

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF  
INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM STUDENTS IN AN IRISH  
UNIVERSITY

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

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**Declaration**

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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## Dedication

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*Dedicated to my parents.*

## Acknowledgements

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## Table of Contents

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Declaration .....	II
Dedication .....	III
Acknowledgements .....	IV
Table of Contents .....	V
List of Figures .....	X
List of Tables .....	XI
Abbreviations .....	XIV
Glossary of Terms .....	XV
Abstract .....	XX
1.INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Presentation of the Study .....	1
1.3 Chapter Outline and Structure of Thesis .....	4
2.CONTEXTUALISATION .....	7
2.1 Introduction .....	7
2.2 Internationalisation of Higher Education .....	7
2.2.1 Approaches to Internationalisation .....	11
2.2.2 Rationales Behind Internationalisation .....	16
2.2.3 Curriculum in International Higher Education .....	20
2.2.4 International Student & Internationalisation of Higher Education ....	23
2.2.5 Rationales Behind the Recruitment of International Students .....	26
2.2.6 Motivations Behind the Student Mobility .....	28
2.3 Internationalisation in Irish Higher Education .....	31
2.3.1 Higher education and Higher Education Authority (HEA) in Ireland	34
2.4 Chapter summary .....	40
3.REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS .....	41
3.1 The International Student Experience .....	41
3.2 Review of Theoretical Concepts Regarding Muslim Students .....	42
3.2.1 Identity and its Relation to Culture .....	43
3.2.2 Multiculturalism and Interculturalism .....	51
3.3 Racism and Discrimination in Ireland .....	53
3.4 Chapter Summary .....	56
4.METHODOLOGY .....	58
4.1 Introduction .....	58
4.2 Research Questions & Aims and Objectives .....	59

4.3	Ontological and Epistemological Considerations .....	60
4.4	Choice of Qualitative Methodology .....	62
4.5	The Choice of Grounded Theory .....	66
4.5.1	The Origins of Grounded Theory .....	67
4.5.2	Principles of Grounded Theory .....	67
4.6	Data Collection .....	69
4.6.1	Interviewing .....	69
4.6.2	Interview Design .....	71
4.6.3	Research Ethics and Approval .....	73
4.6.4	Sampling Strategy .....	73
4.6.5	The Interview Process .....	78
4.6.6	Interviewing Venues and Other Details .....	80
4.6.7	Researchers' Identity and Role During the Interviews .....	80
4.6.8	Research Ethics .....	82
4.7	The Process of Data Analysis .....	82
4.7.1	Glaserian Approach.....	82
4.7.2	Constructivist Grounded Theory .....	84
4.7.3	Initial Coding .....	84
4.7.4	Advantages of Initial Coding and Use of NVivo .....	87
4.7.5	Focused Coding.....	88
4.7.6	Axial & Theoretical Coding .....	88
4.8	Reflexivity.....	89
4.8.1	Reflection, Critical Reflection and Reflexivity.....	90
4.9	Chapter Summary .....	93
5.	PERCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE .....	94
5.1	Introduction .....	94
5.2	Nationality as Part of Identity and Culture .....	96
5.3	Religion as Part of Culture and Identity .....	99
5.3.1	Participants' Relationship with Islam .....	101
5.3.2	Female Muslim Identity .....	105
5.3.3	Practicing Islam.....	109
5.4	Family as a Construct of Culture and Identity .....	113
5.4.1	Family Support for Study Abroad.....	114
5.5	Sojourner Identity .....	116
5.5.1	Objectives & Expectations .....	116
5.5.2	Academic Scholarships .....	120
5.5.3	English Language Proficiency .....	122

5.5.4	Degree Programme .....	126
5.6	Chapter summary .....	128
6.	PERCEPTIONS OF THE HOST SOCIETY AND CULTURE .....	130
6.1	Introduction .....	130
6.2	Ireland as a Different Culture .....	131
6.2.1	Mixed-gender Spaces .....	133
6.2.2	Food and Drink Culture in Ireland .....	135
6.2.3	Greeting Gestures .....	138
6.2.4	Other Factors & The Notion of Independence .....	142
6.3	Ireland as a Welcoming Host .....	145
6.3.1	Ireland's Welcoming Environment & Participants' Well-being .....	147
6.3.2	Ireland, Other Non-Muslim Contexts & Host Receptivity .....	149
6.4	Host Families .....	152
6.5	Negative Perceptions of Muslims in the Host Society .....	155
6.5.1	Identity-based Incidents .....	158
6.6	Chapter Summary .....	160
7.	PERCEPTIONS OF THE HOST INSTITUTION .....	162
7.1	Introduction .....	162
7.2	Institutional Support .....	163
7.2.1	The Cafeteria and the Halal Food .....	165
7.2.2	Other Facilities & Campus Climate .....	166
7.3	International Office .....	168
7.4	The Interfaith Centre .....	175
7.4.1	Interfaith Centre as a Hub for Socialising .....	176
7.4.2	Interfaith Centre and Representation on Campus .....	179
7.4.3	IMS's Relationship with the Academic Staff .....	179
7.5	Curriculum and Language .....	184
7.5.1	Research and Creative Thinking .....	186
7.5.2	Written Assignments .....	188
7.5.3	Pre-degree Programmes & Cross-cultural Adaptation .....	190
7.5.4	Language .....	192
7.6	Chapter Summary .....	195
8.	RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT ON CAMPUS .....	197
8.1	Introduction .....	197
8.2	Relationship Development on Campus .....	197
8.3	Culture Distance .....	200
8.3.1	Headscarf Relationship Development on Campus .....	203

8.3.2	Homophily & Relationship Development on Campus .....	207
8.3.3	Ease of Communication, Mutual Culture and Security .....	210
8.3.4	Colloquial English Being a Challenge in Intercultural Contact.....	212
8.3.5	Religion & Ease of Communication & Mutual Culture.....	214
8.3.6	Irish Peers' Homogenous Friendship Tendencies.....	215
8.3.7	Age as a Facilitating Factor in Intercultural Communication.....	218
8.4	Predispositions .....	220
8.4.1	Openness .....	222
8.4.2	Education and Family .....	225
8.4.3	Stereotypes Regarding Muslims .....	226
8.5	Representing Culture (Cultural Ambassador).....	229
8.6	Learning as a Motivation for Intercultural Contact.....	235
8.6.1	Length of Stay and Work Load.....	238
8.7	Timetable, Group-Work & Intercultural Communication on Campus ....	239
8.8	Reflections .....	243
8.9	Chapter Summary .....	245
9.	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS .....	247
9.1	Introduction .....	247
9.2	Presentation of the Key Findings and the Grounded Theory Model .....	248
9.3	Identity .....	256
9.3.1	Identity Perspectives and Dimensions .....	256
9.3.2	The Notion of <i>Ummah</i> .....	260
9.3.3	Muslim Students & Accommodation of Religious Diversity on Campus	262
9.3.4	Social Identity Theory.....	265
9.4	Culture Distance.....	269
9.5	Host Receptivity.....	272
9.5.1	Institutional Completeness .....	274
9.5.2	Multiculturalism vs Interculturalism.....	275
9.6	Homophily .....	278
9.7	Contact Hypothesis .....	283
9.8	Intercultural Contact and Internationalisation.....	287
9.8.1	Empirical Studies on Intercultural Contact Campus.....	287
9.8.2	Intercultural Communication .....	289
9.8.3	Intercultural Competence .....	291
9.8.4	Intercultural Personhood .....	294
9.9	Chapter Summary .....	295



10.CONCLUSION .....	297
10.1 Introduction .....	297
10.2 Review of Chapters .....	297
10.3 Contribution to the Knowledge .....	300
10.4 Evaluation of the Study .....	302
10.5 Limitations of the Study .....	305
10.6 Recommendations and Future Directions .....	307
10.7 Conclusion .....	308
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	310
Appendices .....	345
Appendix A Forms and the Interview Guide .....	345
Appendix B Data Analysis (List of Initial, Focus Codes & Emerging Themes) .....	354
Appendix C Sample Interviews .....	380

## List of Figures

---

Figure 4-2 A Google Maps picture of Dublin City University Glasnevin Campus...	74
Figure 4-3: Illustration of Initial Coding Process on NVivo .....	86
Figure 8-1: Grounded Theory (Onion) Model of IMS' Relationship Development on Campus (student groups) .....	199
Figure 8-2: Grounded Theory (Flower) Model of Relationship Development on Campus (factors) .....	200
Figure 9-1 Grounded Theory of IMS' Experiences in an Irish University .....	251
Figure 9-2. Stages and Components of Kim's Intercultural Personhood .....	294

## List of Tables

---

Table 2-1: Approaches to Internationalisation of Higher Education .....	15
Table 2-2 Factors influencing students' decision to study abroad .....	30
Table 2-3: International Students by Mode/Duration 2011/12 (All) .....	36
Table 2-4: International Students by Country of Origin 2010-12 .....	37
Besides the intercultural context of the study, the focus is on Muslim students as participants, and their lived experiences in an Irish university as international students. For the purpose of this study, Table 3-2 presents how "Identity" was used as a theoretical lens in previous research on Muslim students.....	
Table 3-1 Use of Identity as a theoretical framework in previous research on Muslim/religious students .....	45
Table 3-2: Barriers to and facilitators of integration identified in Boucher's (1999) study .....	53
Table 4-1: A Comparison of Ethnography, Grounded Theory and Case Studies within Qualitative Research .....	64
Table 4-2 Approach to Grounded Theory .....	66
Table 4-3: List of Themes Used in the Interview Guide.....	72
Table 4-4 Participant Information .....	77
Table 5-1: Grounded theory table of participants' perceptions of culture and identity .....	96
Table 5-2: List of codes supporting Islam Being Regarded as Lifestyle by the Participants .....	102
Table 5-3: Grounded Theory Codes for the Theme 'Aims & Expectations' .....	117
Table 6-1: Grounded Theory Construction of IMS' Perceptions of the Host Culture .....	131

Table 7-1: Grounded Theory Model of IMS's Perceptions of the Host Institution .	163
Table 7-2: The codes constructing the category 'International Office' .	169
Table 7-3: List of codes relating to the category 'Curriculum' .	184
Table 7-4: List of codes relating to Language within the data.....	192
Table 8-1: List of codes relating to 'Culture Distance' .....	201
Table 8-2: List of codes identifying headscarf as a barrier for intercultural contact	203
Table 8-3: List of codes relating to homophily among different student groups on campus. ....	208
Table 8-4: List of codes indicating religion as a construct of ease of communication and mutual culture.....	214
Table 8-5: List of codes pointing to lack of contact between IMS and their Irish peers on campus .....	218
Table 8-6: List of codes relating to openness of mature members of the host society to intercultural contact.....	219
Table 8-7: List of codes relating to sub-category Predisposition.....	221
Table 8-8: List of codes comparing the host students' and international students' openness toward intercultural contact. ....	224
Table 8-9: List of codes pointing to existence of stereotypes regarding Muslim identity .....	227
Table 8-10 List of codes relating to role of timetable and group-work activities in fostering intercultural engagement.....	240
Table 9-1: Experiences of IMS in an Irish University .....	249
Table 9-2: List of Relevant Theories in the Related Literature .....	250
Table 9-3: List of Context and Student Specific Factors Identified in This Study ..	253

Table 9-4: List of Student Specific and Host Country Factors Impacting on Contact .....	254
Table 9-5: List of Criticisms Directed at Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions .....	271

## **Abbreviations**

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DCU: Dublin City University

GT: Grounded Theory

HE: Higher Education

HEI: Higher Education Institution

IMS: International Muslim Students

IS: International Student(s)

NUI: National University of Ireland Galway

RCSI: Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

SA: Saudi Arabia

SALIS: School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies

Ss: Students

TCD: Trinity College Dublin

UCC: University College Cork

UCD: University College Dublin

UL: University of Limerick

UN: United Nations

WTO: World Trade Organisation

## **Glossary of Terms**

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**Agency:** Agency is described as “the ways in which people become agents in their identity construction” by Ercan (2015:232).

**Axial coding:** A process of grounded theory research in which the researcher identifies a category’s properties and dimensions (Charmaz 2006).

**Contact hypothesis:** Contact hypothesis is put forward by Gordon Allport (1954). It emphasises the pivotal role of ‘social categorisation’ in forming our prejudice and normalising from a cognitive perspective.

**Cross-cultural adaptation process:** Cross-cultural adaptation process is defined as “the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments” (Kim 2001:31).

**Culture:** derives from the Latin word root *colare*, and is associated with activities of preservation, of tending to and caring for” (Benhabib 2001: 2)

**Cultural capital:** The assets of individuals that come to represent their education, family, political parties, cultural groups (Bourdieu 2011).

**Cultural identity:** “[A] complex set of beliefs and attitudes that people have about themselves in relation to their culture group membership; usually these come to the fore when people are in contact with another culture” (Berry et al. 2002:357).

**Culture distance:** Culture distance is used as a theoretical concept in previous research (Hofstede 1998, 2005, Gudykunst 2005, Ward 2005, Bennett 2005, Pearson-Evans 1999, Dunne 2008) to refer to the perceived dissimilarities between the two

cultures. Culture distance is also theorised by Berry et al. (2002:361) as a concept used that “refer[s] to how far apart two cultural groups are on dimensions of cultural variation”.

**Globalisation:** “Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century” (Altbach & Knight 2007:290).

**Grounded theory:** A research approach in which the theory is the outcome of the study (Byram 2008). Grounded theory is defined as “the discovery from the data” by Glaser and Strauss (1967:1).

**Homophily:** Homophily mainly operates on the principle similarity breeds connection (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001). It is adopted in this thesis in order to explain the mono-cultural interaction as a result of perceived similarities among students, as well as what emerges from the data as constructs of this perceived similarity.

**Host receptivity:** Host receptivity is defined as “the natives’ openness toward strangers and willingness to accommodate strangers with opportunities to participate in the local social communication process” (Kim 2005:148).

**Identity:** A rigorously investigated field of research with psychological, cognitive, affective and behavioural domains in addition to cultural, political, social, personal, interpersonal and inter-group dimensions. A marker and a differentiator (Banhabib 2002), identity is influenced by external factors such as one’s country of origin or society; therefore, it is a multi-faceted phenomenon and an individual’s construction of identity is equally powerful and significant in terms of what defines identity (Holliday 2004).



**Initial coding:** A process of grounded theory research in which the analysis sticks closest to the data (Charmaz 2006).

**Institutional completeness:** Institutional completeness refers to the extent to which culture/ethnic groups are able to independently conduct their systems of economy, politics and social (Breton 1964, Kim 2005).

**Intercultural:** Gareis (1995: 3) asserts that it is “situations involving two or more cultures and is used mainly to refer to relationships between two people from different cultures”.

**Intercultural communication:** “Intercultural communication is field that has taken a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to the question of how people from different cultures interact” (Monaghan, 2012:30).

**Intercultural competence:** “Intercultural competence is the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people, who to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world” (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009:7).

**Intercultural personhood:** Global citizens who are culturally, socially, politically and environmentally aware and sensitive (Kim 2014, 2015).

**Interculturalism:** “Interculturalism could be understood as aiming to address some of the areas that multiculturalists neglected – by consciously and deliberately promoting interaction between cultures and also by incorporating an anti-racism component which was seen to lacking in multiculturalism” O’Toole (2008:12-13).

**International student:** Someone “who travels to another country to study” (Pyvis & Chapman 2005:23).

**Internationalisation:** “Policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment” (Altbach & Knight 2007:290).

**Islamophobia:** Muslim racism, anti-Muslim discourse (Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006).

**Marginalisation:** Marginalisation described as being deprived of opportunities as a group or individual if not seen as a member of the majority (Tyrer & Ahmad 2006).

**Multiculturalism:** “An orientation that accepts *both* the maintenance of cultural identity and the characteristics of all ethno-cultural groups *and* the contact and the participation of all groups in the larger society” (Berry et al. 2007:375).

**Predisposition:** The “background of the individual while entering communication” (Kim 1988:128).

**Racism:** Racism is defined as “the belief in the superiority/inferiority of people based on racial identity ... [and] a particular form of prejudice defined by preconceived erroneous beliefs about race and members of racial groups.” (Hoyt 2012:225).

**Social identity theory:** Social identity theory situates identity on the premise of social-categorisation, and this process is defined as a reflexive self that “can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications” (Stets and Burke 2000:224).

**Stereotype:** “[S]tereotypes act as both a justificatory device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group, and as a screening or selective device to maintain simplicity in perception and thinking” (Allport 1954:192).

**Theoretical coding:** A process of grounded theory research in which the researcher intensifies the category’s theoretical value (Charmaz 2006).

**Ummah:** A transnational Muslim community (Mandaville 2001, Archer 2009).

## **Abstract**

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### **An Investigation into the Experiences of International Muslim Students in an Irish University.**

**Buse Gamze Üstündağ**

Ireland has transformed from being a country of emigration to a country of immigration within the past two decades. The transformation is evident in Irish higher education which currently recruits over one hundred thousand international students from across the globe. Although Muslim immigration into Ireland began with international students who came to study in Royal College of Surgeons Ireland in 1950s, research on Muslim students, particularly international, in Irish higher education has largely been neglected to date. Consequently, this project explores the experiences of international Muslim students (IMS) in an Irish university, asks whether a religious identity is a pertinent factor in intercultural contact, and investigates internationalisation of higher education in Ireland from the perspective of IMS.

The study used a constructive grounded theory approach within an interpretative framework. 23 semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted with IMS from undergraduate and Master's programmes in Dublin City University (DCU) Glasnevin Campus, which were audio-taped and transcribed. A three-stage analysis was employed in line with constructivist grounded theory: initial coding, focused coding, axial & theoretical coding. NVivo was used to help organise the data during the rigorous analysis process.

The findings reveal that IMS' experiences on campus are mainly built on three interdependent axes: identity, environment and contact. Particularly within the category identity, religion is identified as a major construct reinforcing a transnational Muslim identity and unity among Muslim students with different national and cultural backgrounds. DCU (Glasnevin) emerges as a multicultural campus in which diversity is successfully accommodated. However, a lack of intercultural contact from the perspective of IMS persists on campus perpetuated by factors such as culture distance, homophily, institutional completeness and students' cultural capital. The study highlights the need for an effective intercultural policy and practice instead of multicultural in Irish HEIs, to the advantage of both the international and host students.

# INTRODUCTION

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## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces the study, the research context and questions, the structure of the thesis. The first section will focus on the presentation of the research questions within a given context as well as the purpose and background of these questions. The second section will outline the structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 Presentation of the Study**

This research project is concerned with investigating the experiences of international Muslim students in an Irish University (Dublin City University). Their experiences cover a broad range of topics including participants' reflections of identity and culture, intercultural interactions on campus, perceptions of the host society regarding Muslims, perceived host receptivity and multiculturalism on campus. The study is additionally concerned with exploring students' academic experiences as part of their sojourner experience and the impact of higher education in Ireland on their personhood.

In the light of the recurring headlines in the international media, Muslims draw substantial academic interest, particularly for those who seek to explore and improve communication between cultures in our rapidly globalising world. In Ireland, the number of international students including the ones who come from ethnically Muslim countries has been increasing in the recent years (Education Ireland, 2012). Apart from the common destinations for international students such as the United Kingdom (UK)

and the United States (US), Ireland has begun attracting more international students recently. This offers a fresh case for exploring the intercultural relations among the students on Irish university campuses. The increasing number of international students in a relatively new destination for study abroad such as Ireland indicates a lack of and the need for research in the field of internationalisation and the international student. The current study particularly focuses on Muslim students since there has been a number of research conducted on the experiences of international students in Irish higher education, while Muslim students' experience has been overlooked in the research up to date. This is a strong impetus for the study given the first Muslim immigration into Ireland in fact started with Muslim students coming to Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) in the 1960s (Scharbrodt 2011). This study, therefore, aims to contribute to the internationalisation of higher education in Ireland by exploring experiences of Muslim cohort of international students.

Another significant rationale to add here is Ireland's unique cultural context, which should be conceptualised and examined differently from the common internationalisation contexts such as the UK and the US. Ireland has its own unique society, flow pace and demographics of Muslim immigration, as well as its own societal, political and legal approach towards Muslims. In this way, Ireland offers a fresh and attractive case for researchers to examine the Muslim student experience. DCU campus in particular additionally offers a manageable and compelling context for such research to take place. It is a small-size campus with a multi-faith space and visibly diverse body of students and faculties.

Following the points made, the central questions to this study are presented as below:

- What are the experiences of international Muslim students?

- What factors impact upon international Muslim students' experiences?
- Does a religious identity (i.e. being Muslim) have a pertinent impact on college experience?
- What can experience of international Muslim students offer for internationalisation of HE in Ireland?

By answering these questions, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature understanding Muslims experiences in Ireland, particularly in higher education. It additionally makes a valuable contribution to the development of an intercultural curriculum within an internationalisation framework in Irish higher education, and use of grounded theory in exploring experiences of a cultural group in host environments.

From a more personal perspective, this study is driven by an impetus that is in close relation to the researcher's identity. Coming from Turkey, a secular country with a predominantly Muslim population, I attended the school and university at a time when there was a ban on headscarves in public sphere including campuses in Turkey<sup>1</sup> (until 2010). As I proceeded to become a lecturer at a medical university teaching English, the legislation concerning the lifting of the ban on headscarves in public sphere passed through the parliament. This allowed me to experience two different campus environments as a student and as a teacher, particularly with reference to the religious identities of my peers and students as well as accommodation of diversity. Besides this particularity in my academic experience, the university I worked at received international students from countries such as Iraq, Pakistan and Syria, as well as lecturers from Ireland, the US, the UK, Australia, Belarus, etc., allowing me to work in a multicultural environment. Consequently, my own experiences of moving to Ireland as an international student from Turkey and my background in teaching in a

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<sup>1</sup> Related news pieces could be found in the following links:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/22/turkey-lifts-military-ban-on-islamic-headscarf>  
 [Accessed: 25th March 2017] ,  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11880622> [Accessed: 25th March 2017].

medical university with cultural diversity led me to this research concern. In this regard, the study is driven by my personal belief that universities have the power and the responsibility to accommodate, cherish and benefit from cultural diversity as well as to teach students how to live in diversity.

### **1.3 Chapter Outline and Structure of Thesis**

This study uses grounded theory; therefore, the participant interviews guide the data and the findings. This is to say, the participants' lived experiences that they articulate as their opinions, beliefs, perceptions or incidents construct the main body of the research, and the discussion of relevant theories will be conducted in Chapter 9, following the data analysis. This sequence is reflected in the organisation of the contextualisation (Chapter 2, 3), findings (Chapter 5, 6, 7, 8) and theoretical discussion (Chapter 9) chapters as well as the overall structure of the thesis.

The first chapter is the introduction, which explains the research context and states the research questions. The second chapter is concerned with outlaying the context for the study including the state of literature regarding internationalisation, international students, Muslim students. The chapter explores the factors that come into play in international student experiences in a broad sense, and narrow this down to Ireland while looking into the history of higher education in the country as well as the current practices, policies and frameworks. The third chapter reviews empirical studies conducted to examine international student experience, particularly Muslim students and international students in Ireland, and the theories that were used in these previously conducted studies. It identifies a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of international Muslim students in Irish higher education.



The fourth chapter reviews the research design of the project. The methodological choices are explained in reference to qualitative research framework and grounded theory principles. It is argued that given that the gap in the literature points to an area that has not been researched previously, grounded theory serves the research purpose of exploring the experiences of international Muslim students in Ireland the best. Throughout the chapter, the steps of data analysis are explained and illustrated with figures and screen-captures from the data software programme used. The chapter concludes with the need for reflexivity in grounded theory and how this was sought by the researcher during this research project.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 present the findings of the research under respective core category names. Chapter 5 introduces the first core category which explores participants' construction of identity and culture. It underlines nationality, religion, gender, family and sojourner status as constructs of identity and culture as derived from participant interviews. It also identifies participants' relationship with Islam (i.e. practices, meanings) as a factor in determining how and to what extent religion comes into play in their sojourner experiences in Ireland, as well as nationality, gender and family as factors for determining participants' relationship with Islam. Chapter 6 delves into participants' perceptions of the host society and culture, which is a shift from the identity to the environment. It reviews the perceived cultural dissimilarities in the host society, the host society's welcoming attitude, and identifies negative connotations associated with Muslims in the society, however, lack of identity-based incidents towards them. Chapter 7 narrows the examination of the environment to the host institution and identifies institutional support and curriculum as main constructs of this core category along with participants' relationship with the lecturers. In chapter 8, contact is explored from the perspective of participants. Factors affecting both mono-

cultural and intercultural contact and the value and benefits associated with such contact are examined in detail throughout the chapter.

Chapter 9 presents the key findings and grounded theory model of the study and focuses on the discussion of findings in relation to the relevant theories in the literature. Presentation of the literature review is reserved until after presenting the data analysis in order to follow the flow of the grounded theory approach. The key findings suggest that DCU is primarily a multicultural campus rather than intercultural, and more effort is required in both curricular and extra-curricular activities to promote more intercultural engagement between students. Increased opportunities and experiences of intercultural contact are associated with positive outcomes of internationalisation by the students who participated in this project. Chapter 10 presents the conclusion of the study, in which the significance of the study, limitations and recommendations are reviewed.

## CONTEXTUALISATION

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*“International students are now seen to be at the heart of the University and a valuable source of cultural capital. They help to provide the means of delivering the strategy in that, amongst other things, they add to the diversity of the institution and offer focal points for themed activities, such as events celebrating particular cultures.” (Jones 2007: 25-26).*

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the context of the current study. It focuses on the conceptualisation of globalisation, internationalisation of higher education and the international student experience while reviewing the notable studies identified in the literature. The chapter then delves into the recent changes in Irish higher education landscape, estimated trends regarding the internationalisation of HE Ireland and the diversity of the international student body. The chapter finally discusses the changing face of Ireland with regard to immigration and student mobility.

### **2.2 Internationalisation of Higher Education**

In this section definitions and rationales of internationalisation, as well as the different approaches to the phenomenon employed by researchers and institutions are investigated.

As of yet, a consensus has not been reached on what globalisation and internationalisation are, and how they could be theorised (Green 2012, Altbach & Knight 2007, Knight 2004, Dunne 2011, de Wit 2011). The two terms ‘globalisation’ and ‘internationalisation’ are “related but not the same thing” as Altbach & Knight 2007:290 posit. They further argue that,

Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century. Internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment (ibid).

Looked at from this perspective, globalisation reads as the overarching term above internationalisation, the latter being the consequence of the former. Accordingly, it is the globalisation of specifically the economy that is increasingly connecting countries, hence the people of these countries. The consequential interconnectedness requires certain practices or implementations in order to keep with the pace of the circulation of information as well as goods. Contrary to Altbach & Knight's approach to internationalisation as a result of globalisation, Maassen and Cloete (2006:7) describe globalisation as an inevitable consequence “stem[ming] from the financial markets that started operating on a global scale and from the explosion that occurred in international ‘interconnectedness’ –both virtual and real”. According to this interpretation, the authors prefer to emphasise the technological advancements propelling a worldwide network system heavily dependent on economic ties and relations. As a result of the strengthening of the international networks across the globe, the globe itself becomes smaller, in a metaphorical sense, and finance dominates the new age of relationship between the people of different backgrounds. This then brings us to a new and a very significant aspect of globalisation which entails the increasing connectedness at an individual level, as well as collective, stemming from a global financial interdependency fostered by supranational bodies such as The United Nations (UN)<sup>2</sup>, World Trade Organisation (WTO)<sup>3</sup>. Apart from the economic

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<sup>2</sup> The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945 after the Second World War by 51 countries committed to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights. For further information, see: <http://www.un.org/en/aboutun/index.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> It is an organization for trade opening. It is a forum for governments to negotiate trade agreements. It is a place for them to settle trade disputes. It operates a system of trade rules. Essentially, the WTO is

stress on the emergence and conceptualisation of globalisation and internationalisation, Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1992: 2) propose a different characterisation of the concepts as being “the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life”. This expands the argument to the social dimension which cannot be isolated from the financial claims, since any kind of interconnectedness brings about new means of fusion. Castles and Miller (2009: 51) in that sense, posit that “a key indicator of globalisation is a rapid increase in *cross-border flows* of all sorts, starting with finance and trade, but also including democracy and good governance, cultural and media products, environmental pollution and –most important in our context- people”. Although globalisation is characterised mainly as an economic process, it is a new era of

[N]ew information and communications technologies” (ibid.) which entails “the upsurge in direct investment and the liberalisation and deregulation in cross-border flows of capital, technology and services as well as the creation of a global production system – a new global economy” (Petras and Veltmayer, 2000: 2).

Contrary to the prevalence of this intense interconnectedness, one cannot deny the fact that the globe is divided into smaller groups such as countries and regions. The question of how the mobility of individuals and the masses could be incorporated into the phenomenon of globalisation and internationalisation, or even if there is a common ground that could be called global or international, that embraces historically constructed cultures and practices across the groups of people we call nations, becomes of vital importance. This takes us back to Altbach and Knight’s (2009) argument where they approach globalisation and internationalisation as the *reality* of

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a place where member governments try to sort out the trade problems they face with each other. For further information, see: [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/who\\_we\\_are\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/who_we_are_e.htm)

the century in which we live in and internationalisation as the embodied implementations of this reality.

Despite the volume of definitions and conceptualisations regarding the terms globalisation and internationalisation, Green (2012:2) stresses the lack of a particular lexicon particularly in the field of internationalisation where she argues that “the terminology is often confusing”. She remarks that the terms “global”, “international” and “intercultural” are at times used synonymously although they entail differences<sup>4</sup>. Particularly germane to the difference between the terms international and intercultural, they are constructed upon two different axes, namely, nation and culture. However, the prefix is their common ground which yields to connection and communication between the two or more. Internationalisation interpreted as the consequence of globalisation in order for us to cope with it in an organised manner finds resonance in a wide spectrum from migration studies to business companies (Coviello and Munro 1997). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, I will focus on the internationalisation of higher education.

In this vein, Knight (2004:5) argues that use of internationalisation as a concept is ubiquitous and that there is a profusion of approaches towards conceptualising it. She concludes that although there are myriad definitions, the term still comes to represent “the international dimension of higher education and more widely post-secondary education”. This reads as a direct and a plain statement while leaving some room for clarification when she refers to the word international again. This kind of conceptualisation based on the notion of the nation might be the most practical

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<sup>4</sup> The term intercultural will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and 9.

approach as the world is legally divided into nations<sup>5</sup>. Nonetheless, it might be problematic when visible differentiators such as ethnic or racial differences come into play, let alone the cultural or religious particularities which are not as visible and can only be observed when they are put into practice. Having said that, the notion of internationalisation construed upon the nation is the most widely and broadly used – perhaps the most practical- definition in the literature on internationalisation of higher education and this study will employ Altbach and Knight's (2009) aforementioned definition in accordance with this.

### **2.2.1 Approaches to Internationalisation**

De Wit (2011:15) argues that it was in the 1980s that “internationalisation was invented and carried on, ever increasing its importance” making reference to the economic and business led dimension of the phenomenon and suggests a “critical reflection on the changing concept of internationalisation”. There is a common ground on what the drivers are behind internationalisation of higher education, particularly concerning the organisational dimension<sup>6</sup>. The phenomenon appeared as a result of the neo-liberal turn in the world history following the Cold War era<sup>7</sup>, it is set in a market-led context and it is competitive in nature as it generates a significant source of income. (Jones and Brown 2007).

Although changing, the direction of the mobility of international students historically pointed towards developed countries (i.e. United States of America, United Kingdom,

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<sup>5</sup> This is deducted from the fact that membership of supranational bodies such as United Nations or European Union is based on the notion of nation.

<sup>6</sup> See “Internationalising Higher Education” (Jones and Brown 2007) for more details.

<sup>7</sup> Cold War era here refers to the bipolar period between The United States of America and Russia following the end of World War II. For a detailed discussion, see “Security Studies an Introduction” (William 2008).

Australia, etc.) from less developed countries, indicating a clear cut between sending and receiving countries (Jiani 2016). As a result of this one-way movement, a western-centralised education in the third level became prevalent (Jones and Brown 2007). This Western-oriented approach to curriculum design and delivery in third level education might be problematic in a sense that it might fall short in meeting the needs and expectations of international students coming from diverse backgrounds. As Jones and Brown (2007) suggest, there are strong economic and political rationales behind the internationalisation of higher education; however, since the global citizen<sup>8</sup> rationale is closely linked with the social and cultural capital<sup>9</sup> of students, it is now agreed that a western-centred approach to HE curriculum design, delivery, assessment and evaluation needs to be replaced with a more internationalised outlook (Dunne 2011) and should be enhanced with the addition of technology (McIntosh 2005).

Another problematic approach to the internationalisation of HE is the notion of the recruitment of international students with the primary aim of revenue generation (Deardorff 2006a, 2006b, Jones and Brown 2007, Ryan 2013).

Contemporary debates around the rationalisation of the HE landscape [are] framed by a discourse asserting the primacy of the ‘knowledge economy’ and the central place of HE in national economic revival. (Walsh 2014:5).

Lee and Wesche (2000:638) critique prioritising the economic gains achieved through recruitment of international students in Canada by arguing that these students are “viewed as an important – even essential – source of revenue by post-secondary institutions”. Andrade (2006) denounces this “cash cow” approach unless it is

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of global citizenship is explained as intertwined with peace (Noddings 2005) and a global citizen is a person who is able to “[preserve] a network of relationship and connection across lines of difference and distinctness, while keeping and deepening a sense of one’s own identity and integrity” (McIntosh 2005:23).

<sup>9</sup> Cultural capital is defined as the assets of an individuals that come to represent their education, family, political parties, cultural groups (Bourdieu 2011).



supported by institutionalised services and programmes to mediate international students' adjustment to the host culture besides ensuring a holistic education than mere administration of courses. This is in line with Stromquist's (2007) argument where she proposes a more humanistic approach to the design and delivery of third level education with the incorporation of social justice and mutual understanding between and across the cultures. In spite of the arguments in favour of an internationalised curriculum and intercultural education, the global higher education market has emerged as a big sector with large amounts of annual revenue generation with the ever-increasing number of students involved, and it is marked by high levels of competition among traditional institutions (Guruz 2008).

