other people’s opinions regarding Islamic schools, particularly people in opposition to them on the grounds that it divides our society. Many attempt (Cantle, 2001; Denham, 2001; Ritchie, 2001) to show that deep physical and cultural ethnic segregation leads to parallel lives and a lack of combined identities and values. PI08 responded in an interesting way by saying that he thought such objections were right in some respects, owing to the schools’ strategic setup. He added that these schools needed to develop a more interactive strategy in society and if they wanted to be more effective they had to find a way to fit in to this society as it was reasonable to learn about diverse cultures and religions of a multicultural society (see, for example, Modood and Ahmad, 2007). According to Shah, teachers and leaders have to be responsible:

... not only to deal with racist and religious hatred incidents, but also to prepare pupils for life in a multicultural and multi-faith society in addition to improving their own knowledge and understanding of the communities of students they are responsible for. (2012, p. 57).

He also added that children should interact with the society they live in and know everything possible about their environment.

PI08: They are right in some respects if we want to change. However, it is fine to learn religions such as Judaism, Christianity, or other religions and cultures. Conversely, I would consider it wrong of us to advise our children: ‘We are Muslims and we forbid you to interact with any non-Muslims, especially in this country.’ As I have previously said, regardless of whether or not we like it, we all interact here.

On this we can say participating Muslim parents have had some interaction by sending their children to state primary schools. All my participants sent their children to state schools in order to integrate their children into society and agree that attending a state primary school does not have a negative effect on their religious or social life and has improved their children’s confidence levels. Although they have sent their children to Islamic secondary schools, they made no objections to their children learning about other religions or cultures, most notably in Western host societies. It was impossible to generalise this view because there is no evidence to suggest that all Muslims consider teaching Muslim children about other religions is wrong and should be prevented. In my opinion a Muslim presence in the Western world presents a snapshot of their attitude to society.

Yet other participants perceived Muslim schools as not dividing society because everyone has their own religion with the right to protect their religious beliefs, values and identity.

PI010: Everyone has their own opinion. In every religion people think about their children’s manners. As Muslims, we must observe our children’s behaviour. In our religion we are quick to give *dawah*[[8]](#footnote-8) to other societies, as we need to prepare them [children] for good relationships with others.

One could also contend that it is reasonable for Muslims seeking to protect their religion and identity in the way that the participating Muslim parents have been doing by teaching Islam religion and values which are not in conflict with the identity and values of others. It is their right to transfer their religion, values and morals to convince other people to adapt such values by building good relationships. Such a view could conflict with adversaries of Islamic schools who believe such schools should only focus on education without reference to religion.

On the other hand, the following participant, the Head Teacher of School B, considers that Islamic schools produce high quality students because such schools build social cohesion and make a valuable contribution to society. The advocates of faith schools in general and Muslim schools in particular emphasise that faith schools are not socially divisive, but encourage integration and social unity (see, for example, Halstead and McLaughlin, 2005; Short, 2002; Tinker, 2009; Wright, 2003). He adds that people going through such schools have values and morals as well as solid education, which are more beneficial to society. He explains that to be an intelligent Muslim does not mean you have to be an Imam of a mosque. Rather, it means being a useful person in your society and to be whatever you want to be.

PI014: Islamic schools do not divide our society; they produce good quality students who will make valuable contributions to our society. One student could be inspired to be a doctor, so if his Islamic knowledge is good, he can enter that field. Islamic intelligence does not mean you have to be an imam in a mosque. Your job may be to disperse your Islamic values for other people to see you and say ‘*Mashaa Allah’[[9]](#footnote-9)*. He is a good Muslim, what is Islam?

He asserted that Islamic schools do not destroy cohesion. Billings and Holden (2007) maintain that social cohesion has been enhanced significantly by faith schools by building “critical contributions towards the promotion and sustaining of those values that are essential for building, maintaining and safeguarding cohesive communities” (p. 5). Cohesion is actually a new form of multiculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2009).

This view states that following the path of one’s cultural and religious instruction does not mean destroying his/her society. Having a special identity with practices and belief – as I mentioned in the section on religious education and practice and identity – commands the respect of other people because you protect your good character and respect yourself. Cohesion, in the previous participant’s view, is to communicate with other people in your society while retaining your individual identity.

According to these definitions there is a difference between the participant’s view of cohesion and other definitions. All these definitions deal with natural differences including cultural, ethnic and social background between people in society.

PI014: Islam does not destroy cohesion. What is cohesion? People show their respect for who you are. For example, if my culture or religion says it is forbidden to drink alcohol and I comply with that religious requirement, people will respect me. Conversely, if I want cohesion but drink alcohol, other people may think I have no self-respect or values and will be disrespectful. Cohesion is irrelevant to integration or discarding values or traditional clothing. Ensuring other people can see you have retained your values will command their respect and automatically bring cohesion without which there is no respect.

There is also the issue as to whether participating Muslim parents hold the view that respecting one’s religion and identity necessarily leads to respect of such values. In other words if Muslims comply with the values and principles of their identity, it compels others to respect their lifestyle choices. Avoiding Islam’s forbidden issues ensures that others respect Islamic religious and cultural values and accept practising Muslims in society. In order to be accepted by society, Muslims need to form relationships with citizens to develop strong links and build community cohesion. Participating Muslim parents consider that Islamic schools do not destroy community cohesion which is unrelated to their traditional values and attire.

In the following participant’s view, children interact in society even when they study in Islamic schools. She said that where problems exist in society concerning cohesion this is not the Islamic school’s fault because all schools have children who also fail to interact more widely in society. Muslims in state schools experience social segregation when White British parents refuse to send their children to Muslim-populated schools, which also affects social cohesion. Halstead argues:

A pattern now emerging in some cities is for White parents to stop sending their daughters to a girls’ secondary school when there is a substantial proportion of Muslim girls at the school, so that the school then quickly takes on the nature of a ‘ghetto’ school. (1991, p. 275).

The merit of faith schools, including Islamic schools, is divisive. We cannot say that with or without such schools, society will be more or less united or indeed that there will be any division. The key issue affecting state schools is whether or not they make a more connected and associated society. From participant experiences of this study, the Muslim children experienced discrimination from others in state schools which therefore means that social segregation is not necessarily caused by such schools. Social divisiveness could manifest itself in numerous different ways in many institutions.

At the same time, the same participant also feels appreciated by her society and thinks children can interact after they have reached puberty, completed their GSCEs, and gone on to further and higher education.

PI09: My son interacted in his society because it is important for him to interact here because it’s his country. Where problems exist it is directly with the children themselves rather than with Islamic schools. Our children are different. Some are shy whereas others are open. In other council schools they dislike going to others. They say it is not my group and not my school. If the child goes higher than others, he would say, ‘I am older than you’ and make problem for themselves, but it is not religion. In this country, if we gain people’s compliment and that we can do everything, they give us our rights. I think children can interact with the society because after finishing their GSCE [in Islamic schools] they will come back and continue their education in university or college.

Such thinking is a positive step in that Muslims can shape their new society by planning for their children to interact and return to the wider society after reaching the age of majority. The most important issue for such parents is to ensure their children are of an age where they are less likely to make mistakes. Most participating parents have usually allowed their children to return to state educational institutions after secondary school.

Others speculate as to why the public appear scared by the phenomenon of Islamic schools (see, for example, Hickley, 2009). In the following participant’s opinion, the type of Islamic school makes the difference. Some schools are interactive with good social communications, supportive of non-Muslim communities and good contribution with others in the society. He asserted that in order to interact they would have to change many things:

PI08: To some extent they have a cause for concern because I think some Muslim schools interact with non-Muslim communities which respond to them. They send their kids from Muslim settings and invite people from non-Muslim communities into their schools to deliver events, programme and other activities. It would be a major step forward if the school in our area were to introduce such initiatives.

Although some participants spoke generically about Muslim schools, the following participant mentioned individual girls (Halstead, 1991; Haw, 1994). In her opinion, girls who attend Islamic schools might feel uncomfortable interacting in their community. As they are always surrounded by other Muslim girls and teachers they are unable to interact in a realistic way with non-Muslims, even where the school encourages those pupils to do so.

PI04: Sometimes the girls have been growing up in Muslim-only communities and may well find it hard to interact with non-Muslims. Our girls find it hard to grow up and socialise in a non-Muslim society. I think the school does suggest that it is acceptable for girls to socialise with non-Muslim girls, although I also believe it may be harder for girls who have only ever socialised with Muslim girls and never been in a non-Muslim environment.

### Culture

In the literature review chapter, I described culture as a challenging concept, active and heterogeneous and consequently difficult to define (see Section 2.4.8.1). Separating religion, culture and identity is challenging. In my experience in this study participating Muslim parents use these words interchangeably and may sometimes talk of culture and mean identity and so on. It is important to show that given the parents’ views I had insufficient time during interviews to differentiate their meaning when referring to culture and identity which they usually used interchangeably. Participating parents might touch on this when explaining their perceptions of identity when referring to cultural issues.

With regard to Islamic schools, the Muslim parents who participated in my study indicated that, in their view, these schools are essential to raise awareness of Muslim views which they believe to be the quickest way to identify the features of their Islamic identity and culture.

Many participating parents consider culture as a key issue and hope that Islamic schools can help their children learn about the culture of their country of origin or the whole Islamic culture in general. Sarwar (1983) and Modood et al. (1997) highlight the importance of cultural identity for Muslims. They maintain that parents inspire their children’s faithfulness to stand against Western materialism and permissiveness. Most Muslim parents living in the West are faced with supposed threats to their cultural values and family constitutions (Shah and Conchar, 2009).

PI04: I think the most crucial motivation to send my daughter to an Islamic school is for her to learn about her religion, where she comes from, our culture, and the society we come from.

Although Islam is the religion of Muslim society, culture creates rules which have a major impact on society. Some parents are confused between their religious and domestic culture, as they do not perceive a difference between religion, culture and Muslim identity (Hermanson, 2009).

Lewis (2002) states that culture has added more complications than religion in relation to enabling Muslims to integrate themselves into British society. Consequently, British Muslims face the everyday dilemma of contending with the misunderstanding of their faith, Islam, which is seen as *just a religion* or as being identified by their ethnicity with Islam, which reinforces the Western view that Islam is anathema to their culture. In her study of Muslim youth in Chicago and Detroit, Genieve (2006) finds that there are differences between the old generation of traditional immigrant Muslims, who confuse Islamic religion with culture, and the new generation who wish to differentiate between them. Muslim youth are struggling “to find their place between the culture of their parents and the rejection by their country of birth” (Statham et al., 2005, p. 432). As discussed earlier, Muslim youth are stuck in the middle, and face pressure from both sides. They face the challenge of maintaining “hybrid identities”.

Islamic schools risk failing to tackle the challenges that Muslim students face with frankness and honesty. The following participant supports this concept. She asserts that Muslims need to be careful and should understand the differences between religion and culture with caution.

PI06: I am from Pakistan, and what happens right now is that they send their children to schools but they don’t learn about Islam properly. Cultural factors create big rules which have nothing to do with Islam; rather it is culture, so we have to be careful.

This view touches on the clash between previous and current Muslim generations. This participant is in her thirties and she understands the difference between religion and culture. She criticises the Islamic school’s way of teaching Islam. She feels that cultural factors have influenced the way Islamic principles, values and doctrines are explained which previous generations may not realise but which the younger generation, having had a good education and interacted with wider society, now understand. I believe the situation has changed and this has had a positive effect on younger Muslims in terms of how they understand their culture and identity.

Some parents also consider that culture poses a big challenge, especially for girls. Muslim society is stereotyped by outsiders as having a certain view about women which is always presented as a religious ruling, a view that this parent needs to change because she illustrates that Islam only considers culture rather than religion. Halstead (1991) argues that Muslims place less value on girls’ education than on boys’ and that at least some Muslims wish to use education as a form of social control to force girls to adopt a restricted and subordinate role in society.

PI03: It is not necessary because our culture back home in Pakistan is obviously more cultural. Women do not have a very high standing in society, so I think it is vital for girls in our community and area of Pakistan to understand this well.

At present, UK Muslim attitudes concerning girls’ education in Islamic principles view males and females as equal, with the same entitlements to pursue educational opportunities, as conveyed clearly in the Prophet Muhammad’s Hadith*.* This attitude appears clearly in, firstly, the point that the pursuit of learning is a duty for every Muslim man and woman, without distinction between them, since learning is venerated in Islam and its pursuit is obligatory (Amin, 1961, as cited in Halstead. 1991, p. 270). Secondly, Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia have provided a better basis of educational system for girls. In the UK, however, the situation is more complicated, with many Muslim girls in secondary schools being sent to India and Pakistan to continue their education while many others are just kept at home. It may be that British Muslims from certain cultural backgrounds place little value on girls’ education. It is more likely that Muslims put their religious principles before all other considerations (Halstead, 1991). Ijaz and Abbas (2010) state, however, that Muslim parents respect Muslim women in education for reasons such as the importance of education. This could also reflect my view in that I believe the presence of Muslims in Western countries has affected their cultural and religious attitude towards their daughters’ education. It can also relate to the Muslims value for education and the only viable course of action to revitalise themselves is to achieve greater development.

Many people misunderstand Islam’s rules of distinguishing between culture and religion. According to Elbih (2012), ‘[i]n most Islamic schools, parents try to enforce their cultures over the school and think that their culture is the Islamic religion’ (p. 168). In that respect, Merry (2010) agrees when he argues that parents are “not justified in making decisions for their children that merely ensure the cultural or religious continuity of their own values without thought to the best interests of the children themselves” (p. 101). The best way to differentiate is through knowledge, a rationale some parents use to teach their children to avoid their own mistakes.

PI03: Women sometimes are treated negatively– that is not Islam; that is culture. It is critical to realise the difference, because when I was young I did not realise what was expected of me either culturally or as a Muslim. When I learned the difference I ignored everything that conflicted with Islam and naturally follow Islam. I am hoping my daughter and I will both learn something from this opportunity.

My study journey suggests to me that a revolution is happening among Muslim women seeking to make a big change regarding the stereotypical perspective of women’s position in Islamic society. Most of my participants were women. Having reflected on their situations, I felt that they all wanted their daughters to be strong and to have a successful future. In my view Muslim women are disadvantaged due to the misunderstandings affecting Islamic principles. Islam treats women and men equally with full educational rights to improve and achieve their aims on an equal footing. I believe that the participants, mainly mothers, also see themselves in their daughters and want to actualise their full potential.

Parents who participated in this study measured culture as a key issue and hoped that Islamic schools would help their children learn about their culture, whether in respect of their specific country or ethnicity or Islamic culture. Culture has had a big influence on parental decisions to send their children to Islamic schools; they intend to protect their culture. Although Islam is the religion of Muslim society, culture creates rules which have a major impact on its society. Although culture poses a big challenge for girls in particular, many parents seem to need to change many cultural views toward women because Islam considers women differently.

### Summary

To sum up this section, Muslim identity is important to all these participants and they consider that being in an Islamic school is the best way to shape and defend their children’s identity. Because Islamic identity is fundamental for Muslim parents, they believe Islamic schools help their children build a sense of identity and sense of belonging in the course of teaching them about their religion. They want their children to have an effective, legitimate identity and to be proud of being Muslim. Furthermore, Muslim parents emphasised that, as British citizens, they have equal rights to other citizens and, as such, are entitled to be treated with respect for their religious beliefs. Educated Muslims want to change the familiar view of identity and having a host society identity as distinctive from their heritage identity. In these Muslim parents’ view, children having a host society identity is socially acceptable, provided they maintain their culture and religious beliefs.

In terms of whether Muslim communities’ strategy should change or remain unchanged, participants responded differently. They said that Muslim communities should be more organised and consider their interaction in the society in which they live. Muslim parents should think of their position in society and recognise that they are in a non-Muslim society, where they must interact without losing their unique identity and culture. The Muslim community is one of the biggest religious communities in Britain and participants argued that Muslim children should know that this society is their society because they have chosen to settle here and contribute to their host society. In order to have an influential position within wider society, Muslim communities need to improve their education and knowledge. Some argued that Islamic schools produce high quality students, because such schools, contrary to some public opinion, build social cohesion and make a valuable contribution to their society. Children interact in society even when they study in Islamic schools. In the opinion of Muslim parents, the lack of community cohesion is not the Islamic school’s fault because many other state schools also have children who fail to interact more widely in society. However, some point out those girls attending Islamic schools might feel uncomfortable interacting in their community as they are always surrounded by other Muslim girls and teachers. They are unable to interact in a realistic way with non-Muslims, even where the school encourages these pupils to do so.

## Values and Morals

The objective of moral education from the Islamic perspective is the awakening and appropriate positioning of the inner being within a person (Hussain, 2007; Shah 2006b; Al-Attas, 1979). According to many interviewees, values and morals are the most important societal issues. Hussain states that a moral education is:

... one in which the physical, spiritual and psychological elements are stimulated and guided towards good and right action … The real constituents of moral education are not parents, communities or the state, but the person and the soul within the person. (2007, p. 302).