The political notion of HE is evident not only in the Irish context but in the history of third level education. Particularly in the period between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and WW II where, as Knight and de Wit (1995:5) explains "the export of systems of higher education ... took the form of export from the colonial powers to their colonies, and later to the newly independent states". They further suggest that following the WW II as a result of the regionalisation of third level education through bodies such as National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA) and European Union (EU), HE was centred at the heart of social, political and economic development at the expense of its essence as "centre of the universal knowledge and understanding" (ibid.).

Having looked at the different aspects of the arguments surrounding the internationalisation of HE, two major strands of arguments could be deduced. While there is a body of research highlighting the market-led and competitive nature of the phenomenon (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988, Knight 1999, De Wit 2002, Green, 2003, Guruz 2008, Childress 2009), some challenge this business outlook by stressing the

idea that students lie at the heart of internationalisation, and it is through these students' interaction and communication that internationalisation can be achieved (Noddings et al. 2005, Andrade 2006, Deardorff 2006, Jones and Brown 2007, Byram and Nichols 2011, Ryan et al. 2012, Foster 2013). The latter group of scholars are also serious critics of institutional and organisational approaches toward theorising internationalisation of HE as it tends to neglect the student dimension. This type of theorising might lead to the measurement and assessment of internationalisation solely based on the number of students, brandings and rankings, which overlooks the student dynamics on campus (Green 2003, 2012). Muller (1995:75) remarks that with the end of the Cold War period and the globalisation of the economy, there was a need for universities to reconstruct understanding to converge with knowledge which is "the global marketplace of ideas, data and communication". In the light of the discussion so far, Qiang (2003:250) usefully summarises current approaches to the internationalisation of higher education as presented in Table 2-1:

Table 2-1: Approaches to Internationalisation of Higher Education

<b>Approaches to Internationalisation of Higher Education</b>
<i>The activity approach:</i> Based on implementation of activities, i.e. curriculum, student/faculty exchange, recruitment of international students. Relationship and the impact of activities are not officially assessed. Fragmented and uncoordinated.
<i>The competency approach:</i> Emphasis is on development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values in students, faculty and staff. However, what competencies are needed to in order to achieve this development should be researched and clarified.
<i>The ethos approach:</i> Aims to create a culture or climate that values and supports international/intercultural outlook and initiatives. It emphasises that without a strong and supportive culture internationalisation can never be fully realised in the institution.
<i>The process approach:</i> Integration of an international/intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service through a combination of activities, policies and procedures.

Among the four approaches, the activity and competency approaches lack a clear, tangible and comprehensive framework for practice. The emphasis is on policy statements and uncoordinated practices within the institution. The ethos approach is similar terms of policy statements and adds to the concept by emphasising the fundamental role of an intercultural outlook and activities. However, this approach does not go beyond acknowledgement of the diversity created by international students on campus. The process reads as the most comprehensive framework among the four approaches that could be adopted by higher education institutions. Nevertheless, it should be supported and developed with further research and advocacy in the field.

### **2.2.2 Rationales Behind Internationalisation**

Aigner et al (1992) propose three fundamental reasons behind the internationalisation of higher education: 1) concern over national security; 2) remaining economically competitive; and 3) encouraging a human understanding across nations. Scott (1992) points to seven essential principles for globalised education which include economic competitiveness, environmental interdependence, increasing ethnic and religious diversity of local communities, the influence of international trade on small business, national security and peaceful relations between the nations. Davies (1992:177) asserts that academic entrepreneurialism is closely linked to internationalisation. Johnston & Edelstein (1993) also argue that internationalisation of higher education is largely driven by revenue generation and economic competitiveness. In the current climate, it could be said that the rationales behind the internationalisation of HE are driven by four major aspects largely under the influence of different stakeholders such as international, national and regional governments, the private sector or institutions. As Knight and de Wit (1995:9-10) put it “while each of the stakeholder groups has a distinctive perception and set of priorities with respect to internationalisation, there is a substantial overlap” and they propose the aforementioned four major rationales as follows;

- Economic
- Political
- Cultural
- Educational

Those four dimensions, although they go hand in hand, have particularities in their own rights and in terms of contributions they make to third level education. That is why it is useful to discuss them individually yet in reference to one another.

The economic rationale sits at the centre of internationalisation of HE debates (Altbach 2004 et al). It is argued that with the advancement in technology and globalisation of the economy, the investment in the internationalisation of HE is only growing and, likewise, the internationalisation of HE is fostering technological development and the economic growth (Knight & de Wit 1995). Even though it is prone to much criticism from scholars and educators, the economic rationale is a major driver behind the internationalisation endeavours of institutions. It is seen as a “legitimate vehicle for revenue generation” (Dunne 2009:3).<sup>10</sup>

The political rationale is historically inherent in the internationalisation of higher education. Internationalisation of higher education is an attempt to incorporate the best national practices into an overarching, more comprehensive model. This is evident in the European Union which implements a student exchange programme called Erasmus<sup>11</sup> and follows the framework provided by the Bologna Declaration<sup>12</sup>. Altbach and Knight (2007) explain this as regional internationalisation, which prioritises the strengthening of the regional ties while ensuring security in response to the “homogenising factors of globalisation” (Dunne 2009:3). Nevertheless, in the current climate, the economic rationale maintains its primal position among the drivers.

The final two rationales, namely the cultural and educational will be discussed in relation to one another, given the closely and strongly interwoven ties between the two notions. The academic rationale was originally at the core of internationalisation (Scott

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<sup>10</sup> This is evident in the Irish case since English (as well as Irish) is the official and spoken language of the country. This is an advantage to promote Irish HE internationally to create revenue generation in the absence of sufficient State funding.

<sup>11</sup> Erasmus is a student exchange programme between European countries organised by European Union to promote intercultural contact <https://esn.org/erasmus>.

<sup>12</sup> Bologna Declaration is a joint declaration signed by 29 education ministers on behalf of their countries in Europe with an aim to create a framework for higher education, allow free movement of students and mediate accreditation between the institutions <http://www.ehea.info/pid34248/history.html>.

1998) although its prominence has been overshadowed by the lucrative economic rationale (Crosbie 2006). Dunne (2009:5) highlights the importance and role of universities in “educating students to live and work successfully in a rapidly changing world”, which, in fact, is a way of acknowledging the existence of different cultures and their increased interconnectedness through the process of internationalisation. The duties of university education and the desired outcome of internationalised higher education overlap in students’ capital which they bring with them to the campus and the one they leave with at the end of their educational journey. Both the international and the domestic students harbour a valuable source of social and cultural capital they bring with them. It is the university that offers them a designated space to get in touch with each other and undergo a transformation process, which aspires to reinforce reciprocal tolerance, mutual understanding, global citizenship and intercultural personhood (Nussbaum 1997, Volet and Ang 1998, Volet 1999, Knight 1999; Dewey and Duff 2009, Thanosawan and Laws 2013, Kim 2014, Yemini et al. 2014).

Although counted as one of the desired outcomes of internationalisation of higher education, global citizenship is yet again a contested concept in terms of how it could be cultivated (Bourn 2011, Schartner and Cho 2016). Noddings (2005: 2) approaches the notion from a linguistic and definitive perspective stating that “citizen usually refers to a national or regional identity” whereas “global citizenship cannot yet be described this way”. Her emphasis on 'yet' indicates a lack of ground that the notion could be built upon as well as the attempt to put forward to construct and develop a feasible conceptualisation both in a theoretical and practical sense. Coming from the national and regional bases of theorisation of citizenship, we can say that it entails a certain level of commitment to a body of government as well as benefiting from the services offered and rights granted (Noddings 2005). Since there is no “global

government to which we as individuals owe allegiance, and there are no international laws that bind us unless our national government accepts them” (ibid.), it is a challenging task to define global citizenship in such a vacuum of a binding entity. Regardless, McIntosh (2005: 23) associates global citizenship with six capacities of mind;

- the ability to observe oneself and the world around one
- the ability to make comparisons and contrast
- the ability to “see” plurally as a result
- the ability to understand that both “reality” and language come in versions
- the ability to see power relations and understand them systematically
- the ability to balance awareness of one's own realities with the realities of entities outside of the perceived self

and several capacities of the heart which are the ability to;

- respect one's own feelings and delve deeply into themselves
- become aware of others' feelings and to believe in the validity of those feelings
- experience in oneself a mixture of conflicting feelings without losing a sense of integrity
- experience affective worlds plurally while keeping a gyroscopic sense of one's core orientations
- observe and understand how the “politics of location” affect one's own and others' positions and power in the world
- balance being heartfelt with a felt knowledge of how culture is embedded in the hearts of ourselves and others.

These capacities concerning the mind and the heart might naturally flourish out of one's own endeavours to realise, understand and communicate with the others; nonetheless, education should be the most powerful tool to meet this end and increase not only awareness of others and their cultures, but of social justice and environmental sustainability (Crosbie 2006, 2014, Dewey and Duff 2009, Thanosawan and Laws 2013, Yemini et al. 2014, Landford and Feldman 2015). In this immense diversity around the world -in fact this diversity is not only around and across the world anymore; it is gradually being localised with the congregating power of globalisation- it is a challenging task to first recognise and internalise the merits of difference and

diversity and invest this into the education of next generations. It is the desired outcome of education that embraces the new reality of difference and fusion; global citizens who are culturally, socially, politically and environmentally aware and sensitive (also defined as ‘Intercultural Personhood’ Kim 2014, 2015; ‘Intercultural Competence’, Byram et al. 2002, Deardorff 2011).

Behind the four major rationales, culture stands out as the most relevant aspect concerning the social/cultural capital of the students. It is the expected outcome of the international student experience to transform this social capital from a more singular core to a more globalised citizen “who [is] able to travel, to work between and within” cultures (Stevenson 2014: 48). It is now acknowledged that solely gaining a degree in the third level might be inadequate if not supported by services and programmes which facilitate the development of skills and attitudes to become “self-regulating citizens in a globally connected society” (Benfield and Francis 2008:1). Acknowledging that universities are not mere revenue generation sources, “the need to develop cross-cultural interaction and collaboration on campus and within classrooms” (Stevenson 2014: 49) becomes even more essential in higher education. Ireland, in that sense, could be said to experience ‘internationalisation at home’ (Knight 2004) which confers certain responsibilities on the country’s HE to make “university campuses more inclusive, serving an increasingly diverse student and staff body” (Harrison and Peacock, 2010, p. 878).

### **2.2.3 Curriculum in International Higher Education**

The desired outcomes of internationalisation vary depending on the approaches employed. Dunne (2011) points to a lack of a theoretical framework that would substantially conceptualise internationalisation in order to put it into practice in



universities. This challenge of conceptualising and theorising an intercultural curriculum is due to two major factors: the first being the difficulty of conceptualising what ‘intercultural’ means, second being what ‘curriculum’ is.

In an attempt to define ‘intercultural’, Gareis (1995: 3) asserts that it is “situations involving two or more cultures and is used mainly to refer to relationships between two people from different cultures”. This definition leads us to another complex and multi-layered phenomenon<sup>13</sup> which is to explain what culture is.

Linguistically speaking “culture derives from the Latin word root *colare*, and is associated with activities of preservation, of tending to and caring for” (Benhabib 2001: 2). Joann Gottlieb Herder (quoted in Benhabib 2002: 2) also refers to the word *Kultur* as representation of the “shared values, meanings, linguistic signs and symbols of a people, itself considered a unified and homogeneous entity”.

One major aspect that initially seems evident in both literal definitions is that culture is perceived as a composition of multiple elements that are to be preserved. The multiple elements that make up culture emerge out of pluralistic practices that take place among groups of people, which presumably share the same geographic location. Therefore, it can be argued that culture is a collectively experienced phenomenon. In contrast to this perspective on the practice and definition of culture, Gudykunst et al (1996) highlight the presence and role of the individual<sup>14</sup> in the formation and the communication of culture. Therefore, a challenge researchers and practitioners face is the difficulty to conceptualise culture whether as a collectively or individually

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<sup>13</sup> William (1983: 87) defines culture as “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language ... mainly because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought”.

<sup>14</sup> William (1983: 161) defines individual as “distinction” from the others stressing the “indivisibility” of it as opposed to a group.

experienced phenomena. (Gudykunst et al. 1996) given the fact that communication is experienced at an individual level as well as the group. In their discussion on the collective and individual patterns of communication, Gudykunst et al. (1996:510) emphasise the fact that individuals are an essential part of cultural and communicative activities. They “are socialized” beings and “they learn various patterns of interaction that are based on the norms, rules, and values of their culture” (ibid.).

In an attempt to define the curriculum, Jones and Killick (2007) note there are numerous definitions of a curriculum in the internationalisation of higher education literature. However, they problematise the abundance of descriptions, lack of consensus and the narrow scope of these definitions, largely based on the programme of study. In their argument, the internationalisation of curriculum should be extended to entail:

- Student exchanges
- Volunteering
- Interactions with students beyond culture or comfort groups
- Engagement with clubs and societies
- Symbols and ethos conveying institutional ethos and commitment to global perspectives and diversity (2007:109).

As Knight (2004:11) argues that “internationalisation is also about relating to the diversity of cultures that exist with countries, communities, and institutions”, a university cannot practice internationalisation meaningfully unless internationalisation is in harmony with academic, social and cultural variables of the body of students and staff. Additionally, curriculum<sup>15</sup> should not be reduced to pedagogy, but rather reflect the value-based rationales of the higher education regarding global citizenship and intercultural personhood (Kim 2008, 2015). Jones

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<sup>15</sup> Clegg et al. (2010) point to the tacit nature of curriculum in the UK higher education and suggest that further debate and clarification is needed regarding what constitutes curricular and extra-curricular activities in higher education.

and Brown (2007:25) suggest “[i]nternational students are now seen to be at the heart of the university and a valuable source of cultural capital”. They provide many benefits heavily dependent on one another such as creating diversity on campus, adding new perspectives into the classroom debates and interactions outside the class. Most significantly, international students enable participants of the institution to become culturally aware (Ryan 2013). Nevertheless, the blending of cultures and interactions among them cannot be achieved without subsequent effort to facilitate meaningful intercultural engagement between the parties (see 9.5.2 Multiculturalism vs Interculturalism, 9.6 Homophily). As much as it might read as a superficial and a staged effort to have students involved in intercultural contact through planned activities, a curriculum that puts a special emphasis on intercultural engagement will be more inclined facilitate the realisation of student objectives and a successful internationalisation practice (see 9.2 Presentation of the Key Findings and the Grounded Theory Model).

Having acknowledged curriculum and the student as an essential component of internationalisation of HE whether at home or abroad, the discussion now shifts to the review of the literature on study abroad and the international student experience.

#### **2.2.4 The International Student in the Internationalisation of Higher Education Debate**

The debate on the internationalisation of HE and the international student experience give impetus to this study. What makes campus diversity worthwhile studying is best put in the words of Robinson and Lee (2007: 21)

A university should be such a meeting place for the clash of ideas and world views. There are limits and exceptions, especially as universities

have duties of care to students and a commitment to the pursuit of truth ... a university can make a difference in advance of any particular dilemma by the culture it has developed of approaching controversies with open mind, courteous argument and respect for diversity.

Although Robinson and Lee have a general focus on diversity on campus, according to Thom (2010) “the process of internationalisation in universities is, often viewed as merely a one-sided adjustment by international students to the host culture” (quoted in Shanon-Little 2013: 268). This approach is inadequate in a sense that it neglects the host students who are experiencing and being influenced by internationalisation at home, as well as the pedagogical and institutional factors that might play pivotal roles in the mentioned ‘adjustment process’. Additionally, the levels of adjustment and how it can be measured are still being debated by the scholars and practitioners in this area. Dunne (2011) remarks that the intercultural curriculum is still prone to various definitions which are making it difficult to theorise the concept, determine the goals and outcomes and how it can be achieved in a practical sense.

There is much literature on the conceptualisation and theorisation of student mobility and its patterns. Although the concept is prone to myriad definitions, “references to a life changing experiences are common” (Killick 2013:182). In her article, Andrade (2006:132) defines studying abroad as “a common practice whether the experience is short-term, typically a few months in another country to gain intercultural understanding and/or study the language, or long-term, relocating to a different nation to complete a degree”. In her definition, she puts an ‘intercultural’ emphasis on the short-term experience whilst preferring to use the word “settle” to refer to the long-term experience to obtain a degree. Although short-term and long-term study abroad experience have overlapping themes such as intercultural engagement, this study will focus largely on the long-term experience of the respondents of the project are

international Muslim students enrolled in an undergraduate or Master's programme in an Irish university.

Additionally, considering the fact that universities with the goal of internationalising their campus put special emphasis and significant effort into the recruitment of international students from all over the world, campus diversity might grow unevenly on the axis of nationalities unless cultural and religious particularities are taken into consideration, which might be relevant in the international Muslim students' case.

Internationalisation of higher education predicts a growth in the international student body on campus. Although this might be one way of measuring institutional internationalisation, which is closely linked to the economic rationale (see 2.2.2 Rationales Behind Internationalisation), it might become problematic when the focus is on the examination of the campus climate<sup>16</sup>. Ethnic, cultural, religious and racial elements add new dimensions to intercultural contact on campus, which cannot be neglected in order for students to fully realise the outcomes of internationalising university campuses. This is particularly evident in the research being conducted in the US which highlight the race dynamic on the inter-racial contact on campus and reiterate its detrimental impact on racially different students (Chang 1999). Some of the literature intersects race with religion and concludes that students with multiple minority identities might suffer marginalisation on campus, particularly pertaining to Muslim students (Shammas 2009, 2015; Peek 2010).

Here, there is a need to mention the contextual differences between the US and the Republic of Ireland stemming from the historical patterns with regard to immigration.

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<sup>16</sup> Campus climate is used to refer to the to the campus life "where all students have the opportunity to become involved" (Seggie & Stanford 2001:61).

The US is composed of immigrants who formed an idea of a nation from scratch with great cultural, ethnic, religious and racial differences, whereas Ireland, although it always had indigenous minorities in the composition of the society (i.e. the Traveller community<sup>17</sup>), has been racially homogenous, until recently, in comparison to the US. The US contextually involves domestic ethnic and racial cleavages, whereas in Ireland racial diversity has its roots in immigration, particularly during the “Celtic Tiger”<sup>18</sup> era. Therefore, in Ireland the research involving interracial interactions follows a short history of immigration into the country rather than a historically inherent domestic pattern.

Now we will move to another dimension of internationalisation which is the rationales for international student recruitment. Even though those rationales go hand in hand with rationales for internationalisation of higher education, there are certain nuances that need to be discussed in their own context.

### **2.2.5 Rationales Behind the Recruitment of International Students**

This study focuses solely on the sojourner experience and distils the discussion to “international student” experience. It operationalises “the sojourner” as someone who has one foot in the host country and the other in the home country (Sarroub 2001) and “international student” as someone “who travels to another country to study” (Pyvis & Chapman 2005:23)

According to Guruz (2008:16) “international student mobility refers to students studying in a foreign country”. It is regarded as the one of the core elements of transnational education with the widest socioeconomic, cultural political resonance.

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<sup>17</sup> See 2.3 for a detailed discussion.

<sup>18</sup> Economic boom which took place in the Republic of Ireland between the late 1990s and early 2000s.

He further suggests that transnational education and international mobility of students are hardly new phenomena which, as a matter of fact, date back to “the origins of the medieval European university when it was difficult to distinguish students from teachers” (ibid.). The changing pattern in our rapidly globalising world is the means to deliver the education (i.e. communication, transportation, information technologies) which is positively correlated with the increase in numbers of mobile students and closely linked to growing market of a global knowledge economy.

Andrade (2006) suggests four rationales for the recruitment of international students which are in accordance with the rationales behind the internationalisation of higher education. Among the four rationales economic is ranked first and as being the most obvious. This is due to the fact that the financial contribution of international students to the economy is significant. She employs a comparison of Ireland and the UK to illustrate the positive relationship between the number of students recruited by the country and the revenue gap it creates. For example, in 2005<sup>19</sup> Ireland’s international student number was less than 2 per cent in proportion to the overall number of students enrolled in higher education institutions, whereas the number was approximately 12 per cent in the UK in 2005 (Institute of International Education Institute of International Education 2005) which subsequently increases the amount of money generated<sup>20</sup>.

Secondly, she mentions the impact of globalisation and the maximised demand for intercultural education and understanding (Peterson et al 1997). She reiterates the role

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<sup>19</sup> In 2012, this number rose to 32,000 –an increase of 2% over 2011’s figures- which indicates a positive progress. See Education in Ireland’s (EI) publications for more detailed numbers. <http://www.educationinireland.com/en/publications/international-students-in-higher-education-in-ireland-2011-to-2012.pdf> [last accessed June 2nd 2014]

<sup>20</sup> International students and their dependants supply over US\$13 billion dollars annually to the US economy.

of international students in enhancing intercultural communication “with increased understanding of diversity and global issues” (2006:133). Third, she underlines the political dimension of the phenomenon and adds that international students are important actors in building bridges between the nations, reinforcing international business and trade connections (NAFSA 2003). They also help bolster political alliance and political interests (Schneider, 2000).

In addition to the economic, global and political aspects, the skills international students gain during their degree might lead to a career in the host country where there are no or few nationals qualified for the position offered (Gray 2003, Colebatch 2005). In the same vein as Jones and Brown (2007), the university is expected to take students’ educational and cultural experiences into consideration rather than merely suppose a smooth cross-cultural transition/adjustment without offering support and programming (Boucher et al., 1999). It is evident in the literature that incorporation of activities that foster intercultural contact between the international and host students is a requisite (Zhao et al 2005).

### **2.2.6 Motivations Behind the Student Mobility**

Guruz (2008) employs a pragmatic approach to explain the international student mobility by putting a special emphasis on the globalisation of world markets and competition as its natural consequence. He suggests three factors facilitating young people’s mobility for the sake education abroad:

- Compete in the global labour market
- Make friends
- Meet future business partners



Altbach (2009:290) incorporates an institutional aspect and lists the factors motivating educational institutions to offer international programmes as:

- The desire of universities to improve their own international reputation
- The need to increase revenues due to fierce national competition for students and/or poor public funding in the home country
- The desire of developing countries to enhance the quality of their educational system through foreign education

Looked at from this perspective, the second factor is evident in the Irish case. The country went through an economic crisis period around the late 2000s<sup>21</sup>, hence a revenue generation opportunity provided by the arrival of new international students is an offer that cannot be refused. Altbach's (2009) approach, however, focuses mainly on the host institutions' motivations, while Lee & Tan (1984) posit factors influencing student's decision to study abroad as shown in Table 2-2:

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<sup>21</sup> That period of time marks the end of economic boom and the financial crises largely caused by the mortgage credits.

Table 2-2 Factors influencing students' decision to study abroad

<b>Factors influencing students' decision to study abroad</b>	
<i>Factors in home country</i>	<i>Factors in host country</i>
Limited access to education	Commonality of language
Historical links between host & home countries	Technology-based programmes
GNP growth rate	Geographic proximity
Perceptions of quality	
Wealth of the country	

Table 2-2 summarises both Guruz's and Altbach's approaches to the student mobility as it brings two aspects of the phenomenon together. Although it might be difficult to apply this general scheme to every particular context, it is a valuable categorisation for encapsulating the overlapping elements of student mobility.

In student mobility literature, "the push and pull model" (Altbach 1998, Mazzarol and Soutar 2002) is commonly used (Jiani 2016). The model is essentially based on the causality between the unfavourable factors in home country (the push) and favourable factors in the host (the pull). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) argue that mobility is generally takes place from less developed to the more developed countries. However, this is challenged by new research in the literature. Jiani (2016) argues that earlier version of the push and pull model overlooks students' decision-making mechanism or agency in other words. Jon et al. (2014) note that direction of student mobility is additionally challenged in the light of new research and evidence. There are now students studying abroad in countries such as China, Turkey, South Africa, South

Korea, Mexico motivated by experiencing new cultures and career opportunities (Jiani 2016).

In addition to Lee & Tan's 1984 model, Stark (1967) and Siddle (2000) suggest that push factors may stem from historic, cultural, colonial, economic, or geographic reasons; therefore, causing the migrant a linguistic, cultural and financial hardship as a result of the distance from family and home. In this regard, education is considered a strong influence on an individual's decision to move to another country (Bogue 1969, Quinn & Rubb 2005, Castles & Miller 2009, Brooks & Waters 2011).

Even though a larger and more detailed discussion is required to cover the research area sufficiently, it is beyond the scope of this chapter alone. Nonetheless, these factors substantially advice on a conceptualisation of internationalisation of higher education as one of the key concepts of this study. They will additionally be explored in more detail in Chapter 8 and 9 where the findings of the study will be discussed.

### **2.3 Internationalisation in Irish Higher Education**

This section aims to highlight the recent changes in third level education in Ireland while making reference to the country's history with mobility and immigration in a globalising world. The section highlights the increase in the number of Muslim international students arriving at the country to pursue higher education and draw attention to the lack of research in the context of Ireland.

The international students, as aforementioned, potentially create a new source of revenue not only for the institution but also for the country they reside in. To give an example, the United States which has the largest number of international students (almost 765,000) arguably benefits from a \$22.81 billion contribution to the economy

through those international students and their dependents (Education in Ireland 2012:9, NAFSA 2012)<sup>22</sup>.

The visible increase in the number of young people coming to Ireland for third level education (Keane 2009, Education in Ireland 2012) has become one of the contributing factors to the changing face of Ireland. The country is becoming a globally acknowledged education resource and a research hub<sup>23</sup>. The Republic presents itself as a safe, English-speaking country, which is a member of European Union and with strong historical and economic ties with the UK<sup>24</sup>. In addition to these, Ireland also takes advantage of the language factor (English). The country recognises the significance of the growing knowledge economy and hosts European headquarters of several American technology companies (i.e. Google, Facebook, Twitter). Despite the fact the Republic faces tough competition in terms of attracting international students (i.e. the UK, the US, Australia) (Bennell & Pearce 2003, Hatakenaka 2004), it is progressing towards a stronger stance in terms strategic developments implemented during the past few years<sup>25</sup>. In the paragraphs below, a historical background, as well as the current situation and trends in third level education in Ireland, will be discussed.

As part of Ireland's colonial past with the UK, religion was internalised as the major aspect of the Irish identity by the Irish people which –eventually- came to represent the national and cultural identity (Daly 2003) following the foundation of the new, independent state. Garner (2004) and Fitzgerald (2003) portray Ireland as a historically mono-cultural country and describe the overall profile as being white and Roman

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<sup>22</sup> The Economic Benefits of International Students to the US Economy. November 2012.

<sup>23</sup> See Higher Education Authority's (HEA) website.

<sup>24</sup> See Education in Ireland (EI) website.

<sup>25</sup> See Higher Education Authority's National Strategy Plan 2030 for detailed information [http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/national\\_strategy\\_for\\_higher\\_education\\_2030.pdf](http://www.heai.ie/sites/default/files/national_strategy_for_higher_education_2030.pdf) [last accessed June 2nd 2014).

Catholic. This narrative, however, overlooks the local/indigenous diversity within the island and neglects the place of minorities such as Traveller communities<sup>26</sup> and the Jews migrated from Eastern Europe (Daly 2003)

In the following years of the World War II (WW II). Walsh (2014) points to a shift in Irish HE from being entirely autonomous to a site of political intervention in the 1960s when Donogh O'Malley put forward an initiative to merge Trinity College Dublin, which was established as a Protestant plantation, and University College Dublin, which is regarded as a Catholic and national institution, at a time where “national discourse was dominated by conservative Catholicism, protectionism and nationalism” in the Free State of Ireland (ibid.).<sup>27</sup>

From 1994 to 2006, Ireland has shifted from being a country of emigration into a country of immigration (MacLachlan, O' Connell 2000). The rapid transition from a slow, traditional to a cosmopolitan urban society is reflected in the higher education sector as well. Ireland had every reason to partake in the global knowledge economy with its strengths identified as a “safe” and “English-speaking” country. This remarkable change in the nature of mobility from and into Ireland finds resonance in a wide spectrum from polity level legislations in parliament to everyday encounters in a cafe or a street. O' Sullivan argues that (2007:5) “as has happened in other western capitalist societies, Ireland has seen an expansion and diversification of the education

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<sup>26</sup> The Equal Status Act 2000:7 defines Travellers as follows: Traveller Community means the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified [by themselves and others] as people with a shared history, culture and tradition, including, historically, a nomadic way of life, on the island of Ireland. Travellers are a distinct indigenous minority group, who share characteristics such as nomadism, Traveller Language, craftwork and the importance of the extended family. Available at <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2000/act/8/enacted/en/pdf> [Accessed 19/10/2016]

<sup>27</sup> Irish HE was entirely autonomous following the foundation of the Free State in 1922. Although this “high degree of institutional autonomy” sounds desirable in an academic context, it led to lack of source for funding and financial hardship for universities (Walsh 2014:6).

system in the recent decades, and massive expansion of the third-level sector in the past decade”. As could be found in the reports available online “Ireland attracted students from 170 countries or territories during the 2011/12 academic year (up from 163 in 2010/11) and of these students 52% were female and 48% male”. (Education Ireland 2012:8)

### **2.3.1 Higher Education and Higher Education Authority (HEA) in Ireland**

The increase in the participation in higher education in Ireland, both nationally and internationally, is undeniable (Keane 2009). Higher education in Ireland consists of universities, institutes of technology and private independent colleges. Although the enrolment criteria are determined by each institution, in general, it is based on Leaving Certificate Examination<sup>28</sup> results for Irish citizens; national examination and English competency level<sup>29</sup> for international students. In a growing and developing context such as Ireland, it is essential that a governing body is responsible for the development and delivery of the whole system. The Higher Education Authority (HEA) in Ireland is this kind of body that acts to “create a higher education system that maximises opportunities and ensures a high-quality experience for students”.<sup>30</sup> In an attempt to develop and contribute to the internationalisation of higher education in Ireland, the HEA has recently begun employing surveys nationwide collecting data from both students and employers, which, in fact, indicates that the student experience is being

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<sup>28</sup> Leaving Certificate Examination is a set of exams based on different subjects such as Maths and History in order to apply for post-secondary education in the Republic of Ireland.

<sup>29</sup> International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

<sup>30</sup> The HEA is the statutory funding authority for the universities, institutes of technology and a number of other designated institutions and is the advisory body to the Minister for Education and Skills in relation to the higher education sector. <http://www.heai.ie/en/about-hea>

placed at the heart of the internationalisation. The efforts are created to become a benchmark in the post-secondary education sector; nevertheless, the attempt to take the student perspective into consideration is in line with the intercultural mottos of the country, in general<sup>31</sup>.

The HEA employs an online survey available through a link on their website<sup>32</sup> where the students are asked a hundred questions about their experience in Irish HE. On the FAQs section, the aim of the survey is expressed as

The survey is a national project to engage with students and to hear your views. Institutions and national policy-makers will collect, analyse and report the results of the survey to inform future planning. Feedback will be given at local level and national level. This is your opportunity to help your own institution and to influence the future experience of students in higher education. Have your say now and help to build a better education system for Ireland.

This rationale behind collecting data from students on their experience to engage them more into the system supports the significance of student engagement in higher education policies (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005, Kuh 2001a, 2001b, Coates 2010).

Besides the body of HEA regulating the higher education policies, there is another source of higher education and student related data in Ireland, namely the Education in Ireland (EI) body. However, their data collection on the number of international students discontinued since the release of 2012 report. This leaves HEA as the only resource for updated information regarding the number of international students in Ireland. It should be noted here that HEA's data is a limited source since its latest publication, for instance, captures only Institutes of Technology<sup>33</sup>. Additionally, Jan

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<sup>31</sup> See An Garda Síochána's (Ireland's National Police Service) website. <http://www.garda.ie/Controller.aspx?Page=154>

<sup>32</sup> <http://studentsurvey.ie/wordpress/>

<sup>33</sup> Available at <http://www.heai.ie/node/1557> [Accessed 19/10/2016]

O' Sullivan, Minister for Education and Skills, states in 2016, international students studying in Ireland increased by 25 percent since 2012<sup>34</sup>.

Although not updated since 2012, EI (2012) points to the USA, China and other European countries with the highest number of international students in Ireland. Historical emigration ties with the US, colonial ties with the UK and the Erasmus exchange programme with the EU member and candidate states generate the highest percentage in the numbers. Countries which are either predominantly Muslim, such as Malaysia, or those which have a large Muslim population, such as are listed in the top ten in EI 2011-2012 report in Table 2-3.

Table 2-3: International Students by Mode/Duration 2011/12 (All)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Exch/short (%)</b>	<b>Distance (%)</b>	<b>Offshore (%)</b>	<b>Not Specified (%)</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>2009-10</b>	16,201 (66%)	8,447 (34%)	109 (<1%)	Not collected	21 (<1%)	<b>24,778</b>
<b>2010-11</b>	14,960 (51%)	9,227 (31%)	489 (2%)	4,503 (15%)	197 (1%)	<b>29,376</b>
<b>2011-12</b>	15,596 (49%)	9,110 (28%)	1,128 (4%)	6,166 (19%)	123 (<1%)	<b>32,123</b>

*Source: Education in Ireland 2010-12*

Those are followed by Singapore, Pakistan and Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Students from countries with a sizeable Muslim population represents a significant chunk of the international student cohort in EI 2011-2012 report in Table 2-4.

<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2016-Press-Releases/PR2016-04-21.html> [Accessed 19/10/2016].



Table 2-4: International Students by Country of Origin 2010-12

Rank	Country of Origin	Ireland	Offshore/distance	2011/12 Totals	2010/11 Totals	Difference
1	China	2,751	2,349	5,100	5,105	-5
2	USA	4,415	31	4,446	4,386	60
3	Singapore	141	1,678	1,819	1,545	274
4	UK	1,130	58	1,368	1,611	-243
5	Malaysia	1,168	123	1,291	1,168	123
6	Canada	975	69	1,044	884	160
7	Saudi Arabia	705	124	829	379	450
8	India	788	28	816	858	-42
9	Bahrain	79	727	806	23	783
10	Kuwait	416	32	448	312	136
11	Sweden	170	1	171	191	-20

*Source: Education in Ireland, 2012*

Access to and an accurate number of Muslim students studying as international students in Ireland is not possible given the lack of data on religious affiliations of the students. The universities or colleges likewise do not keep a track of religious background of students during the enrolment process. This might be due to the fact that religious identity is neither a prerequisite for college entry nor a necessary part of one's identity to be openly manifested. However, relevant information regarding the funding opportunities offered by those countries which have a sizeable Muslim population (i.e. Kuwait, Saudi Arabia<sup>35</sup>) is identified online.