The parents interviewed believe that inducting their children into Islamic schools eliminates exposure to an abundance of inappropriate behaviour and acts in wider society that opposes the teachings of Islam and that have a bad influence upon them. Parker-Jenkins (2002) argues that Muslim children are articulated as better British citizens as a result of such schools, providing a moral range and installing a new sense of morality into society.

PI012: I want them to follow Islamic values and morals. I send them to [an] Islamic school because I am sure they will be on the right path, especially when they learn good Islamic values and religious education.

It can be argued that the participating parents choose Islamic schools out of concern for their children’s behaviour and believe that sending their children to an Islamic school provides the most effective way to developing good character traits. Participating parents have thus combined religion with values in the belief that the upholding of religious values is also reflected in their behaviour. This view might develop from traditional thinking where they stereotypically depict the Muslim as honest, loyal, trustworthy, reliable, responsible and so on. All these adjectives are expected of Muslims and other peoples. This therefore raises another issue: are Muslim parents who choose Islamic schools in conflict with wider society? And does the wider society reject the values taught in Islamic schools?

Although these are interesting questions which have been addressed in some way I think more research is needed around these issues. In my opinion Islamic values and morals are not actually rejected but the media has established the stereotypical view of Islam and Muslims which affects the thinking of others who are opposed to everything relating to Islam and Muslims.

This view affects many issues developed over time against minority Muslim communities in Western societies. Opponents of Islamic schools in particular and faith schools in general assert that such schools indoctrinate pupils and adversely affect their independence. It also influences the children’s personal autonomy (see for example, Halstead, 1989).

These parents feel that Islamic schools reduce the risk of exposing their children to the behaviours and practices which go against Islamic values. In order to promote a positive set of values and encourage good behaviour and social responsibility, faith schools need to be supported. For this reason, the Government has supported them (McCreery et al. 2007).

PQ06: [An Islamic school is] setting my child a good example, because – from my experiences– in state schools they swear and fight whereas such behaviours are forbidden in Islamic schools. They also teach my child about her religion.

From my research, a case can be made that participating parents link religious education with good behaviour because they believe that a consequence of a good religious education is that their children will behave in a better way. Some may say a good religious person with a good religious education offers no guarantee of being a good person. From a Muslim’s perspective children who have such a high quality of religious education means they will learn all the principles, values and morals which every Muslim should have in respect of Islamic requirements (see for example, Hussain, 2007, Shah, 2012). I can say that Muslim parents who participated in my study believe that sending – or sometimes forcing - their children to attend Islamic schools ensures they develop into good people and in so doing avoid the poor behaviours experienced or reputed to exist in state schools.

Some parents were pleased with the Islamic schools’ views and guidance on behaviour when compared to the perceived lack of teaching values and morals in state schools. The view expressed by the following participant is that parents always want their children to follow their own religious and cultural values in order to avoid any issues that could affect their identity or harm their religious values. She mentioned RE (religious education) and PE (physical education) as examples of issues which concern those parents (see Hewer, 2001).

PI012: These schools teach children how to behave as good citizens. Children in state schools learn something is different with our religion especially in RE, so we need to protect our children’s identity and religion. Other areas where we need to protect our children from state school practices are also in PE and mixed-sex swimming lessons where children change their clothes in front of each other, which are forbidden in our religion.

When I asked her what she meant by saying ‘something is different’, her answer concentrated on the time and the way of dealing with the practical aspects of Islam, such as praying. She would like her children to learn their religion in the practical way, which means practising their religion in reality by offering time, facilities, and teachers as a part of a school’s curriculum. This also confirms my opinion that Muslim parents connected religious education with Islamic values and morals. However, the previous participant connected the ideas of good citizen and religious practice with good behaviour. She may have been trying to say that being a good citizen means to be in an Islamic school to learn about the Islamic religion and its values. She also mentioned the:

1. Specific subjects RE and PE which, in her view, are the most critical subjects in state schools: and that
2. RE subjects deal with the religious side of their children’s life and PE deals with their behavioural life.

In my opinion, participating Muslim parents have given an overview of how Muslims see their special identity in the context of their values and morals. It can be said that Muslims have individual views regarding their children’s honour which is always governed by Islam’s forbidden and permissible provisions.

Other parents view certain subjects on the curriculum in state schools as being unacceptable and give them concern about their children. The following participant mentioned sex education as being antithetical to her culture and tradition (Halstead, 1997, 1994; Merry, 2005a).

PI09: Everything is available in schools at the moment. In council schools they teach children about sexual protection which goes against our customs and practice. When I was in the Netherlands, when the children start secondary school they are shown a CD every few months where they learn how to protect themselves against pregnancy.

McCreery et al. (2007) state that “within Muslim tradition, rules about modesty and sex mean that parents seek to protect their children from exposure to sexual relationships”. (p. 210). Islamic education supporters and Islamic schools themselves identify a need for sex education in schools. There is no doubt regarding the need for sex education. The debate focuses, however, around the issues of where, how, and by whom this education should be arranged.

The participant also said that it is common in other schools for children to form large groups to abuse children, which puts them under pressure regarding this issue.

PI09: When you are in a big group sometimes they abuse you: ‘We are no longer your friends if you don’t do that.’ So there is much abuse in schools. Children steal things and they make other children funny. But in Islamic schools nothing like this happens. They are much safer.

It is important to mention that there is no clearly compelling evidence regarding the level of bullying or abuse in Islamic schools. In my view, however, I think Muslim parents feel there is no abuse in such schools because:

1. The Islamic school community is such whereby all children know each other and may also come from the relative’s families to ensure a friendlier relationship with each other.
2. The small number of pupils attending Islamic schools enables the school’s staff to have better control of their pupils in order to avoid problems such bullying and abuse.

With all Muslim parents interviewed, the comparison of state schools and Islamic schools was a big issue. All participants compared both types of schools, in positive and negative ways. This view is, I am sure, drawn from personal experiences where most of the participants have children in both types of educational system: where their children were in state primary schools or in the secondary schools with many participating parents sending their sons to state schools while the daughters are sent to Islamic schools.

Most participants agreed that state schools have good facilities such as qualified teachers, high quality equipment and funding.

PI012: Some state schools have the best education and make great efforts to achieve higher results. I have experience of state schools on my arrival here in the UK. I chose Islamic schools for my twins and would have definitely sent my elder children to Islamic schools if they existed when I first arrived.

Other parents interviewed considered that the quality of state schools depended on the area and community where the school was located. The following participant reveals that although many good state schools exist where he lives, it is difficult to secure places in those schools. He adds that other schools are unreasonable in his view, owing to a bad atmosphere and misbehaviour.

PI010: They are good; actually the main thing in the community is the area. I live in Nottingham where there are many state schools, some of which are good schools. We would like our children to go there but some schools are not giving an offer for admission easily. Then they go to other bad schools with an unpleasant atmosphere where they will learn many activities in a bad way. In some state schools teachers cannot do anything because the pupils have more power than their teachers, which is a serious problem. My son, who went there, told me of many bad things that happened at this school.

From the previous participant’s view, one can argue that places generally at good schools are limited which push parents to find other educational options for their children. All parents, regardless of religious perspective, want their children to be in schools which are safe and of a high standard. In my opinion, when parents cannot find such schools they do their best to do so even if they need to establish their own schools. I think this situation faces Muslim parents who send their children to Islamic schools. Finding an alternative solution for the state run schools is a driving force for Muslim parents to establish Islamic schools. It is important to say that it is understandable for these parents to find other schools in order to avoid any adverse effects on their children.

Conversely, most participants were worried by what they felt to be the lack of values and morals and the impact this would have upon their children’s behaviour. Hermans (2004) in his study of Moroccan migrants to the US, found that parents criticised secular schools for teaching their children to implement boundless freedom, show disregard to their parents, question authority, with less focus on teaching values and morals and respect of adults. However, I am cautious here about over-generalising my interviewees’ observations and recognise that they might not represent the experiences of many other Muslim parents.

Although some parents were concerned about the morals and values of state schools, other parents were in between in relation to both types of school. According to their views, there are good state schools which work hard to develop good behaviour and moral attitudes in the behaviour of their pupils. They consider that a lot more misbehaviour exists in state schools compared to Islamic schools, but at the same time there are good students in those schools.

PI06: State secondary schools have a high rate of behavioural problems, whereas in my daughter’s Islamic school I can say such behavioural problems are rare because they are taught the Islamic rules of behaviour. State schools, however, also have good pupils, so I think both schools can have rules for good behaviour.

From this view, participating Muslim parents agree that good state schools exist which raises the question as to why they did not send their children to those schools. There are two reasons for this decision in my opinion.

1. Parents know that good quality state schools are available but the places are limited.
2. Although parents know high quality schools with places exist they prefer Islamic schools because they consider it is more important to offer a religious education which teaches values and morals rather than being a quality state school.

Although Muslim parents have their own views on state schools, some prefer to send their children to Christian faith schools because they also teach morals and values. They are worried by the lack of morals in state schools on their children’s behaviour. In their study of an Islamic nursery and primary school established by a group of mothers, McCreery et al. (2007) found that a number of his participants made reference to values and attitudes. They talked about the great emphasis placed on adults and children alike to be kind, respectful, and have good manners. They saw that those values were so important that they would even send their children to a Jewish school or any other faith school because they shared the same values.

PI08: I think state schools have lost [the teaching of values and morals], I mean there is shortage in morals. I know many Muslim parents have started to send their children to Christian schools, purely Christian schools, simply because of the morality issues.

While values and morals are essential for participating Muslim parents of my study, this view could present an overview as to how those parents’ needs are met. That some parents care about values and morals far more than other issues is obvious where Muslim parents choose to send their children to other religious schools. It can be argued that this is due to the good reputation of faith schools in general regarding their pupils’ behaviour and ethics (see for example Parekh, 2000). Being in faith schools satisfies the needs of those parents for their children to be well behaved. In my view I think Muslim parents who send their children to other religious schools entrust their children’s religious guide without ensuring their behaviour. Parents are worried that the boundless freedom of state schools could have a negative impact on their children hence their preference for other religious schools when they cannot find Islamic schools.

Good behaviour, according to the following interviewee, starts from home, which he sees as being the child’s first school and the parents’ responsibility. Children with high behavioural standards and performance usually have a good family background.

PI014: There are good and bad state schools. With state schools the Government lays down the law and how they should be, which is not necessarily right because they always experiment with new ideas. Schooling starts at home, so in this case, what is expected of today’s state schools? The good performance and behaviour of children in state schools come from a good family background and a sound supportive family’s background, so all starts from home.

By understanding this view we can argue that successful schools are not necessarily state or faith-specific schools but schools with children from good family backgrounds. In my opinion the previous participant poses the view that home and school should collaborate to develop people of good calibre, without which there would be no educational gains.

Regarding other issues about Islamic and state schools, the following participant stressed she wanted her child to be respected in society for adhering to Islamic values and morals taught in Islamic schools, rather than the values of state schools.

PQ06: I want my daughter to be respected by everyone for her manner and not hated by people for swearing, fighting and bad manners. I, as a mother, worry a lot about my children and want them to know about their religion and have access to religious education.

Many participants asserted that they wanted their children’s respect. They sent their children to Islamic schools to learn respect due to the schools’ strategy of teaching them Islamic values, which include the duty of respecting parents.

PI07: When they learn in Islamic schools, they will know their parents’ rights and duties. It is important to know my parents’ rights because I will gain my children’s respect. They will feel what I am doing for them and what their duties are.

In addition to teaching children how to respect their parents, Islamic schools teach children how to respect their society, a view expressed by the following participant who has doubts about the merit of other schools. She thinks they do not teach children to respect their parents in the same way Islamic schools do.

PI06: She now understands how to show respect to her parents. Although they teach respect for parents and society in other schools ... but what happens in reality? I don’t think they teach children how to behave respectfully. Do they teach the child how to behave respectfully to their mothers when they go home after school? They know they have to respect their parents by giving flowers on Mother’s or Father’s day as a whole culture, but I don’t think children are encouraged to respect their parents. There are many places to respect parents, but not in the way that Islam brings that respect.

In this context it is important to ask: do Muslim parents feel that state schools fail to teach children how to respect their parents? In fact my participants did not mean exactly that when they were talking about the respect they want from their children. The value of respect in Islam differs from liberal values. In other ways parents’ respect is highly appreciated in Islam even if this respect sometimes affects children’s freedom and independence.

Muslim parents want to be treated with respect in order to ensure their children recognise their parents’ rights to bring them closer together and feel their struggle to fulfil their children’s needs. It also ensures that children understand their parents’ duties thereby giving them the grounding to be good parents in future and give as much as is needed by learning how, going forward, to be good parents for their own children .

Following Islamic values means to practise these values in one’s daily life (Hussain, 2007; Shah 2006b). This participant has combined personal values and people’s respect. He said that when a Muslim follows his religious values he will command people’s respect by virtue of practising his religion.

PI014: Islamic intelligence does not mean you have to be an imam in a mosque. Your job is to take your Islamic values for people so that they see you as a good Muslim in order to say – *Masha’Allah* – he is a good Muslim.

It can be suggested that practising Islamic values and morals is the most practical way to raise the image of Islam and Muslims and that to be a good Muslim does not entail wearing special clothing in order to display specific appearance. I also think that Western Muslims should rethink their presence (see Ramadan, 2004) by practising Islamic values and morals and taking the first step to effect the philosophy of being a good citizen with an Islamic personality.

Other parents see that following the Qur’an and the Prophet’s instructions in the Hadith leads children to becoming good Muslims. The parents’ duty is to provide Islamic learning sources for their children in the home in order to give them the opportunity to learn about Islam and the principles of a believer in depth.

PI06: Our Prophet (p.b.u.h.) says all the same in Hadith*.* They teach our children their responsibility in an appropriate manner that Allah is our Creator and our Lord and if the child is also keen to be a good Muslim, he will concentrate more.

Living in a pluralist society is another major concern for parents who adhere to Islamic values and morals. Such parents are keen to build good relationships with their non-Muslim neighbours, because Islam instructs Muslims to do so.

PI06: We are Muslims living in this country and [it is] our duty to comply with Islamic teachings and treat all our neighbours as human, whether they are Hindu, Christian, Sikh or Jewish. Islam teaches us the principles of right, wrong and self-control over anger which is haram and comes from evil (shaitan). They [Islamic schools] teach them identity as humans; we represent our religion. By bringing the child to Islam, the school reminds and protects the child on the importance of being human, and good for Muslim and non-Muslim people alike.

It can be argued that the Muslim community does not necessarily isolate itself from society by establishing its own schools. Although Muslims want their own schools, the Islamic principles they follow include building good relationships with people in other parts of society. According to participant views, Islamic schools regard an Islamic national religious strategy as an effective way to teach children how to behave correctly without the need for segregation, regardless of their beliefs and location. It is my personal belief that those Islamic schools which teach such an identity is of benefit to their Muslim communities and is likely to be useful for non-Muslim communities.

Although Muslim parents stressed that they want this type of school to give their children the opportunity to gain Islamic values and morals, they asserted that the home should also support these schools. Among the parents’ many responsibilities are the needs to provide a good standard of life and to prepare their children morally. The following participant considers that parents should care about their children’s behaviour in the same way as they provide feeding and clothing. In her view, sending children to an Islamic school on its own is not enough because parents have the responsibility to provide their children with moral direction.

PI06: Our responsibility and duty as parent are not only to feed and clothe our children, but also to give them good education, decide the schools they should attend and what they learn. When they do something persistently wrong over a long period and we just turn a blind eye to it, and then we see what has happened, we cannot excuse ourselves by blaming the school because although we have sent our children to [an] Islamic school, parents still have full responsibility because of their authority.

She also believes that parents have a major influence on their children. They should deal with their responsibility in a realistic way and teach their children to be good people in the Islamic way. She stressed that parents should be more than careful because they are building a new person and that building needs to be strong. She also believes that the parents’ responsibility is limited. At an early age they can control their children but due to children’s growing up, the parents’ responsibility is reduced naturally.

PI06: If the parents have prepared their child properly, that child should ... become a good, responsible Muslim. The mind of the new born child is empty, like a blank sheet. Everything stems from the child’s parents who are responsible for everything their child learns. For example, I sent my daughter to an Islamic school after she insisted that it was what she wanted. When I said no because we couldn’t afford the fees, she cried. She is just [a] child and soon she will forget.

In discussing the relationship between home and school responsibilities, it can be argued that participating Muslim parents know that sending their children to Islamic schools is insufficient to develop their child’s character, values and behaviour. It is important to mention that Muslim parents who participated in my study gave a comprehensive picture of their responsibility to build a foundation of Muslim children by providing a good background and raising them in a healthy environment and atmosphere. Parents’ responsibility though is finite and limited by the development of their children who then become responsible themselves for their own decisions thereby indicating that parents have less control. For that reason many parents were cautious about their children’s secondary education and asserted that they should attend Islamic schools. Conversely, they agreed that their children could return to post-16 state education when they were then deemed to be sufficiently responsible to choose their way of life. It should be noted, however, and as I have previously mentioned, an influential factor in this decision is also due to parents having less control after this age.