<sup>35</sup> See <http://mohe.gov.sa/en/e-services/student-services/pages/kasservice.aspx> [Accessed 19/10/2016].

The Saudi Arabia government offers scholarships for students who wish to study abroad every year under the scheme of King Abdullah Scholarship Programme. Any student who has completed high school is deemed eligible to apply for the scheme. The application process includes submission of Grade Point Average<sup>36</sup> (GPA) results and choosing one of the English-speaking countries that are listed on the application form. The top-ranked countries are the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom who “have developed clear national priorities and comprehensive strategies to attract a larger number of international students” (Schneider, 2000: 2–3). Ireland with its seven universities<sup>37</sup> and English speaking context still has to develop a national framework and a strategic plan to increase its attractiveness. In that regard, HEA developed a National Strategy Plan for HE to 2030 to set solid internationalisation strategies through structural changes and incorporation of the student experience into the curriculum design in Irish HE, which is yet defined as in “transition”.

In reference to the numbers mentioned earlier, it is important to highlight the fact that Islam is marked as the fastest growing religion in the world (Izsak 2013). The scholarly attention does not come as a surprise given the negative connotations of the religion following the attacks associated with Muslims over the past fifteen years, regardless of the increasing number of Muslims worldwide. To illustrate this point, Niyozov (2010) reports that the Muslim population in Canada increased by 128% from 253,000 to 842,000 between the years 1991-2007 which made Islam the principal non-Christian religious group in the country.

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<sup>36</sup> Grade Point Average (GPA) is used to measure student’s success while leaving the secondary education level in a centralised manner.

<sup>37</sup> See HEA website, publications.

Scharbrodt (2012:221) remarks that there has been a tremendous growth in the number of Muslims in Ireland from around 4,000 in 1991 to current estimates of nearly 50,000. Delaney and Cavatorta (2010:2) posit that the Muslim population in Ireland has been “relatively” neglected in research in comparison to other European countries’ body of literature on this particular group of people. They state that due to the lack of both qualitative and quantitative data on the demographics of Muslims in Ireland, the group is categorised as a “holistic entity” rather than a “heterogeneous community” with its ethnic cleavages (ibid). For example, according to Imam Shehu<sup>38</sup> there were around 1000 adult Muslims from Nigeria living in Ireland in 2006 and he criticises the Arab-dominated discourse prevailing in the Republic. He continues his critique by asserting “Get rid of your Arabism and recognise that Muslims are a diverse group. There are more than 42 different nationalities amongst Muslims in Ireland. There are also different strands of Muslims and various schools of thought”<sup>39</sup>.

This research particularly focuses on a university campus and extracts the international Muslim student population from the rest of the community for its purposes. Given the scarcity of research conducted in the Republic of Ireland concerning the Muslim population (Flynn 2006, Scharbrodt 2012, Scharbrodt and Sakaranaho 2011), this study aims to draw on the existing body of literature and the findings that have been gathered elsewhere outside Ireland before beginning to fill the aforementioned gap within the context of Ireland.

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<sup>38</sup> Imam Shehu is a cleric from Lagos.

<sup>39</sup> Irish Times 10/13/2006, p. 14

## **2.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter examined the phenomenon of internationalisation of higher education, different approaches toward it, and its desired outcomes both for the institutions and the student. It reviewed the relationship between internationalisation and student mobility, and the factors behind student mobility. The chapter concluded with a review of higher education, internationalisation and international students in Ireland with reference to increasing numbers and strategy development. The next chapter reviews the empirical studies conducted to examine experiences of Muslim students in particular and the common theoretical frameworks identified in previous research.

## **REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

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This chapter reviews empirical studies conducted on Muslim students' experiences particularly in higher education outside Ireland, the theories used in these research, and identifies a gap in the literature in the Irish context focusing on international Muslim students' experiences despite the increasing numbers of them in the country, which has often remained embedded in the international student research.

### **3.1 The International Student Experience**

This study uses the international Muslim students as its focal point since internationalisation of higher education and international student mobility go hand in hand. In this chapter, it is aimed that a review of the previous research on Muslim students informs on the formulation of the specific research question of this study. The review of the previous empirical studies with their respective theoretical concepts is not to allow the theory pervade the data collection and analysis, but to incorporate the relevant literature into the research design. By this way, it is also aimed that the researcher familiarises themselves with the theoretical tenets of the research field and confirm the originality of the research question asked. An elaborated discussion of the theories specifically relevant to the findings of this research project will take place in Chapter 9.

To date, a modest number of research has been conducted regarding the experiences of international students in Ireland (Crosbie 2006, 2014, Dunne 2008, 2009, 2011, Sheridan 2011, O'Reiley et al. 2013, Üstündağ 2016), yet a great deal of research has been done outside of Ireland (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, de Vita 2005, Andrade 2006, Guruz 2008, Killick 2013, Ryan 2013, Jon et al. 2014, Jiani 2016, Stevenson 2016). The research shows international student experience point to both positive and negative reflections from the students. The negative experiences are often related to adaptation problems in the host country. In a narrower sense, research to date underlines problems such as language difficulties (Pearson-Evans 2001, 2006, Byram 2006), academic difficulties (Sheridan 2011), financial problems (Ujitani 2006, Turcic 2008), cultural differences (Boucher 1999) and exclusion based on religious identity (Stevenson 2014, 2016). Additionally, it should be noted that food & drink culture in the host country might become a particular challenge for international students, which might impede their adjustment process (Pearson-Evans 2001, 2006, see 6.2.2 Food and Drink Culture in Ireland). The country's climate, attitudes of the host society as well as the norms and values of the society can impact on international students' cross-cultural adjustment<sup>40</sup> (O'Reilly, Ryan, and Hickey 2010 cited in O'Reilly 2013, see Chapter 6).

### **3.2 Review of theoretical concepts used in previous research on Muslim students**

This section has the objective of introducing the most relevant theoretical frameworks that are identified in the literature during the contextualisation of the study. It should

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<sup>40</sup> Cross-cultural adjustment process defined as "the dynamic process by which individuals, upon relocating to new, unfamiliar, or changed cultural environments, establish (or reestablish) and maintain relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationships with those environments" (Kim 2001:31).

be noted that elaborated discussion of theories in relation to the data analysis will take place in Chapter 9.

With this in mind, the section will first introduce the most commonly used theoretical framework “Identity” in the international/Muslim student literature. In line with grounded theory principles, the application of the framework will be conducted in Chapter 9, following the presentation of the data analysis (see Chapter 4 for research methodology). Chapter 9 will additionally present the application and discussion of other theories that are identified as most relevant to the findings of this research.

### **3.2.1 Identity and its relation to culture**

Identity is a rigorously investigated field of research with psychological, cognitive, affective and behavioural domains in addition to cultural, political, social, personal, interpersonal and inter-group dimensions. According to Gudykunst (1998:40) and Nishida “our cultures have a tremendous influence on the way we communicate, whether we are aware of it or not”. Similarly, Hall (1959:169) remarks “culture is communication and communication is culture”. Kim (2009:53), a prominent scholar in the field of intercultural studies, usefully defines identity in the rapid globalisation context of our time as below:

Paradoxically the very forces that diminish physical boundaries have surfaced the notion of identity as a powerful way to differentiate, diverge and even denigrate culturally and ethnically dissimilar others. Such an identity posturing often exacerbates ethnic and national rivalries, rendering alarming daily news headlines and a deeply unsettling global political landscape. To many, the seemingly innocent banner of group identity is now a compelling sore spot galvanising them into an us-against-them line drawing.

Since this project is situated in the field of internationalisation and intercultural contact, Kim's emphasis on the impacts of globalisation on how we define and negotiate identity is important.

Martin and Nakayama (2010:162) suggest that "identity serves as a bridge between culture and communication". Similarly, Benhabib (2002:1) states "*culture* has become a ubiquitous synonym for *identity*, and identity marker and a differentiator" (original in italics). Benhabib (2002) explains that we increasingly come to assume that every group has a culture of their own and this could be found in many aspects of life from media outlets to the courts. Therefore, individuals tend to assume as well as actively seek common characteristic of these groups in the case of communication (Goffman 1956). Berry et al. (2002:357) also define cultural identity as:

[A] complex set of beliefs and attitudes that people have about themselves in relation to their culture group membership; usually these come to the fore when people are in contact with another culture.

However, Benhabib (2002:2) problematises this essentialist approach towards understanding identity by listing three faulty epistemic premises:

1) that cultures are clearly delineable wholes; 2) that cultures are congruent with populations groups and that a noncontroversial description of the culture of a human group is possible; and 3) that even if cultures and groups do not stand in one-to-one correspondence, even if there is more than one culture within a human group and more than one group that may possess the same cultural traits, this poses no important problems for politics or policy.

Here, Benhabib points to the fact that defining culture as an identity marker might in turn result in understanding identity as a whole, linear and a homogenous concept, which indicates a paradox within the concept. Similarly, Holliday (2004) proposes that identity is influenced by external factors such as one's country of origin or society;



therefore, it is a multi-faceted phenomenon and an individual's construction of identity is equally powerful and significant in terms of what defines identity.

Besides the intercultural context of the study, the focus is on Muslim students as participants, and their lived experiences in an Irish university as international students. For the purpose of this study, Table 3-1 presents how "Identity" was used as a theoretical lens in previous research on Muslim students.

Table 3-1 Use of Identity as a theoretical framework in previous research on Muslim/religious students

<b>Identity identified as theoretical lens in previous research on Muslim/religious students</b>	
<b>Muslim identity</b>	(Ercan 2015)
<b>Lifeworlds</b>	(Stevenson 2016)
<b>Othering</b>	(Arar & Haj-Yehia, 2010, Seggie and Sanford 2010, Stevenson 2014, 2016)
<b>Discrimination &amp; Marginalisation</b>	(Schlosser and Sedlacek 2001, Abu-El-Haj 2002, Cole and Ahmadi 2003, Asmar 2004, Modood 2006, Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006, Shammass 2009, Hopkins 2011)

Ercan (2015:226) refers to identity construction of Muslim children as a "difficult task" to conceptualise by critiquing the inadequacy of previous research and theoretical models to explain the notion of being Muslim. She draws from Peek's (2005) conceptualisation of identity and describes it as "the basis for understanding and facilitating social-emotional development" (2015:226). Ercan (2015:232) also refers to the role of agency in identity construction, described as "the ways in which people become agents in their identity construction". The findings of the study suggest that Muslim students participated negotiated construction of their Muslim identity in

various ways when they were in an academic environment. (See Chapter 5 Perceptions of Identity and Culture).

Stevenson (2016:65) draws from Merleau-Ponty's lifeworld dimension as developed by Ashword (2006) as a theoretical framework in her research to investigate "how being a student" is experienced by religious students in the UK. In her research lifeworld dimensions is built on eight dimensions (Ashword 2006:265) as below:

- Selfhood
- Sociality
- Embodiment
- Temporality
- Spatiality
- Project
- Discourse
- Mood

Looked at from lifeworld dimensions' theoretical lens, Stevenson (2016:73) concludes that sense of being is in strong relation with the participants' "social identity and sense of self, and this, in turn, affects their relationship with other staff and students". Therefore, being religious has an inevitable impact on their campus relationship development.

To elaborate further on Table 3-1, Abu-El-Haj (2002) and Schlosser and Sedlacek (2001), stress the fact that Muslim students studying at Western campuses sometimes find themselves in a situation where they have to cope with manifestations of ethnic discrimination and/or Islamophobia<sup>41</sup> fed by "ignorance and fear" (Abu-El-Haj (2002:310). On those campuses, Muslim students also report being identified as outsiders, which could be described as not "being American" in Abu-El-Haj's words (2002:313).

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<sup>41</sup> Muslim racism, anti-Muslim discourse (Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006)

The prevalent perception of Muslim minorities among the Western societies is not associated with a strong and progressive image. Besides, Western societies are inclined to deem the Muslim women submissive and dominated (Modood 2006, Tyrer & Ahmad, 2006). Consequently, Muslim students attending universities, where the culture is largely Western-oriented, might experience otherness, alienation and marginalization, described as being deprived of opportunities as a group or individual if not seen as a member of the majority (Tyrer & Ahmad 2006). This ultimately results in the permanency of the minority group identity status to strive in the hegemony of the dominant culture (Branch 2001, Heller 2001).

Cole and Ahmadi (2003:47) situate the students' intellectual and personal growth at the core of the higher education while they reiterate the need to understand Muslim students' experiences as part of the ever “diverging college student population”. They critique the fact that the Muslim student experience is embedded in international student research to a large extent (2003, 2010), which resonated with Bocher’s (1999) study and add that “excavating empirical data specific to this student group is arduous and generally lacks depth once uncovered” (2003:47). Their 2003 study focuses on female students only (the majority of whom are international students) given that the veil is a visible religious practice peculiar to the females, and they identify communication barriers due to the perceived image of Muslims as being conservative (see 5.3.2 Female Muslim Identity, 8.3.1 Headscarf Practice and Its Impact on Relationship Development on Campus). Their findings also fortify the notion that peer interaction on campus as the most influential on students' feeling of alienation or acceptance as suggested by other scholars working in the field (Heikinheimo and Shute, 1986; Surdam and Collins, 1984, Shammass 2015).

Cole and Ahmadi (2003) also elicit the relationship between the level of perceived discrimination and alienation and the decision to quit veiling. Students who report to have encountered higher levels of marginalisation were found to be “more likely to reinvestigate the purposes of veil” (Cole & Ahmadi 2003:65). In an overall sense, the study reiterates the strong relationship and interplay between religious affiliation and the level of the impact college has on these students with regard to identity development, intercultural communication and interaction, and academic commitment.

In his work to explore the relationship between the campus as a geographic entity and the identities of Muslim students, which was conducted in the UK, Hopkins (2011:160) reports that the campus emerges as a “tolerant and a liberal place”. The students he interviews iterate the fact that college experience is a positive one reinforcing an emancipation and liberation given the contested nature of their identities. This is partly because universities accommodate and embrace diversity in a context where the occupants are inclined to be “more educated than the society as a whole” (Hopkins 2011: 160). The university also brings the people together under the student/learner “shared identity” where they do not have to negotiate their religious or ethnic identity in a “residentially and educationally segregated location” (Hopkins 2011: 161). Nevertheless, large-scale extremist events associated with Muslims such as the 9/11 attacks, the London bombings<sup>42</sup> are highlighted to have a negative effect on their experiences. Additionally, the “dominance of drinking culture on campus” is reported to have been leading to “everyday marginalisation” (Hopkins 2011: 164). The lack of halal food and the marginalised location of the praying facilities on campus

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<sup>42</sup> 9/11 attacks refer to the extremist event which took place in the US in 2001 launched by the terrorist group Al-Qaeda, which resulted in mass losses. London bombings took place in July 2005 and were similarly conducted by men associated with Islam.

also create the sense of exclusion among the Muslim students. He concludes by stating that “as their narratives suggest, the students argue that the university campus is tolerant and diverse, while also experiencing it as exclusionary and hostile” (Hopkins 2011:166). This is due to the ways in which:

[G]lobal issues and national policies shape their experiences on campus as well as the methods whereby they encounter discrimination and exclusion in their everyday use of campus facilities ... the accounts of the students also show that they are not simply accepting the global-national-local transmission of negative discourses about their religion and are instead actively responding to this through everyday resistances, creative dialogues and challenges to the status quo (ibid.)

Hopkins also concludes that the geography of campus is a significant factor impacting students’ sense of belonging<sup>43</sup>, since the location of the prayer facility might indicate how included Muslim students are in the mainstream campus culture.

In a study conducted at a post-1992 university in the UK, Stevenson (2014) explores that religious students might feel at risk of being marginalised for their religious identity on campus and might even feel the need to hide their religious identity in order to avoid such marginalisation. She further states that religious students, among others, are both “highly visible” due to the perceived threat of extremism associated with religion, and “invisible” as a result of the secular education policy and lack of acknowledgement of their identity on campus (Stevenson 2016:63). Muslim students in Stevenson’s (2014) study not only report feelings of frustration with the status of being the other on campus, also that they feel most vulnerable to become the other on campus due to their Muslim identity.

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<sup>43</sup> Sense of belonging is used in a similar vein as Puwar (2004:51) describes; “some bodies have the right to belong in certain locations, while others are marked out as trespassers who are in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined, politically, historically and conceptually circumscribed as being out of place”.

In another study conducted in Australia, on the college experiences of Muslim male and female students, the presumed gender differences were challenged by being reported as not so significant among the group (Asmar et al. 2004). The study concludes that Muslim students display a strong commitment to their academic endeavours and a high level of satisfaction with their studies; however, the authors do not elaborate on the reasons or factors leading to the high levels of academic success and commitment. They note that this needs further exploration in the future studies. They also add the differences in student responses with regard to the sense of belonging to and being valued in the community depending on the presence or absence of praying facilities on campus (see 7.4 The Interfaith Centre, 9.3.3 Muslim Students and Accommodation of Religious Diversity on Campus). It is notable to say that Asmar et al.'s (2004) findings are in line with Hopkins' (2011) in a sense that students do not encounter "overt discrimination" on campus, whereas outside the campus, where the profile of the population changes, they report to have experienced varying levels of discrimination -particularly while commuting to school (Asmar et al. 2004:60). This might suggest that campus is a promising site to embrace diversity and foster intercultural contact where the endorsement and development of the desired global citizenship might be achieved.

The debate on campus diversity is heavily influenced and motivated by the presence of international students on campus; nevertheless, religion has not been counted as difference and has historically been overlooked on secularised western campuses (Nash 2005). Although institutions may opt to remain secular, this might not be the case at an individual level, as religion is regarded as part of one's worldview (see 5.3.1 Participants' Relationship with Islam). Particularly in the case of females who choose to cover their hair as a result of their commitment to Islam, which becomes an open

manifestation of religious identity by the receivers. Gilliat-Ray (2000) stresses the positive relationship between the growing number of international students being recruited by the universities and the richness of religious faith on campus. This suggests a need to explore and understand this facet of the debate by looking at how these religious preferences might impact upon their college experiences and how this could be blended into the notions of intercultural communication and intercultural curriculum development and design in third level education. Nonetheless, this kind of research might be deemed as a threat to the university's' secular approach on the grounds that it breaches the historical motto of higher education, which is free from religion and dogmas.

### **3.2.2 Multiculturalism and Interculturalism**

It is indicated in the above paragraphs that a strong relationship between identity, culture and a host environment pervades previous studies. Given the fact that this study is concerned with international students who identify as Muslim and is set within an internationalisation framework, a discussion of multicultural and intercultural is essential.

The European discourse on race, ethnicity and education emerged in the 1960s in response to growing populations of migrants from other parts of the world, particularly Asia and Africa (Meer et al 2010). The relatively homogenous Europeans “fractured the discourse with theories on multicultural and antiracist education” (Modood and May 2001:305). Higher Education, according to Connor (2004) and David (2007) acts as a mediator between the spheres of minorities and majority in many ways through financial, educational and political opportunities, which helps liberate them from

unemployment and marginality (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Gorard, 2008; Kettley, 2007).

There have been numerous meanings and definitions of multiculturalism (Berry et al. 2007). In its basic form, it is identified as “an orientation that accepts *both* the maintenance of cultural identity and the characteristics of all ethno-cultural groups *and* the contact and the participation of all groups in the larger society” (Berry et al. 2007:375). However, it is critiqued for its failure to facilitate contact between the cultural groups within the same context (Benhabib et al. 2002). Interculturalism is developed and used as a favourable alternative to multiculturalism (Modood 2005).

O’Toole (2008:12-13) conceptualises interculturalism as:

Interculturalism could be understood as aiming to address some of the areas that multiculturalists neglected – by consciously and deliberately promoting interaction between cultures and also by incorporating an anti-racism component which was seen to lacking in multiculturalism.

As is implied in the quotes above, interculturalism is a more progressive approach towards living in diversity, since it does not only put an emphasis on dialogue between the cultures but works to resolve structural issues such as racism<sup>44</sup>.

The current study focuses on the experiences of international Muslim students in Irish Higher Education; however, there is a lack of research engaging with this specific group of students despite the growing numbers aforementioned in the previous section. Boucher’s (1999) work examining the international student experience in Ireland briefly discusses Muslim students’ experiences as embedded in the international

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<sup>44</sup> Defined as “the belief in the superiority/inferiority of people based on racial identity ... [and] a particular form of prejudice defined by preconceived erroneous beliefs about race and members of racial groups.” (Hoyt 2012:225)



student experience. The findings of this study point to a level of discrimination and communication barriers as presented in Table 3-2:

Table 3-2: Barriers to and facilitators of integration identified in Boucher's (1999) study

<b>Boucher 1997</b>	
<b>Barriers to integration:</b>	<b>Facilitators of integration:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irish student culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural events (play, concert)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pub &amp; drinking culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-alcoholic social interactions (cinema, restaurant)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student' country of origin</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homogenous Irish friendship groups</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homogenous Muslim friendship groups</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space (pub, church, sports, mosque) and time (evenings, day time) of socialising</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-segregation</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social pressure to conform to Islamic practices</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home govt. influence (monitoring)</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of stay</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic abilities</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal psychological characteristics</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of discrimination in the environment</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions about morality</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students' stereotypes around European culture</li> </ul>	

### 3.3 Racism and Discrimination in Ireland

In addition to the discussion on internationalisation practices in Ireland that took place in Chapter 2, it is now useful to look at the data available regarding discrimination in

the EU and Ireland. The data collected by the European Commission Barometer reveals the opinions of the society on discrimination towards various groups and in different spheres (i.e. work, education), and compares this to the EU averages. The perception and experiences of discrimination based on religion and belief are identified as 19% in Ireland in comparison to 39% average of the EU in 2009<sup>45</sup> data. In 2012<sup>46</sup>, the number decreases to 13% (total widespread) in Ireland and stays at the average of 39% (total widespread) within the EU. However, the numbers drastically increase in 2015<sup>47</sup> and Ireland scores 41% (total widespread) in perception of discrimination in the society based on religion and or beliefs, while the EU average increases to 50% (total widespread). This is an immensely significant piece of data as it reveals that discrimination based on religion followed a steep upward movement both in Ireland and in the EU. However, considering the low percentages Ireland scored in previous fact sheets, discrimination is more visibly increasing in the Irish society in comparison to the EU average (see 10.5 Limitations of the Study). This situates the Muslims in the society at a rather vulnerable position as a result of their religious identity.

In a recent study conducted by Carr (2016) on Islamophobia in Ireland as shown in Table 3-3, findings also point to instances of both every day and institutional racism

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<sup>45</sup> European Commission, Eurobarometer 2009 on Perceptions of Discrimination in the EU-Ireland, (2009) <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/yearFrom/1974/yearTo/2010/surveyKy/773> [Accessed 20/10/2016].

<sup>46</sup> European Commission, Eurobarometer 2012 on Perceptions of Discrimination in the EU-Ireland, (2012) [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_393\\_fact\\_ie\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_393_fact_ie_en.pdf) [Accessed 20/10/2016].

<sup>47</sup> European Commission, Eurobarometer 2015 on Perceptions of Discrimination in the EU- Ireland, (2015) <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/yearFrom/1974/yearTo/2015/surveyKy/2077> [Accessed 20/10/2016].

Muslim minorities encounter. The participants' lived experiences of Islamophobia, or racism range from lack of access to mainstream primary and secondary education (due to the Christian Church patronage), to verbal abuse on the streets. The participants additionally highlight the role of the media in their perception by the society (see 6.5 Negative Perceptions of Muslims in the Host Society). Carr (2016:83) notes "civil society organisations, working with partners in the State, the non-governmental sector, academia, most importantly of all, across Muslim communities can lay a challenge to Islamophobia".

Table 3-3: Experiences and forms of discrimination identified in Carr's (2016) study

<b>Carr 2016</b>	
<b>Experiences of discrimination in:</b>	<b>forms of:</b>
• Education	• Verbal abuse
• The classroom	• Physical assault
• Accessing employment	• Graffiti and damage to property
• Public transportation, shops & restaurants	
• An Garda Síochána (Irish Police Station)	
• Media	

The discussion of discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims in the Irish society is beyond the scope of this study, nevertheless, it is notable to iterate the existence of Islamophobia in the society and its negative impact on intercultural communication of this particular group of international students. Additionally, it should be noted that the discourse and perceptions regarding international students might not be the same as immigration in Ireland. International students might be perceived more positively by the host society since they are considered to be contributing to the knowledge and economy of the country.

Previous empirical studies conducted on the experiences of international students, among whom some students happen to identify as Muslim, and specifically with the Muslim community in Ireland indicate instances of racism and communication barriers underpinned by cultural distance (see 6.2 Ireland as a Different Culture).

It is evident in the numbers the HEA and EI provide that the body of Muslim international students in Irish HE is expanding, which brings the researcher to the specific concern inherent in this project. Although internationalisation of HE entails “develop[ing] cross-cultural interaction and collaboration on campus and within classrooms” (Stevenson 2014: 49), it receives criticism directed at the continuous void of interaction between the home and host culture students (Leask & Carol 2011, Dunne 2009, 2011, Castro et al. 2016). De Vita (2007: 165) further remarks that “the ideal of transforming a culturally diverse student population into a valued resource for activating processes of international connectivity, social cohesion and intercultural learning is still very much that, an ideal”. Interculturalism is the recognised attitude of the Irish nation to immigration and diversity (Ging and Malcolm 2004); therefore, it needs to find resonance in third level education.

### **3.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter subsequently engaged with the existing empirical body of work on the Muslim students’ experiences on particularly internationalised and English-speaking campuses and has drawn attention to the dearth of such studies engaging with the Muslim students as a group within the international students. It highlighted the use of “Identity” as a theoretical framework in previous research and briefly introduced multiculturalism and interculturalism as frameworks of examination of cultural diversity. The chapter reviewed racism and discrimination based on religious identity

in Ireland and concluded that despite the increasing numbers of racism based on religious identity in Ireland, Muslim students' experiences have been neglected in research up to date. In the following chapter the research design will be reviewed.

## METHODOLOGY

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### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the methodology used in the study. As mentioned in previous chapters, there is a dearth of qualitative studies in the existing body of literature regarding the college experiences of international Muslim students. Additionally, there is a lack of such study specifically in the Irish context with reference to the internationalisation of higher education. This study attempts to bridge this gap with particular attention to the experiences of undergraduate and Master's students in Dublin City University using a qualitative research framework.

There are 2 main reasons for employing this particular framework to the research:

- i. unveiling the lived experiences of a specific cohort of students on campus,
- ii. the dearth of studies in the field.

The main reason is to explore lived experiences of Muslim sojourners in higher education through their perspective. This is essential both to explore internationalisation on DCU campus, and facilitate further studies in the field of intercultural studies. The second is the insufficient amount of research conducted in this particular area that takes religion into account rather than factors such as nationality, ethnicity and race. It is crucial that a study highlights the role and impact of religious preference on Irish university campuses, as well as challenge the tendency to see specific religious groups as homogenous entities.

Following previous work conducted on Muslim students on campus, this study puts special emphasis on in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of this particular body of students using grounded theory. The choice of this methodology, which is

discussed in greater detail in the following sections, facilitates in-depth data collection and a rigorous analysis, enabling the researcher to develop a terminology and a conceptual framework to be utilised in future studies concerning international Muslim students.

## **4.2 Research Questions & Aims and Objectives**

The research questions central to this study are:

- *What are the experiences of international Muslim students (undergraduate & masters) in an Irish university (Dublin City University, Glasnevin Campus)?*
- *What factors impact upon international Muslim students' experiences in the host society and the host institution?*
- *Does religious identity (i.e. being Muslim) have a pertinent impact on the international student experience?*
- *What could IMS' experiences offer internationalisation studies in higher education?*

The overall objective of this study is to provide an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of international Muslim in a particular higher education institution in Ireland. The main objectives of the study are as follow;

- 1) To explore the experiences of IMS in the host institution (DCU) and the host culture (Ireland)
- 2) To identify the factors that impact on IMS' experiences in DCU, and in Ireland
- 3) To discuss the impact of religion on campus from the perspective of international Muslim students in DCU
- 4) To discuss internationalisation in DCU from the perspective of IMS
- 5) To develop a conceptual framework for further studies.

These aims are considered to be significant given the lack of research particularly in the Irish context, despite the increasing number of international students who come

from countries with sizeable Muslim populations<sup>48</sup>. It is also of importance in the current climate in international politics and the debate around globalisation at a broader level<sup>49</sup>.

The specific emphasis put on the lived experiences of international Muslim students in DCU calls for a specific research design built to serve this purpose. The nuances between different approaches to data collection and analysis within the school of qualitative research and the choice of grounded theory approach will be discussed in detail in the sections below.

### **4.3 Ontological and Epistemological Considerations**

Prior to building a design for the research to be conducted, it is important to consider the philosophy underlying the research question. The research question does not come about in a vacuum, but rather reflects a researcher's interests, as well as the ontological and epistemological tendencies. On the one hand, it is essential to choose a methodology with the capability of answering the main research. On the other hand, the nature of the methodology chosen will impact on how these questions are asked, answered and analysed, hence conclusions made.

Since its introduction to social science in 1962 by Thomas Kuhn in his book called 'The Structure of Scientific Revolution', a "paradigm" has been an essential concept in research. A paradigm is not simply how we see the world or what could be known, but also "at a fundamental level, paradigms create new worldviews and social contexts

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<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 2, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Following the massive events such as 9/11 attacks in 2001 and London Bombings in 2005, an extremist organisation called IS, which affiliates itself with Islam, emerged in the Middle East in 2014. It recorded the killings of American hostages and disseminated the footage of the killings. The headlines brought prejudice upon Muslims, particularly after it was made public that a number of EU citizens travelled to Middle East from their home countries to join IS.



that have widespread impacts on the conduct of inquiry” (Morgan 2014:1051). Thus, it could be said that a paradigm is “a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research” (Bogdan and Biklen 1998:2). It is a “basic set of belief that guides action” (Guba 1990:17).

Then one asks the question “how could the researcher’s paradigm impact on what is being studied?” First, it plays a pivotal role in the research concern. Our inclinations and curiosities are not isolated from what we think is the reality that is surrounding us (Bryman 2008). In line with this, Mason (2002:59) reiterates the interplay between the ontology and epistemology of the researcher by stating:

[H]ow we think the social world is constituted, or what we think it is (our ontology), shapes how we think we can know about it, but conversely how we look (the epistemology and methods we use) shapes what we can see.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005:2) suggest there are two major paradigms in research; objectivism and interpretivism. Objectivism is generally associated with a deductive research design, whereas constructivism is associated with an inductive design. That is to say, an objectivist believes that the reality is out there and is independent of our conscious and influence, hence the only way to reach out to a piece of knowledge is a positivist epistemology, which entails a sharp distinction “between scientific statements and normative statements” (Bryman 2012:28). For a positivist orienting around an objectivist ontology, the ways of knowing will follow a path of theory-guided hypothesis and the testing the observation and findings to support, challenge or to add up to the theory at the beginning (Byram et al 2012).

For an interpretivist whose ontological orientation is constructivism, the journey of research follows a different route –reverse almost. A constructivist approach, as opposed to objectivism, would deem reality as a notion that is constantly being built

by social actors. Hence reality is not an isolated entity but a constructed meaning (Patton 1980). This notion of reality would naturally lead the researcher to the shores of *understanding*. The essence of the research is not to test what we think reality independent of us is, but to understand how we create it through our interactions (Cohen and Mannion 1992). This study is concerned with what the experiences of IMS are in an Irish university and how they reflect on those experiences during the interviews, therefore adopts an interpretivist stance.

#### **4.4 Choice of Qualitative Methodology**

In line with Mason's emphasis on reality as how we 'know' and 'understand' it, Corbin and Strauss (2008:1) defines a qualitative study as 'a process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge'. Given the scope of this research project, Glaser and Strauss' conceptualisation of qualitative research is considered as the guiding principle for framing the methodology of this study.

[T]he crucial elements of sociological theory are often found best with a qualitative method, that is, from data on structural conditions, consequences, deviances, norms, processes, patterns, and systems; because qualitative research is, more often than not, the end product of research within a substantive area beyond which few research sociologists are motivated to move; and because qualitative research is often the most "adequate" and "efficient" way to obtain the type of information required and to contend with the difficulties of an empirical situation. (1967:18)

A feasible qualitative research question should be chosen very meticulously upon identifying a problem in our environment which "eventually links to what other have done, but something you can call your own" (Stake 2010:75). As the question and the methods go hand in hand in conceptualising the study, the place also emerges almost simultaneously in the very same process.

For most of us, most of the time, the research problem should have first priority – but a question cannot be conceptualised without some thought of method and place of study. (Stake 2010:74).

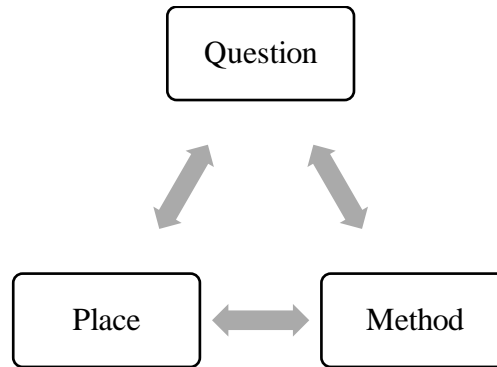


Figure 4-1: The interplay between Question, Method and Place (Stake 2010)

This study draws on Stake’s (2010:74) model in Figure 4-1 for explaining how the question, the method and the place interplay in conceptualising the study. In the same vein, Creswell and Clark (2007:40) highlights the fact that “we cannot separate what people say from the context in which they say it”. This again brings the researcher to a constructivist paradigm, hence, the qualitative framework.