### 4.5.1 Summary

To summarise this section, values and morals, according to the interviewees, are the most important societal issues. Parents believe that sending their children into Islamic schools will eliminate exposure to an abundance of inappropriate behaviour and acts in a society which is opposed to Islamic teachings. They are satisfied with the Islamic ethos and teaching of behaviour, especially when they compare this to the perceived lack of similar values and morals in state schools. Although some parents are concerned about the morals and values of state schools, other parents had a more balanced view in relation to both types of school. Even though Muslim parents have their own views of state schools, some prefer to send their children to Christian faith schools, for example, because there is no other choice for them when they don’t find Islamic schools. In addition, they believe that these religious schools also emphasise morals and values more. Living in a pluralist society is another major concern for parents who adhere to Islamic values and morals. While Muslim parents stressed that they want this type of school to give their children the opportunity to gain Islamic values and morals, they also asserted that the home should also support these schools.

## Islamic Environment and Safety

Participating Muslim Parents believe that growing up in an Islamic environment plays a major role in becoming a good Muslim. Many parents shared the views expressed in the following quotation regarding the placement of their children in an Islamic environment which was clearly one of the primary considerations of choosing an Islamic school – being in an Islamic environment increases the parents’ sense of security for their children.

PI08: I think the biggest thing is the environment– I think I love that. At the time, I thought that sending my children to an Islamic school with an Islamic environment would be the best option.

PI02: As a parent, when my children, my girls or boys, go to school, my first priority is peace of mind knowing that they are in a safe environment where they will learn to respect parents and the society around them. I also feel more secure when they are going to that school.

Muslim parents want an environment which supports their children in learning about the Islamic religion, morals, behaviours and practices (see Section 2.4.10).

Muslim parents always connect the idea of a safe environment to Islamic schools, where they feel their children are safe (Merry, 2010; Haddad et al., 2006; Zine, 2006; Smith, 2000). Participating Muslim parents in my study have also expressed the same view:

PI09: [To] keep my sons and daughters in a safe environment, to keep them religious, because childhood learning leads to better growth and provides enough religious and cultural information.

The question to ask here is: Can Islamic schools guarantee a safe environment? In my view there is no doubt that my Muslim participants believed that Islamic schools offer the safe, harmless environment which they want for their children. I believe those parents have such confidence for various reasons as follows:

1. An Islamic school environment is suitable and safe because, in their opinion, teachers, pupils and staff have the same background, religion and ethnicity giving the parents a sense of confidence that they can relax knowing their children are in a safe environment where they are understood and respected.
2. In their opinion, all people in Islamic schools share the same values and morals so they behave correctly.
3. Being in an Islamic school environment makes Muslim parents feel more welcomed and comfortable because they can talk with teachers and staff in their local language avoiding awkwardness and discomfort. Muslim parents can feel embarrassed in state schools usually due to racist and stereotypical views (see for example, Crozier and Davies, 2007)

On the other hand, parents would worry about their children growing up in non-Islamic schools due to the perceived problems such schools have to contend with, such as drugs, racism, bullying, and other socially unacceptable behaviour. Elbih (2012) states that the separation of Muslim students is essential for their safety and defence from un-Islamic behaviours prevalent in public spaces, such as dating, drugs, premarital sex and negative peer pressures.

As the following opinion shows, for these parents, being in a safe environment means being in an Islamic school.

PI011: State schools are ok, but there can be many problems which I consider children should not deal with, such as drugs, racism, bad behaviour and bullying. I would like my children to grow up in an Islamic atmosphere and feel they are in a safe environment.

Muslim parents do not reject state schools but their choices are informed by ideas about drugs, racism, bullying and so on. With such problems being the concern of Muslim and non-Muslim parents alike worried for children’s safety, it is fair to say Muslim parents have the right to protect their children from such problems. This can also be linked to discussions regarding the choice of good state schools. As I mentioned in previous sections, some participating Muslim parents want their children to attend high quality state schools but can only find places in schools of poor repute with poorly behaved children, which, as a consequence, has led Muslim parents to establish their own schools.

Related to this issue some parents feel dissatisfied with the state schools in their area and have found that many problems exist with children from different backgrounds linked to racism. The fact that Muslim children experience racism and/or discrimination in British schools seems unarguable (Hurst, 2000; Ahmad, 2002; Coles, 2004; Parker-Jenkins, 2002; Zine, 2006). Short (2002) considers that faith schools protect children from individual and institutional racism, which might increase their educational achievement and success. Walford (2004) suggests that “perceptions of racism within existing state-maintained schools are one of the reasons why some Muslim parents have opened their own schools”. (p. 215).

PI05: There are many really good state schools but not in the area where I live ... I live in area where I feel it is a bad part of the city for me, and I always hear racist fights are happening. So many kids have been in hospital and it just creates a bad atmosphere so I will never send my kids there.

Many Muslim communities are located in socio-economically deprived areas with poor services. Such circumstances affect their children’s education with ensuing under-achievement and poor performance. In my view, Muslim communities have realised they need to be more organised and inspired to improve their position in Western society. This present revival may lead them to establish their own institutions including Islamic schools.

On the other hand, parents feel comfortable with their children in an Islamic environment because they feel it is similar to their home environment. Osler and Hussain’s (1995) study of Muslim mothers who chose to send their daughters to Islamic schools found that those mothers were concerned to create consistency between the values endorsed in the home and those taught at school. This line of thinking was solid among recent converts to Islam, who occasionally felt they were as yet ineffectively prepared to raise their daughters with the contextual knowledge and values of their new faith. The next interviewee informed me that their children’s self-esteem was lower in other schools because of the environment that children felt was different from their home environment.

PI04: They feel more comfortable in the Islamic school environment because it is the same as the home environment, but when our children go to other schools their self-esteem becomes much lower because they are going into a different environment.

According to Merry (2010), Islamic schools provide students with beliefs, values, and standards comparable to their home, and help students develop optimistic self-identification and well-being. Zine (2006) agrees with this view and sees that the environment of an Islamic school helps students to understand their identity, that of others and the world. Zine (2007) affirms that Islamic schools offer a culturally matching space and a more seamless adaptation between the values, beliefs, and practices of the home and school environment. One could ask how the school’s environment compares to the home environment. In other words what are the similarities of these environments? I am sure that for these participating Muslim parents this means the same values and morals which their children experience in their homes to create the sense of being in the same environment. Common religious practices such as praying and fasting also give children used to doing so at home a sense of security through practising their religion at school in the same way as they do at home.

Growing up in an Islamic environment is an essential benefit for children according to the parents in this sample. The similarity between the home and the school environments is crucial and has a major influence on the child’s way of expressing themselves (Hewitt, 1996) in that they are not only more confident and can speak about themselves but also have more capacity and pride about their own identities as Muslims. The participant below told me that she has had experience in state schools where many Muslim children are attending.

PI06: In state schools, when Muslim children say something, I can see that on their faces. It is as though they cannot speak, because there is a difference between their home and school. They think they cannot talk. It seems as though they may sometimes feel ashamed or perhaps be embarrassed because of their skin or something they cannot express themselves. When Muslim [children] go to Islamic schools, however, and they are in an obviously Islamic environment, they are capable of expressing themselves and their motivation effectively. They are proud of themselves as Muslims. It makes them more confident, and brings them self-esteem.

According to the following participant’s view, being in an Islamic environment gives children a great opportunity to become involved with and interact in their society, which means they can express themselves and talk frankly about their attitudes and opinions. The greatest benefit of Islamic schooling as reported by participants is building confidence and being more confident both inside and outside of schools.

PI07: When children are involved in an environment which is [the] same as their regular home environment, where they are used to live, I think they feel comfortable and are more confident at the same time. They will speak and get themselves involved more in the society– both at school and elsewhere.

Some might ask how the Islamic school environment gives children the opportunity to interact and be more confident in their society. In reality, Muslim children are surrounded by teachers and pupils from their religion and background, so how does this environment encourage their interaction with wider society in a similar way to their home environment? Such an environment could isolate children from society and confirm opposing views which suggest that such schools are divisive and harm social cohesion. It also reinforces their views of indoctrination and autonomy. Opponents often raise the notion of indoctrinated children (see for example, Halstead, 1995) copying their parents without being themselves or having the freedom to express their personality. Islamic schools, it can be argued, also undermine the child’s autonomy (see for example, Levinson, 1999; Parker-Jenkins, 2005) by transferring the parents’ religious beliefs. In my opinion, participating Muslim parents believe the Islamic school environment is the best solution for the many issues raised. These parents believe it is their basic right to bequeath their religious, cultural and social values so that their children can create the new generation in line with their beliefs and values. The parents also believe that being in an Islamic environment does not isolate their children from society but develops them into good citizens. Another belief they hold is that Islamic schools are non-divisive and increase social cohesion by teaching pupils about other religions and cultures in society.

In addition to the similarity between the home and school environments, Muslim parents often make a correlation between a high quality of secular and religious education and a safe environment in which feeling safe means having good achievements within the familiar society of an Islamic school.

PI013: These schools provide high level of education in religious and secular sides and I feel my children are in a safe environment because everyone comes from the same background with the same values and customs. They feel they are in their home.

Moreover, parents believe religious education is far more effective in an Islamic environment. Children learn through practical experiences with the opportunity to live what they learn in reality, as the following mother states.

PI03: I wanted her to be in Islamic school with other girls doing everything which they cannot do in other schools, for example: Learning all the practicalities of Islam, such as praying five times a day and Learning about our history and the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), Seerah and Hadith. I think it is easier to teach all of these principles and practices of Islam at school than at home, because children do not listen to their parents. It is better to go to a school environment where they will absorb everything more effectively without their parents, because they know they have a teacher and must listen, so maybe they listen better.

This mother asserted that an important issue for parents was the knowledge that their children were in an Islamic environment and a setting where they were surrounded by Muslim teachers and children who gave them a sense of belonging (see the Identity section above) and the opportunity to gain positive classmate influences.

PI03: As a parent I was hoping she would learn the respect that comes from the Muslim environment she is in, respect for parents, respect for others, and respect for their elders. I was hoping that she would learn from other role models like her teachers and older girls who live in our society and embody the best of [being] Muslim.

She adds that being in an Islamic environment makes a big difference especially for learning simple and basic things. In her experience, these schools give her daughter effective support to know her Islamic legacy. They help parents who cannot provide that for their children.

PI03: I know children who have never been to Islamic schools. Although their families teach them, it is not the same. Little things that my daughter knows, others who are in her age or my age do not know simple things such as *As-Sahaba*[[10]](#footnote-10), for example. You take it for granted that they will learn such things in an Islamic school. Conversely, in state school, they do not even know the Prophets, their names, or the basics of our legacy and culture. We need to know simple things. It makes a difference when we do not have to tell our child to pray because they know how to read and understand the Qur’an’s values. We take all this for granted. Simply it is not the same as being in a more Islamic environment.

Although the previous participant has supported the Muslim parents’ viewpoint of being in an Islamic environment, it is clear that such an environment means:

1. Providing religious practises and knowledge which are easier for teachers than parents to teach.
2. Teachers and classmates providing role models that may improve the child’s knowledge, confidence and self-esteem.
3. Encouraging Muslim children to learn about and practise their religion makes life easier by ensuring their children have better religious knowledge and practice.

It may also be true that the child is more dutiful to teachers than to parents. It could be said that being in a suitably healthy atmosphere makes the teaching process more effective and successful. In my opinion, this particular view has also influenced Muslim parents’ choices for their children’s education.

Additionally, many participants realised that the relationship between an environment and identity helps their children develop their sense of belonging.

PQ022: They are in an environment where they are taught about their Muslim identity and belonging and made to understand where they come from.

PI06: When Muslim children go to an Islamic school, and are obviously in an Islamic environment, they can represent themselves [and] their motivation. They are proud of themselves as Muslims. It makes them more confident, which enhances their self-esteem.

Being in that environment builds the child’s confidence as in the following participant view because they learn about their religion, culture, and also learn about people from other communities with different backgrounds.

PI02: The best thing is that they are building confidence, they [are] learning about British society as well as about other communities. People come from different backgrounds. So they are very happy in their school and I am quite happy as well.

The following participant thinks that Islamic schools play a major part in confidence-building. She feels her daughter has become more confident because of the environment since she attended an Islamic school. As said before (see Section 2.4.10), the similarity between home and school environment has a major influence on the children’s ability to express themselves, and also gives them more capacity and pride about their own identity as Muslims. In respect of that, this participant said her daughter can wear her *hijab* and jilbab without fear of being bullied or blamed by other students or teachers.

PI06: When they are in Islamic school they are in an environment that compares to their home and families. When my daughter started her Islamic school, she wore *hijab* and jilbab, and was confident. Those girls want to wear *hijab* but don’t do so because of their teachers’ and colleagues’ view and wanted to know what would happen to them if they were covered. In Islamic school they feel more confident because everyone is wearing the same uniform. They can play with confidence.

Furthermore, when I asked her if Islamic schools help to build confidence in children, she agreed, based on her experience of state schools. She found problems such as poor self-confidence arose because of the difference between the home and the school environments (Moll, 2009; Sirin and Fine, 2008; Merry, 2010; Zine, 2006). Many participating Muslim parents worry that state schools might affect their children’s confidence, and may feel uncomfortable with other state school children from other cultures, religions and different attire.

Being in an Islamic environment, however, improves children’s confidence and prevents the pressure of a different environment where everything they do must be explained. This view has been expressed by the following participant.

PI03: They [girls] feel very embarrassed and need to explain to everybody why they dress or do things in this way; why they are not allowed to go, for example, to friends who are boys. For example, they feel embarrassed and have gone ahead and done all these things, maybe give in to be pressured to do drinking, maybe drugs or relationships. In the Islamic environment, there is the best of both worlds [means: this life and the hereafter] so feel no need and when you become an adult 16, 17 years old and have your confidence in yourself. You know who you are so feel no need to be pressured to be like anyone else. You do not feel the need to be embarrassed or feel ashamed. This [is] the most important thing.

Some children feel under pressure when they are in other school environments because they need to explain their attire, their conduct, and their religious practices such as praying, fasting or when girls wear Islamic clothing. Feeling under pressure might push those children into bad behaviour such as taking drugs or drinking alcohol which Islam expressly forbids. In an Islamic environment these children feel relaxed without any need to explain themselves, because all the children understand the reasons for their behaviour.

In terms of an Islamic environment’s advantages – as I mentioned above – wearing *hijab* is critical for participating Muslim parents and this mother feels her daughter is confident in wearing her *hijab* in Islamic schools’ environment.

PI03: Other girls of my daughter’s age would be deeply embarrassed to go out wearing full *hijab*. I know several young Muslim girls who only wear their *hijab* when they are at school. As they are at Islamic school and learning in a different way, these girls including my daughter realise what Islam expects of them or where the boundaries lie in society.

The following participant believes that being in Islamic schools enables her daughter to be

a role model for other Muslim girls. Wearing *hijab* does not limit her success but gives her more confidence to do many things.

PI06: I have sent my daughter to an institute with a proper Islamic atmosphere to learn how to become a good role model for other Muslim girls, women, and when she becomes a mother, she will also be a good role model for other Muslim mothers, when she completes her studies and secures a good job – *In shaa Allah*[[11]](#footnote-11)*.*

Islamic attire does not limit the success of Muslim girls who can be successful members of the society even wearing *hijab*. From my experiences of meeting participating Muslim parents, they want their daughters to be successful members of society in the Muslim way. Many of my participants were mothers who found their way in society such as doing their jobs, knowing their rights and duties while wearing *hijab*. In fact, their appearance as Muslim ladies does not affect their confidence and personality. I am sure those parents work hard to provide a good future for their children, especially girls.

Another participant wants his daughters to be successful when they reach adulthood and encourages them to do exactly what they want, and hopes that schools will encourage the girls in this respect. He notes a lack of qualified people who can lead the Muslim communities, hopefully pushing women, especially in girls’ schools. This can be linked to the previous participant who wants her daughter to be a role model for other girls and women in the Muslim community.

Those parents agree that the first step of bringing qualified people who can lead and improve Muslim communities into their society begins in the Islamic schools. The problem of a shortage of qualified leaders could be solved by encouraging such institutions and giving them more support.

PI06: I want my girls to become responsible adults when they grow up and leave school, not necessarily career-oriented but if they wanted to do so, that is their decision which I am open to consider. If they want education or to go to a university it doesn’t matter. Muslim girls who wear *hijab* can do anything and still be successful. They can have education but, generally speaking, many people have leadership qualities, who understand what is happening and can lead Muslim communities. Muslim communities have many things missing and my hope is to keep them away from undesirable experiences found in state schools, which I observed in a stint on my teaching assessment many years ago.

One can ask whether all Muslim parents think in a similar way to the previous participant in relation to Muslim girls’ independence. Regarding the Muslim community stereotype, thinking of the girls’ position could lead to the view that we cannot generalise because of the girls’ position in their communities. It can be argued that the girls’ situation has changed for many reasons including newer life styles which affect the Muslim traditional thinking about girls’ honour with many now accepting that girls can have a social life without negative consequences. The economic situation for Muslim families leads many to allow their daughters to continue their education and work to safeguard their future. I also believe the Western lifestyle has impacted on the Muslim mentality and views affecting women’s duties and rights in their host society.

Others spoke about how Islamic schools help and encourage children with learning difficulties in two ways. Firstly, they encourage the schools to help the children to develop a close relationship in order to help and understand their needs.

PI04: If they see a quiet child they will tell another child to approach that child and help by socialising with him or get to know him and encourage his self-esteem.

Secondly, because of the strong relationship between parents and teachers – where many times, teachers are from the same communities – teachers also try to contact the parents. So they can be familiar with the child’s needs, hobbies, and can deal with him or her in the best way.

PI04: Teachers will also contact his home and talk to his parents to find out more about the child at home as well as school, to boost the child’s self-esteem.

It can be argued that this point could be more to do with the small schools rather than being Islamic or not. This type of relationship between school and parents often depends on the number of pupils in the schools. In a big school with a large number of pupils, teachers and staff cannot be familiar with all pupils’ needs and problems as they can in a smaller school.

Being in an Islamic environment also helps children improve their confidence by having good contact with teachers who are able to enhance the children’s personality, as can be seen in this participant’s view.

PI09: [Children] do so with good intention, when you maintain contact with them and their school activities enable the teachers to increase their [the children’s] confidence. The school environment also gives them the confidence to improve their personality.

The three angles of the education process combine the teacher, child and parents. From my participating parents’ views, being in an Islamic environment gives the child a good education with teachers who can understand their needs and connection with parents through their relationship and shared religious, cultural and social background. Most importantly, however, is the question as to whether:

1. Islamic schools offer good quality teachers who can deal with such problems and
2. Whether parents understand their responsibility over and above the schools’ responsibility.

In my view, to date there is no definite answer and such questions need more research.

### 4.6.1.1 Qualified Teachers and School Environment

Having qualified teachers is the first step for creating good schools in one parent’s view. Good teachers must be inspiring and give children the confidence they need to be effective people capable of independent thought in society. Durkee (1987) considers that Islamic schools should focus more on employing professional Muslim teachers because teachers are required to have Islamic knowledge and expertise in order to become role models for their students. Cristillo (2009) objected when he saw that employing non-Muslim teachers in Islamic schools helps the students develop local cultural resources and facilitates their move into normal high schools and universities. This participant suggested that Islamic schools need funding to offer a high quality of teachers who can improve the teaching standards.

PI08: The teaching standards are lacking. From a practical viewpoint I understand that recruiting qualified teachers at that level costs a lot of money. Independent schools don’t have the funds, so although I can understand where it comes from, I think a new vision with a different approach independent of money is required.

In respect of the cost of qualified teachers, the same participant also asserted that although money is not everything, funding is important for developing Islamic schools (see, for example, Jackson and O’Crady, 2007).

Why, one might ask, do some Islamic schools not employ non-Muslim teachers especially in secular subjects such as mathematics, science, geography and so on? In my view, one must say that those Islamic schools which employ non-Muslim teachers will improve their position in society and change the stereotype of people’s thinking of these schools.

This might also encourage social integration by mixing those teachers’ cultures with Islamic culture and combining ethnicity and religious features in society. It may also improve the quality of Islamic schools with teaching and learning skills becoming more effective and supervisory. It is not easy to find non-Muslim teachers who may work in Islamic schools, however, for financial, religious, cultural and social reasons. Personally, I believe offering state funding to Islamic schools may resolve the problem of providing high quality teachers. According to Parker-Jenkins (2002) The Muslim Education Trust suggests that there are a sizeable number of Muslim parents who want government funding for Islamic schools.

Financial difficulty also affects the quality of teaching staff in Islamic schools. Walford (2004) argues that ‘while Britain still has a low number of trained Muslim teachers, another reason for recruitment difficulties is that most of those private schools pay less than the national pay scales’ (p. 209). Elbih (2012) suggests that state funding will move the school from a community project to a formal, professional state project, which reflects significance and means more consistency for the school, the teachers, and the students’ (p. 169). It also ensures a quality Islamic education that is distant from extremist and fundamentalist views.

On the other hand, the lack of Muslim teachers in state schools gives Muslim pupils a low sense of achievement and bad behaviour as observed by the following participant.

PI06: [I]n other schools, there are many behavioural problems and we are ashamed all that usually they are Muslim boys. Why? If there is a good Muslim teacher, he will see his brown face. I think children will follow his instructions and have more self-esteem.

This view has been supported by Short (2002) who reports on the Home Office Study findings which revealed that “parents felt that some teachers not only had negative attitudes towards Islam but occasionally undermined their children’s beliefs and practices” (p. 566). Several students stated that the teachers placed them on lower academic tracks, based on the stereotype that they were ESL students [English Second Language] or that Muslims, particularly women, are uninterested in education (Elbih, 2012).

Abbas (2002) found that due to the lower social class backgrounds of South Asian parents, they are more expected to have a positive attitude toward South Asian teachers because of their ethnicity. Those co-ethnic teachers were considered to be of superior significance by South Asian parents because they were thought to be well informed about the discrimination faced by ethnic minorities. “They were also felt to be able to communicate positively with pupils because of shared history, religion or culture as well as being able to speak in an array of South Asian languages and dialects” (p. 304).

PI06: State schools teach pupils about their identity and that they are Muslim. I have seen this personally because I did a teaching assistant’s course. I needed a placement, which I did in my children’s school. All the teachers at that school are Christian. I was setting up the class because there were no Muslim teachers and an important issue with 25 Muslim children is that teachers are expected to be role models. When a Muslim child says something I could see that the facial expressions of the Muslim children meant they cannot speak, because there is something different between home and school.

According to Sirin et al. (2009), state school teachers have students from numerous cultural groups and it is essential for them to become familiar with their students’ cultural differences in relation to the parenting beliefs, which can be as varied as the diversity of students in their classrooms. Children of immigrants enter state schools in great numbers and might be at risk of failure when teachers lack information regarding their culture at home, because the parenting beliefs about education and their connections with schools and teachers may be misunderstood and consequently viewed negatively. In response to this, some parents choose to send their children to schools that equate to their home cultures (McCreery et al., 2007). There are many Muslim teachers in state schools. Those teachers “serve as bridges between cultures, helping their colleagues understand the nuances of the students’ backgrounds, their deeper needs, and allay parents’ misconceptions about public schools and Western societies” (Niyozov, 2010, p. 34). However, Niyozov (2010) stresses that nowadays teachers, educators, and the general population in the West are conscious not merely of Islam and its main tenets, but also of its inner variety, complexities, and of Muslims’ relations with non-Muslims universally.

Participant PI06 thinks that if state schools had more high calibre Muslim teachers who can be role models, it would have a major impact on improving the behaviour of Muslim boys. In this respect Bhatti (2011) argues that the enormous majority of Muslim children who attend state schools in Britain have not been taught by conventional teachers from their own communities who might become positive role models for them. Sirin et al. state:

While most other immigrant groups do not have an option to send their children to schools that are specifically geared toward their home cultures, some Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools where teachers and students do share similar cultural beliefs. (2009, p. 464).

In my opinion it is highly beneficial for the state to encourage state schools to employ Muslim teachers and encourage Islamic schools to employ non-Muslim teachers with similar benefits to society by bringing different views together and reducing societal differences. I also believe that we should re-think the educational strategy for a multicultural society where workshops and training are vital to create a sympathetic and understanding atmosphere to build a strong and cohesive society.

#### 4.6.1.2 Summary

In order to help their children learn about Islamic morals, behaviours and practices, Muslim parents want an Islamic environment**.** As viewed by Muslim parents, growing up in an Islamic environment plays a major role in becoming a good Muslim. Many parents see the placement of their children in an Islamic environment as clearly one of the primary considerations in choosing an Islamic school. Being in an Islamic school environment increases the parents’ sense of security for their children. Parents always connect the idea of a safe environment with Islamic schools where they feel their children are safe. Similarly, parents would worry about their children growing up in non-Islamic schools due to the problems such schools have to contend with, such as drugs, racism, bullying and other socially unacceptable behaviours. Parents feel comfortable with their children in an Islamic environment because they feel it is similar to their home environment. In addition to the similarity between home and school environment, Muslim parents always make a connection between a high level of secular and religious education and a safe environment where feeling safe leads to having good results in the familiar environment of Islamic schools.

Islamic schools play a major part in confidence-building with Muslims. Furthermore, some children feel under pressure when they are in other school environments because they need to explain their attire, their conduct, and their religious practices such as praying and fasting. Muslim parents, however, prefer an Islamic school environment, even when they have difficulty in paying tuition fees. Moreover, they believe that funding is important for Islamic schools to develop an effective strategy and the new vision is finding ways to improve Islamic schools.

The knowledge that children are in an Islamic environment and setting where they are surrounded by Muslim teachers and children give their children a sense of belonging and the opportunity to gain positive attitudes from their classmates. Moreover, good teachers must be inspiring and give children the confidence they need to become effective and competent of independent thought in society.

## Single-sex Education

Single-sex education is a major issue in Muslim communities (see, for example, Elbih, 2012; Parker-Jenkins and Haw, 1996; Shaikh and Kelly, 1989). The majority of participating parents in my study were in agreement with wanting single-sex education for their children, especially in adolescence. All interview participants preferred single-sex education, while the questionnaire revealed two participants, when responding to this question, who were unsure of their preferences for single-sex education.

PQ07: I’m unsure whether it would affect learning if both genders are being taught together.

PQ03: Boys and girls are Muslims and should be trusted. Some Muslims go to state schools and are in the same classroom with other Muslim boys and girls.

A small number of the participating Muslim parents represented an important percentage of parents who considered single-sex education as not their preferred choice when compared to the total number of participating Muslim parents. This could give us an important insight into the Muslim parents in British society who advocate single-sex education for their children. It is worth establishing the basis upon which Muslim parents regard single-sex education as necessary or important. For example, the first of the foregoing participants was unsure of the positive influences of such an education on the teaching and learning experience regardless of gender.

To date, however, there has been no evidence to show that single-sex education could improve children’s learning and performances (see for example, Shah, 2009) or that co-educational education reduced children’s learning and achievement (see for example, Robinson and Smithers, 1999). Conversely, the second participant discussed this issue from the other side of this debate.

This parent believes Muslim children should be trusted because they are Muslims and seemingly have had a good religious upbringing resulting in being well behaved. The participant considers being in state schools with other Muslim children, regardless of gender, has no negative impact on Muslim children of the same background and their mixed state school education is harmless. It is therefore reasonable to say that Muslim children with a good family background, who have been taught how to behave in society can attend mixed schools without the concern of negative influences befalling them. For all of the aforementioned reasons, participating parents did not reject mixed primary education but prefer or sometimes affirmed their preference for single-sex secondary school education.

On the other hand, most other Muslim parents in my two samples (questionnaire and interview) and all interviewed prefer separate-sex schools for boys and girls after puberty for many reasons including religious, cultural, and behavioural ones.

### 4.7.1 Religious Reasons

Most participants said they preferred single-sex schooling after puberty for Islamic religious reasons (Shah, 1998) which require children to be separated after puberty.

PI011: I like my children to be in single-sex schools because they are Muslims and it is haram to be in a mixed school because Islam instructs us to be in separate schools. It is better to be in separate schools. I prefer single-sex schooling for my kids.

Many participants believed that girls are forbidden to be in the same school with boys.

PI010: In our religion children must be separated when they reach a special age, because at that stage they need to be separated, especially in schools. Boys and girls have to study in separate single-sex schools.

According to this participant, secondary age children should be separated in schools.

Others consider that according to the Prophet Muhammad, the sexes must be separated, so they asserted that children ought to be in single-sex schools.

PI06: In my opinion, girls and boys should be separated because our Prophet (p.b.u.h.) asked us to do so. So in my opinion, they should be separate[d] in Islamic schools.

PI07: It is good for girls to be in separate schools because mixing sex is forbidden in Islam; it is against Islam. Mixed schooling affects their achievements. It is also of the best interests of the girls and boys.

Religion has been the major influence affecting the decision-making of participating Muslim parents touched on by previous participating parents, all of whom indicated that single-sex education is a religious choice without reference to other educational issues and regardless of whether it stems from Qur’an or Hadith. Shah and Iqbal (2011) argue that “the Qur’anic teachings may not be gender discriminatory, but the discourses that have been produced in articulation with multiple social, economic, political and cultural factors in different Muslim societies and legitimised in the name of religion are often gendered”.(p. 768). It can be argued that gendered education is not necessarily religious in origin (or derived from the Qur’an) but has developed due to cultural and other factors. This point might link to the power of culture and tradition that many of the participating parents mentioned when they were talking about their motivation for sending their children to single-sex Islamic schools (see section 4.4.2).

Shah and Conchar’s (2009) study - which included the teachers, parents/carers, community leaders, faith groups and others, a large number of students and young people from mixed schools, faith schools and single-sex schools - found that about 90 per cent of Muslims, 27 per cent of Christians, 28 per cent of no religion, and 52.9 per cent of others stated that single-sex education was ‘very important/ important’. Some might argue that if 90 per cent say single-sex education is important/very important, why do over 90 per cent of Muslim parents send their children to mixed schools in the UK? Although this percentage emphasises the impact of beliefs and culture on these choices or preferences, many other significant factors affect Muslim parents’ choices regarding their children’s education. These factors, as mentioned above, include economic, social, political and other dimensions of these issues which sometimes prevent Muslim parents from sending their children to single-sex schools. This point may also explain the minority of Muslim parents who send their children to Islamic schools as I mentioned at the beginning of my research.

Respondents in Shah and Conchar (2009) study were also monitored by heritage (heritage for the purposes of this study is defined as born in the UK/not born in the UK). Single-sex education was recognised as ‘very important/important’ by 43.6% of respondents born in the UK and 60.6% of those not born in the UK: a greater percentage of those not born in the UK favour single-sex education. Shah and Conchar’s (2009) findings indicate that about half of the female respondents from this ethnic group are also not in favour of single-sex education” (p. 194). The most interesting findings were that “the main priority of young people is an inclusive, democratic and equal opportunities environment rather than a single-sex or single-faith school” (p. 195).These findings pointed to changing attitudes of the youth generation compared to their parents’ generation. Their findings also reflect the impact of environment on educational preferences.

In fact, Muslims in the West have created communities that maintain strong familial, emotional, cultural, social, political and other relations with their countries of origin. It can be argued that religious concerns have a strong influence on the Muslim communities within their host society. However, the question is, how may these concerns have affected Muslim communities in general? In other words, what is the situation of Muslim youth when they are educated in separate schools? And does this type of school harm the new Muslim generation’s interaction within the whole society?

These questions might reflect some educators’ views, Halstead and Mclaughlin, (2005) argue that

Faith schools involve restricted non-common educational environments because the very nature of the school involves the separation of a group of children and young people for schooling from the rest of society: a Catholic, Jewish or Muslim school, for example, is intended primarily for children and young people of that faith, despite the fact that, for various reasons, admissions to the school may extend beyond these boundaries. The educational environment of a faith school is ‘restricted’ and ‘non-common’ in that it is precisely intended for a particular group within society and not for society as a whole. (p. 63).

Moreover, there was an acknowledgement that limiting young people to single-sex organisations had a negative impact on their social skills. Shah and Conchar’s study (2009) showed that although single-sex education was supported by the majority of the entire participants in the focus groups, there were strong and unambiguous reasons offered by many, primarily women and young people, in support of co-education to prepare young people for ‘the real world’ (p. 195).

This point is contrasted by some participating Muslim parents who see that Muslim schools are not necessarily dividing society

PI014: Islamic schools produce respectable quality students who will make appreciated contributions to our society. They do not divide our society or destroy cohesion. In fact, we need to prepare our children for good relationships with others not to isolate them from the whole society. We have our own religion and identity and we expect society to treat us with respect and admiration.

It is important to mention that there are many other social factors that might affect people’s interaction and cause problems inside societies. The Ouseley Report (2001), for example, lists some of these factors:

[L]ack of communication between communities; a political structure bowing to community leaders and regeneration programmes forcing communities to bid against each other; a poor public image of the area and poor public services, exacerbating White and minority ethnic flight; and a segregated school system that has failed to challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes and played a marginal role in brokering cultural shifts between family, school, and public life. These are the forces that have led to inter-cultural intolerance of a highly ethnicised nature, in a public realm of relinquished commitment to the commons. (as cited in Amin and Parkinson 2002).

On the other hand, Muslim parents claim to favour Islamic schools chiefly because they combine the National Curriculum and an Islamic religious curriculum. In their opinion, this combination provides all aspects of education, safeguards their children’s future and affirms their children’s belonging and interactions with others. In other words, were the State to take greater control and favourably fund such schools many fears of social divisiveness, conflict, radicalism and extremism would diminish. The majority of my participating Muslim parents believe that the best choice for their children is to offer them the best chance to continue their education in a safe environment together with a high quality religious and secular education. They believe these features will create good citizens and make the whole of society stronger.