A qualitative methodology is framed by the depth and richness of data and is associated with five major strategies of inquiry. Among these are ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenology and narrative research (Creswell et al 2003:15). One of the core aims of this project is to unveil the lived experiences of Muslim international students in DCU. The terminology used in the very core of the project is an important signifier of the ontological and epistemological stances, which call for a constructivist paradigm underpinned by:

- understanding
- multiple participant meanings
- social and historical construction
- theory generation (Creswell et al 2003:6).

The study is designed to explore and understand the experiences of this cohort of students by looking at their construction of meaning around the notion, and therefore, aligns with a constructivist qualitative paradigm. In line with Creswell et al's (2003:6) underpinning of qualitative research, particularly understanding and theory generation, the strategy of inquiry in this project is additionally informed by the state of literature at the time of research. Given the void of research on the experiences of IMS, this project draws from the principles of grounded theory. In others words, the theory is the outcome of the study (Byram 2008). In order to justify the researcher's methodological stance further, Creswell et al's (2003:14-15) categorisation of strategies of inquiry will be referred to. Among the 5 strategies, ethnography, grounded theory and case study will be compared in Table 4-1 since they resonate most with the aims & objectives of the study.

Table 4-1: A Comparison of Ethnography, Grounded Theory and Case Studies  
within Qualitative Research

<b>Ethnographies</b>	<b>Grounded theory</b>	<b>Case studies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study of an intact cultural group</li> <li>• Natural setting</li> <li>• Prolonged period of time</li> <li>• Observational data</li> <li>• Lived experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theory of process, action or interaction</li> <li>• Grounded in the views of participants</li> <li>• Refinement and interrelationship of categories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-depth exploration of a program, event, activity, process or individuals</li> <li>• Bound by time &amp; activity</li> <li>• Sustained period of time</li> </ul>

These strategies overlap in many ways, such as data sites, field works and data collection methods. They all substantially use interviews, observations or document

analysis either as the main way of data collection or as a supplementary source. Their priority is determined by the theoretical framework of the research project (Merriam 2009). Glaser suggests “[u]nformed or novice researchers embrace grounded theory for dissertation or master’s theses when, in their view, the more preconceived methods do not give relevant answers” (2010:2). Since this project focuses on the lived experiences of a particular group of international students, whose experiences have not been sufficiently understood to date, grounded theory appears as the most suited inquiry strategy to the purposes of this research. The grounded theory model that is applied to this research is presented in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2 Approach to Grounded Theory

<b>Grounded Theory Approach as Applied in This Research</b>	
<b>Phase 1</b>	Researcher's' background & interests Research concern Review of literature (contextualisation purposes) Formulation of research questions
<b>Phase 2</b>	Research Design Data collection
<b>Phase 3</b>	Data analysis Generation of a theoretical model (Grounded Theory Model)
<b>Phase 4</b>	Review of literature (theoretical discussion purposes)
<b>Phase 5</b>	Discussion of findings & theoretical model in relation to the most relevant theories identified in the literature

Table 4-2 is designed to visualise the sequence of phases during the application of grounded theory in this research. It is usefully divided into five phases in which follows a sequential and interdependent order. The table additionally reflects the structure of the thesis with reference to in what order questions, data and theories are presented.

## 4.5 The Choice of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory best fits into the ontological and epistemological paradigm of this research in consonance with the reasoning discussed in section 3.4. Glaser and Strauss define grounded theory as “the discovery from the data” (1967:1), and further critique the common social science methodologies at the time by stating that “[m]ost writing on sociological method has been concerned with how accurate facts can be obtained and how theory can thereby be more rigorously tested” (ibid.).

### **4.5.1 The Origins of Grounded Theory**

With the introduction of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967), a systematic way of collecting data and building theory from the data has been addressed. They problematise the ‘overemphasis on verification’ in social research at the time. In “The Origins of Grounded Theory” Glaser and Strauss (1967) puts a special emphasis on “theory as process” (p:32). Therefore, the process becomes of vital importance to the structure of data collection and data analysis. The process is underpinned by scientific measures such as coding, memoing, comparing relationships to ensure transparency and ‘theory generation’ at the end. Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to this process as inductive and they propose standards such as “logical consistency, clarity, parsimony, density, scope, integration, as well as its fit and its ability to work” (p:5) in order to evaluate the outcome of this inductive process of theory generation.

### **4.5.2 Principles of Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory approach as originated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) works on the core principles of ‘theoretical sampling’, ‘theoretical saturation’ and ‘comparative analysis’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Theoretical sampling is defined as “the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:45). That is to say, the emerging theory encompasses data collection (Charmaz 2006). Charmaz clarifies that data collection in grounded theory starts with initial sampling, which is “where you start” in accordance with your research question, “whereas theoretical sampling directs you where to go” (2006:100). This calls for a simultaneous data collection and data analysis process to take place.

Rich data collection, which is essential in grounded theory school; however, poses the risk of the researcher being absorbed in the data without a particular focus or direction (Charmaz 2006). Theoretical saturation assists the researcher in making accurate decisions and judgments for when a category cannot produce any further insights into theory generation process. It is defined as the state in data collection where “no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:61).

Glaser and Straus (1967) put forward comparative analysis as the method “of joint coding and analysis to generate theory” (p:102). That is, the analysis is concerned with creating categories and properties which lead to the generation of a theory rather than proving it. It is a systematic and transparent process with stages of coding the data, memoing, theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation. Charmaz refers to comparative analysis as theoretical sorting and she defines it as the “logic for organizing your analysis and a way of creating and finding theoretical links that prompts you to make comparisons between categories” (2006:115). Stages of coding and memoing will be elaborated on in respective sections below.

These principles of data analysis guide the research into two possible directions for theory generation; substantial theory generation and formal theory generation. Whereas a substantial theory is applicable to a substantive area of empirical inquiry such as friendship groups on campus, a formal theory comes to represent a conceptual area, i.e. migration. Both substantive and formal theories must be grounded in the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and must involve stages which stick closely to a “series of systematic, exact methods that starts collecting data and takes the researcher to a theoretical piece that is publishable” (Glaser 2010:1).



Glaser also posits three characteristics of a grounded theory researcher:

- an ability to conceptualise data
- an ability to tolerate some confusion
- an ability to tolerate confusion's attendant regression (2010:4).

Glaser considers these characteristics as 'essential' for a grounded theorist since arriving at conceptualisations sits in the heart of the approach, and this cannot be achieved without the characteristics listed above, according to him. He further argues that researchers who "cannot tolerate confusion and regression, and who need to continually feel in cognitive control, fell by aside" (ibid). Therefore, a researcher ought to carefully reflect on their character and skills as a researcher, as well as the research concern and the state of related literature prior to commencing a grounded theory research.

## **4.6 Data Collection**

This project utilises interviewing as the method for data collection, and DCU Glasnevin campus as the data collection site. Creswell et al (2007) suggest there are various types of interview designs for qualitative studies to employ, gather rich data and investigate the phenomenon. The next sections will elaborate on the interview design and the interviewing process.

### **4.6.1 Interviewing**

Charmaz (2006) points to the long history of interviewing as a "useful data gathering method" in qualitative research and defines interview as "directed conversation" (Lofland & Lofland 1984, 1995, cited in Charmaz 2006:25). She further argues intensive interviews encourage participants to reflect and articulate in-depth, resulting in a rich data collection. Since this project is concerned with exploring experiences of

IMS in an Irish university, it adopts a grounded theory method and uses interviewing in order to elicit participants' lived experiences. In line with this, Kvale (1996:105) remarks "interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world".

In his review of interview types in qualitative analysis, Turner (2010) examines three types of interviews under 1) informal conversational, 2) standardised open-ended, and 3) general interview guide interviews. Gall et al (2003:239) state informal conversational interviews depend "...entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in a natural interaction, typically one that occurs as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork". Even though it offers flexibility, Creswell et al (2007) problematise use of informal conversational interviews by pointing to the difficulties of coding such data. Standardised open-ended interviews are characterised by a strict adherence to the questions with no flexibility in the way they are addressed or phrased during the interviews (Turner 2010). This might help discourage researcher's biases (Gall et al 2003), nevertheless, the rigid nature this type of interviews might inhibit the flow of the conversation with the participants by leaving little to no space for the necessary ability to manoeuvre in order to fully grasp the meaning-making process.

The general interview guide approach is what is utilised in this project, since it allows the researcher both to follow a previously designed guide in each interview for *consistency*, and work with participants' responses to the structured questions when a follow-up is needed for *clarity*. Turner (2010) argues flexibility in general interview guide approach might pose the challenge of consistency in participant responses, particularly for coding stages of data analysis. Nevertheless, this approach is regarded

as the best suited to the needs of this research as it seeks to excavate in-depth data on the experiences of IMS in DCU, which cannot be made possible without probes and follow-up questions during the interviews when needed. Robin and Robin (2005) argue that researchers will inevitably bring their influence into what is being researched, therefore, the flexibility in general interview guide approach might additionally raise the question of researcher's bias during the interviews. However, given the core principle of data encompassing the theory generation in grounded theory, researcher's bias is minimised in order to allow the data steer the interviews. See Appendix A for the interview guide.

#### **4.6.2 Interview Design**

Interview preparation is essential for a successful interview process. Turner (2010:757) argues "[t]his process can help make or break the process and can either alleviate or exacerbate the problematic circumstances that could potentially occur once the research is implemented". McNamara (2002) and Creswell (1998) also highlight the pivotal role of interview design in the process and regard it as the key to maximise its benefit to the study. Emphasising the role of interview preparation is not to negate the principles of grounded theory, which advises avoiding entering the field with pre-conceived ideas and a framework of a theory. On the contrary, grounded theory seeks to encourage theory generation by allowing the data to direct the researcher. However, Dunne (2011:114) argues that core of the debates around the place of literature review in grounded theory is not about 'if' but about 'when' it should be conducted. In order to avoid disconnection from the state of literature, to identify the niche and research questions, it is essential that early stage researchers familiarise themselves with the subject area prior to data collection stage. Reflexivity is advised for researchers in

order to raise and maintain their awareness while engaging with the literature and data analysis at later stages (Dunne 2011), and this will be elaborated on in the final section of this chapter.

In this study, the main objective is to investigate the experiences of IMS in an Irish university in detail, particularly their perceptions of the host culture, the host institution, the challenges they encounter during their sojourn and if/how these notions are related to Muslimness. Therefore, the interview guide was designed in a thematic way divided into nine themes as presented in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3: List of Themes Used in the Interview Guide

<b>Interview Themes</b>
Theme 1: Participant Information
Theme 2: Social life in DCU
Theme 3: Sense of Identity
Theme 4: Thoughts on Host Culture
Theme 5: Academic Life
Theme 6: Thoughts on the Institution
Theme 7: Intercultural Contact and Motivations
Theme 8: Religious practice
Theme 9: Perceptions of Higher Education

Theme 3 and 8 are designed to elicit participants' reflections on their culture and identity, which resonates with the findings discussed in Chapter 4 entitled "IMS' Perceptions of Identity and Culture". Theme 4 is designed in order to investigate participants' perceptions of the host culture and their relations with the members of the host society. Participants' responses to the questions of Theme 4 are elaborated on in Chapter 5, which focuses on conceptualising IMS' perceptions of the host culture.

Theme 5,6 and 9 are designed to explore IMS' perceptions of the host institution in a higher education context, and this echoes with Chapter 6 "IMS Perceptions of the Host Institution". Lastly, Theme 2 and 7 are incorporated into the interview guide in order to investigate IMS relationship development on campus, both intercultural and mono-cultural. The participant reflections obtained from theme 2 and 7 are discussed in Chapter 7 under "IMS' Relationship Development on Campus".

### **4.6.3 Research ethics and approval**

Upon designing the interview guide, ethical approval of DCU Ethics Committee was sought in June 2014. The DCU Ethics application form along with a copy of the Interview Guide, Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A) were submitted. Following the Committee's review, ethical approval was granted with a request to change the participant recruiting strategy. In the initial submission, this was presented as snowball sampling. However, the Committee advised a poster be designed for the recruiting of participants and put up in various locations and school boards on campus. In line with this, a poster was created and participants recruiting phase commenced.

### **4.6.4 Sampling Strategy**

When commencing a project, there are various sampling strategies and factors that the researcher has to take into account. According to Noy (2007) sampling strategy is crucial part the overall interview design. Corbin and Strauss (2008:151) propose that "the initial decisions made about a project give the researcher a sense of direction and a place from which to begin data gathering." In a similar vein, Charmaz (2006) points

to the ‘initial sampling’ as the place a researcher begins from, and ‘theoretical sampling’ as the direction the researcher will be guided to.

In this research, the main strategy employed is snowball sampling, described as the procedure in which “the researcher accessed informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (Noy 2008:330). Upon DCU Research Ethic Committee’s review, a poster was added to the participant recruiting strategy of this study; however, the poster did not initiate participation to the project.

The interview process was initiated through personally spending time in the Interfaith Centre, which is the multi-faith centre located in the centre of Glasnevin campus, and making contacts as the students visited the centre.



Figure 4-2 A Google Maps picture of Dublin City University Glasnevin Campus

This decision was made in line with Corbin and Strauss’ (2008:151) ‘initial considerations’ for grounded theory researchers. They posit ‘the site or the group to study’ as imposed by the research questions, is where the researcher commences their data collection (ibid). Given the fact that this research project is concerned with

unveiling the experiences of international Muslim students in an Irish university, the Interfaith Centre, where Muslim students often go to practice their religion, was regarded as the most suited site for the researcher to commence participant recruitment process.

One difficulty that I encountered during participant recruitment process was the fact that the International Office in DCU does not keep a track of students' religious affiliation, which should neither be a must nor a necessity. This made it impossible for the sampling strategy to be built upon the data gathered from an official source in DCU. Another challenge/limitation posed by the snowball sampling strategy employed in this research is that it could confine the researcher to a limited circle of participants, hence invalidate ultimate objective of theoretical sampling. However, the challenge was overcome with principles of theoretical sampling. Three strategies were employed by the researcher;

- the researcher initiated the participant recruitment with a diverse demographics representative of different variables (i.e. gender, age, country of origin) (see 4.6.5 for a detailed discussion of participant recruitment process)
- the interviews were carefully examined during the initial coding process and the direction of the research was clearly identified in terms of participant recruitment for theoretical sampling (see 4.6.5)
- each participant interviewed was asked to provide multiple number of contacts in order to reach out to as many participants as possible and minimise delays due to lack of participation.

These strategies assisted the researcher in having sizable but concentrated participant profile in line with theoretical sampling strategy. Table 4-4 below presents the demographics of students who participated in this study.



Table 4-4 Participant Information

NAME	SEX	AGE	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	DEGREE	SCHOLARSHIP STATUS	YEAR IN DCU	YEAR IN IRELAND	HEADSCARF
A'WAAN	M	31	EGYPT	M	No	2	2	NA
MALIK	M	22	SA	UG	Yes	3	5	NA
DIYA	M	27	SA	M	Yes	2	4	NA
ALIA	F	25	SA	M	Yes	1	2YRS 3M	Y
AMBER	F	26	SA	M	Yes	2	3	Y
AYDA	F	25	KUWAIT	UG	Yes	2	4	Y
ELHAM	F	26	SA	M	Yes	1	1	Y
FARAH	F	23	SA	UG	Yes	2	3	Y
MUSA	M	35	SA	M	Yes	1	1	NA
FATIMA	F	23	SA	UG	Yes	2	3	Y
INBAR	F	25	SA	M	Yes	1	2	Y
LAYLA	F	19	OMAN	UG	Yes	1	2	Y
LINA	F	20	OMAN	UG	Yes	1	3	Y
MALIKA	F	25	ITALY	M	No	2	2	N
NUHA	F	19	OMAN	UG	Yes	1	2	Y
SADA	F	24	SA	M	Yes	1	2YRS 3M	N
SAHAR	F	20	OMAN	UG	Yes	1	2	Y
ZAHRA	F	34	LIBYA	M	Yes	1	1	Y
SAMI	M	21	OMAN	UG	Yes	2	3	NA
TAHU	M	20	OMAN	UG	Yes	2	3	NA
BAHA	M	29	SA	UG	Yes	3	5	NA
ZARA	F	26	SA	M	Yes	2	3	Y
NAWRIN	F	29	BANGLADESH	M	No	6	7	N

The demography of international Muslim students is another limitation to this study's sampling strategies since the highest number of students attending DCU are concentrated in certain countries such as Saudi Arabia and Oman. The data could be inclusive of, for instance, socialisation habits that are particular to Saudi students in DCU. Similarly, if the study took place in Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, which is a medical college based in Dublin, the sampling could have been inclusive of Malaysian students as well. However, this poses the challenge of further complicating the contextualisation of the study, since it also depends on campus related factors. In the light of all these factors, the study focused only on students in DCU in order to discuss the findings in a contextual framework, and incorporate these contextual factors into the direction of future research in the field.

#### **4.6.5 The Interview Process**

The interviewing process started following the approval of DCU Research Ethics Committee in September 2014 with two pilot interviews. Twenty-three interviews in total were conducted until June 2015. The interviews were conducted in English, face to face, and were taped in audio format. The reason as to why the interviews were conducted in English is the fact that both the researcher and the interviewees come from different countries with fluency in different mother tongues. This lack of commonality among the participants and the researcher with regard to language called for identification of a language that whoever participated in this project could use. Additionally, use of a non-English language would require additional translations of the transcripts into English, since the host institution of the research being undertaken is located in an English-speaking country. Therefore, English was used as medium

throughout the study. All taped interviews were transcribed by the researcher following the interview and the students were each given a pseudonym respective of their gender (i.e. female Islamic names for female participants, male Islamic names for male participants) for confidentiality purposes. Even though transcribing proved to be an arduous and time consuming process for me as the researcher, I benefited from it greatly since it allowed me to familiarise myself with the data, reflect further on my shaping thoughts as I was transcribing, pay attention to the details that might have gone unnoticed during the interview, and helped me improve myself and the interview guide for the next round of interviews (Dunne 2008, Darlington and Scott 2003).

The first round of interviews was conducted with six participants with equal number of males and females. During the transcription and initial coding process of these interviews, it was identified that more female participants were needed in order to saturate the emerging categories that specifically related to female experiences (i.e. implications of headscarf on campus relationship development). In line with grounded theory's theoretical sampling principle, in the next round, thirteen female participants were interviewed in comparison to a number of two male participants. In this round, the female student sampling included both different country of origins (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Oman, Italy) and different dress codes (i.e. wearing headscarf and long coat, wearing headscarf and mainstream fashion clothes, not wearing the headscarf). In the final round of four interviews, two male students and two female students were interviewed in order to reach and confirm theoretical saturation.

#### **4.6.6 Interviewing Venues and Other Details**

Upon reviewing previously conducted grounded theory research (Dunne 2008, Zhu 2013), the initial decision was made to conduct interviews in informal and comfortable venues such as a café. However, during the pilot interviews, a café environment proved to be challenging particularly for audiotaping the interview due to the level of external noise. Therefore, the interview location was altered to quieter places on campus (i.e. seminar rooms). This was achieved with the help of SALIS School Office assisting me with booking these rooms once the interview date was confirmed with the participant. In some cases, when/if the rooms were not available, a study room in the library was booked and the interview took place there.

All interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. All participants were required to read the plain language form and sign the consent form prior to the interview. After signing the consent form, the interviews started with a brief ‘small talk’ for the purpose of ‘breaking the ice’ and building rapport, which was not recorded. The participant was introduced to the tape recorder device, and was advised not to fixate on the device, but rather focus on the flow of conversation. The interviews were additionally recorded on the researcher’s mobile phone for data back-up and protection reasons and were later converted into MP3 audio files and stored.

#### **4.6.7 Researchers’ Identity and Role During the Interviews**

In all interviews, I used this brief and informal prologue to introduce my role in the conversation:

Just to make sure that everything is all set and you are ready, there is not a right or wrong answer to any of the questions here. These are designed to have a conversation with you about your experiences in

DCU, and I only use the questions [I point to the interview guide] not to get lost. I might sometimes ask "why?", "how?", "what do you mean by this?", but these are not to judge or criticise anything you say. I will be using them to get more information about what you say, is that okay?

Following this brief introduction, the participants reported immediate confirmation and we could proceed to the interview. A sense of comfort with and appreciation to researcher's role in the interview was observed among participants with this brief articulation prior to commencing the interviews. It was also observed that this informal introduction of researcher's role prepared participants to reflect further on their thoughts themselves as they were discussing their responses to the questions, which was not envisaged previously. Therefore, a positive relationship between participants' empathy and the rapport with the researcher during the interview was observed. This was particularly important since the medium was English, and female participants could find it difficult to reflect fully on their religious identity given the stigmas around the visibility of the headscarf.

On an additional note, the researcher is a female who does not wear the headscarf, nonetheless, is familiar with the religion Islam due to their upbringing in a Muslim environment. In that sense, at the outset of the research, for instance, the researcher was able to formulate the question "How often do you pray?" and incorporate it into the interview guide in order to elicit the frequency of prayers from the participants. If the researcher was not familiar with the praying-5-times-a-day principle in Islam, this question might not have found a place in the interview guide. Further discussion on researcher's identity and reflexivity in research is conducted in section 4.8 Reflexivity.

#### **4.6.8 Research Ethics**

Davis (2012) remarks data collected in relation to religious belief or faith of participants are classified as sensitive data and calls for protection. To protect the anonymity of the participants, they were each given pseudonyms. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were asked to confirm they read and understood “Plain Language Statement” and “Informed Participant Consent” before they were asked to sign it. The participants were additionally informed regarding access to tape-recorded data, which is made only available to the researcher. It was reiterated at the beginning of each interview that participation to this project was on a voluntary basis and that the participant could withdraw at any time of the research as they wished. However, no participant wished to withdraw from the research during the course of this project.

### **4.7 The Process of Data Analysis**

In (constructivist) grounded theory, Charmaz (2006:45) argues “coding generates the bones of your analysis”. Coding does not only mean beginning to sort the data as the researcher collects but also “shapes an analytic frame from which [the researcher] builds the analysis” (ibid). Therefore, coding in grounded theory lies at the core of the data analysis, which will eventually lead to theory generation. Coding is defined as “extracting concepts from raw data and developing them in terms of their properties and dimensions” (Corbin and Strauss 2008:159). Charmaz (2006:43) refers to coding as the “analytical account” of data as the researcher sorts the data.

#### **4.7.1 Glaserian Approach**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) coins data analysis process as the “Constant Comparative Method” and lists four stages as shown below:

1. comparing incidents applicable to each category
2. integrating categories and their properties
3. delimiting the theory
4. writing the theory (p:105).

In this first phase, comparing incidents applicable to each category, the researcher codes as many concepts as possible as to create related categories. The researcher uses margins or cards, or a software programme and the codes are either merged into existing categories, or new categories emerge as the coding continues. The researcher compares the concepts with “previous incidents with the same or different groups coded in the same category” (Glaser and Strauss 1967:106), therefore, achieves a constant comparative analysis. In the second phase, memos, which are described as “written records of analysis” (Corbin and Strauss 2008:117), are incorporated into emerging categories, which helps identify the properties of these categories. Properties are defined as “characteristics that define and describe concepts” (Corbin and Strauss 2008:159), therefore, the researcher seeks to give categories multiple dimensional shapes at this stage, as properties are identified with the integration of memos and codes. The third phase ‘delimiting the theory’ is characterised by ‘reduction of terminology’ and ‘consequent generalising’ in order to achieve ‘parsimony’ and ‘scope’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967:111). That is, the researcher integrates the properties of categories further in order to achieve parsimony through reduction, and employ rather abstract terms to define and crystallise categories with the aim of expanding the scope of the theories. In the fourth and final stage, the researcher is able to communicate the content of their research with the help of their analytical framework and present the substantive theory.

### **4.7.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory**

Charmaz's (2006) presentation of grounded theory follows a similar outlook and analytical framework, however, she employs specific terminology for phases of coding, which constructs the back bone of grounded theory work. In her book 'Constructing Grounded Theory' (2006), she explains phases of coding in four steps:

- Initial coding
- Focus coding
- Axial coding (Corbin and Strauss 1990)
- Theoretical coding

These four phases and the terminology will be used to explain this study's data analysis process particularly in relation to coding stage. A substantial and rigorous coding stage will consequently lead theoretical saturation and substantive theory at the end.

### **4.7.3 Initial Coding**

Coding in grounded theory is the essential link between the theory and the data, and the process begins with initial coding in which the analysis sticks closest to the data (Charmaz 2006). The phase is characterised by 'remaining open to the theoretical possibilities' and coding the raw data in small units such as word by word, line by line or incident by incident. It is an arduous yet spontaneous task, as it both predicts closeness to data, and openness to possible theoretical directions. The emerging codes must fit the data rather than data being forced to fit the codes at this stage. Charmaz (2006:49) offers seven 'codes' for coding the data:

- remain open
- stay close to the data
- keep your codes simple and precise
- construct short codes



- preserve actions
- compare data with data
- move quickly with data

In line with these codes, the process of data analysis was initiated with the collection of the first six interviews. The interviews were swiftly transcribed by the researcher, which significantly increased the researcher's familiarity with the raw data. The transcribed interviews were imported into NVivo software for qualitative data analysis. The transcriptions were filed as 'Interviews' under the section 'Sources'. The software allowed the researcher to swiftly move through the data as Charmaz (2006) advises for the initial coding stage. The interviews were coded with a 'line-by-line' approach during this stage in order to 'remain open' and 'stay close to the data'. Following the first six interviews, a critical reflection was made through these questions:

- What processes are at issue here? How can I define it?
- How does this process develop?
- How does the research participant(s) act while involved in this process?
- What does the research participant(s) profess to think and feel while involved in this process? What might his or her observed behaviour indicate?
- When, why, and how does the process change?
- What are the consequences of the process? (Charmaz 2006:51)

Upon closely investigating the data and reflecting on these questions, the initial coding stage proceeded with the recruitment of fifteen more participants with the incorporation of theoretical sampling into the process. That is, following the initial coding of the raw data from six interviews with an equal number of males and females, the sampling strategy was clearly defined in terms of what direction it should go. The emerging patterns from the data indicated substantial areas to be explored in female experience as opposed to the male, therefore the gap identified in the first six interviews encompassed the researcher for theory generation.

The next round of interviews was conducted with fifteen more participants, and initial coding continued with the aim of filling in the gaps in the data and seeking for new concepts. A final number of twenty-three was reached at the end of interviewing process when the theoretical saturation was achieved (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The duration of coding gradually decreased as the initial coding phase progressed in line with researcher's familiarity with the interview material. Additionally, less codes were generated as the initial coding process continued, since theoretical saturation was gradually taking place and concepts were more defined indicating a shift towards focused coding stage. At the end of the initial coding process, the data was coded into 528 units on NVivo software programme, in addition to forty-six memos created. An example of the coding process can be seen in Figure 4-3:

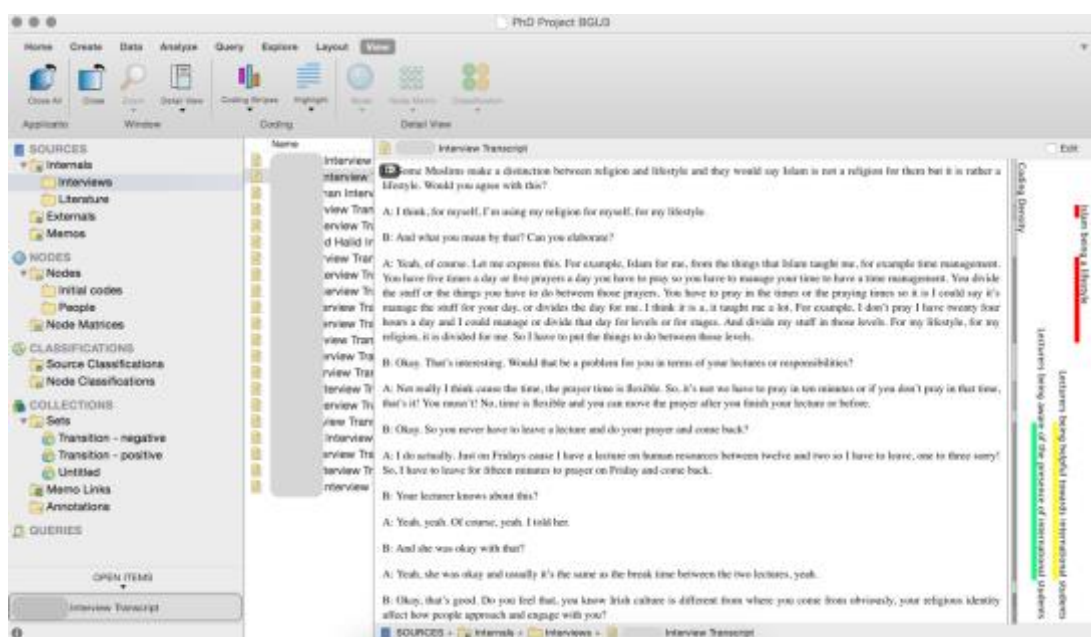


Figure 4-3: Illustration of Initial Coding Process on NVivo

#### **4.7.4 Advantages of Initial Coding and Use of NVivo**

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), the rigorous coding performed at the beginning of data analysis consequently allows the researcher to develop thick descriptions and well-built theories at later stages. By labelling the units of data, the researcher, however, does not arrive at a theory. Even though computer based programmes assist the process of labelling the data, a computer does not establish the links between the concepts. Corbin and Strauss (2008) nicely phrase it as “[t]hinking is the heart and soul of qualitative analysis. Thinking is the engine that drives the process and brings the researcher into the analytic process” (p:163). Therefore, it is essential that the researcher takes their time, reflects on the codes and the memos they create, and ‘interpret’ what is going on in the data.

NVivo functioned as an effective tool to serve the purpose of the initial coding stage by assisting me to generate a large number of codes. However, as the analysis moved on to focused coding stage, which will be discussed in detail in the section below, navigation on NVivo became mundane and mechanical, crippling my thinking process that is the ‘heart and soul’ of the data analysis. Consequently, the data analysis was conducted manually by me from this point further. It should be noted that this kind of detailed initial coding significantly assisted me to complete two criteria of grounded theory research; ‘fit’ and ‘relevance’ (Charmaz 2006:54). The codes and concepts created during the initial coding process enabled the analytical framework to fit and be relevant to the data collected.

#### **4.7.5 Focused Coding**

The second phase of analysing the data was conducted under the principles of focused coding, which “requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise your data incisively and completely” (Charmaz 2006:57). There was an organic shift towards focused coding through later stages of initial coding with the increased familiarity with the data and level theoretical saturation. Therefore, focused coding did not take place as a straightforward stage, but an intertwined continuum of initial coding of the data. It is also used to represent the interval between initial coding and axial coding, where the researcher takes some time and reflect further on the emerging concepts and their potential relations to each other in the data. Concepts such as “perceived hospitality”, “institutional support” intensified empirically and analytically during the focused coding phase.

#### **4.7.6 Axial & Theoretical Coding**

Axial and theoretical coding are elaborated on simultaneously in this section insofar as they both took place interdependent on each other. That is, while axial coding assisted the researcher with identifying a category’s properties and dimensions (Charmaz 2006), theoretical coding simultaneously took place by intensifying the category’s theoretical value. The properties and dimensions lend themselves to theory building by pointing to the patterns and relations in the data and between the categories. Corbin and Strauss (2008) points to the intertwined nature of coding stages in grounded theory and they add “the distinctions made between the two types of coding are ‘artificial’ and for explanatory purposes only” (p:198). Even though they refer to open and axial coding in the paragraph, I, as a researcher, in my journey with

grounded theory, realised that all coding stages in grounded theory are essentially interdependent, and the effort to separate them is artificial and cognitively impossible.

During axial coding, which consequently led to theoretical coding, these points were used to stimulate the analytical thinking of the researcher:

- conditions: the circumstances or situations that form the structure of the studied phenomenon
- actions/interactions: participants' routine or strategic responses to issues, events
- consequences: outcomes of actions/interactions (Corbin and Strauss as cited in Charmaz 2006:61).

With this organising scheme, axial coding allowed the researcher to “relate categories to subcategories, specif[y] the properties and dimensions of a category, and reassembl[e] the data [the researcher] have fractured during initial coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis” (Charmaz 2006:60), which consequently led to the development of the substantial grounded theory. The extended list of categories, sub-categories and their properties could be found in Appendix B.

## **4.8 Reflexivity**

One issue that warrants attention in grounded theory is reflexivity. According to Mason (1996:6), a reflexive research “means that the researcher should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their ‘data’”. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) notes that reflexivity is needed when the ethical committee cannot be there, and is, therefore, closely related to ethical procedures in research as well. Turner (1981) argues that the

researcher is part of the interaction with the data, and Lipson (1991) further suggests that the researcher cannot be deemed as a separate entity from the data, yet a part of it. These arguments underlining the role of the researcher echo with the above discussions of the interpretive and constructivist paradigms of this research. Hutchinson (1993:187) emphasises the role of reflexivity in grounded theory by stating "... because grounded theory research[s] interpersonal interaction, the researcher is inevitably part of his or her daily observations" during the research process. Cutcliffe (2000) problematises the lack of debate on how this interaction between the researcher and the data in grounded theory should take place, despite the evidence of work advocating the researcher's interactive role in data analysis. Morse (1994) concludes that there are dissonant guidelines regarding 'prior knowledge' (Cutcliffe 2000:1479) in grounded theory, and Hutchinson (1993) alerts the researchers to be conscious of their a priori held values, opinion, thoughts and knowledge.

#### **4.8.1 Reflection, Critical Reflection and Reflexivity**

Finlay (2008) distinguishes between two types of reflections; reflection on action, which is characterised by 'reflection after the event', and reflection in action, which is defined as 'thinking while doing' (p:3). With the help of both reflection types, the researcher seeks to establish and maintain the relationship between their preconceptions and data analysis. Fook, White and Gardner (2006:9) propose that reflection rather "remain[s] at the level of relatively undisruptive changes in techniques or superficial thinking", therefore, cannot provide with the critical framework necessary for transformations. Fook and Askeland (2006:53), on the other hand, argue that

[p]art of the power of critical reflection in opening up new perspectives and choices about practice may only be realized if the connections between individual thinking and identity, and dominant social beliefs are articulated and realized.

Critical reflection, therefore, enables the researcher to “become aware of hidden power of ideas they have absorbed unwittingly from their social context” (Fook 2006 as cited in Finlay 2008:6). Consequently, Finlay (2008:3) puts forward reflexivity as a key concept in data analysis, and contends that through reflexivity, researchers are able to reflect “critically on the impact of their own background, assumptions, positioning, feelings, behaviour while also attending to the impact of the wider organisational, discursive, ideological and political context”

In the context of this research, the researcher’s identity and role have been at the core of reflexivity; from the first step of choosing the area of research concern to the final stages of theory generation. My upbringing in a predominantly Muslim culture in a secular country, my worldview, which is not confined to any particular religion, my background in teaching in third-level education, my own experiences as an international student in Ireland amount to a potentially powerful impact on the conduit of this research. Additionally, I am a female, who is a non-native speaker of English as well as my participants, coming from a non-Irish educational background; all of which might potentially lead to a significant impact on how this research has been conducted and interpreted during data analysis. In line with the previous arguments presented concerning how the researcher and the research cannot be regarded as detached entities, this research acknowledges the researcher’s identity and role, and resort to reflexivity both on-action and in-action throughout the research process. In the below paragraphs, the details of how I engaged with reflexivity will be elaborated on.

I adopted Quinn's (2000:82) three fundamental processes to engage with reflexivity; 'retrospection', 'self-evaluation' and 'reorientation'. As part of retrospection, I critically reflected on my identity in order to raise and maintain my awareness of my identity prior to data collection. I was interested in doing research in intercultural studies to investigate international Muslim students' experiences in Ireland because my Muslim upbringing and current status as an international student in Ireland resonate largely with my research interest. Therefore, I considered it as a challenge and a blessing for conducting this research insofar as my identity allowed me to familiarise myself with the participant experience to the point that would otherwise be impossible. On the other hand, the challenge of falling into the trap of taking for granted assumptions regarding Muslim cultures and sojourners always kept me alert and on-guard against any assumptions I might have made out of my data with no substantial evidence.

As part of self-evaluation, upon commencing on data collection, I realised that my nationality was warmly welcomed by the participants, and this was due to the unspoken membership of a religious community. The idea of *Ummah*, which is described as "the Muslim community of the faithful" (Archer 2009:329), and translates as a transcendent notion of brother/sisterhood among Muslims, and is evident in the findings of this research (see 9.3.2 The Notion of *Umma*), immensely helped me reduce anxiety and build rapport with my participants. However, I was highly aware of the fact that this was a research in progress, not a collection of memoirs, therefore, I never ceased to reflect-in-action. In the interviews, I often used follow-up questions (i.e. why, how, what do you mean by that) in order to elicit as much in-depth information as possible and challenge my pre-existing knowledge of all sorts relating to Muslim cultures and practices, and sojourning in Ireland. My



supervisors, additionally, always encouraged me to reflect-on-action during our meetings with their critical questions and constructive feedback. Consequently, I was able to maintain my critical self-evaluation during data analysis and theory generation phases thanks to my supervisors' critical eye and constructive feedback on my work and my progress.

Reorientation enabled me to channel my critical reflections into future phases. This, in turn, allowed me to improve the rigour and quality of my work. Additionally, through reorientation, and with my increased awareness of the ways my identity might impact on my research, I was encouraged to establishing greater honesty and transparency. This has positive implications for the validity of this research.

Finlay (2008) argues “[d]one well and effectively, a reflective practice can be an enormously powerful tool to examine and transform practice” (p:10). This project puts a special emphasis on the reflective practices as discussed in the above paragraphs. Evidently, reflexivity contributed to the rigour, transparency and parsimony of this study, all of which sit at the core of grounded theory research.

## **4.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter sought to address methodological issues in this project. It first briefly discussed aims and objectives of this study, clearly stating the main and sub-research questions. The discussion then moved on to incorporate philosophical underpinnings and the choice of qualitative framework. It elaborated on the choice of grounded theory and how it was used for data collection and analysis in this project. The chapter concluded with reflexivity in order to situate the researcher in the research and critically engage with researchers' role in conducting this grounded theory project. The next chapters will now present the research findings.

## PERCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE

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*The identity cannot be compartmentalised; it cannot be split in halves or thirds, nor have any clearly defined set of boundaries. I do not have several identities, I only have one, made of all the elements that have shaped its unique proportions.*

*Amin Maalouf*

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the first core category emerging from the data analysis and it focuses on IMS' perceptions of culture and identity. Even though both notions are significantly broad, the chapter offers insights into the interviews, and how IMS define themselves in the Irish host context. According to Gudykunst (1998:40) and Nishida "our cultures have a tremendous influence on the way we communicate, whether we are aware of it or not". Similarly, Hall (1959:169) remarks "culture is communication and communication is culture". From the data analysis two sub-categories emerge; i) country dependent factors ii) sojourn dependent factors. The presentation is designed to examine the participants' reflections in relation to broader notions, i.e. country of origin and religion, then to focus on perceptions of being a sojourner in the Irish host culture.

The term *cultural identity* is used to refer to the collective dimension of identity throughout this chapter in line with Kim's conceptualisation (2009)<sup>50</sup>. The notion of being Muslim has been one of the focus points of this study. Therefore, a conscious effort was made to elicit IMS' conceptualisation of Muslimness. In order to address

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<sup>50</sup> Kim also argues that cultural identity regarded as a group phenomenon includes "terms such as national, cultural, ethnolinguistic, racial and religious identity" (p:59)

this, IMS were asked how they define themselves through a number of questions throughout the interviews as such:

- *How would you describe culture?*
- *What would culture mean to you?*
- *What comes to your head when I say culture?*
- *What does being Muslim mean to you?*
- *What does Islam mean to you?*
- *What does being international student mean to you?*
- *What does study abroad mean to you?*

Even though this research is not solely concerned with identity, it is crucial to get a substantial understanding of the participants' perceptions of the self in order to progress to later stages of analysis, which deal with the host environment and intercultural contact. Following the culture and identity-related questions, country of origin (nationality) and religion emerged as the most densely populated codes followed by family and gender. Table 5-1 presents the core category 'Perceptions of Culture and Identity,' and its relationship with the categories and sub-categories. It is not surprising that IMS almost automatically define identity on the axis of nationality when they are considered to be international students in a foreign context. The contextual identity attached to their status in the given environment is coined with reference to nationality. The following section now focuses on the country of origin-dependent factors.

Table 5-1: Grounded theory table of participants' perceptions of culture and identity

Core Category	Perceptions of Identity and Culture			
Categories	Nationality	Religion	Family	Sojourner
Sub-categories		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifestyle</li> <li>• Female Muslim Identity</li> <li>• Practices</li> <li>• Peace &amp; Love</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support (i.e. study abroad)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objectives &amp; expectations</li> <li>• Academic Scholarships (well-being, academic success)</li> <li>• English Language Proficiency</li> <li>• Degree programme</li> </ul>

## 5.2 Nationality as Part of Identity and Culture

Nationality emerges as a dominant aspect of identity from the interviews with the participants. It is evident in the code '*Describing Culture Based on Nationality (28)*'. Although this could be due to a number of reasons ranging from a sense of belonging to a way of living; one factor was not envisaged prior to the data collection phase of the study. The factor concerned is the home country government scholarship that the majority of the participants receive, and these funding schemes are identified as bolstering the notion of national identity among the IMS during the interviews. Although 'Academic Scholarship' as a construct is examined under the category 'Sojourner'. Nationality emerged as an inevitable theme while discussing culture with international students, where the national is embedded in the word itself. This is evident in the code '*Describing Culture Based on Nationality (28)*' and Zahra's response when she speaks about her study abroad experience:

You know it is a chance for us to meet different nationalities.  
(Zahra, F)

She perceives this intercultural experience to be across the cultures which are defined by nations.

This kind of close association between nationality and cross-cultural exchange is also evident in Inbar's (F) remarks when she states:

I'm always curious about these things, about other nationalities.  
(Inbar, F)

The organic relationship between the notions of nation and culture is further supported by Tahu (M):

Nationality is part of it, part of the culture. (Tahu, M)

These quotations illustrate that participants deem nation and culture to be in interplay with each other, which form their intercultural experiences in Ireland. This does not only reflect their thoughts about the host culture and what they perceive it to be, but it also offers a self-reflection on their identity, namely a unique notion of culture created by one's nation. This approach, however, is narrow in a sense that it only suggests one aspect of IMS identity, which is the intersection of nation and culture. Inbar brings a very enlightening perspective into the complex issue.

I: They [non-Saudi people] always misunderstand the culture or the religion, so it's good to explain everything that there is difference between my country, the culture and religion.

B: What do you mean by your culture?

I: I mean Saudi, and my religion Islam.

B: And what is the difference?

I: Lots of things about everything. Because they feel, Muslims, women in Islam, [are] not appreciated. That's totally not true. I just wanna explain exactly what Islam is. Cause driving in my country is not legal [for women]. They [think] it's because of

Islam that women can't drive. That's [a] totally different thing. It's a Saudi nationality issue. It's not about Islam. There [are] lots of things to explain about hijab, about everything. They [think] Islam is just about hijab or if you take off the hijab you're not Muslim, lots of things. I feel really responsible to give them right information about what is right and what's not, and what Islam is and what Saudi is, cultural nationality is so. (Inbar, F)

She discloses through self-reflection regarding her intersecting identities and states her nationality is, as opposed to the general perception, not to be amalgamated into the same discourse as her religion however interactive they might be. The discourse of oppressed women, according to her, is a result of her country's way of treating women but not exactly Islam. She feels the need to make this distinction clear for people she engages with outside her home country since this is how she is being perceived by them. Her cross-cultural experience is substantially impinged by her national identity, which is perceived to be closely associated with her religious faith and broader culture by the non-Muslim groups. Her views are also in line with quotations from other participants who suggested nationality was part of their culture.

I think when you say culture, the first thing come to my mind it's a small word but it's a big meaning. Culture mean[s] your country. (Musa, M)

Culture, it's a different country have special costumes, special things, and also different thinking about things maybe? (Fatima, F)

[W]earing the Abaya<sup>51</sup> is a cultural thing, and people who cover their faces in Saudi Arabia. (Inbar, F)

B: What culture would you say you are?

S: Saudi culture. (Sada, F)

[B]ecause in Jeddah for example not just Saudi, we have people from Egypt, from Turkey, from UK, from Germany so we communicate with all these different culture[s], so it's not new for me to communicate with other culture[s]. (Sada, F)

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<sup>51</sup> A long coat-like dress worn by some Muslim women.

It is clear from the standpoint of IMS that their country of origin is a substantial influence on how they define culture, as well as what constitutes intercultural contact.

Participant Inbar (F) continues with further remarks on the issue.

In my country, in my culture, there's bad thing[s] and there's good thing[s], but I need people to understand that Islam is different than our culture in Saudi Arabia. (Inbar, F)

She uses culture to express her identity in relation to her nationality, and in doing so separates religion from what she perceives to be culture. Participant remarks thus far suggest that culture is largely embedded in one's nation, therefore, the idea of one's culture is largely a predicament of one's national identity. Fatima (F) concludes with a plain articulation of what she considers herself to be:

I am Saudi, I am Muslim, but it's altogether you know, it's just combined. (Fatima, F)

It is evident in her statement that she describes nationality and religion as separate concepts yet they are in interplay with each other. Upon identifying this clear interplay, the next section now shifts focus to religion, which is another significant aspect of participants' understanding of culture and identity.

### **5.3 Religion as Part of Culture and Identity**

Religion, as is apparent in the title of this project, was expected to play a large role in how IMS perceived and manifested their identities as international students in the Irish context. An exploration of the relationship between participants' identity and religion was carried out in order to observe Islam's status as a visible religion through dress code and practices, rather than encourage an essentialist reading of participant interviews. The data analysis takes the notion of Islam being a visible religion from assumption to grounding it in the words of participants who identify themselves as

Muslim at varying levels by wearing the headscarf or praying five times a day. In the open coding stages both direct references such as “I am Muslim” and indirect ones such as “they don’t treat you as Muslim” that appeared in context were counted as a reference to being Muslim, hence, the participants’ religious aspect of identity. However, in focused coding stages, the large piece of data was divided into smaller chunks indicating more specific references, e.g. ‘gendered religious identity’, ‘meanings and practices’, and ‘individual interpretations’. Sada from Saudi Arabia makes direct reference to her Muslim identity when she states: “I am Muslim.” Tahu, who is also from Saudi Arabia, in a similar vein identifies himself as Muslim straightforwardly: “I am Muslim.”.

Participants’ identification with a Muslim identity did not come in a vacuum of context during the interviews. The context in which the participants explained their Muslim identities is identified in relation to a broader sense of culture and lifestyle. This notion of religion being part or a reflection of culture is evident in Malika’s (F) remarks, whose family is from Egypt, yet who is an Italian citizen: “I think the religion is part of my culture.” She further expands on the contextualisation of this statement as follows:

“My parents were telling us that [Christmas] is not part of our culture, this is something about the Christian cultures. They [Christian Italians] do this because their religion follow[s] this kind of rules and it’s not part of ours.” (Malika, F)

Here she takes Christmas as a reference point to a cultural event that she and her family cannot identify with, nor be a part of on the grounds of religious lines. The quotation highlights the role of religion as a cultural construct in engaging with different cultural environments. The dominant religion in Italy is not able to overshadow religion’s power in defining culture even though she identifies as Italian national. This then



raises the questions; what is a participant's relationship with Islam and to what extent the participants' relationship with Islam impacts on their cross-cultural experiences? These questions will be explored in the section that follows.

### **5.3.1 Participants' Relationship with Islam**

The interviews reveal that participants' religion, Islam, becomes their lifestyle (Yel and Nas 2014, Kadioğlu 2005). This relationship includes a dress code (for a female Muslim in particular) and practices, and in turn, the prevalence and visibility of these codes and practices lead the IMS to consider Islam as a way of life. According to Inbar (F), Islam is a substantial part of her life. She further contextualises this point as follows:

We also have Muslim families. It's not just about culture. It's also about my religion. Islam is taking huge part in my life. (Inbar, F)

She suggests that Islam becomes more than simply an identity tag, but a way of life, which has implications in one's world-view, and communication with their environment. She additionally points to the role of the family as carriers of culture.

Sami (M) further supports and elaborates on the role of Islam in Muslims' life in his remarks:

You know, Muslim countries have a mixture between [their] culture and the Islamic religion. It is also affecting our culture very much so. Whatever we do is based on our religion. (Sami, M)

It is a striking yet a clear explanation of the intersection between nationality, religion, culture and identity, as well as this intersection's impact on how individuals lead their lives. Apart from Inbar and Sami, a large number of students stated in the interviews that they see Islam as their lifestyle as presented in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2: List of codes supporting Islam Being Regarded as Lifestyle by the  
Participants

<b>Islam and Participants' Lifestyle</b>
Islam being a lifestyle (11)
Islam organising daily life (4)
Islam teaching how (3)
Islam teaching right or wrong (1)

I think for myself, I'm using my religion for myself, for my lifestyle. (Malik, M)

Islam means religion, Islam means everything. (Layla, F)

You have to follow certain rules and it's [Islam] part of your everyday life. (Malika, F)

I guess the Islamic religion is more than any other religion, part of the culture and part of the day life of everything of person who follow that religion, because it gives you rules not only for the pray time, but [also] how to behave so it's really part of your identity I think ... Islam gives you rules for your lives, how to behave, how to pray, not make dangerous things you know. (Malika, F)

Religion means the way of life, how to live your life. To determine what's wrong what's right to do. (A'waan, M)

B: What does Islam mean to you?

L: It's my way of life, everything to me. It's what I believe and it help[s] me to live my life. In Islam we have rules, and this means I have to do them in my life. (Lina, F)

As Layla suggests, when she proposes that Islam means everything, the religion Islam has the potential to become the individual's lifestyle as a result of its holistic nature. Malik and Malika, A'waan and Lina confirm this by suggesting they live their lives according to Islam's advice and practices. This is further explained in the words of Malik from Saudi Arabia as he continues:

For example, Islam for me, from the things that Islam taught me, for example time management. You have five times a day or five prayers a day you have to pray so you have to manage your time to have a time management. You divide the stuff or the things you have to do between those prayers. You have to pray in the times or the praying times so it is I could say it [is] manage the stuff for your day, or divides the day for me. I think it [has] taught me a lot. For example, [if] I don't pray, I have twenty-four hours a day, and I could manage or divide that day for levels or for stages, and divide my stuff in those levels. For my lifestyle, for my religion, it is divided for me. So I have to put the things to do in between those levels. (Malik, M)

Malik clearly identifies Islam's role in his life as an organiser by putting his daily practices at the heart of it. This notion of Islam being a daily life organiser is additionally evident in the codes such as "*Islam Organising Daily Life (4)*", "*Islam Teaching How (3)*". The notion is further supported by Diya (M):

I think Islam is a whole life, my whole life, influencing my spiritual side, my social relations, my habits, a lot of things. I mean [it] is a way, I need Islam for this life here. (Diya, M)

He concurs with Malik in his perspective of Islam being a lifestyle and an organiser. He also mentions the spiritual aspect of this perception. The quotation is compelling to the extent it makes reference to the potential impact of Islamic identity on an international Muslim student's cross-cultural experience since the believers of Islam do not only focus on certain celebrations and occasional practices but experience Islam as part of their daily life. This sort of a commitment additionally leads participants to regard it as *difficult* idea to internalise and follow in life Malika:

It's difficult religion and concept itself, and this difficulty is making the life of Islamic people even worse. (Malika, F)

As Malika points out, the perception of Islam even by its believers is that it is a difficult concept. The use of a strong word such as 'worse' also suggests a controversial relationship between the religion and the believer. She continues with her remarks, as follows:

But I think nowadays Islam means difficult not only in Europe, difficult in every country. I don't blame the just the Western idea, I blame also the Arabic idea of Islam. (Malika, F)

This quotation is significant in demonstrating not only Islam's perceived relationship with a European context but also the individual's relationship with it as one's identity; Islam is interpreted as a *difficult culture* by the Italian participant. In an attempt to deconstruct what these difficulties are, she first makes reference Europe not only geographically, but also as an ideology. She proposes that "Islam and the West might be incompatible" as a result of divergent value systems adopted. Nevertheless, she does not limit her perception to geography and different values systems, and further suggests that interpretations of Islam might result in difficulties. This suggests Islam is prone to different interpretations in a different jurisdiction.

The data also reveal that participants' relationship with Islam is dependent on gender as well as the environment. To illustrate this point better Sami (M) remarks:

I think the gender also makes the difference because, like, the females are more strict [on] the Islamic side. (Sami, M)

He emphasises the fact that Islam might be interpreted as stricter for females due to the practices only females are required to follow, i.e. headscarf. Therefore, as we narrow the scope of the Muslim identity to more specific cohorts such as female Muslim, group specific practices begin to emerge.

A deeper level analysis of the role of women in Islam is beyond the scope of this study as this project focuses on intercultural experiences of international Muslim students in a non-Muslim third level education context and draws from intercultural studies and internationalisation of HE literature rather than theology or woman's studies. However, it is important to explore what the IMS suggest their perceptions of being a

female Muslim are and whether this might impact on their intercultural experiences in the Irish HE.

### 5.3.2 Female Muslim Identity

One of the most densely populated codes relating to being Muslim is '*Seeing Headscarf or Face Veil as A Choice*' (14). The quotations grouped in this code suggest an equally distributed gender dimension. The number of male students that have quotations in this code is four while the number of females is six. This is a significant indicator of a shared perception of the headscarf being a choice, given that it is a gender biased topic. One of the female participants Zahra remarks:

Wearing hijab, that is what I want ... it is not mandatory. Yeah, my religion tell[s] me to wear it, yeah, because some people, my friends ask me [does] your father, [does] your husband oblige you to wear it, but no. I'm happy to wear it you know, I am happy.  
(Zahra, F)

Zahra understands that the headscarf is advised as dress code by her religion. However, her stance on her headscarf as her choice is considerably straightforward; she clearly delivers it as her decision as well as mentioning the stereotypical approach towards head-scarved females, which regards the practice as closely linked to oppression. She is content to say that this was her understanding of what her faith entailed, thus her choice.

Wearing the hijab so. it's my choice (Inbar, F)

It's my decision (Zara, F)

Similarly, a male participant, Sami, posits:

Wom[en] in Islam are ordered to cover their hair but it also depend[s] on the person. It's not a sign for being a good Muslim, or if you're not covering your hair [that doesn't mean you're not a good Muslim]. (Sami, M)

He is making a point that Islamic practices are advised by Quran and formed by one's cultural surrounding, but at the end of the day, it is the person themselves that make the decisions on how they experience their faith. It is important to note here that researcher's choice concerning the headscarf<sup>52</sup> as a female might have intervened as a limitation to the openness of participants' thoughts on the headscarf practice. However, Sami also quotes a personal experience to explain his thoughts further on the issue, and this might suggest that the researcher's headscarf choice may not fully discourage the participants from articulating their authentic thoughts.

[There was] a Saudi student; she is a girl, in the foundation. She was not covering her head... it doesn't depend on how religious you are to be good to people. It depends on your thoughts and your personality. So I'm not judging her [whether] she is wearing the hijab or not. That's her decision and I'm not responsible for that. (Sami, M)

He admits that hijab might have been advised by Islam as a dress code for females, it might have also been encouraged by society, however, it is one's individual decision regarding the practice that matters. Malik, from Saudi Arabia, reiterates Sami's thoughts and remarks concerning the headscarf:

To be honest it's a choice. It's their choice of course. At the end, it's their religion. Everybody choose[s] what they want. As I told you at the start, it depends on the person if you [are] practising or not practising, and I know different females not wearing the headscarf, but they still practice Islam and wearing the headscarf is not the end. It's not everything in Islam or religion, or taking off the headscarf is not everything. They might be wearing the headscarf but they are not good people, they are not good Muslims! And however, they take off the headscarf, they would be good people, good Muslim. So it's not something that you can judge the person in front of you. (Malik, M)

He emphasises his respect for individual choices when it comes to how individuals practice their faith, and that he would reserve his judgement in order not to label

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<sup>52</sup> The researcher does not wear a headscarf.

someone according to how they look. This kind of attitude on the IMS front might result in a favourable imprint on intercultural contact with the host and other international students on campus in terms of openness (7.4.1).

Farah (F) stresses the factors of ‘family’ and ‘country of origin’ in being a female Muslim:

Actually, my family told me if you want to take it off, you can. But for me no, because I [am] used to wear[ing] it, so it’s a part of something. When I go out, I [am] used to put[ting] it [on] so that’s why. Now it’s my decision, but before [it was] not my decision.

She concludes that when she was first taking the decision to wear the headscarf, the decision might have been under the influence of the family, society, peers, etc., which resonates with the close relationship between identity and home country factors. Nonetheless, she admits she is given the space to make her choices as to how to approach Islamic practices. As a result, she is able to have an ownership over her decisions and the female-specific practices she follows within Islam. Even though the imprint of the home country factors could be seen in her choices, she finds her empowerment by giving meaning to and taking ownership of her faith-related practices. In a similar vein Malika points to the family factor in the decision to start wearing the hijab:

I guess she [her mother] had always the idea that it wasn’t really necessary to cover your hair but it was how you really going to express yourself or behave, and she [her mother] always expressively told me that this is something that you have to decide on your own, and you have to read and think what these sentences mean [in the Quran]. (Malika, F)

Even though Malika is from Italy and Farah from Saudi Arabia, their families’ values overlap in that they both emphasise the prominence of one’s free will in constructing their reading of Islam. Therefore, family influence might not be confined merely to a

single aspect of passing the religion on to next generations; it might additionally encourage free will and choice. Nawrin (F) draws from her experience when she associates headscarf with conservatism:

The problem [with wearing hijab] is that they won't talk to you openly about everything, but they can talk to me about everything. They don't see me that conservative you know.  
(Nawrin, F)

Here she emphasises the salient perception of head-scarved women being conservative, and because she is not wearing the headscarf, she is able to give the impression that she is someone people could openly talk to. As noted earlier she additionally was raised in a constitutionally secular country (Bangladesh), and in a family where members do not practise the wearing of the headscarf. The idea of families and participants as individuals having their own interpretations of religion resonates with Gudykunst's (1998) notion of cultures and subcultures, in which he argues that cultures aren't homogenous entities and there are groups within cultures that both have overlapping and divergent values with those of the larger culture. Nawrin's remarks also might indicate 'pre-conceived ideas' regarding Muslim woman (see 7.3.1. 7.5.), and implications on intercultural contact.

Baha (M) confirms his peers' thoughts when he remarks:

It is up to every single one to wear [the headscarf] or not. (Baha, M)

Thus far it is clear from participant responses that they are inclined to have their own perceptions of faith and how it should be practised, which then translates into their individual interpretations regarding being Muslim, more specifically female Muslim.

On a final note, Malik (M) and Amber (F) reminds of the plasticity and fluidity of human nature and remarks: "You [might] have mistakes, you forget stuff, you do



something wrong, but you go back and correct these things.” (Malik) “No one can say I am full of religion, I’m [a] religious person, because all of us, we have mistakes and we [made] mistakes.” (Amber). They put forward a broader aspect of individual interpretations of Islam. In their construction of being Muslim, they emphasise the flexible nature of human being, hence their belief system. It is apparent that participants are under substantial influence of their culture, which entails their religious faith and identity formation in this particular environment they call home. However, it should also be noted that participants tend to have their own interpretations regarding religion and faith.

### **5.3.3 Practising Islam**

Another aspect that emerges from the data in relation to ‘religion’ and ‘being Muslim’, regardless of gender, is the practices the participants follow as well as the meaning they attach to these. Practices in Islam vary from daily bodily movement as a way of worshipping, to abstaining from certain types of food and beverages that are regarded as unhealthy or harmful for human beings in the Quran (the Holy Book of Islam). It requires time and effort for a Muslim to attend to these practices thoroughly on a daily basis. In line with this, the question of praying routines was addressed in the interviews.

An approximate seventy-three percent of the participants confirmed praying five times a day during the interviews. However, as previously mentioned, a link between different interpretations of Islam and the country of origin is identified in the data, and this can have an influence on the participants’ prayer routines, especially on a daily basis. To illustrate this, majority students from Middle Eastern or Gulf countries note that they pray five times a day along with observing other sorts of occasional worships.

As opposed to this, Malika from Italy and Nawrin from Bangladesh do not confirm praying five times a day. Instead Malika (F) proposes:

I think because I lived abroad or I lived in a European country I kind of follow the rules of the European idea of how the religion [is performed] which I think is to believe in something but not really practice. (Malika, F)

Similar to Malika, Nawrin from Bangladesh does not confirm praying five times a day devoutly, instead, she chooses to pluralise the word practice, and does not specify a type of prayer:

I'm religious in a way that I do my prayers I do my things, but I'll be doing them in my house. (Nawrin, F)

She does not separate herself from the Muslim community; on the contrary, she embraces her overarching Muslim identity (see The Notion of *Umma* 9.3.2). However, as a result of the secular background, she rather prefers to keep the practices outside the public sphere, in her private domain. The data analysis indicates that 'home country factors' impact on the student's understanding of Islam; therefore, how the student practices it.

### **5.3.3.1 Peace and love as meaning attached to Islam**

Apart from the impact of country of origin, the participants also give meaning to their faith through peace and love as constructed by their very own interpretations. During the interviews, the questions regarding prayer routines did not only aim to measure students' devoutness from the aspect of physical practices; the questions also aimed to capture the meaning the IMS attach to Islam, which consequently brought depth into participants understanding of their faith from a Muslim's point of view. '*Islam meaning peace and/or love (19)*' emerged from the data analysis as a result of the reflections on what Islam means to the participants during the interviews.

From my perspective, my point of view that spreading peace.  
(Tahu, M)

Similarly, Zara, Amber and Malik state:

Islam give[s] me peace. (Zara, F)

Islam mean[s] peace. (Amber, F)

I think feeling peace. (Malik, M)

It's [Islam] all related to make your life better and peaceful.  
(Malika, F)

From the readings of the data, Islam signifies an inner reconciliation that should be exhibited in beings and doings of the participants. This again links back to the argument that Islam is deemed as a lifestyle by its followers. Additionally, the binding principle among all Muslims, other people is Islam's peaceful nature:

Islam mean[s] peace. Islam means I love you as a person (Amber, F)

You have to understand your religion very well to live peaceful with others. (Sami, M)

Islam give[s] me the peace, give[s] the people the peace. Because like, when I say Selamun aleykum [greetings in Arabic and Islamic cultures] that means I give you the peace, you have to give me the peace. And Islam like [teach] us how to be, how to contact with another people. You have to contact with another people in the peace way. You have to contact with another people in the good way. (Zara, F)

An understanding of Islam without borders and based on the principle of spreading peace and love will be explored further in 8.5. On an interesting note, even though the perception of peace and love is considered to link to their inner well-being, participants remarked that it was something worthy of spreading and sharing.

From my perspective, my point of view that spreading peace, and just do my own part as being Muslim, spreading peace, showing people that you are a good person and representing Islam in a good way. (Tahu, M)

Tahu's (M) idea of peace and love is not exclusive to his self and well-being, yet it is a form of representation achieved through peaceful means and actions. His remarks resemble Malika's in that they both emphasise being Muslim entails a good representation of what it fundamentally means to Muslims, whose community is affiliated with negative images in international media, which will be discussed in 5.5. This might conversely have a positive impact on participants' openness towards intercultural communication as cultural ambassadors which will be explored in 8.4.1.

Similarly, Baha (M) suggests:

What Islam mean[s] to me... it just to love your people, love your neighbours, love yourself and be good [to] people around you.

His remarks synthesise the essence of being Muslim, and how this essence is communicated through their everyday actions. This deep belief in being in peace and love, as well as spreading it, clashes with the image of Muslims in international media as pointed out by the participants.

It's not about hate, it's always about love. (Baha, M).

The reference he makes to the notion of hate again sets a good example of how IMS already anticipate a negative connotation around their faith, and how they aspire to counteract with their own perception of Islam, namely peace & love. It is evident that Islam does not only organise participants' daily doings, but also influence their interactions with people, be it mono-cultural or intercultural. The discussion here is not to say the notion of peace and love is exclusive to Islam religion; the point made here is to highlight what the interview data offers the researcher as IMS understanding of their religion. Additionally, at initial stages of data collection, participants' understanding of Islam came as a striking counter-argument to the 'negative

perceptions of Islam’ that is explored in 6.5. Later as the data collection continued, it was conceived that IMS’ perception of ‘peace and love’ is a deeper and more meaningful unapologetic stance rather than a banal counter-argument of claiming the culture. This suggests implications for dynamics of intercultural contact that is discussed as Openness (8.4.1) and Cultural Ambassador (8.5), and *Ummah* (9.3.2) in later chapters of the thesis.

## **5.4 Family as a Construct of Culture and Identity**

Apart from nationality and religion, the family is identified as an important construct of IMS cultural identity. It was expected that family would emerge as a construct of culture prior to data collection. Ahmad (1974:14) refers to the family as a “divinely-inspired institution” in Islam, and as the students suggest in above paragraphs, Islamic and national values are closely linked. The notion of the family is, in fact, best expressed in Alia’s (F) quotation:

As you know the Arabic are really close into the family. (Alia, F)

However, a grounded theory researcher is not supposed to force any questions or pre-set ideas into the interviews with participants (Glaser and Strauss 1978) as this would negate the theory generation. Therefore, familiarity with and expectation of the notion of family emerging as a strong value in Muslim cultures was held back by the researcher for the sake of openness of IMS’ own reflections about themselves (see 4.8 Reflexivity).

### 5.4.1 Family Support for Study Abroad

Family indeed emerged as a significant element of participants' cultural identity. IMS used family to conceptualise their upbringing, as well as their role models and influence. As is evident in the code "*Family influencing their decisions (25)*", students often sought support from family when they were aspiring to study abroad prior to commencing their degrees in Ireland. The family support is evident in Malik's and Layla and Nuha's remarks:

My dad was, he supports it the most, to go, to come here. (Malik, M)

I just wanted to study abroad and my dad kept on telling me to study abroad because it's like much better. Yeah that's why I chose. (Layla, F).

My sister is studying here in RCSI (Royal College of Surgeons). So, my parent said like they feel more comfortable if I went with my sister. (Nuha, F)

These quotations illustrate the way families are supportive of IMS' study abroad decisions. This led the researcher to ask the reasons behind the families' support, and whether it was unconditional in line with grounded theory principles (see 4.5.2, 4.6.5). When further investigated in the data, it is identified that often a family member had study abroad experience at some time in their lives, which both set up a role model for the participants, and encouraged them to go and have a similar kind of experience outside home. Fatima remarks:

Actually, my dad studied abroad. But he studied in America. So I've always wanted to be outside. I don't want to study inside...even my cousins [are] studying abroad as well. And some of my friends and people I know. (Fatima, F)

However, the data shows that family support does not always come in the form of outright support. IMS report their families' selective attitude influencing their decisions about study abroad:

To be honest my first choice was Canada. I want[ed to] go there, I organised everything for there but my mother told me Ireland is more close to the Middle East. (Amber, F)

As Amber (F) puts forward here, her family was influential in her decision as much as supportive. This is further supported by Farah and Zahra when they say:

F: We have many options actually, but my family want me to go something closer to my country.

B: So, your brother influenced your decision [he is a student in DCU]

F: Yeah yeah, he did. (Farah, F)

I have more than one choice yeah. I think it was for my husband, it was his choices. (Zahra, F)

The influence of family on participants' decisions is evident in these remarks. The value that IMS attach to study abroad is enhanced by family members being role models -often an elder member. However, the family's values might bias IMS' decisions. This suggests a link between family influence and the society of origin regarding IMS' study abroad decisions. In some cases, a family member is reported to be studying abroad along with the participant:

Actually, my brother was here before me, so he recommended that for me and the major as well. (Farah, F)

B: Is you husband in DCU?

Z: He is PhD student in here. (Zahra, F)

B: How did you decide to come to Ireland?

A: It happened accidentally like, I heard about some course here so I came. I just took the decision; the decision was in two weeks. So it was very quickly, didn't plan for long term.