Ramadan (2004) states that protecting children from bad influences and making them live among Muslims are the most important objectives for establishing the phenomenon of Islamic schools. However, he argues that these motivations might cut off young Muslims from their surrounding society. He asserts “some Islamic schools are in the West but, apart from the compulsory disciplines, live in another dimension: while being not completely ‘here’, neither are they completely from ‘there’, and one would like the child to know who he is” (p. 131). Ramadan (2004) states that “the school puts forward a way of life, a space, and a parallel reality that has practically no link with the society around it” (p. 131). Although the programmes of such schools are drawn up in line with the national curriculum, there is the fact that in wider society young Muslim people are surrounded by others who do not share their faith and they might not otherwise meet socially even though they are living in the same society. This is also might be a big challenge that Islamic schools are facing in the west. The strategy of Islamic schools must reflect both their students’ original culture and the new culture they are becoming part of (see Bectovic, 2011). Some of my participants mentioned that education is the best way for Muslims to integrate into their host society

PI08: If they [Muslims] want to make their mark, they must also interact and education is the only valuable direction to achieve this objective. Muslim communities should be more structured, interact in society, and think about their interaction in the society in which they live.

As mentioned in previous chapters, while Muslim parents who prefer sending their children to such schools are very much a minority, the large majority of Muslim parents, who choose to live in the west might be concerned about isolating their children from the surrounding society if they sent their children to Islamic schools (see for example, Haw, 1994; Merry, 2005c).

However, Ramadan (20) states that “[w]hile the public school system teaches children to express themselves, give their opinions, and articulate their doubts and hopes, the exact opposite is found in some mosques and Islamic organizations” (p. 127). Ramadan asks an important question, “By adding ‘Islamic’ disciplines (e.g., learning the Qur’an and the traditions) and teaching them in the classical manner (that is to say, usually as it is done ‘there’), do we really give the pupils the tools they need to live here, pious, self-fulfilled, and aware of their responsibilities?” (p. 131). His answer is “a scattering of Islamic teachings, verses learned by heart, and values idealistically passed on do not necessarily forge a personality whose faith is deep, whose consciousness is alert, and whose mind is active and critical” (p. 132).

Ramadan (2004) argues that the legitimacy of Islamic schools should be evaluated by their ability to produce Islamic education objectives which include the education of mind, the education of heart and the education of mind and heart (see section, 2.3.4). However, he claims that most Islamic schools are still far from achieving even a minor part of these objectives:

[S]ome schools continue to serve up an education that pushes children toward the development of two contradictory personalities—one within a school that tries to provide a happy environment and where Islamic teaching and behaviour have been inculcated, and the other outside school, where they end up getting lost without knowing how to use ethical references to establish their own ethical guideposts because they have not really been prepared to face life in society and to interact with others in it (p. 132).

It can be argued that Islamic schools should update their strategy and try to follow new educational theories to solve the many problems they face in the host societies (see section, 4.4.1.1). In my opinion, education and more interaction in society is the best way for Muslim communities to have far more opportunities to change their standing and outlook in life. The Muslim community is one of the biggest communities in Britain and needs to think wisely about its situation, about what it wants and its place in British society. They should try to persuade their host society that there is nothing to fear from its educational philosophy. They should also continue to work with their host society around their educational philosophy and the acceptance of its peaceful character.

Ramadan states that there are some Islamic schools in Britain, Sweden and United States which have tried to find an alternative solution for the educational crisis by recruiting qualified teachers of any background. They also keep in touch with wider society through various activities.

They are in touch with the outside and, through a variety of activities, make it possible for their pupils to get a better grasp of their surroundings and to interact with children of the same age and with their fellow-citizens and to put their ethical teaching into practice through visible acts of solidarity grounded in the society in which they live (p. 132).

Following on this, I suggest that if Islamic schools adopted this strategy of interaction they would offer a good example of schools for the Muslim minority. It would mean a very good start for young Muslims giving them a huge opportunity to integrate into their society. Offering ‘state funded’ Islamic schools also is a good solution for many problems because when the state funds such schools it offers all facilities, improves the educational and integrational standards and makes it possible for Muslim youth to have a better relationship with others surrounding them in their society. The state and such schools combining forces could lead to developing greater integration of minority communities.

### 4.7.2 Cultural Reasons

Cultural reasons for segregating children at a specific age are very important to the majority of parents as reflected in the participants’ statements. Mixed schools are unacceptable for these parents for religious reasons. The following parent cannot imagine her daughter in a mixed school and would be worried that her daughter received negative influences.

PI04: I think Islam is better because the boys and girls must not mix. Single-sex school is perfect as I doubt whether I could send my daughter to a mixed-sex school because I think other people with a poor cultural background might influence her, which we are keen to avoid.

PI012: I prefer single-sex schools for children, especially over 10 or 11 years old, because it is better for them to be in separate schools.

From the previous participant’s view we touch on the importance of culture and its strong impact on Muslim cultural matters. Some parents, ignorant of cultural issues, feel concern that mixed schools might have an adverse influence on their children. I think the participant may mean that Muslim children attending co-educational state schools could feel stressed with the constant need to explain their actions when unable to find people who understood their cultural background. As all pupils in Islamic schools are Muslim, they have the same values and cultural issues to behave naturally without the need to explain their actions.

Others have argued that separation is a religious requisite, socialising the discourses by claiming that “in Muslim culture girls are not allowed to go out with boys, which is not a problem in a single-sex school” (Shah and Conchar, 2009, p. 27). However, “the tendency amongst second generations to set apart religion from culture can be partly attributed to their British education which fosters rational and critical thinking” (Ijaz and Abbas, 2010, p. 323). On the other hand, it has been argued that young Muslim women have shown better social, political and theological engagement based on their identities as British-born Muslims within the host society. Abbas (2010) confirms that “without doubt, it is reasonably well confirmed that Muslim women outperform their male counterparts in higher education, and are more successful in negotiating issues of ethnicity, identity and high profile religious minority status” (p. 291).

Another participant believed there is no need for separate primary schools but stressed that single-sex secondary schooling is vital for teenagers. In this participant’s view, this period is critical because of the free environment in mixed schools. Children of this age like to experiment and cannot always recognise right from wrong. Even though she had reservations, she agreed for her daughter to be in a state single-sex school. She believes that education does not work without religion, even if the schools are single-sex.

PI09: Not all schools are bad if they are mixed, but a child from the reception stage to Year Six does not need to be in a separate school. The problems begin with teenagers because they don’t know right from wrong, and think that they are here in the country of freedom and can [get] bad information from wrong sources. \*\*\*\* High School for girls is a single-sex school. Although a private single-sex school is better for your child, it is better to put your child in a private school for your culture and religion. Notwithstanding, private non-religious schools can also cause many problems because people like to try different things.

Muslims do not reject mixed sex schooling in their entirety. While happy for their children to attend mixed primary schools, at the critical time of adolescence, participating parents wanted their children to attend single sex secondary schools. Muslim parents, and I assume this is also true for all parents, try to do their best to protect their children through puberty. In this context we should consider the Muslim parents’ views of single-sex schooling:

1. Being in mixed sex primary schools is acceptable.
2. Single-sex secondary school education is critical for religious and cultural reasons.

Some parents consider that even children of seven must be separated due to Islamic rules, which is a view held by one participant and that being in state schools means other boys and girls might touch one another. These different views might come from the cultural stereotypes that have influenced especially the first Muslim migrants. Ijaz and Abbas (2010), in their study of the attitude of women’s education by first migrant parents and second-generation British-born parents, showed serious concerns about mixed schools. Their respondents wanted their daughters to be in single-sex schools due to their religious and cultural beliefs, even if they were very young. They found that although the overwhelming attitude toward the education of parents was positive and that they wanted their daughters to have a good education without differentiating between boys and girls, among the first generation “there was a common fear of the influence of ‘decadent Western society’ destroying the moral and cultural values of their daughters”. (p. 322). This view is shared by the following participant:

PI01: I love it and agree with it because of the needs for girls and boys. When they were children we must look after them. Islamic rules state that children are to be separated at the age of seven and so they have to be separated in schools. I want to say that in state schools both boys and girls are together. They will push, touch, and all of which is haram.

According to Ijaz and Abbas (2010), “[f]irst-generation migrants with little or no education possess limited formal knowledge of their religion and in fact adhere to a version of Islam mixed with distinct cultural practices”. (p. 322). In this situation, Shah and Iqbal (2011) argue that when a social or educational context seems a threat to this belief system, then “discourses are created as authorised by religion to legitimise them”.

Another parent sees no problem with children younger than ten years old being in mixed schools. She stressed that secondary schools must be single-sex for the above-ten-year-old.

PI03: It depends on the age. As I said, if they are under than ten in primary school, there is no need for a single-sex school. But when they reach adolescence, which is very critical age, and where the mistakes are made, in that specific age group, especially below 6th Form, secondary schools must be single-sex.

My research evidence shows that, for these parents, choosing single-sex schools depends on the child’s age. As previously mentioned, participating parents were not concerned about their children attending co-educational primary schools which was seen as a non-issue in childhood. We could argue that this is predicated on their parents’ experiences in the host society whether for themselves or their children. They might have disliked their own experiences particularly related to the values and morals of mixed state schools which are considered to offer limitless freedom. It is important to remember that most participating parents educate their children, especially boys, in state schools but are more aware of the need for their girls to attend single-sex Islamic schools. Many parents also mentioned the experiences of their relatives or neighbours which possibly affected their decisions in relation to single-sex schooling.

It could be argued that culture has added more complications than religion in enabling Muslims to integrate themselves into British society (see Section 4.3.1.2). Subsequently, and on a daily basis, Britain’s Muslims face the dilemma of encountering the Western view that Islam is anathema to British culture and of competing with the misconstruction of their faith Islam (Lewis, 2002).

In relation to cultural issues, the next participant said that there is no difference between boys and girls in relation to protection. But Muslim parents consider their daughters’ well-being by sending them to single-sex schools because their culture is as important as their religion. Muslims are used to dealing with cultural issues and sometimes they see it as a fundamental matter. Culture has become more involved in Muslims’ lives, especially in the West. They have seen that community culture and values are threatened by state schools with co-educational provision, while girls-only schools are seen as providing a relatively infiltration-free zone because of the separated context, therefore supporting religious and cultural dialogue (Shah and Iqbal, 2011). Anwar (1994) in his study claims that one of his participants saw that “co-education is okay until they are teenagers, then the problem starts about going out with boys, etc., because we like our girls to marry into our own religious group and see them happy”. (p. 31).

PI014: Although it is correct to protect your daughter, it is equally important to protect your son. In this culture, girls may carry a ‘black mark’ whereas boys can do anything.

It is possible that his combined perception of religion and culture is what determines Muslim thinking of their children’s education. In some respects, Muslims care about the secular, cultural and religious education their children receive. Of particular concern is the emphasis which Muslims place on the honour of their daughters which has significant cultural and religious implications. On occasion, this deep sense of honour pressurises parents to consider their convictions and community direction. In other words, some parents might not be convinced by the education their girls receive in Islamic schools but cannot go against stereotypical thinking. Although the same can also be said of boys, parents face less pressure due to the different stereotypical viewpoint which affects boys. Boys have far more freedom in the Muslim community with cultural tradition giving them many more freedoms which are forbidden to girls. It cannot be argued that it is Islam which allows boys to behave as they wish because of their gender. Rather it is cultural rather than religious views which influence Muslim thinking affecting both genders and which reinforce the classical view especially in dealings with girls.

As I mentioned, many Muslim parents consider that sending girls to single-sex schools is a cultural and religious requirement. They deal with girls as a special case, with some parents sending their daughters simply to be in a separate environment, even if the quality of education is not perfect, as in the following participants’ view.

PI08: Muslim parents regard their girls like valuable jewellery to be protected, a concept which I can understand. In some ways, I think that it is a hypocritical idea by people who send their girls to school for this reason and are not bothered with the education they receive. The only reason they are sending them to these schools is because they are girls and because there are only girls in that school.

The point of this finding has been confirmed by Ijaz and Abbas’s (2010) study, where Muslim parents see single-sex Islamic schools as the best solution for all their fears and concerns regarding their daughters’ education despite the quality of the education on offer. There was a vast demand for single-sex schools in their area, where children could obtain both religious and Western education. In their study (2010) all parents, notwithstanding differences in terms of education, age, and sex, asserted that they would give their daughters plenty of opportunities to study as much as they required in Islamic schools. Nevertheless, the majority of parents were not worried about the standard of education in these schools. Shah and Iqbal (2011) also confirmed this finding in their study. They state that “parents may choose single-sex schools purely because it is single-sex, which is appropriate in their faith/culture, rather than because of the quality of the school”. (p. 194).

The education of Muslim women has received huge attention, especially in the West. Ijaz and Abass (2010) in their study of Muslim parents’ attitudes toward women’s education, claim that the first generation of Muslim parents were not concerned about sending their boys to mixed state schools. They allowed their sons boundless freedom while limiting their daughters’ activities. This can be explained in terms of the concept of honour and shame. The stereotype of women is that women should behave with seemly modesty. On the other hand, the second generation did not base this distinction on gender. They were equally worried about boys as well as girls. While they still encouraged sexual modesty with girls, parents also feared boys becoming morally corrupted and involved with criminal activities such as those associated with illegal drugs. Parents did not accept the justification for Western equality; they preferred the equality of Islam.

Sending girls to single-sex schools is common in many Muslim families (see Anwar, 1994; Ijaz and Abbas, 2010). The participant below informed me of her experience when she was of school age. Her parents sent her and her sister to a single-sex Islamic school but sent her brothers to state school. She feels that if her brothers had also gone to the Islamic schools, they would have been better educationally and morally than they are now.

PI04: My parents sent my sister and me to an Islamic school, but sent my brothers to a state school. When my brothers went to a state school, I thought that had they gone to an Islamic school. They would have received better education.

In general, participating parents prefer single-sex education for boys and girls. Most of them agreed that boys and girls should be educated separately and that it was not only relevant to girls. They preferred single-sex schools for boys in the same way that they preferred it for girls and saw no difference in separate education for both genders.

PI07: We need to protect boys as well as girls, regardless to the gender. Single-sex education is good and is, in fact, better for both sexes because when they are together, they will not focus well on their study but try to make contact with other boys and girls.

Single-sex education is obviously an important issue for participating Muslim parents. In previous studies (see for example, Anwar, 1994; Ijaz and Abbas, 2010; Ijaz and Abass, 2010) single-sex schooling was chosen more often for girls than boys. In my study, however, participating Muslim parents asserted their preference for boys and girls to attend separate schools, a finding which might be due to the Muslim parents’ experiences of their children’s education. Many parents choose to send girls to single-sex schools but sent boys to mixed schools for previously mentioned reasons. Some parents opined that they found, over a period of time, mixed schooling was also harming their boys. This led many participating parents to believe they should also send their sons to single-sex schools. It could be argued that, economic reasons are crucial in this situation. Sending both boys and girls to private single-sex schools is very expensive. The economic position of the family has to be taken into consideration when discussing parental decisions - not only Muslim parents - regarding the type of education they offer for their children, both boys and girls.

According to Shah and Iqbal (2011), parents are influenced by fewer considerations when choosing a boys-only school. These are usually educational achievement and affordability. For girls, however, parents are influenced by a broader range of considerations.

Cultural determinants, social manipulations, gender discrimination, economic priorities, religious interpretations, political exploitations, and simple pragmatics, to vested interests and many others. (Shah and Iqbal, 2011, p. 764).

Dealing equally with both sexes enables parents to protect boys and girls, as indicated in the following view:

PI010: I prefer single-sex schools for boys and girls. I do not agree with the practice of only sending girls to single-sex schools. We are here to take care of our boys and girls, because if we only take care of the girls, we are destroying the opposite sex and taking care of one sex means we also need to take care of the other sex. As parents, we have to treat both boys and girls equally.

PI03: If you are going to choose single-sex education for one gender of your children, then it is important to do for both. I chose single-sex for my boys and girls.

According to the next participant’s view, all schools, whether Islamic or state, should be single-sex. He believed that single-sex schooling is more beneficial and it was more common in this country in the past. For example, he observed that schools in this country used to have separate entrances for boys and girls (see, for example, Ivinson and Murphy, 2007).

PI08: If you can have separate schools for girls then the boys can also be separated. Girls and boys, whether they were in Islamic or non-Islamic, Muslim and non-Muslim, including state schools, could be separated. Schools which do that, used to have girls’ entrances and boys’ entrances, so I don’t know why they have changed that.

In conclusion, in most participants’ views single-sex schooling is a religious requirement after a child’s puberty. This finding has been confirmed by Shah and Conchar in their study (2009). Segregating children was seen as very important with mixed schools being unacceptable to these parents for religious reasons. Although some parents believe there is no need for separate schools at primary stage, they asserted that single-sex schools are vital for teenagers. Furthermore, in terms of culture, this has had a major impact on people’s views in relation to their children’s education. Culture has added more complications than religion in relation to enabling Muslims to integrate themselves into British society (see Ramadan, 2004). Normally people try to protect their daughters and give boys more freedom, because of their culture. Many Muslim parents think sending girls to single-sex schools is a cultural and religious requirement. Most of the parents in my study, however, prefer single-sex education for both boys and girls, mostly agreeing on separate education and single-sex schools as being relevant for boys. They saw no difference in separate education for both genders.