B: How did you hear about it?

A: From my cousin

B: Okay, is he a student here too?

A: Yeah he is a student. (A'waan, M)

These quotations suggest that recommendation and previous experience of others, especially whom they are close to, are valued by IMS. The recommendation of relatives might become influential factors in their decision-making process as a result of this value they place on family ties. Its power manifests itself perhaps the strongest when it comes to making decisions. This section evidently foregrounds the family's role in IMS' decisions, I now turn to perhaps the most relevant aspect of the study abroad phenomenon, which is the conceptualisation of 'sojourner' from the perspective of IMS.

## **5.5 Sojourner Identity**

In line with Muslim identity discussions carried out during the interviews, a set of questions was designed to excavate IMS' thoughts on being international students in addition to their Muslim identity. Examples of questions are:

- *What does being an international student mean to you?*
- *What do you expect from higher education in Ireland?*
- *What do you think about your study abroad experience in DCU?*
- *What is the benefit of studying in DCU for you?*

The categories that emerge in relation to the international student phenomenon are presented below as 'Objectives & Expectations', which is also closely linked to 'Academic Scholarships', 'Language' and 'Degree Programme'.

### **5.5.1 Objectives & Expectations**

Having 'objectives & expectations' was one of the most salient themes discussed in the interviews by the IMS with the codes Table 5-3:



Table 5-3: Grounded Theory Codes for the Theme ‘Aims & Expectations’.

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Expectations</b>
<i>Working Hard (10)</i>	<i>Seeing Study Abroad Beyond Education Purposes (36)</i>
<i>Having Aims and Objectives (8)</i>	<i>Seeing Study Abroad Experience as Character Building (8)</i>
<i>Being work focused (2)</i>	<i>Seeing Study Abroad as the Future (4)</i>
	<i>Seeing Study Abroad as Advantage over Others (1)</i>

The idea of working towards a future oriented goal is a dominant outlook among the participants. Leaving their home country behind for a reason from their perspective crystallises as their objectives. Amber (F) clearly states why she is sojourning in Ireland:

I’m not here to play. I’m not leaving my country to play. I’m here to work and study only. (Amber, F)

Amber’s statement comes across as a very straightforward, which might negatively affect engaging with the host culture. Nonetheless, what Amber is essentially conveying here is the fact that she has a reason to be in Ireland, which is deeply embedded in academic success, and a future oriented career plan. This might indicate a positive attitude among IMS towards curriculum activities that foster intercultural contact (see 8.7 and 9.7). Other references such as ‘I want to complete my Masters’ or ‘I want to complete my PhD’ are also considered as general references to be oriented towards a goal in the data, therefore, having objectives.

The students also made an apparent and significant reference to how they perceive the study abroad experience during the interviews. According to the participants the

notion of 'study abroad' represents more than obtaining the degree offered by an Irish third level education institution. The participants refer to the study abroad phenomenon as 'beyond education', 'the future', a 'dream come true', and an 'advantage over others' as is presented in Table 5-3. Even though these notions cannot be separated from pursuing a degree in Irish HE, the codes contain nuances regarding the participants' intercultural communication experience, and becoming intercultural beings as well as their self-development (see 9.8). Malik elaborates on this point below:

I think going to study abroad is not just for education purposes. There are other purposes. For example, like the knowledge you get from socialising with other people. To be honest, I think when you, if you go abroad to study, graduate and come back just [with] a paper, you have a degree [but] you haven't done enough.  
(Malik, M)

According to Malik, the phenomenon of study abroad cannot be conceptualised without fulfilling the communication and self-development aspects. Therefore, he emphasises the importance of having a more holistic approach towards study abroad experience in order to benefit from it substantially. When asked what his expectations were from study abroad, he replies:

I would expect from HE, yeah, to get higher education, to learn more, to explore stuff that I don't know about, of course help me develop myself, my personality, my involvement, like communication with people. (Malik, M)

I am expecting that and I am getting [what I expect] as well! Malik in first year is not [the] same as Malik in third year. If Malik in third year is same as Malik in first year, that means I wasted three years of my life cause I haven't changed, I haven't developed myself so I haven't learnt anything! (Malik, M)

I don't think, I don't feel like I wanna be a part of the whole. Because when I came here, just to me I want to be around different society. I [was] born in [an] Islamic [society], in Saudi Arabia, which is Muslim country. And we've seen all about Islam and [I] don't wanna say I'm fed up or anything; I just have

enough -not enough maybe, but I have more than I need to know about Islam. So I need to learn something different, I need to learn more stuff about, other stuff about different areas. (Baha, M)

It is evident that Malik and Baha regard study abroad experience closely related to cross-cultural communication, self-development and changing for the better through learning. Baha, in particular, points to a kind of saturation he feels he has reached with the Islamic cultural environment in his home country. He adds this serves as a motivation to engage more with other cultures through study abroad experience. His perspective links back to the role of nationality in describing one's culture as discussed in 5.2. The data, additionally, points to a relationship between IMS' conceptualisation of study abroad and their motivations for intercultural interactions. Intercultural contact is identified to be highly influenced by pre-conceived ideas or a level of curiosity regarding Muslim identity among non-Muslim students, and IMS' positive conceptualisation of study abroad for self-development appears to have a positive imprint on how they approach to other people's questions (see 8.5).

Similarly, Malika emphasises the communication, learning and self-development aspects of study abroad when reflecting on her experience. She suggests how she could incorporate this experience into her life:

It's necessary because you need to approach different minds, not just only from your background, not just from Irish people['s perspective]. [Y]ou can learn a lot from them and they can learn a lot from you and I think it's necessary, because you know it gives you an idea of how you want to prospect your life, [shows you] the way they work, [and you can compare] how they work in Italy or in your own town; so how you [can] improve [yourself]. My idea is always [to] go out and maybe come back [to] ameliorate your situation or your town from this point [of view], increase [your] knowledge and the notions of the other parts [of the world]. That doesn't mean that they are better than

us or we are better than them; [it is] just that we need that progress about education. (Malika, F)

Having presented IMS conceptualisation of study abroad in the axis of objectives and expectations, which emerge as rather positive notions, the sections below present more specific aspects of being oriented towards future goals such as the scholarship schemes, English language proficiency, and the degree programme. The respective paragraphs also review these dimensions' relationship with each other.

### **5.5.2 Academic Scholarships**

Funding schemes appear strongly related to being an international student from the perspective of IMS. This is largely owing to the demographics of participants to this study. 20 of the students stated they were availing of a generous government scholarship scheme covering all financial aspects of their study abroad, and one student stated that he was in receipt of a DCU scholarship which include fees and a monthly stipend as financial contribution to his budget in Ireland. A'waan from Egypt states that he was partially funded for the second year by his supervisor and the school, which also covered the fees for the visa he needed for residency in Ireland. Malik, on the other hand suggests he first applied for the scholarship in his home country and then chose the country to study abroad after being eligible for the scholarship scheme.

I was looking to get a scholarship from my country...firstly you have to get certain marks in high school. I had to come here, study English and provide an acceptance letter for college, show them that I achieved certain mark[s] in the IELTS exam, which is an English exam. Then, they would [examine] my case and decide if I can get the scholarship or not. (Malik, M)

Here Malik explains the procedure to be granted the government scholarship for students from Saudi Arabia. The procedure is similar for other Gulf country students

such as those from Oman or Kuwait. The only Libyan participant also stated that she was funded under a government scholarship.

### **5.5.2.1 The Academic Scholarship and the Students' Well-being**

Malik additionally elaborates on his thoughts and emotions around the scholarship scheme here:

You know you have a scholarship; you have to get certain marks. You can't go under certain level, so we have to study more and more. You are coming here to study. You're looking for a competitive advantage than other students back home. When you finish, you go back, it's easy to find a job for yourself. (Malik, M)

The scholarship evidently contributes to the well-being of students by substantially decreasing financial pressures, which is one of the factors that is discussed in the literature as detrimental to students' cross-cultural experience (Church 1982, Lin and Yi 1997). The students are able to focus on other aspects of their cross-cultural journey.

### **5.5.2.2 The academic scholarship and academic success**

That being said, the scholarship's competitive and demanding nature is reported to cause a different type of stress, which is academic. This statement is further supported by Sami (M):

It's like a gift, not everybody is getting the scholarship in the country. But at the same time, you have to put your effort for it. Because ... not everyone is getting this opportunity... it's a bit of a pressure, but I am fine with this. (Sami, M)

As the quotation suggests, availing of a government scholarship causes a level of stress regarding academic success in the Irish HE. Sami is able to cope with the reported level of stress, since his views, appear to be affected by a kind of expected utility (see

5.5.1, 5.5.3) associated with the competitive and advantageous nature of the scholarship scheme. This is evident in Malik's words as well when he highlights the advantageous position the scholarships offer to the recipients especially with regard to career opportunities. From this reading of the data, the post-graduation utility seems to challenge the negative effect of academic stress that might be caused by the scholarship (see 5.5.1).

In line with this argument, the data reveal that 23 out of 23 participants, regardless of country of origin, gender, age and other demographic factors, which might moderate the relationship between motivations and study abroad, proposed they were professionally driven to initiate this sojourner experience. When examined further, 'academic scholarships' strongly relates to participants' academic and career driven objectives, which are presented below as 'English language proficiency' and 'degree programme'.

### **5.5.3 English Language Proficiency**

Language and degree programme are deemed an integral part of being an international student by the IMS. English is largely considered a valuable language to learn for better job opportunities upon completing the degree by the participants. In a dialogue with Amal, she unveils this language aspect of her career related motivations:

B: I see all of your choices are actually English speaking countries...

A: Yeah, because there was like China, Japan, Spain... but if I want them, I have to study the original language. I can't study English in that country.

B: What is the reason you prefer English?

A: Because it is the spoken language, and also when I am applying for a job, they want English, even, not Arabic.

B: In Saudi Arabia?

A: Yeah. (Amal, F)

Amal situates the language factor in a broader picture of job opportunities. She highlights the advantage international graduates have over domestic graduates in the job market. In her words, it is apparent that in job applications, English proficiency is sought by employers. A good way to meet this requirement is improving language skills through study abroad, which indicates a utility value similar to that of the relationship between the academic scholarships and academic success. Similarly, Sada remarks:

S: Like some of my [Saudi] friends have the same reason as me, they [Irish] speak English.

B: So, this [English proficiency] puts you in an advantageous position?

S: Yeah, you have English, you speak English, you write English.  
(Sada, F)

Amal underpins English language competency as an advantage in participants' aspiration to successfully perform in a company in her home country, where she values working. At this point, English language proficiency appears to function as an extrinsic, yet strong, push factor for study abroad in Ireland from the perspective of IMS. For the purpose of this study push and pull factors are defined as follows:

Push factors operate within the source country and initiate a student's decision to undertake international study. 'Pull' factors operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002: 82)<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Mazzarol, T. and Soutar, G.N., 2002. "Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 16(2), pp.82-90.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) refer to push factors as ‘initiators’ of the decision taken to study abroad. These factors that facilitate the outcome of study abroad might be inherent in the country of origin, the host country or the student themselves as the scholars argue. It is then proposed that there is an interplay between the source factors, the host factors and the student’s decision making mechanism (see 2.2.6).

D: Because in Saudi Arabia, all the big companies prefer the one who speak[s] English and studies abroad than the one who just speak[s] Arabic and did university in Saudi. A lot of the companies in Saudi Arabia, the communication language is English between the employees and the staff, English language, so that’s good for me.

B: So I presume English was one of the major reasons why you chose Ireland?

D: Yeah. (Diya, M)

Diya concurs with his peers that English language proficiency is a skill sought by employers in his country of origin, and that he would value gaining this skill even when it is considered to be reinforced by a utility function.

B: Are English speaking countries the top choices?

S: Yeah, especially for career.

B: Why did you choose to study abroad?

S: To be able to get a good job in Saudi Arabia you need a degree from other countries. Okay I can study in some Saudi university but I will get a higher salary and high job opportunity if I travel abroad and go to some university in abroad.

B: So it is essentially a career focused decision?

S: Yeah exactly, everyone has a goal and my goal is good opportunity, good salary, to live better.” (Sami, M)

The dialogue with Sami suggests further links between the language aspect of professional development aspirations and country of origin. English language proficiency is one of the generic factors that transpires in international student literature (Tanaka, Ellis 2003, et. al.). Nevertheless, a context-specific review should



not be neglected by the researcher. In the case of Saudi Arabia, which is one of the country of origins in this study, participants reveal the dynamics of job applications and business while discussing the factors that influenced their decision to study abroad. Consequently, this pushes students to look for an English-speaking country for study abroad causing Ireland to pull them as an English-speaking country. In line with this argument, Nuha and Lina quote:

B: Was English language a factor in your decision?

N: Yeah, of course! I only wanted to go to English speaking countries. (Nuha, F)

B: So you make a lot of references to English, and all the countries you put down in your application form are English speaking countries. Can we say this is an important factor for you?

L: Yeah because when you want to learn a language completely different to your mother language, you have to go to country itself... I would say I didn't to Germany because English is the main language in the world these days. (Lina, F)

As suggested in the above paragraphs, English is considered as a favourable language to master by the participants. Language, in this sense, can be incorporated into the push factors as the participants' quotations above; in the case of Saudi Arabia, the employers regard English speaking candidates in a more advantageous position, or into the pull factors, which then predicts English language speaking countries will attract more international students. Alternatively, the student might be driven by a more intrinsic motive such as personal interest or outlook in life, and set out to study abroad. Elham illustrates this point when she quotes:

B: How did you decide to come to Ireland?

E: I study in Saudi, I listen, watch movie[s] in English. Because I need [to listen] more and talk with [English-speaking] people. (Elham, F)

Elham is a language student (which is part of her pre-master's course) and is still improving her English. Here, she describes she wants to improve her English for her own personal development, which distinguishes her from the majority of participants who describe language as rather an extrinsically driven motivation. It is evident that even though participants' career related aspirations relate to international student identity as extrinsic push factors, it additionally serves for self-development as well. This indicates different values attached to study abroad and intercultural contact from the perspective of IMS (see 9.8). It is also identified in this section that participants' aspirations are prone to external influence, which supports the theory of push and pull factors in international student literature (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002).

#### **5.5.4 Degree Programme**

Different levels of priorities, and different values attached regarding international student identity are evident in participants' discussion thus far. This applies to the degree programme they choose to study as well. In their discussion, IMS incorporate different elements and factors into the construction of their expectations from the degree they are registered in the Irish HE. When associating the college degree with a good job opportunity, one student might prioritise family expectations, while the other empowerment. To illustrate this point further, these quotations below will show how some participants relate their degree related goals to family factor. Amber (F) states:

Study abroad mean[s] to me the future. The future that I'm looking for myself first, my husband as second, and my children. I will start my life after I get my certificate in DCU. I know most of the door open for me after I finish. (Amber, F)

Similarly, Sami offers an invaluable insight into what makes his degree-related objective in the Irish HE valuable.

I think it's a huge step in everybody's life. I think it's the stage where you change your life on being a teenager to the person you will be for the rest of your life. And also it's amid-point in your life, you want to get a degree to help you for example to complete your life or get a job, or a family, like whatever you want to do next. So, it's a big step especially for me. I think this is a pressure for me, like my brother didn't continue his education. He went to first year of college and he wasn't good enough for engineering and he dropped and went to work to help the family because I'm not from a rich family, so he had to do that. for me I feel this is my responsibility, like my family depends on me. My mum or brother they say to me 'we want you to be better than us, we want you to get a degree', so [it] feels like I don't want to make them disappointed. So, I really want to get this degree. (Sami, M)

His remarks once again point out to a complex system of constructing discourses around expectations of international students, therefore, it is noteworthy to identify what kind of discourses the participants employ when discussing their study abroad experience regarding their degree-related expectations. A'waan (M) suggests he chose to become an international student in DCU because of the degree he valued to pursue:

I was looking for my subjects I found it in DCU. I found in Waterford as well but it was just manufacturing, not business so [I chose DCU]. (A'waan, M)

He emphasises the specific qualification of the degree as he concludes what would assist him the best in achieving the desired occupation for future. He adds that his scholarship status additionally encourages him to be persistent in his aspirations for his professional-development. This is also partially due to the fact the scholarship requires that the student go back home once the degree is successfully completed;

In the contract I signed, it says I have to go back to my country once I graduate. (Malik, M).

The requirements of the scholarship offered by the government, in a way, condition the aspirations to become oriented towards the infrastructure and fabric of the country of origin. This results in different rankings and discourses of overlapping aims and objectives among the participants.

## 5.6 Chapter summary

The investigation thus far outlined key aspects of identity and culture IMS articulated during the interviews. The chapter first examined nationality and religion's relationship with identity and how these notions were used by the participants to define themselves. It then moved on to incorporation of the gender dimension into the religious identity, and examined practices, which, in particular, female Muslim participants adhere to. The relationship between gender, nationality as well as the practices and meaning of Islam were explored in the following sections. It is identified that the participants' understanding of Islam is dependent on their larger environment such as nation, gender, family, yet, is prone to their own interpretations. From this reading of the data, four arguments are significant as regard to identity and intercultural contact on campus:

- Participants' discussion of identity is influenced by their nationality and religion at a group level, and self-conceptualisation at individual level.
- Participants' religious identity manifests itself in their daily activities, practices, values, and is described as 'lifestyle' by the participants.
- Cultural identity conceptualised as intersection of nationality, religion and family is not a linear concept demonstrating a homogenous nature, it rather is a heterogeneous and fluid concept with both overlapping and divergent values.
- One's country of origin might impact the practice of religion, with particular reference to gender, and this might have an impact (positive/negative) on the nature of intercultural contact on campus.

These arguments that arise in this section will be reviewed further in the next chapters along with other factors and relationships. The next chapter now explores the host culture from the perspective of IMS.

## PERCEPTIONS OF THE HOST SOCIETY AND CULTURE

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### 6.1 Introduction

Following the discussion regarding the participants' identity and culture in Chapter 4, this chapter aims to examine the host environment the IMS sojourn in as international students. Chapter 5 examined the identity and culture of IMS from a number of aspects such as nationality, gender, religion and family. Upon identifying the key aspects of IMS identity as entrées to Irish HE, it is essential to examine the environment hosting them. There are a number of reasons for the researcher to integrate the host culture factors into the discussion:

1. it unveils the perceived characteristics of the host culture,
2. it identifies perceived similarities as well as dissimilarities between the two cultures,
3. it examines the impact of perceived cultural similarities and dissimilarities on the sojourn experience from the perspective of IMS.

From the data analysis, Ireland emerges as a 'welcoming host' that respects religious differences. Nevertheless, perceived host receptivity<sup>54</sup> does not necessarily provide a meaningful intercultural communication between the parties. The categories are presented in Table 6-1, key arguments are reviewed in below paragraphs, implications on intercultural experiences of IMS, as well as multiculturalism in the host environment are discussed as concluding remarks.

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<sup>54</sup> Host receptivity is conceptualised by Kim (1988, 2001, 2005) as part of Integrative Theory of Intercultural Communication in the literature. The theoretical concept will be discussed in detail and in relation to the findings in Chapter 9.

Table 6-1: Grounded Theory Construction of IMS' Perceptions of the Host Culture

<b>Core Category</b>	<b>Perceptions of the Host Society &amp; Culture</b>		
<b>Categories</b>	<b>Culture Distance<sup>55</sup></b>	<b>Host Receptivity</b>	<b>Negative Perceptions re Muslims</b>
<b>Sub-categories</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mixed-gender spaces</li> <li>• Food &amp; drink</li> <li>• Greeting gestures</li> <li>• Other factors (i.e. transport, house-keeping)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcoming &amp; friendly environment</li> <li>• Host families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International media</li> <li>• Identity-based incidents</li> </ul>

## 6.2 Ireland as a Different Culture

During the research design stage of the project, it was envisaged that Ireland would emerge as a culturally different country from the perspective of the participants. This assumption was based on differences that extend to a large range of factors - geographical, racial, religious and political - between Ireland and the home countries of the participants. This approach is additionally in line with the identity discussion that took place in the previous chapters.<sup>56</sup> A brief discussion of Ireland as the host environment was outlined in 2.3 and 3.2.2. However, the discussion did not go beyond introducing the research question and its key elements to the reader in the chapter

<sup>55</sup> Culture distance is used as a theoretical concept in previous research (Hofstede 1998, 2005, Gudykunst 2005, Ward 2005, Bennett 2005, Pearson-Evans 1999, Dunne 2008) to refer to the perceived dissimilarities between two cultures. The term will be elaborated on further in Chapter 9 with reference to the findings and theoretical literature review.

<sup>56</sup> The case of the Italian-national participant will be discussed both as an exception and focus case since Italy does not share the level divergences as other country of origins such as Kuwait or Bangladesh with Ireland (i.e. official membership of a transnational union (European Union), a shared identity as a result of unionisation).

concerned. In this section, the IMS reflect on their thoughts regarding the host culture, which brings the discussion to an evidence-based level. The code '*Seeing Ireland as a Different Culture (19)*' emerges as a dense a code with a substantial number of participant references. The essential idea of the code correlates with '*Comparing Ireland to Home Country (4)*'. These codes indicate a fundamental perception of the two cultures as different from each other, and this section below will begin with discussing this.

A'waan from Egypt suggests that it was not an easy transition for him since Ireland was an entirely different culture to him.

When I go back to my country in the summer –usually I go during the summer for holiday, I can see the differences between cultures.  
(A'waan, M)

I wasn't expecting to get used to their culture. Say, the way they lived, their food, their life style, the way they spend time. Cause you know it's different from country to country, from culture to culture.  
(A'waan, M)

As he states above, A'waan perceives culture to be closely related to 'way of life' in the country, which resonates with 'Islam being a lifestyle' that was reviewed in Chapter 4. This suggests an understanding of 'lifestyle' based on culture and values from the perspective of IMS, which conjectures itself onto aspects of everyday life individuals (i.e. food, the way people spend time). It should also be noted that A'waan mentioned dating culture among his peers in Ireland as part of culture distance; however, the topic did not find resonance in other interviews with participants, therefore, did not qualify to become a separate unit of code within 'Culture Distance'. Consequently, A'waan deems Ireland dissimilar to his home country when culture is conceptualised as lifestyle. This is a compelling quotation, since socialising patterns might be embedded in the values of a society at large. Individuals from different



cultures might value particular or distinct types of thoughts, emotions and behaviours. When these differences are conceptualised as ‘way of life’, this might lead to a perception of a culture distance, and pose a barrier to intercultural communication. This causality is illustrated in A’waan’s quotation as he states he constructs the culture difference on the way the host society lives. He adds that going back and forth between Ireland and his home country helps him realise the two cultures are different.

The perceived differences are salient in expectations of IMS prior to their sojourn in Ireland.

It was [going] to be a different culture. (Farah, F)

Farah puts forward her anticipation from her study abroad experience to take place in a different culture. When asked further, she highlights the difference between her country and Ireland specifically with reference to gender-related aspects, which will be explored in the next section.

### **6.2.1 Mixed –gender Spaces**

Farah puts forward her anticipation regarding Ireland being a different culture to that of her home country before she commenced on her sojourn in the previous quotation. When asked further to clarify what kind of differences she has witnessed so far she continues as below:

It is very different from my country. Because in my country [there is] only males in the college or females, [it is] not mixed. Also [the difference is] because [of] my hijab as well. (Farah, F)

It is evident in this quotation that Farah perceives Saudi Arabian culture and Irish culture to be distant from each other on particular, yet fundamental points. She remarked previously that the pre- conception of the environment that she was

expecting to enter was that it would be different. In the following lines, this becomes evident-based in Farah's experience in the host culture. This gender-based difference is also articulated by another female participant from Saudi Arabia.

In Saudi Arabia we don't have mixed boys and girls [classes]. When I come to [DCU] the first time, all the people in the class [were] boys and girls. I stayed near my brother. The teacher told me [that it was the] wrong way. 'You have to [sit] near the international student[s] to speak English, whereas [your brother and you] speak Arabic'. I told him [that] I can't. Because [it was] the first time and in Saudi Arabia you cannot imagine me [sit] near any men who [is] not related [to] me. This [was] so difficult; [it was] the first difficult[y] in Dublin. But now, it's okay. (Zara, F)

In this anecdote, Zara takes us back to her first encounters with the host culture, and she highlights a very significant gender aspect that comes as a controversy in her lived experience. Even though mixed-gender classrooms are not common in Irish education system until higher education level, mixed-gender is the norm across Irish HE institutions<sup>57</sup>. Lina suggests a similar experience to that of Zara in the academic environment in DCU.

In labs I [always] do work with the boys. I'm coming from Oman, [a] Muslim [country]. In my high school and secondary [school] it was only girls, there weren't any boys. I feel I am shy a little bit so I stay farther away from [the boys in the lab], not that far, but a good distance enough to talk and stuff. (Lina, F)

In her quotation, Lina highlights that her history of single-sex schools, which covers significant formative years in an individual's life, has an inevitable impact on her response to the new environment, where the mixed-sex classes and labs are the norm. She also suggests that same-sex schooling experience she had in Omani education

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<sup>57</sup> The fact that Irish schools still follow practices advised by the Church at institutional level suggests Ireland's Catholic identity still finds resonance in certain areas. Nevertheless, this attitude is more liberal-oriented as the education progresses towards a higher degree. A detailed discussion of overlapping religious practices that are salient in Irish and Islamic cultures would be beyond the scope of this study; however, it is evident in the words of participants that the strong Catholic past of Ireland –unlike staunch secular countries like France- is perceived to lead to a more 'respectful' stance towards presence of religion.

system might have an inevitable impact on her relations and communication with the host students –of the opposite sex in particular. Lina’s reflections on her communication level with the opposite sex students in lab indicates a distant attitude in communication from the participant’s side. This distant attitude might become a barrier between the female participants and the host students during intercultural communication (see 8.3, 8.3.1). It is also notable to point out that this barrier in intercultural communication between Lina and the male students is due to both the environment in which she grew up and her emotions around such contact -possibly stemming from the cultural environment she grew up in as well. Having said that, the mixed gender space is not limited to classroom as is suggested by Alia below.

If anything is broken [in the flat] I have to call my landlord. For example, the plumber came [to my house] and I ha[d] to stand with him. That is [something] I [had] never done in my life! (Alia, F)

Being in the same room with a male, to whom she is not related, is evidently a significant cross-cultural experience due to notable frictions between the two cultures for Alia. These two quotations from two female participants from strict Islamic cultures have so far highlighted the nature of culture distance, as well as the possible communication barriers resulting from this distance. Since the participants come to Ireland as international students, these encounters with the host culture become inevitable in their experience. In the next section, the food & drink dimension of the host culture is reviewed, which according to the participants is different from their home culture.

### **6.2.2 Food and Drink Culture in Ireland**

Food and drink orientations of the host culture emerged as a salient topic of discussion during the interviews, which is evident in codes *‘Irish Culture Being Described as*

*Drink-oriented (9)*'. Sami argues that food and drink should not be perceived separate from a larger frame of culture.

I think this is part of Irish culture, like the pubs and the drinks. (Sami, M)

His remarks suggest that what societies consume as food & drink is deeply embedded in cultural values and the shared history of those people. He continues with citing how his understanding of the evident relationship between culture and food evolved in time.

At the beginning [I thought] Irish people [were] drinking so much. But then I [got] to know the country and I said okay, this is part of their culture. I respect that even if I don't agree with that. I respect their culture, but I'm not into that. (Sami, M)

He clearly distinguishes the role of food & drink in culture; therefore, his negative reaction towards it at the beginning transforms into respecting a cultural phenomenon that is dominant in the host culture. Amber, on the other, as a female from Saudi Arabia, who wears the headscarf, proposes that she has never been engaged in the Irish culture. When asked what her thoughts were regarding Irish culture, she states:

I have no idea actually. I have no idea about the Irish culture... Guinness? Potato? (Amber, F)

Amber claims to have no conception of what Irish culture is due to lack of contact with the host culture. What is more compelling in this quotation than a female, headscarved student articulating her lack of engagement with the host culture, is that even though the participant proposes to have no conception of the host culture, she suggests two concepts that she associates with the host culture in her mind; namely Guinness and potato, both of which are consumable products. This offers a significant insight into the perception of Ireland by the foreigners, in which food and drink occupies a large place. Amber's statement is additionally in line with what Sami suggests as

constituents of *culture*<sup>58</sup>. These quotations highlight consumable aspects of culture, as well as indicating discrepancies between the two cultures, which might potentially have detrimental effects on the level and extent of intercultural contact.

On another note, Nawrin from Bangladesh, who does not wear the headscarf, implies a positive approach towards the food & drink culture that is prevalent in Ireland.

[In Ireland] the culture would be very open-minded. Whenever you go to a pub [there is] music, people are singing, chatting and everything. I think it's a very friendly culture. (Nawrin, F)

It is evident that Nawrin participates in food & drink culture in Ireland, since she describes a pub environment in her quotation. She also finds the participants of this cultural activity friendly, which confirms the positive attitude towards it.

B: Do you feel influenced by the host culture?

N: Yeah! For having fun and partying! I'm living a good life here, no complaints (Nawrin, F)

When further asked whether she felt influenced by this particular culture, which is prevalent in the host environment in Ireland, she recognises the influence of it in a positive manner. In line with Nawrin's approach, Tahu articulates a positive stance on discovering aspects of the Irish culture upon following his engagement with the host environment.

T: I had no idea about the Irish, I had no idea about their famous drink, Guinness, I had no idea about their culture, no idea about their favourite music, favourite celebrations and all that stuff. [I learned it] all here.

B: What were your first impressions? Did you have any adaptation problems then?

T: No, actually I find it interesting, experiencing new things. I'm used to Omani music, [Irish songs are] different from other countries, and their cultural dress and all that stuff are amazing. (Tahu, M)

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<sup>58</sup> Author's emphasis.

Tahu recognises the close relationship of music with the food & drink culture in the host environment. His association of music with eating and drinking in Ireland is evident in the previous participant (Nawrin, F) quotation, as well. These remarks imply music, food & drink are perceived as significant elements of the host culture, and engagement with these aspects of the culture would increase the likelihood of engagement with the host environment and its members. The socialising patterns that are embedded in the culture; hence the values system that constitutes the culture, have so far suggested an inevitable impact on the level and nature of intercultural contact between the host and non-host Muslim students. The next section will deal with the difference based on greetings gestures between the home and host cultures from the perspective of IMS.

### **6.2.3 Greeting Gestures**

Apart from the consumable aspects of the culture, greeting gestures, which are largely informed by the norms and values of societies, emerge as a culture distance factor between home and the host culture from the perspective of the participants. To illustrate this point better, Amber narrates an encounter she experienced on campus regarding greeting gestures.

For example, yesterday, I [had] to show an old man how to use the computer. [First] he welcomed me and [said] hi, I'm Michael. And as you know I can't shake hand[s] with men, but I did. This is [a] big mistake in religion, but I [can't] ignore him, I [can't] tell him 'no I can't'. He is old. He won't consider what I need [for] my religion.  
(Amber, F)

Her anecdote relating to a culturally reinforced common practice in the host environment offers a well-developed showcase of the nature and impact of culture distance during intercultural contact. Amber, who was born and raised in a strict Islamic culture, and is also married, cannot be considered practising this greeting

gesture in her home country. This is additionally echoed by Zara earlier in the classroom setting. However, Amber's identity as an international student in the host environment encourages her to observe and participate in the host culture practices. This suggests she prioritise her sojourner identity rather than national or religious one. Amber's attitude also points to the notion of 'Host Communication Competence' proposed by Kim (1988, 2005); however, the discussion of related theories will take place in 9.5. Inbar mentions the same topic (the culture distance concerning the commonplace greeting gestures in the host society) with reference to her lived experience.

When we [head-scarved female students] first meet in groups, they [host students] always hesitate how to say hi you know. They feel like [because I wear] a headscarf, I cannot speak to them. Especially men, they always hesitate to say hi or something. But when I say hi and talk to them, it is like [as if] something melts you know. (Inbar, F)

Inbar is aware of the visibility of her religious identity through her headscarf, as well as the discrepancies between the greeting gestures of the two cultures. She additionally observes a recurring behaviour pattern specifically among male students when approaching her, as a result of this perceived culture distance (see 8.3, 9.4). Consequently, she prefers to take a step towards the host culture zone while prioritising her sojourner identity, and adaptation to the host environment.

### **6.2.3.1 Participants' Reactions to the Cultural Difference Based on Greeting Gestures**

Inbar explains her cross-cultural experiences with the handshake incident as mentioned earlier by the participant Amber, as well.

Also when we are in a group or something, they [host students] just want to shake hands. Some of us [female Muslim students] can't do it, we don't want to do it. Sometimes when I explain they understand, they laugh and say [that] it's fine, but sometimes some of them get a little bit upset. It's really weird but I think I really want them to know that. When there is a lot of people, you don't want the other person to feel embarrassed so sometimes, I just shake [hands] with them. If it is just a few people, I explain it, but [if there] is lots of people, I don't want people to feel embarrassed so. (Inbar, F)

Inbar tries to avoid an uncomfortable situation, which she expressed as 'embarrassing', for the person she is engaging with in a group. The two quotations from participants so far have indicated knowledge of as well as conformity to the host communication system. A similar perspective on the issue is evident in Sada's narrative.

I was waiting with my friend for the elevator and guys from Brazil... they are so friendly. They don't do [kissing on the cheeks] intentionally, they just do it. I was waiting and he [said] good morning and kiss[ed] me on my cheeks. I was like okay! And my friend was like 'what did he do!' I can do nothing because he just [does] it and I respect that. It's their culture, they hug and kiss because we are friend[s]. In our culture, it's not okay. I act like I didn't see even [with] people who shake my hands. It's embarrassing if he come[s] to [meet] you and you say no. There is problem with that. For me, I start [with] 'okay I can shake your hand', but after that, I explain [that] some [Muslim] people don't like [hand shaking] so you have to be aware. (Sada, F)

Lina also reports a similar attitude towards this cultural difference to that of Inbar.

If I was in this situation, if someone came to me, I would shake hands in the first [encounter] because you see, we are different. They [the host] act normally. [The fact that] we are coming from [a] different culture is not their fault. They didn't know that before. In the first meeting I would shake hand[s] but then I would explain to him [that] because of my religion I can't, and I would avoid [it]. I am sure he would understand, whereas if I didn't [shake hands] in the first time if I said 'oh no I can't shake hands', that [would be] very rude. It's not like our religion. It's not like peace or love. (Lina, F)

It is evident that the common greeting gestures in the host culture are not a favourable situation to encounter, for female students in particular. The quotations reveal that



participants observe this cultural pattern in the host culture. However, they comply with this cultural demand merely to be able to function in the host environment. At a deeper level, perhaps if they were able to choose, they might still opt for a less bodily engagement. Lina additionally makes reference to her interpretation of Islam as ‘being good’, and spreading ‘peace and love’, which emerged as a strong theme in the interviews, and is examined in the previous chapter under section 5.3.1 *‘Participants’ Relationship with Islam’*. This quotation is compelling in the way it showcases how the participants draw from their conceptualisation of religion in their real life experiences, specifically with regards to intercultural communication. Additionally, there were cases in the data where the head-scarved female participants suggested they had no problem with shaking hands with males.

B: Some students said they had difficult time shaking hands with males in Ireland? Would you relate to this?

S: No I'm used to shake hands, no problem. (Sahar, F)

As a counter example, Sahar gives evidence for the role of families in constructing culture; therefore, one's values and everyday behaviours (see 5.4). Even though Sahar is a head-scarved female, and is from an Islamic country (Oman), she states she has no problem with the common greeting gestures in the host culture. In other parts of the interview, Sahar suggested that her father ‘forced’ (in participant's words) her to work in customer services in a multi-cultural bank, where she was “interacting with customers, [who] were Brazilian, American, [and] were from different backgrounds”. Sahar's familiarity with members of the cultures in which greeting gestures are similar to that of Ireland's, and her family's, father's, values might have influenced her approach toward common greeting gestures in the host environment as an international student. The role of participants' previous experience and familiarity with intercultural

communication on their relationship development on campus is discussed in as ‘Predisposition’<sup>59</sup> 8.4 (Kim 1988) in Chapter 7.

#### **6.2.4 Other Factors (i.e. transportation, housekeeping) and the Notion of Independence**

Transport emerged as a salient cultural difference in the host environment, specifically suggested by female participants from Gulf countries. Transportation, as is used in this thesis includes transport activities of the participants’, which includes larger scale travel such as inter-city or to different countries. Alia, who is a female student from Saudi Arabia, points to the different means of transportation in the two countries.

In Saudi Arabia, we only have car[s] with driver[s], but here no, there is no car. I have to go take the tram or the bus. In my first year, I was like okay, I can go, I can walk, but no... sometimes I want to go out but I don’t want to walk, so [I decide to] stay home. When I’m back to my country, I’m like wow, car is convenient. (Alia, F)

In Alia’s quotation, it emerges that public transport is not as widely used in Saudi Arabia (her home country) as it is in Ireland. According to her, in Saudi Arabia, what is considered mainstream is travel by car; therefore, the mass transportation system becomes something IMS have to get used to as part of their sojourner experience in this host environment.

Navigating around, and getting used a country’s transportation system might not look like a cross-cultural adaptation phenomenon at first sight in comparison to deeper level frictions such as the dress code, or food & drink. However, it is still a relevant aspect in examining the host environment from the lens of IMS with regards to cultural dissimilarities. There is additionally a different dimension in this travel phenomenon.

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<sup>59</sup> Predispositions is conceptualised as part of Kim’s Integrative Theory of Intercultural Communication in the literature. Predispositions as a theoretical concept will be discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

Some participants are able to perform these activities on their own in the host environment, which gives them a feeling of accomplishment and independence.

Now I realise that I get experience and I can live on [my own]. You [get] some experience [from] you living here and that's useful because in Saudi Arabia girl[s] normally do nothing. People do everything for them, but here, I have to do everything by myself and that is different for us. In Saudi Arabia, I wasn't able to travel alone ... but now I have good experience. (Sada, F)

Sada associates her daily doings in the host environment with a type of independence she was not able to have in her home country. In other words, the host environment both creates the space for Sada to rely on herself, and functions as a push for her to realise her capacity to do this (see 9.5). Similarly, Alia and Nuha mention their dependence on others around her in her home country, yet how this changed in the host environment.

Back in my country, I don't do anything at home, to be honest with you. We have a house keeper and my mother doesn't want me to work at home. She spoil[s] me. When I [first] came here [Ireland], I [didn't] know what to do. I [didn't] know how to clean! Then I started getting experience in cleaning. (Alia, F)

I became independent. I wasn't independent at all. Because there [in home country], we have housemates [keepers]. they cook, they clean. here now I do everything by myself. I cook, I clean, I study. (Nuha, F)

As both Alia and Nuha narrate, their sojourner experience in Ireland created an utterly new environment for them, where they have to perform daily tasks on their own besides their academic responsibilities. Therefore, the daily routines and commute, as well as financial planning, become part of IMS' cross-cultural adaptation process. In line with Kim's Stress – Adaptation – Growth Model (2001), the stress caused by seeking equilibrium in the new environment is replaced by adaptation to the sojourner life in the host society. To illustrate this point better Alia continues with explaining

how her sojourn experience brings added responsibilities into her daily life, which she might not be used to:

I have to bring grocery to the house, that's a lot of responsibility, clean the house, sometimes [cook] maybe... (Alia, F).

Alia and Nuha are not the only participants who perceive these daily tasks as added responsibilities on top of their workload as international students. In an exceptional case, Zahra who is married with three children highlights the added responsibilities, and her struggle to balance these elements in her life in Ireland.

As a mother [I have to] prepare children [for the school]... this is a problem you know. I suffer but I struggle. I can do it. For example, when [the] teacher say [to the students] 'I can't see your marks', and you know I do my exams every Friday in the class. I have children [but] I'm the first in the class. I can be a superwoman as my teacher used to say! [The teacher] 'You are a superwoman because you have children, you take them to school [and] you do your homework.' [The teacher to the students in class] 'She has children, she has a house, she do[es] everything, she cook[s] everyday [and] she does her homework every night. You [the students] are free and you're not doing your homework.' (Zahra, F)

These added responsibilities participants mention regardless of their marital status emerge as little everyday activities with a deeper meaning underneath. In other words, while students are engaging in these kinds of daily chores, i.e. cleaning, taking the bus to college, they are also engaging with their international student identity, which is situational to Ireland. The things they feel they accomplish on a daily basis are the things they either were either not given the opportunity or did not feel the need to do prior to becoming sojourners in Ireland (see 5.5).

Before moving on the discussion regarding host receptivity, it is useful to note here that geographical proximity emerges as a supporting factor for IMS' decision to come to Ireland as international students. That is participants such as Alia and Malik, for instance, stated that Ireland's geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia was a

motivational factor behind their decision to study abroad here. Geographical proximity emerges as a contrast to the perceived culture distance that has been discussed in the section thus far. It is additionally linked to the notion and influence of family as discussed in 5.4. Geographical proximity to the country of origin emerges as a positive pull factor since participants' associate this with family consent and their well-being in terms of how far they have to travel away from home for education purposes. The discussion so far has focused largely on the perceived cultural dissimilarities by the IMS. In the next section, the focus shifts towards the perceived positive aspects of the host culture.

### **6.3 Ireland as a Welcoming Host**

One of the most compelling codes that emerged out of data analysis is the 'friendly' and 'welcoming' image of Ireland. The code '*Seeing Ireland/Irish People Friendly (29)*' is one of the most densely populated codes. Discussing each and every reference out of the code would be beyond the space limitations of this section; however, the following paragraphs will aim to showcase the most relevant and compelling quotations. Inbar, who is a female and head-scarved student from Saudi Arabia, describes her perception of and the experience in the host culture as below.

B: How would you describe the host culture here?

I: They are really friendly, first thing I noticed is really friendly... They are so welcoming, they are nice and there is no... I don't know how to say...

B: Negative attitude?

I: Yeah! They don't [have] negative attitude. Maybe if I were in London, if I [was] walk[ing] on the street or something, some people [would] look at me not a good way because I'm wearing hijab, but I don't know what it is called here...

B: Racism?

I: Racism, exactly! So that's, I think, the most important thing for me. I can walk on the street and I feel safe. That's the [most] important thing, and I think they [the Irish] are really really really friendly, kind people.

B: Do you have an example for this?

I: My cousin is doing her masters [in England]. From what she told me she can't go out at night...to some areas. She needs to be really careful. She can't go to metros at night, she always has someone speak[ing] bad to her. That never happened to me here, so I think I really like that about Ireland.

B: Is she wearing the hijab?

I: Yes.

B: I am sorry to hear that. Did you have this image of Ireland before you came here?

I: That's the main thing that encouraged me to come here. They're really friendly people, and they don't really treat people based on their nationality, culture or religion. It [has given] me a push, motivation. Ireland has that image. (Inbar, F)

This quotation is significant in various ways. Inbar first explains her perception of the host culture, which she conceptualises as 'friendly', followed by 'safe'. Then, she supports this perception of hers with evidence in the host culture, and through comparison with the UK. She additionally emphasises how a 'friendly' and 'safe' environment might function as a push and a motivation for an international, Muslim in particular, student to choose Ireland as a study abroad destination, as well as to maintain their wellbeing throughout their stay. Ireland's friendly image, and how this friendly image attracts prospect IMS is apparent in Amber's remarks.

Actually, what attracted me [to] Ireland is [it being] a very close country to our culture. They are very polite and straight. It [is] not like another city as you know. Also, they are very very friendly people. (Amber, F)

Amber's remarks here challenge the perceived culture distance between Ireland and the Gulf countries in specific, by marking Ireland as a close country to her culture. However, this should not be taken as a general statement, but rather be interpreted as

a context-specific phenomenon. To put it in other words, the presence and salience of cultural dissimilarities between the host culture and IMS cannot be neglected; nevertheless, certain elements are identified as ‘close’ in the host culture by IMS.

### **6.3.1 Impact of Ireland’s Welcoming & Friendly Environment on Participants’ Well-being**

Farah further supports the ‘friendly’ image of Ireland as the host environment.

They [the Irish] are very nice and they are really friendly. I didn’t feel like I am someone strange [for] them. Yeah, it is very nice, I’m happy here. (Farah, F)

According to Farah’s experience with the host culture, she has not felt alienated in the society. The concept of not feeling alienated in the host culture does not necessarily ensure a meaningful intercultural contact between the parties; however, the host is regarded as offering a safe and multicultural environment, which is reported to foster IMS’ well-being, which unfolds as ‘being happy’ in Ireland, in the quotation. To bolster this argument, Farah elaborates on her worries regarding her headscarf, and how these worries were challenged by her lived experiences.

When I was in my country, I was worried about my [head]scarf, when I came here, it is strange that people deal with us as [if] I’m not Muslim you know. Because [of] this, they [the Irish] are friendly and I like it here. (Farah, F)

Farah was evidently worried about the visibility of her headscarf practice, and how this practice would be perceived by the non-Muslim host culture. Her pre-departure worries might be justified, since the ‘negative image of Islam’, particularly informed by the media, is perceived to be ubiquitous in the host context by the participants. Despite the prevalence of pre-conceived ideas regarding Muslims, Ireland emerges as a non-discriminatory host environment, in which religious pluralism is respected. On

an interesting note, one of the participants, who doesn't wear the headscarf, and was born and raised in Italy, also appears to share similar thoughts regarding host receptivity as Farah and Amber, both of whom wear the head-scarved.

At the beginning, I was planning to come here [Ireland] to do a course for English, and then I felt happy and welcome[d] [by] the country so I decided to stay. You know I was thinking about the [weather], the people... I knew from the beginning that I wasn't going to be [a] part of the country in some ways; whereas here in Ireland I found very nice people... it is not a country which is judging you or looking at you. I got really respected. I live [with an] Irish host family, and I never had any kind of problems with food or my practices. They say to me [nothing] and they were very nice to me. Also, I never heard among people, you know, any kind of racism. Even you know on the bus, never never never heard of something.  
(Malika, F)

When looked at from the male students' perspective, who are considered to be at a lower risk group in terms of visibility of stigmatised practices (i.e. headscarf), their reflections regarding the receptivity of the host society appears to be overlapping with those of female students'

They [the Irish] are actually friendly and they are helpful. I did not imagine [or] expect them to be like that (Tahu, M)

This [Irish] people are welcoming us. (Baha, M)

It's a very good country. I have not met any people that had some hate for Islam or anything like, say, [as] in other Western countries.  
(Baha, M)

The respondents so far, including both head-scarved and non-head-scarved females and males, have keenly argued that Ireland was a friendly and safe environment for them and that they did not encounter racism here, which would be a significant detrimental factor affecting the stress level and well-being of these students.



### **6.3.2 Comparing Ireland to Other Non-Muslim Contexts with Regard to Host Receptivity**

One of the key factors that the participants base their arguments on apart from the attitude they encounter from the host society is a comparison of the Irish context to the other countries in Europe and outside Europe. In other words, Ireland emerges as a 'friendly', 'safe' and 'welcoming' host culture partially in comparison to rather hostile practices or legislations in place regarding Muslims in other contexts. A striking example of lived experiences in two non-Muslim contexts –one being Ireland– as an IMS is articulated by Zahra.

The Irish society accepts us with our headscarves ... you know when you feel the society accepts, you think about how you can make lots of friendships or lots [of] friends, Irish friends, just to tell them [that] I love this country because the people of this country are friendly. Maybe I told you previously... I can't say it's a bad experience for me in Prag or in Czech Republic but... sometimes people do something bad in front of you, or try to take your headscarf [off] or to remove it you know... (Zahra, F)

Zahra compares her experience in the Irish society with that of the Czech Republic she experienced previously. In her remarks, Ireland apparently distinguishes itself as host with a closer stance to multiculturalism rather than assimilation. Zahra additionally points to a lack of suppression based on religious belief in the context of Ireland in her experience.

I have friends who wear the hijab and they gr[e]w up in Ireland – came here at the age of seven or something, and they never faced any discrimination. People actually know about the hijab now so they respect it. (Nawrin, F)

Nawrin's remarks also suggest Ireland's positive attitude towards religious and cultural pluralism is not limited to short-term sojourners such as international student, but it extends to the rights and well-being of migrants or non-Irish nationals. Even

though Nawrin states Irish society is familiar with the practice of wearing a headscarf in her quotation, according to Malika, Ireland still has a short history with immigration, and this could be a key factor in society's multicultural tendencies in comparison to other contexts with a longer history of immigration.

I think because Ireland does not have long history with immigration... It's like different for Ireland. [they have] respect [for immigrants] in comparison to Italy. There is a huge difference [between the two countries]. (Malika, F)

Malika's experience in Italy as her home country is what she takes as her comparison point. Ireland, again, in comparison with another context picked by the participants upon a lived experience, emerges as a country with respect for diversity within its society. This time, however, supported by the idea of having a relatively shorter history with immigration, rather than a focus on Ireland's 'friendly' and 'safe' characteristics. Participants' arguments cannot be generalised due to the limited source of data. However, it offers a significant insight into how the accommodation of diversity within a European context is perceived by migrants and sojourners, which might contribute to the discussion as regards the development of a multicultural framework in Europe. As a final remark on the issue, Baha refers to France as his comparison point to evaluate Ireland's host receptivity.

B: I hear this, [that there is] a lot of issue in France for example hijab in university, or banning the hijab and all that. I don't know if you heard about this before?

B: I did.

B: And this shouldn't be an issue. We don't see it in Ireland. We don't have this. (Baha, M)

France's staunch stance towards presence of religion in public sphere, which also concerns headscarf practices of Muslim females, has been a topic of debate both in

academia and in media (Laborde 2006, Judge 2004)<sup>60</sup><sup>61</sup>. Discussing the effectiveness and consequences of such a staunch stance towards presence of religion in public sphere is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, one thing stands clear in the data; France's staunch stance concerning presence of religion in the public sphere is highlighted by the participants as a factor that might negatively impact the well-being of Muslims in the society. With regards to Ireland's rather positive stance on religious pluralism in the society as perceived by the participants, Baha reminds of institutional differences between Ireland and France, as well as his home country, emphasising the way an institutionalised approach affects the cultural perception of pluralism in societal level.

The law here [Ireland] is protecting every single one here. It doesn't matter what religion, race, gender. The law here is protecting anyone. I think this is what we don't [have] in Saudi Arabia. We don't have different religions. We have one religion and we, [the] country, will not accept any religion to be there, and it is so sad. (Baha, M)

Ireland emerges as a country that respects the presence of religions in the society through institutionalised practices from the interviews with IMS. Whereas the home country of the participant Baha is depicted as a mono-religious environment, both culturally and legally, by the participant himself. Even though Ireland is perceived to be culturally different by the participants, its official and societal stance are evidently

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<sup>60</sup> Laborde, C., 2005. Secular Philosophy and Muslim Headscarves in Schools\*. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 13(3), pp.305-329. Judge, H., 2004. The Muslim headscarf and French schools. *American Journal of Education*, 111(1), pp.1-24.

<sup>61</sup> More recently controversial passing of the bill banning burkini (swimwear covering part of the body including the hair) in France sparked a public debate which resulted in reversal of the bill by the Supreme Court. To see more: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/24/french-police-make-woman-remove-burkini-on-nice-beach>, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/24/french-burkini-ban-row-escalates-clothing-incident-woman-police-nice-beach>, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37183083>.

considered non-hostile<sup>62</sup>. An extended discussion of multiculturalism in Ireland in relation to the data and a wider context of Europe will be conducted in Chapter 8.

## **6.4 Host Families**

The role of host families, particularly pertaining to cross-cultural adjustment by gaining access to the host culture, was evident in the interviews. This was not envisaged prior to data collection since the researcher was not aware of the option of host families as accommodation among international students in Ireland. The researcher was also not aware of the fact that host families are encouraged by home country governments of some participants as a favourable option for accommodation to serve the purpose of improving students' English. The concept of 'host families' emerged during the interviews organically while the participants were reflecting on the host culture and their cross-cultural experiences. At later stages, the question addressing accommodation with the host family was incorporated into the interview guideline (see 4.6.2). It is identified that host families create a safe and family-like environment for the IMS, and this positive context links to the students' well-being in the host culture. Additionally, the participants emphasise the role of host families as culture carriers, which could be interpreted as access to culture from the perspective of IMS.

Host family experience is not identified exclusively to a specific group within the participants (i.e. participants from Gulf countries). It is additionally evident in the data

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<sup>62</sup> Ireland –as an additional support to participants' perceptions- scores lower than EU average on perceptions of discrimination in the EU both 2012 and 2015 reports. However, it is important to note that in 2012 EU average for discrimination by ethnic origin is 56%, religion or beliefs is 39% (total widespread), Ireland average is 35% and 13% respectively. In 2015 the numbers increase to 64% for ethnic origin, 50% for religion or beliefs in EU, and 58% and 41% respectively in Ireland. The reports could be found in the link; <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/yearFrom/1973/yearTo/2013/surveyKy/1043#> [Last accessed: 06<sup>th</sup> June 2016].

collected from the Italian-national participant. Malika reflects positively on her experience with the host family as an IMS:

I lived in a host family, Irish host family. I never had any kind of problems with food or my practices. They say to me [nothing] and they were very nice to me so. (Malika, F)

The host families emerge as a reflection of the perceived host receptivity by the participants. Sami similarly states that he had a good relationship and experience with his host family while additionally highlighting the host families' role in replacing the concept of family when the students are away from home as international students, which has positive implications on the students' cultural transition.

I stayed with host family in Dundrum. It was new experience for me because this [was] the first time I [went] outside [my] country by my own so it was a good experience as well. They were like a family for me. they [were] so nice and I lived with them for nine months, it was a good experience for me. (Sami, M)

In line with Sami's remarks that focus on the family-like role of host families in students' cultural transition, Tahu confirms that he lived with a host family in his first year in Ireland, and that he benefited from this experience in terms of cultural exchange. His statement also relates back to the previous section, in which food & drink is discussed as part of culture (6.2.2).

I used to live with a host family first year when I was doing my foundation. Yeah they used to cook potatoes a lot. I didn't argue, I didn't say anything, I just ate whatever they cooked for me. I once cooked for them Omani food. I actually kind of messed up cause it was my first time. I cooked for them tradition dish back in Oman called Arsiya. (Tahu, M)

Tahu reiterates the importance of food as a cultural artefact in intercultural communication and exchange between the parties, which additionally supports the discussion behind the section 'food and drink' as cultural difference. Apart from this type of intercultural communication through food exchange, Fatima highlights the

notion of Ireland being perceived as a culturally different country, and how host families could assist the international students in entering and adjusting to this new culture.

At first, you know it's going to be a strange country, and you need people that are actually from there to help you so it is recommended to be with a host family at first, but then you can move out once you feel comfortable enough. (Fatima, F)

She also emphasises that staying with host families is recommended by the home country government, which is the sponsor of the student scholarships. However, she also states why host family accommodation is recommended by the government, which relates to 'English language proficiency' discussed as part of sojourner identity in 5.5.3. Fatima adds following their transition period, the students are free to move on to the type of accommodation they wish to continue their studies in.

Thus far analysis has focused on IMS' positive perceptions of the host culture. The participants report high levels of host receptivity manifested in the form of a welcoming attitude and respect for religious pluralism in the host context, which could play pivotal roles in facilitating a favourable context for cross-cultural adjustment. Having said that, there are areas of reported cultural differences that could impede intercultural communication (i.e. 'food and drink', 'greeting gestures'), which might lead to a multicultural environment rather than intercultural (see 3.2.2). Host families emerge as key actors in reducing the level of stress and the likelihood of homesickness from the data and the students reported that they were able to benefit from host families' knowledge for widening their perspectives on the host environment. In the next section, the discussion will focus more specifically on the negative perceptions of Muslims in the host society as reported by the IMS.

## 6.5 Negative Perceptions of Muslims in the Host Society

Host culture's perception of the sojourners and their identities (i.e. national, religious), as discussed in Chapter 5, is crucial in order to understand the host receptivity. Thus far the discussion has focused on IMS' positive thoughts concerning the host culture. It is identified that Ireland creates a multicultural environment for IMS to be able to maintain their identities and culture. Nevertheless, the participants also mentioned Muslims' association with negative images in the interviews. This negative association has an impact on intercultural contact from the perspective of the participants. Diya argues that a negative image of Muslims exists among non-Muslim members of the host society, and this might affect the relationship between the two groups.

I still believe that the very bad image of Muslims influence [the relationships], especially the relationship between the Muslims and the non-Muslims. (Diya, M)

Diya implies a dichotomy between the Muslims and the non-Muslims in his remarks. This might be a largely generalised articulation of the relationship between the IMS and the host students excluding individual variances. However, it is crucial to note that he is led to think this way based on his lived experience with the host culture in Ireland for over two years at the time of data collection. He continues with the role of media in creating this dichotomy, and how this affects cross-cultural communication for Muslims:

Nowadays, you know the international media, the movies, they represent a very bad image of Muslims in general, and that I think influence people in the West, in Europe and in [the] USA. I think we are Muslims here [Ireland], when people see how we deal with people, how we communicate with them, we'll give an idea about if that's right or wrong. So, you [as a Muslim] need to take it seriously and be careful. (Diya, M)

When asked further if he had an example of something he did to fix the so-called negative image of Muslims fuelled by media misrepresentation, Diya refers to explaining his praying practices to his friends, which Diya thinks might help his peers relate to Muslim practices through first-hand knowledge.

D: We [Muslims] say we pray five times... for some people it's too much. [Once there was] two Irish guys and an Italian girl [and] I need[ed] to go to interfaith [centre] to pray. [I said] I will come back. When you practice what you say I think it is more influential [than] just saying you are practising. I think [it] make[s] difference.

B: Okay so when they see it in their daily life it becomes more normal than just speculating about it?

D: Yeah, they can understand it, they can imagine. (Diya, M)

Here, Diya is trying to capture the difference between speculating about a culture, and experiencing the culture. According to him, he cannot deny the unfavourable portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the media. Nevertheless, he values giving non-Muslims insights into being Muslim and practising Islam (see 8.4.3, 8.5). Sami, similarly, mentions the negative discourse regarding Muslim identity in non-Muslim settings, and acknowledges the crucial role of communicating one's Muslim identity to others, as well as understanding it well as one's religion.

If you say you are Muslim [people think] you can't do that thing. You can do many things in the right way. You have to understand your religion very well to live peaceful with the others. Islam is a religion that people understand wrong. (Sami, M)

From the perspective of participants, their Muslim identity and the philosophy of Islam are being diluted with media misrepresentation and speculations. Consequently, the IMS find themselves in a position to clarify the concept of being Muslim, and what being Muslim actually entails for an individual, perhaps outside the political sphere:

They [non-Muslims] have the idea [that] we [Muslims] are a bit aggressive with them. They [ask] me about my headscarf [if] it's my choice or someone oblige me, or [if] it's mandatory. I can explain.



For me I think it's [a] good idea or good chance for us to have a chat about our cultures (Zahra, F)

From Zahra's point of view, Muslims are portrayed in the media as homogenously aggressive, and this eventually has an impact on the life of sojourners in the host environment; specifically, if that host environment is a non-Muslim one. Malika expresses a frustration and dissatisfaction with this kind of dichotomy between the Muslims and non-Muslims, the image created by the media, and the status quo.

I feel kinda offended when they [non-Muslims] describe [a] Muslim [person] very nice. It looks like you don't deserve to be! 'Oh he is Muslim, he's such a nice guy you know. He is praying and doing his own thing.' You know [this is because of] Islamophobia. (Malika, F)

This quotation by Malika is compelling in two ways;

- i. it affirms the bond between the religious identity of the sojourner, and the perception of this religious identity by the host society,
- ii. it illustrates an example of what participants perceive as Islamophobia, and Islamophobia's impact on intercultural communication.

As evident in Malika's remarks, the status quo regarding Muslim identity is not favourable by the participants, and they feel that the prevalent mindset regarding Muslims needs to be addressed, and challenged. Baha describes the situation, as follows:

The media is very strong sometimes. I'm not talking about Irish media but the media in general. You can access any media [source] [with] your phone, you can see all the crisis around the Middle East and they [non-Muslims] attach it to Islam and all that. If I hear what's happening in the Middle East [and that] it's attached to Islam as a seventeen or eighteen year-old, I will think all Muslims [to be] this way. The fact is they don't [have] enough knowledge to know who we are and what Muslim people think. Maybe they [the Irish] have this [bad] image from the media sometimes. (Baha, M)

IMS point to a certain level of prejudice against their culture and identity as a result of the prevalent discourse they perceive that exists in the host culture. They

additionally make strong and clear references to the role of media in the formation of these misconceptions. As emerged from the data so far, Ireland is depicted as a country with a short history of immigration, which is not deeply familiar with Muslim communities and their lifestyle, but is still a respectful host, where members of the non-mainstream community can feel safe enough to be able to practice their religion. Despite the negativity that has seemingly become main-stream for Muslims in international media, which participants suggest affect the ways they are pictured by the host culture, racism did not emerge as a strong theme from the interviews. This is quite surprising since, in the literature that has examined Muslim immigrants' experiences thus far, racism has been one of the most salient themes (Fekete 2004 et al)<sup>63</sup>. This aspect of the host environment situates Ireland in a very specific and unusual place in the literature, where the members of the society might be negatively biased towards the concept of Muslim, yet not actively racist.

### **6.5.1 Identity-based Incidents**

One of the relatively few number of incidents the participants addressed during the interviews, which was directed against participants' identity, religious in particular, is presented below. It starts with Zahra narrating an event in which she was not personally involved. However, as she progresses with the anecdote, she adopts a more personalised language indicating her familiarity with the subject:

I have [a] Malaysian friend that happened to her. Some teenager tried to remove her headscarf. They are teenagers, not adults, but this is the problem we are facing here in Ireland. A teenager tend[s] to

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<sup>63</sup> Fekete, L., 2004. Anti-Muslim racism and the European security state. *Race & Class*, 46(1), pp.3-29.

Poynting, S. and Mason, V., 2007. The resistible rise of Islamophobia Anti-Muslim racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001. *Journal of sociology*, 43(1), pp.61-86.

create lots of problems that will make you a bit frightened, you know, of the society. But nothing happened to me [so far]. (Zahra, F)

Even though Zahra states no negative incident happened to her individually so far, it is apparent that she can relate to the few incidents she heard of as a female Muslim sojourner in Ireland. Amber also mentions the teenagers, and that their presence around them makes her feel insecure.

I can't walk to my apartment alone because I know I will face a teenager near Spar, [then] what will happen?... Because you are international [student], they know you are rich, you have phone, credit card, etc. They [teenagers] will tell you 'give me your phone, give me your credit card or I will do that'. (Amber, F)

Her fears are justified by an incident a family member of hers had experienced.

My uncle, he lives with me. Someone stole his phone, yeah. (Amber, F)

This incident is considered crime; however, it is compelling in these examples that Amber points to the 'wealthy' image of international students from Gulf countries, therefore, their nationality might cause undesired situations for these students in the host environment, if not their religious identity. Similarly, Zara mentions teenagers outside campus as a matter of concern.

The teenager [s] outside, or some of the people outside, annoy Muslim girl[s]. (Zara, F)

This negative incident is clearly taking place outside campus boundaries, nevertheless, it is crucial to incorporate this into the discussion in this chapter, since students use these off-campus roads, streets to commute to school every day and DCU authorities should be alerted to the undesirable environment outside the campus, specifically regarding female Muslim students. The teenagers' attitude towards IMS, and the concern they cause among female students in particular should be noted as confirming the role of 'age' on the nature of intercultural communication.

## 6.6 Chapter Summary

The discussion so far has focused on the reported cultural differences, as well as the host receptivity of Irish society toward IMS. The chapter identified key notions that the participants highlighted as cultural differences, examined under categories of ‘mixed-gender spaces’, ‘food and drink’, ‘greeting gestures’, and other factors (i.e. transportation, household chores). The chapter then moved on to the perceived host receptivity, namely ‘welcoming and friendly’ attitude, a ‘safe’ and ‘non-discriminatory’ environment as reported by the students. Host families were identified as one of the key actors in enabling the students access to the host culture, hence the knowledge that is needed for competence in the new cultural milieu. The chapter then focused on the negative aspects that were reported by the participants regarding their cross-cultural environment. Prevalent negative perceptions fuelled by the international media and a few identity-based incidents with regard to these negative perceptions were examined through the lens of international Muslim students. The arguments emerging from this chapter are presented below:

- The participants describe the host society as culturally different to that of their culture due to both host country, and home country factors
- The host society emerges as a multicultural environment in which religious pluralism is welcomed and respected
- Negative perceptions are prevalent in the host society regarding Muslims, and this is perceived to be due to the representation of Islam and Muslims in the international media
- There is a positive relationship between participants’ knowledge of the host culture and participants’ ability to function in the host culture; however,

increased functionality only applies to surface matters such as infrastructure or navigation, not the core values or norms of the participants.

In the following sections, the examination of the host environment will be narrowed down to DCU campus as the host institution.

## PERCEPTIONS OF THE HOST INSTITUTION

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### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the host institution, namely DCU, from the lens of IMS following the discussion on the host society in Chapter 6. In the discussion of the host society, the participants argued that Ireland was culturally different, however, was a welcoming host with respect to participant's religious faith and cultural identity. The participants also pointed to the negative image of Muslims in the host society, nevertheless, did not discuss identity-based incidents as a prevalent phenomenon. In this part of the thesis, the examination is saturated to specifically DCU and its campus climate, facilities, services and academic staff from the perspective of IMS as presented in Table 7-1. Positive aspects of the institution are identified, as well as the challenges the participants come across during their study abroad experience. From the data analysis 'institutional support' and a positive relationship with the lecturers emerge as two key factors that facilitate IMS' well-being and sense of belonging on campus. The space created for students' cultural & religious practices, as well as the geography of the campus are perceived as signs of respect towards culturally different members of the university by the IMS. Students identify 'written assignments' and 'research-oriented skills' as challenges in the Irish HE. In the next sections, these themes will be elaborated further in reference to internationalisation and cross-cultural adjustment.

Table 7-1: Grounded Theory Model of IMS's Perceptions of the Host Institution

<b>Core Category: IMS' Perceptions of the Host Institution (DCU)</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Constituents</b>
<b>Institutional Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International Office</li> <li>• Interfaith Centre</li> <li>• Relationship with the Academic Staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Sense of belonging</li> <li>• Approachable</li> <li>• Non-discriminatory</li> <li>• Accessible</li> </ul>
<b>Curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research &amp; creative thinking</li> <li>• Written assignments</li> <li>• The role of pre-degree programmes</li> </ul>	
<b>Language</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competency</li> <li>• Accent</li> <li>• Psychological barriers</li> </ul>	

## 7.2 Institutional Support

In this section, the discussion will largely focus on students' perspectives and perceptions regarding DCU as their host institution. The code '*Being Happy with/in DCU (24)*' and '*Being Happy with Campus Facilities (22)*' emerge as themes with high reference numbers from the data analysis. This is a significant point, to begin with, since the dense nature of the presented codes suggests a high level of overall satisfaction with the host institution. Malik relates his overall satisfaction with the campus to the availability of campus facilities that can accommodate him with his particular needs as an IMS.

To be honest, I'm happy at the end. I'm studying [on] campus, the canteen has halal food, there is Interfaith [Centre], they are providing prayer room. Now [it] moved to a bigger room. Father Joe last year worked hard to the bigger prayer room. He was so helpful. They [also] help us use the Interfaith [for] different occasions and events [of] the Islamic Society. Actually, they are very good. (Malik, M)

It was argued in Chapter 5 that IMS regarded their Muslim identity to be integral part of their being and daily life (see 5.3.1). The majority of the students argued that Islam –consequently their Muslim identity- is their lifestyle. Following this discussion and arguments, it is not surprising to see that IMS highlight the campus facilities, which allow them to practise their religion, and campus facilities' positive impact on the students' evaluation of the host institution. Amber's thoughts are in line with Malik's regarding the space and freedom DCU is able to offer them through its facilities.