### 4.7.3 Behavioural Reasons

Behavioural issues are also important for participating Muslim parents. The majority of participants agreed that single-sex education is best for their children to be assured of good behaviour starting at a young age, which is easier to promote in single-sex schools. In their study of girls from one single-sex and one co-educational school, Granleese and Joseph (1993) considered self-concept in the context of behaviour and self-concept. They found that girls in single-sex schools were less critical of their behavioural mode than girls in mixed schools. This lack of criticism was one of the best predictors of overall self-worth in single-sex education. Other observations include girls having a comfortable attitude, with less pressure over their appearance and dressing as they chose. Guarisco (2010) argues that boys of poor families and minority groups attending boys-only schools improve their level of achievement through improved behaviour, where teachers focused on differences in learning style.

PI02: It is good for both sexes to be educated separately, not just morally … their behaviour. When my daughter goes to the school I cannot see what she is doing there. But when they grow up they can be responsible, go outside, and learn how to behave with people generally and members of the opposite sex.

According to the next view, single-sex Islamic schools give both boys and girls a good opportunity to behave naturally and properly. In her opinion, both sexes at this age need an environment in which they can understand and deal with their lives. This environment can be found in single-sex Islamic schools.

PI02: In general, single-sex Islamic schools are good. Also, when separating girls from boys, we are teaching something different or talking to boys differently. Boys and girls are at an age where they have limited knowledge about many of the things they are learning. So when they go to different [separate] schools, girls would learn about everything which would prepare them to know right from wrong and would be able to make their own decisions.

These Muslim parents claim to prefer single-sex schooling because it protects their children’s behaviour by teaching them Islamic values and keeping them away from many bad things. Shah and Conchar (2009) consider that “Islamic schools with emphasis on Islamic values, moral code and sex-segregation appear to provide a ‘safe haven’ where young Muslims are expected to learn to be worthy members of the community” (p. 55). According to the view below, the best way to educate children is for girls to be with girls and boys with boys at least in the early ages of education, after which they can decide whether or not to go to university.

PI02: I think it is good for young children to be in single-sex schools; they should have full and complete education in separate environment – then decide whether they want to go to university. In my opinion, single-sex schools protect the children from many bad things.

PQ05: They [the children] are much safer [in their single-sex schools] and they are a very good environment for my daughter and my son to be in.

The most important questions arising from these views are:

1. Who can decide that single-sex education offers an environment which prevents children coming into contact with bad things?
2. And who can decide which type of things is bad?

‘Bad things’ for Muslim parents may not be bad for other parents; cultural issues affect people of different backgrounds and religions could indicate their thinking affecting traditional and, perhaps also, religious values. Although Muslims in the West are now often third or fourth generation, they may still retain their ancestors’ thinking which is not to say, however, that single-sex schooling is an old-fashioned form of education. In fact, Muslims still follow their cultural and religious values to ensure their children behave correctly and protect them in their new society. It can be argued that Islamic values and morals, however, are not necessarily in conflict with societal values and morals.

Some parents spoke frankly about the bad things which worried them if their children were in mixed schools. The participant below talked about sexual relationships in the early teenage years. She feels that being in mixed schools increases this risk especially.

PQ010: There is a certain age when boys and girls must be separated because of the problems which could result from being together at a very young age. Sexually active children may undergo teenage pregnancy.

Muslim parents’ views regarding sex education were the most contentious issue in respect of co-educational schools. It is fair to say that these Muslim parents vigorously oppose their children – boys and girls alike – attending mixed sex schools. Participating Muslim parents believe that being in a separate environment protects their children from sexual relationships outside marriage. Islam’s strict principles on sex forbid women and men having relations outside of marriage which itself has detailed requirements and is more highly valued in Islamic society. Although I believe Muslim parents are not against sex education *per se*, especially in single-sex schools, they oppose the way it is taught in schools; they want children to know everything about their bodies and sexual life but prefer it to be carried out in an Islamic way (see, for example, The British Muslims for Secular Democracy*,* 2010).

The following participant fully agreed with the view that children in single-sex Islamic schools are likely to behave in a good way and that they learn many things that give them good knowledge and, as a result, they have improved behaviour and confidence due to the special atmosphere where girls feel more comfortable by being in a same-sex school. For the same reasons, boys also behave properly and feel more confident.

PI013: For me, single-sex schooling makes children behave positively. They [single-sex schools] give ideas about what is going on, and everything which makes their confidence stronger and makes them behave suitably. Girls feel more confident and could communicate with others without any distraction by the other sex inside class or inside school. In boys-only schools, boys also feel more comfortable and could concentrate better on their study, which, as a result, have positive impact on their behaviour.

Although this participant is not educated to a high level, her overview of the classroom situation affecting girls and boys, is a view which reflects many concurring academic views that single sex schools are a good environment for both genders without distractions and poor performance (see for example, Granleese and Joseph,1993; Goodlad, 1984; Lee and Bryk 1986; Salomone 2003).

Other participants indicated that they would also prefer single-sex schools for their children, even when there are no Islamic schools in their areas, or if offered cheaper and better education. This view could be supported by Shah and Conchar’s (2009) study on single-sex education, in which they found that 58.6% of adult male respondents and 51.5% of women respondents respectively stated that single-sex schooling is important or very important. Shah and Conchar (2009) collected their data under four main headings: education; culture; religion; and social. Many respondents argued that single-sex education offers a better environment with more focus on education, and complained that teachers in mixed-sex schools often support one gender in preference to another, and also mentioned high achievement and performance.

PI05: I will say that even if there were no Islamic schools and the ‘A’ levels in my area were cheaper or offered better education, I would still prefer to send my children to single-sex schools, even if they were not Islamic schools. I would not send them to mixed schools. I would only consider a single-sex school for my sons and daughters.

Single-sex schooling can be more important than religious education for some participating Muslim parents. According to the previous participant, being in a single sex school is significant even where it is a secular school. In my opinion, this view derives from the concept of having a safe environment where many parents - not only Muslim – regard single-sex schools as safer than mixed gender schools.

Furthermore, same-sex teachers in schools are as important as having same-sex peers. The following participant sees that such teachers have a good influence on the children’s behaviour. In her view, the teachers in these schools play a larger role and when children go to such schools they will find they are supported by teachers who are from the same sex.

Being in an Islamic school environment and atmosphere gives children the chance to learn and behave with the support of their teachers. The previous participant stressed that boys should also be in single-sex Islamic schools because they will also gain and improve their education by going to Islamic schools, with same-sex teachers offering high achievement in a safe environment.

PI06: If there is a boys’ school they will teach them in a proper institute, with proper teachers. Some of our children don’t have good parents, such as single mothers who have one or two boys who go to an Islamic school where there is a good teacher [who] will become a father figure to those boys. Our society has created many behavioural problems, so I think boys also need to be in a safe environment where they can learn with men to support them. When men are good Muslims, [they] will solve most of our problems. For that reason, we must consider the boys, to ensure we develop good boys as well as girls.

In this participant’s opinion one could argue that male teachers are essential in the boys’ schools. The question here is this: Is the teacher’s gender important? In the Islamic view, teachers in boys’ schools must be males. From this participant’s view, however, the psychological outlook of male teachers is also important which may play a big role and sometimes influence boys’ behaviour in schools. Good teachers could be father-figures for children without fathers for reasons such as divorce or death and might be very helpful for single mothers who have difficulty communicating problems with their sons. It is significant to say that at this specific period of their life, boys need to be with fathers or teachers who can communicate well with them and understand their needs which they cannot explain or share with their mothers. However, it is also important to note that this point might reflect patriarchy in Islamic society and culture where men have more power over their families and where all members of Muslim family are controlled by the father of the family. This view might stem from Muslim traditional, religious and cultural outlooks. Although some would argue this is religious and others would argue it is cultural, this patriarchy does not uniformly define modern Muslim families. Keddie (2009) states that

Muslim feminists tend to stress the gender justice principles in the Qur’an and endorse its differentiated approach to equity – a ‘separate but equal’ approach where men and women are fundamentally equal before God but have different capacities according to their ‘natural’ and complementary roles (p. 267).

Such concerns are amongst the most debatable issues raised in liberal philosophy and which have affected the views of others regarding Islam, Muslim culture and identity (see for example, Halstead, 1991).

### Summary

To sum up, Muslim parents who participated in my study argued that in order to promote good behaviour from a young age, single-sex education was the best for their children. In their views, single-sex schools are the best choice because no damage is likely to be caused by attending these schools. In response to the fourth research question – according to some Muslim parents how does single-sex Islamic education influence their children’s behaviour? – my participants claimed that single-sex schools were the best choice since they improve children’s behavioural characteristics, create a healthy atmosphere for children of both genders to ask questions, talk of everything, and decide upon what they want in their lives. These findings have been confirmed before (see, for example, Smithers and Robinson, 2006; Shah and Conchar, 2009).

### Children’s Academic Achievement

Children in single-sex schools, as the following participant claims, can concentrate more and can improve their achievement. Feeling comfortable with the same sex gives children more confidence and as a result affecting their achievements in a positive way.

PI012: They concentrate more on their education. There is no single factor that can affect their achievement and they feel more comfortable to say anything with children of the same sex.

It is important to mention that many studies have confirmed the low achievement of Muslim students in state schools (Abbas, 2004; Anwar and Bakahsh, 2002). According to the 2001 Census (ONS), one third of Muslim students leave school without qualifications. Shah (2008) says that these low achievements have been caused by many factors, such as socio-economic background, school factors, gender, population mix, region, length of stay in Britain and many other reasons. Improving children’s achievement is an important benefit of being in single-sex schools, as many studies (Goodlad, 1984; Lee and Bryk 1986; Salomone 2003) observe that students in single-sex schools are more focused on their studies, spend more time on homework, and show higher academic achievement than students in co-educational schools. Grase (2003) and Bryk et al. (1993) state that positive effects on academic achievement in mathematics, science, reading and writing at the second- and final-year levels for pupils have been experienced by pupils who attend single-sex schools. Salomone argues:

Evidence from abroad [suggests] that single-sex schools increase both interest and course-taking not only in math, science and technology among girls, but also in language arts and foreign languages among boys, academic subjects traditionally less favoured by them. (2006, pp. 792.793).

Other participants agreed with the view on the benefits of single-sex education on their children’s achievement.

PI06: Although boys always wanted to interact with the girls and the girls also wanted to interact with the boys, they also feel shame and shy of each other.

The participant above was very sure when I asked her: Do you mean single-sex education improves their achievements?

PI01: Yes, because they could do what they want to do when they are separate, but when they are together, they may feel shy and hesitant.

In understanding this view, the participating parent might mean that by being in the separate single-sex school environment, gives their children far more confidence and freedom to express their opinions openly. On the other hand, however, does a separate classroom environment enhance children’s confidence levels? A same sex environment is unable to measure the child’s confidence due to being in a separate space without features that could affect their behaviour. In other words, it is a good opportunity to measure whether or not a child has confidence and self-esteem in a mixed environment. In my opinion, no evidence exists to show whether a separate or mixed environment affects a child’s confidence. Rather, the child’s confidence levels are affected by personality rather their environment.

This view can be compared with another participant’s opinion who considers that single-sex education has negative (see Robinson and Smithers, 1999; Vail, 2002) and positive effects (see Salomone, 2006; Roidan, 2004; Granleese and Joseph, 1993). Oigara (2011) states that boys felt good to share their classes with girls, as it enabled them to develop a good knowledge of the opposite sex and to have good relations with them. On the other hand, he then argues that the single-sex classroom permits concentration on study without any distraction from the opposite sex. Vail (2002) says, the “advantage most often associated with separate schooling of boys and girls is the elimination of distraction. Freed from the worries of impressing the opposite sex, boys and girls can focus on their books” (p. 35). Although he reveals both aspects, he stressed that there are far more positive than negative effects, the negative effects being such as the lack of confidence and an embarrassment with girls.

PI014: I went to a single-sex school when I was a child. There are more disadvantages than there are advantages. For example, when you go to college or university and you have never talked to girls before, the confidence becomes low, which is good thing in my opinion. On the positive side, it gives more focus on studies. When a child reaches thirteen or fourteen they reach adolescence and experience many distractions. When boys study with boys in a same-sex study environment, they become more competitive. The distraction of the opposite sex does not happen in single-sex schools, which provides a good learning environment.

Furthermore, the next participant thought that being in single-sex schools means we are protecting our next generation because we are helping them to save their time and concentrate far more on their studies without any distractions from the opposite sex. She sees that when boys and girls are together, they are always busy with each other, which will affect their achievements. However, in separate schools she claims they will focus on their lessons.

PI06: If boys and girls are together, what happens? I don’t think they are thinking of their learning. None of them will learn. What will we save for the country, future, and the new generation? This is our next generation, so all for the country. If boys and girls are separated, they would achieve better. They are wasting their time. Boys always look at the girls and want to do everything. Maybe I am wrong but this is my personal view about this country’s schools. If they made them single-sex, they will achieve better results.

PQ010: Being in a single-sex school improves their [the girls’] performance because they concentrate on their education, but when they are in a mixed school, they try to impress the boys and so as a result, they would forget about their learning.

In some ways, single-sex education helps children concentrate on their studies without being distracted by the opposite sex. In mixed schools, sometimes children seek attention from others, especially the opposite sex, which might reduce their achievements. Advocates of single-sex classrooms and schools have provided two reasons for supporting this idea: firstly, distractions usually exhibited by the other sex and, secondly, the different learning styles of both sexes (Reeves, 2006). Some might say that although boys and girls distract each other in mixed schools, there are benefits to being in the same class together. It can give them the skills of dealing with the opposite sex and improves their confidence. From my experience with participating Muslim parents, confidence could be gained in different and many other ways than being in mixed schools. Muslims have their own ways of thinking especially regarding their daughters. They believe that to be a confident girl does not mean to be daring and bold but rather good Islamic manners is of a quiet, shy girl who has a limited sense of freedom without being apprehensive or hesitant, a view which is hard to understood by those without prior knowledge of the Muslim religious, cultural and traditional thinking.

Boys and girls in co-educational schools are distracted by each other. They always try to impress one another and this drives their attention away from individual learning. Vail (2002) says the most important advantage of single-sex schooling is the elimination of distractions between boys and girls. Boys and girls can focus on their books instead of impressing the opposite sex.

PI08: Less distraction is probably one thing. But generally speaking, I think the absence of the opposite gender results in less distractions, which is a benefit.

PI07: Single-sex education is very helpful. Students concentrate on their lessons more than anything else, whereas in mixed-sex schools, they compete with each other to be more beautiful.

I believe that distraction is an issue of concern to all parents whether or not they are Muslim. All parents know that children, especially in their adolescence, often want interactions with the opposite sex, usually at the expense of their lessons and achievements. Parents manage this in different ways; I feel sure participating Muslim parents are as keen to deal with religious distractions and cultural views.

In her experience, the following participant entirely agreed that single-sex education is beneficial. She found that her daughter concentrates on her studies and made good progress due to the lack of distraction.

PI03: I fully agree with single-sex education which I have found with my daughter. She is – *Masha’Allah –*, her grades are very high and I am satisfied that she is concentrating on her studies and did not spend her time on the distractions that she is likely to find in mixed schools.

At this special age, children are looking for relations with the opposite sex which can adversely affect their achievement. They may not concentrate on their lessons in preference to their appearance, in order to interact with the opposite sex. Conversely, in single-sex Islamic schools all girls wear the same uniform and deal with the same sex, which makes them more focused on their studies in order to achieve a high performance.

The next participant considered this point to be the most important benefit of single-sex Islamic schools.

PI08: I think it helps a lot. They want to look good for people but don’t care much about their education. In the girls’ school they are equal, all of them wear the same dress, have the same scarf and the same record of study, so they do not go and see who can get the best-looking guy or something and interact, join gangs. From my observations of Islamic school, there are very few gangs, yet in state schools, girls and boys form mixed groups in the school. So in this school [state schools] they like being together all of the time.

Some people may object to this by saying that most British schools have a uniform which all pupils must wear daily so making this point irrelevant. Regardless of whether it is state or private, British schools require the children to wear the school’s uniform to ensure their equality and organisation. It is noteworthy that the schools’ uniforms differ which can be unacceptable to those Muslim parents concerned by very short skirts which fail to reflect Muslim criteria for modesty. Furthermore, although the school uniform is similar, pupils add accessories to make them more attractive so that pupils become more interested in their appearance which can still distract them from their education.

Likewise, in this parent’s view, being in mixed schools affects the children’s religion and educational performances. She believes that being in single-sex schools makes children interact more inside the classroom and gives them good opportunities to attain high achievements. Mixed schools offer many distractions to draw their attention and lead them away from good performances.

PI04: What I hear nowadays has changed my view of mixed-sex schools. Girls and boys mix too much, and are far too free with each other. They don’t know about their religion, which plays a big part in me and my family. With their education they mix too much with other people of the opposite sex. They forget about the educational side of things.

In addition, the next participant stressed that single-sex schools, whether or not they are Islamic schools, achieve very high results because there are no distractions from the opposite sex. Being in single-sex schools enables children to concentrate more and to achieve high performances.

PI08: In terms of achievement, single-sex schools probably achieve higher results. If we take \*\*\*\* Girls High School, their report was 100%, 99% for everyone. It is a single-sex school, non-Islamic school, and even \*\*\*\* School for boys is also in the top category. I think it shows what can be achieved without any distractions from the opposite sex.

The relationship between single-sex schooling and good achievement has been argued. Shah and Conchar (2009) suggest that single-sex schools are generally selective. In respect of that, Shah and Conchar (2009) state that there is no definite evidence in terms of single-sex schooling and achievement because evaluation of single-sex education’s success or failure is “linked to multiple factors such as institutional goals and ethos, indicators of success used, historical context and status of school, student selection processes, and others” (p. 197). It is important to mention that good achievement in such private schools is not because they are single-sex but it relates to many factors such as being selective (see for example, Smithers and Robinson, 2006). This also reflects on Islamic schools where we can say they select pupils from traditional Muslim families with good backgrounds.

Many parents share this view. The parent below sees that all single-sex schools make a difference in the children’s performance. The exception with Islamic schools is the religious education. He believes that children in those schools are more confident because they don’t feel shame or embarrassment with the opposite sex.

PI013: They help them raise their standards, which I think is the same for Islamic and state schools, with the only difference being religious education. In Islamic schools girls and boys can achieve good results because they don’t feel ashamed and they are quiet because they are not afraid of the opposite sex. They are also more confident.

### Summary

In summary, according to many participants’ views, improving children’s achievement is an important benefit of being in single-sex schools. Children can concentrate more, increase their attainments, feel comfortable with the same sex, increase their confidence and affect their achievements in a positive way. Muslim parents believe that being in single-sex schools means protecting the next generation, because these schools are helping them to save their time and to focus on their studies without any distractions or side effects from the opposite sex. Single-sex schools, whether or not they are Islamic, achieve very high results and there are no distractions from the opposite sex. Children in those schools are more confident because they do not feel shame or embarrassment with the opposite sex.

## Conclusion

This chapter has tried to capture Muslim parents’ motivations for sending their children to Islamic schools. It has presented the results gathered from qualitative data collected through individual interviews and questionnaires with Muslim parents whose children attend Islamic schools. By presenting the results from the qualitative data collected for this study, it can be concluded that participating Muslim parents in general have no problem with their children attending state primary schools but stressed they want their children to attend Islamic secondary schools. Most participating Muslim parents also gave their children the opportunity to choose the school they wanted to attend. Nonetheless, some of them were sending their children to Islamic schools without having secured their children’s agreement, perhaps because they are still young and cannot choose or because this is their family’ tradition. This may also be because they had their own opinions of state schools, which they felt were unsuitable and disadvantageous for their children at the secondary stage. Moreover, according to parents’ aspirations, participating Muslim parents wanted their children to turn out with good values, highly educated, as worthy people, responsible citizens and respectable people. It is notably to conclude that the previous sections have answered the research questions, which were:

1. **Why do some Muslim parents send their children to Islamic schools?**

In brief, the most important motivations for choosing Islamic schools are:

1. **A ‘good education’.**

In this study all parents stressed that obtaining a ‘good education’ was the most vital reason for sending their children to an Islamic school. From the perspective of my participants, being in an Islamic school is the most effective way for them to offer a religious and secular education while also guaranteeing that their children’s education reflects their parents’ religion and culture. A ‘good education’ for participating parents means an education that includes both religious and secular education, Islamic knowledge, Islamic practices and Arabic language.

1. **Identity and Culture.**

Muslim parents in this study use the words ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ interchangeably and may sometimes talk of culture and mean identity and so on. This underlines that Islamic identity and culture are vital for Muslim parents because they believe Islamic schools help their children develop a sense of identity, belonging and culture, through teaching them about their religion. An Islamic identity is fundamental for Muslim parents and they believe Islamic schools help their children build a sense of identity and belonging in the course of teaching them about their religion and culture. In their view, children can have a socially adequate host society identity, provided that they maintain their culture and religious beliefs. Participating parents also believe that sending their children to Islamic schools will eliminate exposure to an abundance of inappropriate behaviour and acts in a society which are opposed to Islamic teachings. It is very important for participating Muslim parents to raise their children in an Islamic environment and they felt pleased and contented that their children experience such similarity between their home and school environments.

**C- Single-sex Education**

The majority of participants’ parents in my study were in agreement with single-sex education for their children, especially in adolescence. Muslim parents prefer separate-sex schools for boys and parents are happy for their children to attend mixed primary schools but believe their children must be in single-sex Islamic secondary schools or, in some cases, non-Islamic single-sex schools girls after puberty for many reasons, which include religious, cultural and behavioural issues. They feel that being in the classroom with the same sex gives children more confidence and as a result affects their performances in a positive way.

1. **Why do some Muslim parents prefer single-sex Islamic schools for their children?**

In general, Muslim parents prefer single-sex schools for boys and girls after puberty for many reasons, which include religious, cultural and behavioural issues. In their view, segregating children is very important with mixed schools being unacceptable to parents in a religious context. Moreover, in respect of cultural reasons, culture has had a major impact on people’s views in relation to their children’s education. The behavioural dissimilarities between sexes were also taken into account according to participating Muslim parents’ views.

1. **According to some Muslim parents, how does single-sex Islamic education influence their children’s behaviour?**

For these parents, single-sex schools were seen as the best choice for their children since they improve their behavioural characteristics, create a healthy atmosphere for children of both genders to ask questions, talk of everything, and decide upon what they want in their lives.

1. **According to some Muslim parents, how does single-sex education benefit their children’s academic performance?**

These Muslim parents believe that being in single-sex schools enhances children’s performance, thus protecting the next generation, because these schools are helping them to save their time and to focus upon their studies without any distractions or side effects from the opposite sex. Children can concentrate more, increase their attainment, feel comfortable with the same sex, increase their confidence and affect their achievements in a positive way.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Introduction

This thesis aims at a critical analysis of some Muslim parents’ motivations for sending their children to Islamic schools. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were predominantly used to collect and analyse the views of Muslim parents who have children attending two self-funded Islamic schools. The parents’ participants were identified from two private Islamic schools in a city in the north of England. The organisation and structure of the thesis is shown in Chapter One and consists of five chapters.

This chapter provides a summary of the important conclusions I have drawn from my study. In addition to this, I will draw attention to the educational significance of my research findings, including implications for further research.

My study has been conducted in order to determine some of the factors that motivate Muslim parents to enrol their children in Islamic schools.

In Chapter One I argued that even where communities are long established, they still feel that they need to educate children separately in order to support their moral values and to ensure the stability of the community. British society is now very much a multi-faith society and the topic of faith schools has become progressively more controversial. I identified faith in general and faith schools where the ethos of the school is based on the values of a particular religion whether it is state-funded or privately-run. A historical background of faith schools was presented including the types of such schools in the state sector including Voluntary-Controlled (VC) and Voluntary-Aided (VA) schools. In addition, faith schools in the wider school system and faith schools in the independent sector were mentioned in this chapter. I also presented the main issues and debates around faith schools between their advocates and their opponents. These issues and debates were presented in terms of social, philosophical and moral categories.

In recent years, Britain has observed an increase in the number of Islamic schools, at both primary and secondary levels. Some Muslim parents look for an Islamic school for their children. Supporters of such schools consider that the curriculum should always reflect an Islamic orientation. In addition, because of the significance of religion and the importance of spiritual and moral values, many Muslim parents, as other parents, feel a responsibility to protect their children’s religion and identity. This study was an attempt to find out why. What is it that they think is lacking in state school education? What is it that they believe only an Islamic school can offer?

The main aims of this study, outlined in the Introduction of the thesis, have been to contribute to an analysis of single-sex Islamic schools and to explore the factors and motivations that have influenced some Muslim parents to choose single-sex Islamic schools for their children.

A number of Muslim parents tend to send their children to single–sex schools. This is especially true for girls of secondary age. Many private Muslim schools have been established as local education authorities have closed single-sex schools. Issues such as gender and religion/culture have been the main impetus behind the establishment of these schools in Britain.

It should be noted that the Muslim parents in this study do not accept the mixing of the sexes, particularly in secondary schools, because, in their opinion, this may threaten the social structure and harmony of Muslim communities. I have also argued that this can lead to conflict with the authorities, who believe that co-educational schools encourage gender equality and benefit pupils, especially girls. Parents are aggravated by the clear challenge of co-education to their values and modesty. Many Muslim parents want different treatment for girls and have asserted their right to choose single-sex schools for their children.

An exploration of contemporary issues connected to faith schools such as indoctrination, social division and the subject of children’s rights vs parental rights as objections to faith schools were considered in Chapter Two. All these issues were explored and included the viewpoints of both opponents and advocates of faith schools. In this chapter too some definitions of the principal terms used in my study such as ‘Islam’, ‘Muslim’, ‘Islamic schools’, and ‘Islamic education’ were identified and explained to avoid potential misunderstandings and confusion. Explaining the phenomenon of Islamic schools and their different types was also deliberated in this chapter. Muslim parents’ motivations and concerns are also considered as factors having major effects on their decisions for sending their children to Islamic schools. The discussion in Chapter Two largely concentrated on these motivations and concerns, such as a ‘good education’, the curriculum, Islamic festivals and facilities, the shortage of qualified Muslim teachers, discrimination, Muslim girls and discrimination, Islamic dress and Islamophobia.

Chapter Two also provided a platform for showing how identity is important for Muslim parents and how it influences their decision in choosing schools. It focused also on how participating Muslim parents considered the relative importance of their children’s Muslim identity and British identity. In addition, this study focused on how participating Muslim parents understood culture and sought to interrogate how culture has impacted on these parents’ decision to send their children to Islamic schools.

My study also has touched on the issue of how participating Muslim parents understand their culture to be related to their religion as well as how culture affects those parents’ views and decisions about their children’s education. Islamic morals and values were similarly considered as other motivations adapted by participating Muslim parents. These schools and their teachers are tasked not just to teach knowledge but to provide role models for young learners in order to encourage Islamic values and to inspire a high engagement with knowledge. Islamic schools are expected to offer knowledge of Islam and Islamic teachings in order to allow better engagement with faith-related arguments and practices, as well as preparing Muslim children to be able to negotiate and reconcile the requests of their faith with their rights and duties as British citizens. The relationship between the values and beliefs taught in Islamic schools and the general community was addressed in this chapter.

Furthermore, Islamic schools, for these parents, in contrast to state schools, provide a more accessible environment where they can express what they want, explaining their concerns and their wishes for their children, including academic and personal needs. Social cohesion is another issue which has been presented in Chapter Two, where concerns of causing damage to societal cohesion are usually directed towards minority faith schools. Muslim schools in particular have become subject to media attention since the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks in the USA and the UK. It is reported by some that Muslim schools damage social cohesion.

Chapter Two also provided the aims of Islamic education, which are to provide Muslims with knowledge to build their faith and take transformative action to change their lives according to Allah’s instructions as a proof of their faith. Education is important and valued in Islam, as it enables successive generations to acknowledge their relationship with and dependence on God. The key to the Islamic theory of knowledge is that all knowledge is of God, in every sense.

In the same chapter I considered the concept of single-sex and mixed education in general, its history, its opponents and advocates, the learning-style differences between boys and girls, and single-sex education in Islam. Single-sex education is revealed as one of the most important issues identified by many Muslim educators and parents in the West. Related literature has revealed that most current studies, carried out largely on Islamic education and Islamic schools, have focused on separating genders in schools.

Chapter Three acknowledged the research methods related to the exploration of the key research questions identified in the Introduction of the thesis. The point of this chapter was to present the research methodology, research design, population studied, and the sample, the methodology of gathering data and its sources, data analysis and ethical considerations.

The particular approaches chosen were a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. I considered it appropriate to use questionnaire and interview methods in order to identify Muslim parents’ motivations to send their children to Islamic schools. The research procedures chosen to be employed in this study were determined by the aims of the research. For gathering data and producing an analysis of parents’ motivations it was essential to collect the opinions of the diverse actors and bodies in substantial depth. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to offer a general overview of the understanding of Muslim parents’ feelings about Muslim schools in England, their philosophies, strategies, aims and motivations for choosing these schools.

The questionnaire for the respondents covered the following areas: parents’ motivations for choosing such faith schools; the parents’ attitudes towards single-sex Islamic schools; and their motivations for choosing single-sex schools for their daughters, especially after puberty. In my study I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended answers to supplement the questionnaire data and to permit probing for further information as necessary. I used one-to-one interviews with parents because it was easy to arrange where only two people’s diaries needed to coincide, and the opinions and ideas expressed throughout the interview stem from the one interviewee. This means the researcher could match specific ideas with specific people. The main advantages of the interview were that it offered a good chance to question participants thoroughly on aspects of the research investigation and allowed for a greater depth of information. Moreover, it made possible that the researcher could gather data in relation to the feelings and emotions of individuals. In this chapter, I described also the difficulties I experienced, such as the shortage of participants at the beginning of the data collection, whether in the pilot study or in the main study.

Chapter Four was concerned with the presentation of the research findings and discussion. These findings should be viewed as exploratory rather than absolute, because of the size of sample chosen. In this chapter, Muslim parents’ views and opinions recorded in interviews are explored alongside the questionnaire. Both interviews and the questionnaire provided a wealth of information on what motivates some Muslim parents to send their children to Islamic schools, while at the same time highlighting those parents’ concerns about state schools.

My study found that participating Muslim parents consider it very important to choose their children’s school at these stages from pre-school stage until university carefully. In my study most participating parents agreed to send their children to state primary schools because they felt it was safe and reasonable for their children to be in that environment from the age of 5 to 11. Participating parents agreed that studying in a primary state school gave their children confidence as they developed school friends from previous years. Some parents wished to have primary and secondary stage Islamic schools and they seemed dismayed at the prospect of their children studying in state schools, but without Islamic primary schools in their residential area, they had no choice.

However, the most common issue to appear in my research was participating Muslim parents demanding Islamic secondary schools for their children. This is because parents are responsible for the care of their children at the 11 to 16 age range, which is widely held as risky because the child is developing and can easily go astray. On the other hand, the opponents of faith schools in general and Islamic schools in particular fear such schools indoctrinate their pupils and thus reduce them to victims incapable of logically endorsing, modifying or refusing the lifestyle taught in such schools.

Participating Muslim parents thought of this age in an interesting way, and that protecting their adolescent children was a parent’s critical responsibility for their children. Such parents feel that placing their children in state primary schools is fine while still young, but moved their children to an Islamic school at the secondary stage, out of concern for this critical age stage. It can be said that unanimously they wanted their children to turn out with good values, as worthy people, responsible citizens and respectable people.

Normally, most of the participants had sought their children’s opinion of Islamic schools before enrolment. Securing the child’s agreement for admission to the school is critical. Parents informed me that their children had been in state primary schools and after having decided to send them to Islamic schools they asked their children for their views in order to feel comfortable about their decision.

My study found that good education is the most essential motivator for all participating parents, regardless of their faith and background. All parents stressed that a good education is the most fundamental reason for sending their children to an Islamic school. Good education includes, for them, religious and secular education, religious practice, Islamic knowledge and learning the Arabic language. Most participating parents added that they chose an Islamic school for their children because they were taught religious education without losing out on the national curriculum. In fact, most participants were looking for both a good educational and practical future. The benefits of a religious education with the national curriculum encouraged participating Muslim parents to send their children to Islamic schools to provide all aspects of education and to feel that their children’s future was secured. Although knowledge is the key to a prosperous future that is beneficial to society, parents were as keen on the theoretical teachings of Islam and combining this theoretical learning with applying that knowledge in practical ways – for example, to pray at the correct time, to read the Holy Quran, and to fast in Ramadan.

Furthermore, because the Arabic language is the language of the Quran and a Muslim has to read and write the Quran, the Arabic language is also essential for Islamic education. Participating parents send their children to an Islamic school to learn Arabic to ensure that the Quran is read and understood correctly.

In terms of motivation, identity and culture are the participating Muslim parents’ second motivation for sending their children to Islamic schools. Islamic identity is essential for participating Muslim parents, because they believe Islamic schools help their children develop a sense of identity and belonging through teaching them about their religion.

Many participating parents considered culture as a key issue and hoped that Islamic schools would help their children learn about the cultures of their specific country and Islamic culture in general. Although Islam is the religion of Muslim society, the culture creates rules which have a major impact on its society. Culture raises a big challenge for girls in particular, where Muslim society has a stereotype about women which is always presented as a religious issue. Many participating parents appear to need to adjust their cultural views towards women because Islam considers women differently. Furthermore, Islamic identity is special, and participating Muslim parents have the view that being in an Islamic school is the best way to protect their children’s identity.

In respect of behaviour, participating parents believe that enrolling their children in Islamic schools will eliminate exposure to an abundance of inappropriate behaviour and acts in a society that opposes Islam’s teachings. Most participants agreed that state schools have good facilities such as qualified teachers, high quality equipment and funding. Similarly, they were worried by what they felt to be the lack of values and morals and the impact this would have on their children’s behaviour. Participating parents were pleased with the Islamic schools’ views and guidance on behaviour when compared to the perceived lack of teaching values and morals in state schools. In addition, Muslim parents consider that Islamic schools offer a special education which helps their children to produce their own personality, which improves self-confidence, creates an opportunity to build their own world, and to use their mind without feeling forced by parents and teachers. Satisfaction and comfort is important for participating Muslim parents who feel that Islamic schools ensure their children can appreciate themselves by knowing who they are and how their unique identity is special. Participating parents believe that growing up in an Islamic environment plays a major part in becoming a good Muslim. Parents always connected the idea of a safe environment with Islamic schools, where they feel their children are safe with no need to worry. However, participating parents worry about their children growing up in other schools due to the problems which such schools have to contend with: drugs; racism; bullying; and other socially unacceptable behaviour.

The third motivation for participating Muslim parents is single-sex education via Islamic schools. Muslim parents prefer single-sex schools for boys and girls after puberty for many reasons, including religious, cultural and behavioural issues.

In respect of religious and cultural reasons, many parents believe that, in Islam, girls are forbidden to be in the same school with boys. They should be separated in their own schools. Segregating children at a certain age is very important to the majority of these parents as reflected in their statements. Mixed schools are unacceptable for the parents in this religious context. However, some participants believed there was no need for separate primary schools but stressed that single-sex schooling is vital for teenagers. Related to the cultural reasons, many participating parents considered sending girls to single-sex schools as a cultural and religious requirement. They deal with girls as a special case with some parents sending their daughters simply to be in a separate environment. Participating parents prefer single-sex education for boys and girls. Most of them agreed that boys and girls should be educated separately and that it was not only significant to girls. They favoured single-sex schools for boys in the same way that they favoured it for girls and saw no difference in separate education for both genders. Dealing equally with both sexes enables them to protect boys and girls.

In respect of behavioural reasons, the majority of participants agreed that single-sex education was the best for their children in childhood to be assured of good behaviour, which starts at a young age and is easier to promote in single-sex schools. Preparing children at a young age is important due to their lack of knowledge. Girls in their girls-only environment can ask questions, talk of everything, and easily know right from wrong. Growing up in this environment gives girls an early opportunity to decide upon what they want for their lives. These parents stated that the best way to educate children was for girls to be with girls and boys with boys, at least in the early stages of education after which they can decide whether or not to go to university. This separate environment gives children more confidence. Children at a young age need single-sex schools, which cause no harm and have no adverse effects.

These parents believe children in single-sex schools can focus more and can improve their achievement. Feeling comfortable with the same sex gives children more confidence and as a result influences their achievements in a positive way. For them, protecting the next generation means being in single-sex schools, because it saves time and concentrates far more on studying without any distractions from the opposite sex. Participants stressed that single-sex schools, Islamic or not, achieve very high results, because there are no interruptions from the opposite sex. Being in single-sex schools enables children to concentrate more and achieve high performance. According to many participant views, improving children’s achievements is an important benefit of being in single-sex schools. Children can concentrate more, increase their attainments, feel comfortable with the same sex, increase their confidence and affect their achievements in a positive way.

Generally, the attitudes of participating Muslim parents toward Islamic schools were very positive; parents had positive attitudes towards the learning of both sides of education, religious and secular, in addition to religious practice in which children can practice their religion freely and respectably. It can be said that participating parents possess an influential motivation towards their children’s education in both religious and secular education due to their belief that education is essential for success in future careers and life. The positive attitudes were shown also in relation to improving their children’s behaviour by learning Islamic values and morals, and in the attitude toward the environment provided in Islamic schools where parents feel secure and safe towards their children, boys and girls, in single-sex school surroundings.

In conclusion, participating Muslim parents’ attitudes toward Islamic schools are that:

1. Islamic schools are comparable or better than state schools when it comes to academic performance. However, some enhancement is needed, especially in the area of teachers’ qualifications and teaching strategies.
2. Muslim parents prefer Islamic schools at the secondary stage for both their sons and daughters, while the majority were satisfied with primary state schools for their children. Participating parents see it as their responsibility to protect their children, and the best way to do so is by sending them to Islamic schools, especially at the adolescent age. However, most of the participants had sought their children’s opinion of Islamic schools before enrolment.
3. Muslim parents who participated believe that this type of school makes their children feel a sense of comfort and belonging because they are with other students from the same background and they are in an environment that is similar to their home environment.
4. Attendance at Islamic schools advances their children’s behaviour due to these schools’ strategy of learning and teaching Islamic values and morals. On the other hand, attendance at state schools might affect their children’s behaviour because, in their opinion, state schools do not deal efficiently with morals and values.
5. Islamic schools are encouraging society cohesion and make their children interact more with their society, especially when they teach other religions. From this point, many participating parents asserted that government should provide funding for such schools on the basis of quality of student produced by the schools.
6. Muslim parents who participated in my study saw that the Arabic language is essential for education, because it is the language of the Quran.
7. Islamic schools support a specific Islamic identity because they develop a sense of identity and belonging through teaching them about their religion.
8. Parents believe that educating their children in Islamic schools reduces exposure to an abundance of inappropriate behaviour and acts in a society that opposes Islam’s teachings.
9. Muslim parents see that Islamic schools offer special education, which helps their children produce their own personality which itself improves self-confidence and self-esteem.
10. Muslim parents prefer single-sex schools for both boys and girls after puberty for many reasons, which include religious, cultural and behavioural issues.
11. Single-sex education is the best way for a much higher achievement.

## 5.2 The Contributions of this Study

In conclusion, my study has made a number of contributions into two vital areas. First of all, the findings of this research maintain earlier studies’ findings (see for example, Elbih, 2012; Halstead, 1992; Ijaz and Abbas, 2010; Meer, 2007; McCreery et al., 2007; Ramadan, 2004; Parker-Jenkins, 2002; Shah, 1998, 2012; Shah and Conchar, 2009; Vail, 2002; Tinker, 2006; Zine, 2006) by providing supplementary evidence regarding the particular factors that influence some Muslim parents when they choose Islamic schools for their children. Secondly, a clear picture of participating Muslim parents’ motivations for choosing Islamic schools in the UK has been provided in my research. I strongly believe that the knowledge gained from this research is useful both from a theoretical and practical viewpoints. The findings have implications not only for Muslim parents and their children, but also for government and British educational authorities to focus on the needs of Muslim communities, especially in education. In this regard, my study is making a contribution to the overall Islamic education issues and the debate particularly in the context of Islamic schools phenomenon in the UK.

The thesis will be available in the public field through public libraries and my findings will be beneficial for policy makers, the Muslim community, and national bodies. In particular, policy makers with educational roles will be interested in this study because it depicts minority communities which have been established for a long time but which are still waiting for support and understanding from the state. The Muslim community will also be interested since this study highlights the general problems of Muslim children inside and outside the educational system from their parents’ perspectives. It also brings to light many issues regarding Muslim religion, culture and identity that present many difficulties and challenges. It is also beneficial for the national context where it sheds light on one part of society which is always suspected and being accused. Finally, because it explains parents’ motivations behind sending Muslim children to such specific schools this makes their reasons clearer and rational.

I hope to publicise the findings through publications of several sections in conference papers and journal articles.

## 5.3 Strength and Limitations of the Research

This study is considered important for a number of reasons. Firstly, this study has contributed to an understanding of Islamic schools. Secondly, this study has provided some empirical evidence concerning Muslim parents’ motivations for sending their children to Islamic schools. Thirdly, the study has explored different parents’ attitudes towards single-sex Islamic schools. Fourthly, this study explored the relationship between Muslim parents and state schools in the British society. Fifthly, it is hoped that Muslim and state schools will benefit from this study in developing their teaching strategies in dealing with Muslim children.

Essential strengths of this study are my approach to ethics and data analysis which have enabled me to present the views of most of my research participants in the findings. Furthermore, being an insider-researcher, who understands the interviewees’ culture, has great significance at all levels and can be considered as strength. I saw myself as an insider researcher also because I was familiar with Islamic schools. On the other hand, being an insider can be a limitation because some participants may say things that they assumed I would like to hear, even though in my study my ethical approach to the participants’ involvement may have minimised these limitations. At the same time, I saw myself also as an outside researcher without a deep involvement in the schools which might limit the strength of a qualitative case study by providing less insider information and perspectives. At the same time, it gave me more capacity to see outside information. However, nobody can do a limitation-free study on anything so the study is not without limitations.

Obviously this thesis only focused on two single-sex Islamic secondary schools and the reported results were certainly influenced by the specific participants in this study. However, the findings that emerged from the produced data and analyses suggest that similar results might occur in many other single-sex Islamic schools. Despite these consequences, particular features of this research site affected the data and analyses in distinctive ways and future studies could further develop this area.

Furthermore, one important limitation to my study was that it did not include a co-educational Islamic school in the design. Although I initially hoped to focus on one all-boys school, one all-girls school, and one co-educational school, I was unable to locate a co-educational secondary Islamic school, because such a school does not exist in the local area.

## 5.4 Further Research

The life of Muslims in the West, in general and in education in particular, is quite varied. Some issues remain controversial and need to be reconsidered in the light of the foundational resources of Islam. However, when considering these issues it is very important that it is done under two important conditions: a) respecting the Western society’s contexts, and b) remaining faithful to Islamic resources.

Because of living in such diverse circumstances, future studies should spotlight the potentialities of Islamic education in the West. That might bring a better understanding of these societies and help to construct bridges of dialogue, acceptance, agreement, cooperation and understanding. Re-thinking about state-funded Islamic schools is also very important as many problems could be solved by adapting the strategy of education that makes such a combination between State and Muslim communities to establish more state-funded Islamic schools. These schools will bring Muslims inside their host society and encourage their interaction by providing high quality education for their children which includes their religious and cultural aspects. It might also be worth conducting similar research with Muslim parents who have opted not to send their children to Islamic schools – just to see if this provides an alternative model for interaction between Muslim and host societies.

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**List of Appendices**

# Appendix 1

# Questionnaire

I would like to thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research study by answering this questionnaire. This study is meant to look at your motivations for sending your son/daughter to an Islamic school. You will initially be asked about some personal details which will remain confidential and will not be passed to any other people. The rest of the questions will ask for your thoughts about Islamic schools.

This is an invitation to take part in a research project, which I hope, will be have value to the Islamic schools in the UK. The study concerns your own experiences of being a parent of Muslim child who is studying in Islamic school. I would be very grateful if you could share these with me. The questionnaire should take you only 15-20 minutes, and your help will contribute to identifying Muslim parent’s motivations for sending their children to these schools.

***The questionnaire is anonymous. All information collected will be treated as confidential.***

This questionnaire is one of the main parts of my PhD programme the title of which is: **Islamic Education and Single-sex Schooling: an investigation into the motivations of Muslim parents when sending their children to Islamic schools**

**Please answer the following questions:**

1- Who is filling in this questionnaire? **□** Father **□** Mother **□** Others

1. Do you have son/daughter in an Islamic school?

If you have more than one son/daughter please indicate how many: Sons and how many daughters.

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3-Why do you prefer an Islamic school for your daughter/son?

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4- What is the most important reason that you send your child to the Islamic school? Please circle.

Islamic environment

Religious education

Preservation of religion and identity

Protection from public school influences

Any other reasons

And why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What is your opinion about state schools?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

6- Do you prefer Islamic single-sex schools? Why?

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7-Do you think that educating children separately from the opposite sex benefits your children’s performance? Why do you think this is so?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

8-How do Muslim schools help children develop a sense of identity and belonging?

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9-How do Muslim schools help children develop their confidence and self-esteem?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

10-Do you think single-sex schools help girls to achieve high performance? What makes you think this?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

11-Do you think single-sex schools help boys to achieve high performance? What makes you think this?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

12-Did you ask your son/daughter’s opinion when you chose an Islamic school for him/her?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

13-Did your child agree you when you chose an Islamic school for him or her?

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14-Did you take advice from other people when you were thinking about these schools?

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15-How did you choose this school for your child?

Some friends advised you.

You had heard about their good achievement in exams and test.

You were in such a school and you believe it is the best type of school for your child.

Other reasons:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

16-What do think about the standard of Islamic schools?

Academic

Facilities

Teaching

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I hope that you have enjoyed answering the questions. If you have any comments relevant to the research or if you would like to share your experience personally, I will be pleased if you contact me to discuss this matter further.

The second part of this research project involves briefly interviewing parents about why they send their children to single-sex Islamic schools. If you are willing to participate in an interview or a group discussion, please tick the box below and leave a phone number at which you can be contacted.

**YES**, I am willing to take part in an interview or group discussion.

I can be reached at the following number: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**NO**, I do not wish to be interviewed nor participate in an interview or group discussion.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Jazakumallah khairan for completing this questionnaire

Your time and effort are highly appreciated

**Yours Sincerely,**

**Masauda Elaswed**

# Appendix 2

# Interview Questions

Interview Guidelines: Firstly, little chat to make the principles more relax and comfortable.

Many thanks for agreeing to be interviewed as a part of this study. I am a research student at The University of Sheffield. I would like to inform you that all information will be dealt with anonymously and confidentially. I will be using this voice recorder to help me review my data, so if you feel unhappy about that, I can switch it off. Finally, I would like to say there is no right or wrong answer, the most important thing to me is your views and expression of your experience and feeling.

Opening questions: Introduce yourself.

Tell me: How many children do you have in the Islamic school?

Their grads;

And how long you have been in the UK?

How would you describe yourself?

How long your child has been in an Islamic school?

1. When you have made choice to send your child to Islamic school? I mean since primary stage or when he/she arrived to the secondary stage.
2. What is your opinion about state schools?
3. You have made choice to send your child to Islamic school. Tell me about how you arrived at this decision?
4. When you choose this school for your child, what were you hoping your child will achieve by enrolling to such school?
5. What about your child responses about that school you have chosen for him/her?
6. What were you hoping to gain as a parent?
7. What is the most important motivation that you send your child to the Islamic school?
8. Are there other reasons that you believe very important?
9. How do Muslim schools help children develop a sense of identity and belonging?
10. How do Muslim schools help children develop their confidence and self esteem?
11. What sort of person would your child to be?
12. How would you describe your son/daughter?
13. What is your opinion about single-sex Islamic schools?
14. Do you prefer single-sex for your children boys and girls?
15. Do you think educating children separately from the opposite sex helps to improve their performance at school?
16. What benefits is your child getting by being at Islamic school rather than state school? How important are these to you?

# Appendix 3

# Explanation of Islamic Words

Akhirah The hereafter

Alhamdu lellah literally means ‘Praise is to God’, an expression of

gratitude towards God.

Allah God

Ashaitan Evil

Assalamu alyakum An Arabic greeting often used by Muslims

around the world.

As-Sahaba Those who lived with and saw the prophet

Mohammad (p.b.u.h.) believed in his message

and died as Muslims.

Dawah The proselytising or preaching of Islam.

Deen Religion or faith

Dunia Worldly knowledge

Fard Obligatory

Faraed the plural of fard.

Hadith An account of narrations and reports of the deeds

and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad

(known as the Sunnah).

Halal Permitted

Halaqat Al-ilm Circles of knowledge

Haram Forbidden

Hijab refers to both the head-covering traditionally worn

by some Muslim women and modest Islamic

styles of dress in general.

Imam An Islamic leadership position

In shaa Allah If God wills

Jilbab Refers to any long and loose-fit coat or garment

worn by Muslim women.

Jism Body

Madrasa School

Masha’Allah An Arabic phrase that expresses appreciation,

joy, or praise thankfulness for an event or just as

mentioned believed in his message.

Masjid Mosque

Nafs Mind

Niqab A cloth which covers the face as a part of sartorial

Prophet Messenger

Ruh Spirit

Seerah Life history of Prophet Muhammad.

Sunnah The Prophet Muhammad’s sunnah comprises

his deeds, utterances, and his spoken approval.

Taqwa The Islamic term that denotes God-

consciousness, mindfulness and piety.

The Qur’an The Holy book of Muslims.

Ummah An Arabic word meaning nation or community.

1. Section 69(3) means section 69(3) of the 1998 Act as it applies to independent schools by virtue of section 124B of that Act. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Akhirah: The hereafter [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Alhamdu lellah: literally means ‘Praise is to God’, an expression of gratitude towards God. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Baba: Dad. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Seerah: Life history of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hadith: An account of narrations and reports of the deeds and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (known as the Sunnah). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ICE: Islam and Citizenship Education. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Dawah: the proselytising or preaching of Islam. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Masha’Allah:An Arabic phrase that expresses appreciation, joy, or praise thankfulness for an event or person that just as mentioned [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. As-Sahaba: Those who lived with and saw the prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) believed in his message and died as Muslims. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In shaa Allah: If God wills. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)