I'm happy about what [we have] in DCU rather than in any other university. I'm happy because I have a room [that I can] pray in. I'm happy because we are respect[ed]. I'm happy about also for the prayer on Friday, you know we have a little long prayer. I'm happy about DCU in Ireland. (Amber, F)

Amber is content with the receptivity she receives from DCU especially for students like her. She associates this kind of receptivity with 'respect' for her identity, and this potentially has a positive relationship with her general well-being and self-esteem in the host culture. The 'campus', in a study conducted by Hopkins (2011), was identified as a unique environment, where the members were inclined to be equals under a grand student identity (see Chapter 3). The quotations presented in this chapter so far echo what the IMS expressed about the hospitality of the host society in Chapter 6. In the case of DCU, however, a specific reference is made to its inclusiveness by the participants, which is offered through its facilities. To illustrate this point better, Fatima explains that a spiritual place where she could practise her religion is missing in her life in Ireland since she is not able to attend the mosque as much as she is used to:



I think I used to be more spiritual back home because you know I'm exposed to being in a mosque-like weekly and we have celebrations and stuff, but here you're not exposed such things, if you want to keep up with them you have to keep up with them yourself. You have to make that atmosphere yourself. (Fatima, F)

It is evident that even though Irish society emerges as a welcoming host from the interview discussions, the participants still point to their lack of access to a spiritual place in order to maintain their religious practices in a social environment, such as a mosque, as they are used to. That is why DCU as the host institution is separated from the host society in line with Hopkin's (2011) argument, but perhaps from a different point of view, which, in the case of this thesis, is practising pluralism. DCU thus far appears as a more 'conscious' environment with a commitment to internalisation and accommodating cultural diversity than the host society. Farah concurs with Amber in her interpretation of DCU facilities offered to them as respect for their identity.

There's Interfaith; it's prayer room for Muslims. That's really good and it's really respect from DCU for our religion. (Farah, F)

### **7.2.1 The Cafeteria and the Halal Food**

Apart from the 'respect' for religious identity, Farah's statements point to a wider range of campus spaces and facilities offered to them as international students. Her satisfaction with DCU as the host institution is not confined to religious lines.

There are many facilities here; the library, the restaurant and the gym as well ... and I always have lunch in the cafeteria, I like their meal. (Farah, F)

Students' satisfaction with canteens is also evident due to the specific diet they are required to follow as part of their religion.

I use the canteen in business school. I use the [one in the] Helix. The Interfaith Centre.... I used to go there for prayer. I think it's really nice [to] have a place we can pray [in], and it's for all religion[s] so it's really nice. I actually met lots of people there. They're all Muslim

but they're not from the same nationalities. So it's really good.  
(Inbar, F)

Inbar highlights the fact that she is able to use school canteens for her meal routines, and this does not pose a problem for her as an IMS. This is a good indication of preparedness and inclusiveness of DCU as a host institution for IMS (see 9.5.1). Apart from the canteen, the Interfaith Centre is mentioned in the quotation as a satisfactory space offered to IMS. Inbar additionally stresses the centre's role as a hub for bringing students of the same interest from different nationalities together which resonates with mosques being social places for Muslims. In addition to that, the 'hub' function of the Interfaith Centre on campus might serve the purpose of intercultural contact by bringing students from different countries and religions. The role of the Interfaith Centre in intercultural communication will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7. Besides Inbar, Zara reports satisfaction with DCU concerning her dietary requirements.

[In my] first time, I couldn't eat from the restaurant because you know they [might] have ham or something that we can't eat in [our] religion. Now [I know] in the Helix, we have the sandwich that is right, halal. That means you have [respect] for the Muslim people. This is very good thing [DCU does]. (Zara, F)

Even though Zara admits she approached the food offered in DCU cautiously at first, she reports satisfaction with it during the interviews upon realising the food was in line with her dietary requirements.

## **7.2.2 Other Facilities (i.e. gym, library, clubs and societies) and the Campus Climate**

It is also evident from the data that participants are engaged in extracurricular activities outside their academic schedules and religious duties on campus. DCU, therefore,

emerges from the interviews as a satisfactory host with regard to its facilities. Sami reports satisfaction with campus facilities that encourage him to be physically more active, and as Amber and Tahu argue below, DCU offers students the space and opportunity to avail of throughout their study abroad experience:

I registered to the gym and I go so I get to know few people in the gym. It was also a good relief from studying environment and stuff. I think [the facilities] are really good, especially the sports centre. Most of my spare time I spend in the sports centre. I go to the gym according to my schedule. I play football with my friends in the playgrounds. So yeah overall [the facilities] are good enough. (Sami, M)

What I like here in DCU, [we] have like many opportunit[ies] to be. (Amber, F)

[DCU] provides a lot of good facilities here, like its library, meeting rooms for your group work... I'm really happy. (Tahu, M)

Apart from the library and the gym facilities, clubs and societies are mentioned by the participants both as a facility they could avail of on campus and a factor for facilitating intercultural experiences. This is evident particularly when participants' involvement level with different clubs and societies are examined comparatively. That is the participants who are mainly involved with the Islamic society and a club and society which is relevant to their degree (i.e. engineering society), their circle of friends remain within the same structural diversity (i.e. culture groups, classmates). Students who participate in different clubs and societies have an increased chance of engaging in intercultural experiences, whereas the students who do not miss this non-curricular opportunity to interact with more diverse body of students. To illustrate this point further Nawrin, for instance, states she is involved in many clubs and societies which help her meet new people from different walks of life; however, Alia and Malik does not show interest in becoming an active member of clubs and societies and the interviews indicate that they largely make friends through the Interfaith Centre or

working groups. Tahu also suggests a positive aspect of host institution facilities and the general positive climate on his well-being and success as an international student.

DCU is actually as I said before providing me with all the stuff to move on and success. (Tahu, M)

Baha agrees with Tahu concerning the campus climate and facilities in DCU.

I'm here and I'm happy... The campus is lovely... We don't have to walk around too much; the buildings are very close... As university, it is very international... If anyone ask me where to study, I would say DCU. (Baha, M)

Baha describes the campus as small, but international, which he finds satisfying in his experience. These two points are significant since DCU is an institution which currently practises internationalisation, and is perceived to be so by the students. This perception constitutes good feedback for DCU from its students. Secondly, the campus geography is described as a small and built-in sphere by Baha, which additionally resonates with Hopkin's study (2011), in which the participants suggest campus geographies are closely linked to their institutional satisfaction, and the level of respect these students perceive to receive in the institution. In the aforementioned study, Muslim students report having a prayer facility on campus; however, the prayer facility concerned is reported to be distant from, perhaps, the centre of the campus, where students mostly spend their time according to their timetables. In that case, the Muslim students report dissatisfaction with the campus in Hopkin's study, whereas DCU emerges as an inclusive campus from the data in this project due to its inclusive structure. The place and role of a praying facility will be further explored in 7.4.

### **7.3 International Office**

The relationship of IMS with the International Office emerges as a dominant code regarding their satisfaction with the host institution. The questions that were used to

prompt a discussion about participants' experiences with the international office were selected straightforwardly for a clear understanding of the relationship dynamics. The types of questions are presented below:

- *Are you aware of the international office on campus?*
- *What is your experience with the international office on campus?*
- *Have you ever got in touch with the international office on campus?*

Following the interviews, '*International Office Being Accessible for International Students (16)*' and '*International Office Offering Help to International Students (16)*' emerge as the most populous codes from the data under the category 'International Office' as presented in Table 7-2.

Table 7-2: The codes constructing the category 'International Office'.

<b>International Office</b>
International Office being accessible for students (16)
International Office offering help to international students (16)
Having good experience with the International Office (12)
International Office offering advice and guidance for students (7)
International Office keeping track of international students (3)

It was envisaged that the international office services, such as organising orientations for international students, student meet-up events, as well as offering international students guidance in paperwork they are required to submit to authorities in order to become legal immigrants in Ireland, would be reviewed by the participants in the interviews, since all of these services and duties of the international office mean being actively involved in the international student experience. However, when IMS elaborated on their lived experiences with the international office, it was identified that being accessible and helpful towards the participants were the two major factors underpinning participants' satisfaction with the service. Farah replies below when

asked if she was aware of the international office services that were available on campus.

Yeah sure I know that! They are very helpful and if you want help, [if you have] any question[s], go to them and they help. If I have any problem, I go to them and they advise and they give information.  
(Farah, F)

Here the quotation suggests a rather more personal and intimate bond than merely looking after student paperwork and organising events under the responsibilities of a generic student centre service. This kind of a bond between the international students and international office came as a compelling articulation to the researcher even at the time of the interviews, therefore, the discussion continued as follows:

B: Have you ever contacted them [international office] for any reason?

F: Yeah, I did! Sometimes when I [feel] lost, I [ask] them what I should do and they give me advice like go speak to the lecturer or something like that.

B: And do you follow their advice?

F: Yeah sure! Because when they give me advice [it] makes sense, I do it. But [they] always give advice [that] makes sense. That's it. So yeah, they're very helpful.

B: And you feel comfortable [approaching them]?

F: Yeah. (Farah, F)

Farah remarks that she is in touch with the international office on a regular, and perhaps personal basis, since she feels comfortable in doing this so. It is also evident that she does not only find international office approachable from where she stands, but also helpful in relevant and practical ways. As she points out in the discussion, the international office offered her guidance in tangible ways as to how to approach her problems in DCU she might not necessarily be familiar with given the new academic environment she is a part of. This approach of the international office towards international students resonates with the arguments proposed in Chapter 2 as regards

rejecting the dilution of internationalisation of HE to revenue generation through recruitment of international students. It was proposed that internationalisation of higher education should rather encourage progress towards a more humanistic approach in a culturally diverse campus. Similarly, Malika states that she has also availed of the service at a personal level apart from the paperwork she is required to deal with.

I contact them [International Office] to ask help for English skills, for writing skills. I [also] contact[ed] them for counselling you know I wanted to defer so I wanted to ask them some information. They encouraged me to stay. I am happy very much about them. (Malika, F)

Deferring is a crucial decision for a student to make, since it means terminating the education in the institution. Even though it could be temporary, it still ends active student life on campus. Malika, when undergoing such a crucial time in terms of making a decision that would have implications on the course of her life, did not hesitate to contact the international office to ask for advice. This clearly places the international office in a trustworthy and accessible spot in the eyes of the IMS, which is the desired outcome of internationalisation in higher education. When Inbar narrates her experience with the international office, she perhaps does not come across as personal as Farah's narrative. Nevertheless, she highlights the level of her satisfaction with the international office, similarly conceptualised through notions of 'approachable' and 'helpful'.

I get in touch with them for some letters or [paperwork] and they are really helpful. When I ask a question, because, in the first month, I had some problem[s] with getting my student card, they were really helpful. They worked really hard to solve this problem. I think they are really helpful. (Inbar, F)

Inbar's experience with the international office seemingly includes the mundane tasks every international office is required to assist international students with.

Nevertheless, it is her reflections on this experience that makes it noteworthy and distinguished. Her narrative regarding her experience with the international office carries a grateful and appreciative tone as could be seen in use of adjectives, i.e. ‘really’, ‘helpful’, ‘hard’. Those reflections resonate with Farah’s idea of the international office, which she portrayed as a helpful and accessible service within DCU. Another participant Sami echoes Inbar’s perception of international office staff and the quality of service they offer.

I think the people working in the International Office are so good, welcoming and so helping. I told [you] I had a problem last year about a subject in engineering and I had this idea of ‘if I go to [International Office], [they] could help us. [they] did actually! So, we wanted to get more time for the subject because the teacher was too fast [for us], not giving us the basis. So, we had some problems with the exam. Our grades were low. I talked to [International Office] and [the staff member] said [she would] talk to the head of [the school]. [The head of department] told the lecturer about the module [and] that IS [were] having some problems about the module. At the end [the lecturer] talked to a demonstrator [in] the lab and he gave us extra course at the end of semester before our last exam. [The demonstrator] was more slowly in explaining thing so we g[ot] the opportunity to see that subject was not as hard as we thought. So that helped us a lot and we passed the module. (Sami, M)

Following this anecdote of Sami, which involves his experience with the international office, I was prompted to ask whether this decision to contact the international office regarding a curricular issue was made due to the lack of knowledge, or exhaustion of other contact points on campus such as the School Office.

B: Did you contact the School Office for that?

S: No, we went straight to the international office.

B: [Because] you felt more comfortable with that?

S: Yeah! (Sami, M)

The following lines of the interview conversation apparently represent a bond between the international office and the international office in times of coping with the



obstacles these students encounter during their study abroad. It appears as a well-established bond that leads the international students to regard the international office as their contact point even if the problem to be tackled is a curricular issue that could be resolved within the School itself, and through its specific services. Baha's reflections follow a similar line as Sami's.

I always contact [international office]. I mean they always send us e-mails, [they] are kind to me, they're always there to tell us what's next, what to do about you know GNIB, visa, health insurance. ... If I have an issue or something, I'm sure there's ways the international office will advise me to follow. [My sister] has an issue sometimes here and the first thing [I said] when she [told] me 'look you don't [tell] me because I'm not an expert, you talk to the international office, they will help', and I think she did with the international office and things g[o]t sorted out. (Baha, M)

Baha chooses to address the international office when he feels he is confronted with an obstacle in the host culture. He goes even further and recommends contacting the international office to other international students around him as well. This points to an active and working international office service in DCU campus, which the students find approachable, and where the cross-cultural issues of the international students are resolved through collaboration with school offices, or respective contact points when needed. Nawrin additionally emphasises the international office's sensitivity towards cultural pluralism on campus and compares this with the services that are available on other university campuses in Ireland.

I think DCU host IS better than UCD (University College Dublin) and Trinity [College Dublin]. I think they [DCU] are more understanding and sensitive to different cultures. They host different IS meetings, coffee mornings every now and then so that IS would get to know each other. It's a very good way to introduce [international] students to the host culture you know. They organise that and they talk to students 'are you okay?', 'are you facing any problems?', etc. [We] find it more friendly approach ... that's a very good way to have people integrated. (Nawrin, F)

From Nawrin's point of view, the events that the international office organise have a positive impact on international students' access to the host culture, which they might not be familiar with yet. Additionally, for the later stages of the sojourn, these events seemingly continue to have a positive impact on international students' well-being, since it fosters intercultural contact. These events also provide an opportunity for the international office to gain insight into individual experiences of international students in Ireland; therefore, they can flag the problems in a timely manner. Nawrin confirms the previous participants' statements regarding the accessible and helpful service international students receive from the international office on campus.

I have to contact them every year for the GNIB<sup>64</sup> card, that's one thing. Another thing is to apply for re-entry visa, so the college organises that as well. International office helps us a lot. I went there when I had few problems [does not matter] personal or academic, there are always people there to help students out. For any reason, you can just go there, they'll help you out as much as they can. (Nawrin, F)

To illustrate Narwin's comments, Malik narrates a lived experience of his with the international office concerning his grades in the new academic environment.

M: In the first year, I received an e-mail from the head of the International Office and we met at the international office. She [asked] me why I failed my subjects. She didn't ask me directly 'why did you fail?' but she asked if everything [was] good, [if] there [was] something she could help with.

B: Did you benefit from this? How did that make you feel?

M: Yeah! That made me feel the international office is there if you need them. (Malik, M)

International office has thus far emerged as an active and accessible point of contact, which deals with international student issues at both group and individual, academic and personal, and, practical and procedural levels. Accessibility, positive and

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<sup>64</sup> Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) card is a residency permit that requires annual renewal. This is not an automated process. The immigrant is required to contact the Bureau with requested documents before the card expires every year.

understanding approach, regular contact with students, networking through and across other point of contacts on campus, and tangible solutions to both generic and specific issues international students are confronted with are the major elements that construct this kind of a successful international office service on campus from the lens of IMS on DCU campus.

## **7.4 The Interfaith Centre**

The Interfaith Centre, originally the Chaplaincy, is located on DCU Glasnevin campus. It is a facility hosting all kinds of religious practices of the students on campus as well as organising free events such as mindfulness and yoga. It is aimed at creating a spiritual venue on campus for the students to be able to avail of not only for religious practices, but also to sit back, relax and perhaps socialise with free tea and coffee available all day.

In the presence of such a facility within the campus, and IMS as the participants of this study –all of whom identified as Muslim, and reported to conduct praying practices- the questions aiming to elicit students’ thoughts on the Interfaith Centre were directly incorporated into the interview guide and considered as one of the most significant parts. Following the interviews *‘The Interfaith Centre Helping Socialise (17)’*, *‘Praying in the Interfaith Centre (15)’*, *‘The Interfaith Centre Being a Hub (9)’* emerged as the dominant codes, which indicates a tendency among participants to deem the facility as a hub for socialising beyond praying purposes. This, at first sight, resembles prevalent socialising behaviour in Islamic cultures in and around mosques

(Ozyurt 2010, Woodlock 2010)<sup>65</sup>, and suggests links to the discussion of cultural identity that took place in Chapter 5. A deeper level of analysis now will be presented below with respective quotations from the students.

### **7.4.1 Interfaith Centre as a Hub for Socialising**

The role of the Interfaith Centre as a hub creating the opportunity for students to get engaged in intercultural contact was previously mentioned in 7.2., especially in Inbar's remarks.

The Interfaith Centre.... I used to go there for prayer. I think it's really nice [to] have a place we can pray [in], and it's for all religion[s] so it's really nice. I actually met lots of people there. They're all Muslim but they're not from the same nationalities. So, it's really good. (Inbar, F)

The Interfaith Centre is mentioned as part of the institutional support due to the space it creates both for spiritual, and social needs of the participants. Both functionalities of the facility are reiterated in the remarks of Zahra as follows:

I go [to the Interfaith Centre] for prayer sometimes [and] to have a coffee sometimes. (Zahra, F)

It is evident in this question that the Interfaith Centre is operating on two different levels for participants and their needs on campus; one resulting from their being Muslim, which serves the purpose of a 'mosque-like' prayer facility, the other from the international student identity, which serves the purpose of creating a space on campus for socialising or taking a break. Baha states he sometimes goes to the

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<sup>65</sup> Ozyurt, S.Ş., 2010. Bridge Builders or Boundary Markers? The Role of the Mosque in the Acculturation Process of Immigrant Muslim Women in the United States. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 30(3), pp.295-315.

Woodlock, R., 2010. Praying where they don't belong: female muslim converts and access to mosques in Melbourne, Australia. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 30(2), pp.265-278.

Interfaith Centre merely with the intention to socialise when asked where he would spend his time on campus outside attending classes. It is a compelling confidence in articulating resourcefulness of the Interfaith Centre for being a social hub from the lens of IMS; therefore, it attracts students to spend time in it.

Either in the library or in the Interfaith sometimes. [I] just go there and socialise with people, talk to them, get to know someone. (Baha, M)

I started meeting people in the Interfaith (Baha, M)

Baha additionally mentions the Friday<sup>66</sup> prayer –which is highly regarded by Muslims as their communal practice every week – a large gathering with the community, and that the Interfaith Centre is making this possible for them on campus. Farah approaches the discussion from a more spatial aspect, and describes the place as a comfortable zone for students to be able to relax and socialise.

We can sit in the couch area and there are many people [that] come [in] and sit and talk. I also talk to them. It's a very good social area. (Farah, F)

In her depiction, Farah explains the praying facility as a place she can spend time outside her religious duties as well. From a similar point of view, Nawrin portrays the centre as a comfortable space for socialising.

“There is also tea and coffee there so after prayers you can sit with your friends and chat for a while as well.” (Nawrin, F)

Sami additionally emphasises the intercultural communication opportunity aspect of the Interfaith Centre since it brings students from different nationalities together under its roof:

It [the Interfaith Centre] is a very good place to [get to] know people. I think because always when you go there you find some new students, especially international students [I am] talking [about]. I

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<sup>66</sup> Friday is the holy day of Islamic belief.

got to know [a student] last year. He did the same course as I do now but he has already graduated. So, he was giving me some advice about the course and so. I think it's a good place to get to know people, yeah. (Sami, M)

The presence and impact of a multi-faith centre on the well-being of the participants indicates the importance of a comprehensive infrastructure on an internationalising campus. This infrastructure creating a resourceful environment is particularly crucial if the aim of the higher education institution is to encourage and maintain culturally, intellectually and spiritually whole individuals within its contexture. The reflections elicited from the IMS throughout the data collection process only proves the pivotal role of a multi-faith centre in conjecturing a holistic paradigm regarding institutional internationalisation on campus, which is then described as 'welcoming' and 'inclusive' as much as 'diverse' and 'plural' by the students. In a literature review paper authored by Mohammadi et al (2007), the Eurocentric infrastructure of Australian hospitals is reviewed, and it is concluded even though Australia has become a culturally more diverse country in the recent years, the hospitals, in their current state at the time of publishing, were unable to respond to the basic needs of Muslim patients and their relatives<sup>67</sup>. Similarly, a paper by Ward and Wood (2010)<sup>68</sup> discussing an 18-month campaign that took place on city campus of RMIT University for the return of prayer rooms on campus, which was a success on the students' side with the re-incorporation of the rooms by the university. These studies once again stress the vitality of creating such spaces where the students are allowed to be free to practise their spirituality on campus premises. It is a win-win situation on both sides since the students perceive themselves to be valued as holistic entities by the institution, which

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<sup>67</sup> Mohammadi, N., Evans, D. and Jones, T., 2007. Muslims in Australian hospitals: The clash of cultures. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 13(5), pp.310-315.

<sup>68</sup> Ward, L. and Wood, K., 2010. 'Right the wrong': the RMIT University Muslim Prayer Room Campaign.

improve their well-being and academic success, while the institution benefits from the diversity-friendly climate created on the campus, which becomes the visible outcome of a well-practised internationalisation efforts.

#### **7.4.2 Interfaith Centre and Representation on Campus**

In addition to the Interfaith Centre's praying facility purpose, the data reveals that the centre is perceived to be closely associated with the Islamic Society (ISOC) on campus. Therefore, DCU, considered as an institution, does not only offer visible space for cultural diversity and religious pluralism to be practised, it also allows the culture co-exist at representation level through clubs and societies. *'Being Member of a Clubs & Societies on Campus (4)'* mostly resonated with the Islamic society on campus for the IMS that were interviewed. Even though the code is not dense, it suggests an inclination towards maintaining the cultural identity of the participants in line with the discussion in Chapter 4. The Interfaith Centre and Islamic society on campus are not simply a space that is embracing both the diversity on campus and the particular needs of IMS. It is also a continuation of values and traditions of the Muslim student in their host institution. Therefore, being member of the Islamic Society, events of which are associated with the space the Interfaith Centre offers, is interpreted as maintenance of cultural identity of IMS. Apart from the ISOC, students reported membership largely in their respective field of study, which was considered valuable by the participants mostly for networking reasons.

#### **7.4.3 IMS's Relationship with the Academic Staff**

Participants' reflections on their relationship with their lecturers was a significant topic covered in the interviews, since education is the primary reason why the

participants come to Ireland, and the staff members are active members of the academic sphere in Irish HE. *'Having Good Experience with Lectures (15)'* emerges as the code with the highest numbers of references in it from the topic. This, at the first glance, offers a positive perspective on the role of lecturers in the host academic environment. Following this, *'Lecturers Being Helpful Towards International Students (10)'* and *'Lecturers Not Differentiating Between the Host and International Students (7)'* are listed as the second and third codes with highest number of references. Particularly the equal status the participants perceive to be holding with the host students in the eyes and actions of the host academia lecturers indicates an assimilative academic sphere as opposed to the inclusive social sphere identified on campus in previous paragraphs. Regardless, Inbar has a positive perception of the lecturers as she mentions below:

I think it's really good, the way [lecturers] g[ive] lectures. Because they speak with us, they just want us to interact with us. It is really interesting to be lecturer, I really like being there, in the lecture, [hear] what they are saying and that's what [is] different [from] my country because [the lecturers there] just read from book or speak without interaction. So, I think the way that [the lecturers] are interacting with us, the way they want us to ask questions, I think that is very good. (Inbar, F)

Inbar distinguishes the clear gap between the two academic cultures straight away in her quotation. In the education system, of which she had been a part until she commenced on her studies in Irish HE, the teacher is regarded as the epitome of knowledge, as well as the authority figure, and there seems to be little to no interaction between the teacher and learner in the classroom, which could also be described as rote-learning<sup>69</sup>. However, the lecturers in the Irish education system encourage

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<sup>69</sup> Rote learning is characterised as memorising without learning. See DAVID KEMBER Misconceptions about the learning approaches, motivation and study practices of Asian students Higher Education 40: 99–121, 2000



students to become actively involved in the teaching and learning process that takes place in the classroom, which is a new phenomenon that is positively responded to by Inbar. She continues to state this kind of approach towards education matches her idea of what learning in HE should be.

When I c[o]me here, in the lecture, I feel like I'm really learning you know. Something is different when [the lecturers] speak I really understand what they are saying. I think that's what HE is. (Inbar, F)

Malika who comes from the Italian education system reports the high level of support she receives from her lecturers in Irish HE and compares this kind of attitude from the teachers in Irish academia to that of Italian academia.

What I really find [different] here is the relationship with the lecturers. There is a huge support for any kind of problem [as opposed to] my country. This is something I find very helpful. If you have any problems, you just need to send an e-mail. They are really comprehensive and they are really understanding. You don't have this kind of support in my [previous] university [in Italy]. (Malika, F)

The approachable and interactive image of the lecturers in DCU also helped Malika combat her fears around approaching lecturers that were formed in her substantial years in Italian education system.

[Being here] helped me to realise [I don't have to] fear that much of the lecturer[s]. [I] actually go converse with them, meet them [to talk about their] comments and advice. I find it very interesting and helpful; the idea that when you're struggling with something, there is someone you can find. (Malika, F)

Similarly, Tahu points to the 'helpful' approach he has been receiving from the lecturers while Sami highlights the availability of the staff as his peers previously did so, and Nawrin supports the approachable nature of lecturers by describing them as friendly.

I do like some [of] the teacher[s] here. They are very helpful. They would send us reminders every two days about the assignments. They would show you where to find the information. (Tahu, M)

If you need something you can talk to your lecturer. They [are] always available, they [are] always there, they [are] always helpful, I mean for any any question that I had [so far]. They always answer me, they always meet me for appointment, yeah. (Sami, M).

My teachers [in Ireland] have been more than helpful to me... the teachers are very friendly, [so is] the way they teach you and everything. It's very easy to understand for non-English speaking students you know. (Nawrin, F)

Besides the 'helpfulness' that resonates with IMS' favourable perceptions of the International Office service, and 'friendliness' that echoes with participants' reflections on the host society, 'respect' lends itself to the data analysis under the sub-category 'Relationship with the Academic Staff' as well. The interplay between the 'helpfulness' and 'respect' towards the international students in the host environment underlines the role of host institution resources in ensuring and maintaining sojourners' well-being. These two elements are sensitive issues to be touched on as there has to be a practical definition of what helpful is, to what extent it could be used to ensure student well-being, and how can we distinguish the fine line between 'being helpful' and 'spoon-feeding'. Similar questions and concerns arise respectively for the notion of 'respect' as well, and particularly, to what extent institutions maintain and practise 'respect' towards different cultures on campus, especially in the academic realm, when the students are 'buying' this kind of education that not only the students but also the global market deem advantageous. The participants' reflections on DCU services, and their relationship with staff in that sense offers a valuable case study concerning these questions. Even though these findings cannot be generalised, they have the value of contributing to the internationalisation debate, and suggest evidence-based solutions to the recurring issues in the international student experience. In this study, the participants advocate for the positive impact of cultural recognition and

respect from the institution, as well as highlighting the importance of presence and availability of points of contact, whether be it the international office or the staff members. This suggests an understanding of IS' need in the host institution, which is not necessarily spoon feeding, but a system that is equipped with the knowledge of the international students, and their respective cultures. The kind of balance between awareness and resourcefulness among the academic staff in DCU is evident in Malik's remarks.

[My] experiences with Lecturers [are] good actually. They know you are international student. They expect the differences. If you told them that, for example 'I don't know that rule', 'I wasn't aware working that way' they will understand and will give you a second chance. I think they understand and treat you the way they should.  
(Malik, M)

This is an excellent example of creating the space for the students to find their own path into the teaching and learning experience in the host institution by trying, failing and discovering, while maintaining the practice of professionalism. The academic staff member does not necessarily alter curriculum in fundamental points, which would then go against the educational values that international students are aiming to adopt in the host institution, but rather create the space for the new students to be able to familiarise themselves with the new pedagogies, and become resourceful enough to facilitate the transition. As an illustration, Farah points to the creative ways she perceives her lecturers to be dealing with the needs of multicultural classrooms:

[the lecturers] are very good and they consider that you are international so they are very creative because when they deal with you, they put in mind you're not same as the Irish you know. And that's really helpful for the IS. That's what I like [about] the lecturer[s] in DCU. (Farah, F)

This quotation reiterates the crucial role of academic staff when they are equipped with the necessary knowledge of the culturally diverse classrooms for the international

students to be able to navigate their way around and into the new education system, feel recognised in the classroom, and maintain the essential psychological and academic factors in order to be successful.

## 7.5 Curriculum and Language

Following the discussion on the reflections of IMS on their relationship and communication with lecturers in the host institution, it is now timely to discuss another major aspect of the host institution, which concerns the curriculum, and closely linked to this language, which, in this case is English, as presented in Table 7-3.

Table 7-3: List of codes relating to the category ‘Curriculum’

Category:	Curriculum
Codes:	Irish HE introducing different learning styles (10)
	The Irish HE curriculum being more challenging than HE curriculum in home country (8)
	Irish education being more interactive (7)
	Writing in English being a challenge (5)
	Irish HE being research-based (4)
	Written assignments being difficult (3)
	Irish HE valuing participation in class (2)

The curriculum is, when looked at from a broader perspective, essentially what brings IMS to Ireland with the aim of receiving a degree in their respective programmes. ‘Degree’ and ‘Academic Scholarships’ emerge as elements that construct sojourner identity of the IMS, which was discussed in Chapter 5. In the data *‘Comparing the*

*Education System in Home Country and Ireland (19)*’ emerge as a strong code with a substantial number of references. This clearly indicates that IMS perceive the Irish curriculum to be different than their home country curricula. When discussed further in the interviews, it was identified that the most significant challenges that created the difference was ‘written assignments’ and ‘research culture’, which consequently encourage critical thinking in Irish HE. Participants additionally associate their English skills and competency with the cognitive or research abilities to successfully complete written assignments. Apart from these two strings of identified challenges, the students’ remarks point to other differences between the Irish and home country education systems, although, these differences are too scattered to be grouped under one umbrella category. Nevertheless, to illustrate this point, a few examples of the quotations are presented below, in which participants make references to the different, therefore, challenging environment in the Irish HE landscape.

Where I come from is highly different. First of all, the Italian and UK system, I would argue, are different on the approach, for example in Italy you don’t have to follow the course, you don’t have this submission deadlines. (Malika, F)

In Bangladesh, all universities are English medium, they follow American curriculum so there are two semesters in a year so what happens in your syllabus is smaller. And there [are] always exams instead of continuous assessments. (Nawrin, F)

The education system is much more different than the education system back home ... in here different people, different nationalities, different cultures, different education system, more challenging lifestyle or environment. And you have to work hard to adapt [to] different environment and to learn from different people (Malik, M)

The next section now will focus on the overlapping challenges identified by the students in Irish HE, namely ‘research & critical thinking’, and ‘written assignments’.

### 7.5.1 Research and Creative Thinking

One of the major overlapping themes that emerged from the interviews, especially when students were discussing the academic environment and the challenges in DCU, was the research culture they were introduced to. The students also concluded they were expected to swiftly adapt to this education system in the host institution in order to be successful. An example of this could be improving their critical thinking skills that are required for the research projects they were expected to complete. The critical thinking approach is not only endorsed for conducting research, but also in the classroom, during teaching & learning, according to the students. This is a new phenomenon for the IMS, since they explained that their home country education system would not necessarily value research and learning based on critical thinking. Amber states that creative thinking and the standard of the work the lecturers expect of the students in DCU is not something she was familiar with before, and that she had to work hard to adapt to this.

In DCU they are looking for something creative, they expect something very good from you. But in my country, they give the structure, and [say] 'do what I say'. As a whole, this is the structure; follow it, do it, present it, you are fine. But here in DCU, they look for something creative. They never mind to do something lecturer did not ask. (Amber, F)

She points to the education culture in Irish HE that puts value on challenging the status quo, having a creative approach to learning, and taking ownership of one's own learning. Amber, however, completed her education in an environment that discourages diverse voices, and incorporation of different student interpretations into the delivery of knowledge. This is a stark contrast she emphasises between the two education cultures she has been a part of so far, and she evidently feels the need to

adapt to this new system that encourages her to become more vocal, creative and critical in her learning journey. Malika (F) confirms this when she says:

They [DCU] validate your opinion and participation in class.

Tahu (M) brings perspective into the discussion by suggesting that the difference does not actually lie in the materials that are being used in the education systems, but rather in the way they are being delivered:

They are the same books; I don't think there is a difference ... the style of teaching ... that's all the difference. (Tahu, M)

Similarly, Zara from Saudi Arabia explains how this difference in teaching and learning experience in Irish HE is reflected in her individual learning style in DCU:

DCU is different from my country. It is completely different. For example, in my [home] country we don't learn how to use the library, and actually we don't use the library [ever]. But [after] I c[a]me here [I had] to learn how to go the library, how to do research. In my [home] country we don't do the research. We only have the book, and study and then [take] the exam. But here the first thing we [had] to learn [was] the library, how to use [it], how to reference something I read. This [is something] we don't have in my [home] country. (Zara, F)

Also I see the difference [in] study[ing] between here and my [home] country. Because in my [home] country when the teacher explain[s] the lecture, they explain the book exactly, but here the teacher [is] speaking in general about the headline and you have to read the article. In my [home] country we don't have to do it this way. Study means I just read the book in Saudi Arabia, but here no, you have to research, you have to read different book[s], you have to paraphrase what you read [with] your own word[s]. [It is] more challeng[ing]. (Zara, F)

Zara clearly pictures the differences between the Irish HE system and the education in her home country from a learner's point of view as an international student. According to her account, research skills were not something she was able to improve in her home country education system. This simultaneously creates a challenge and an opportunity for her to re-discover herself as a learner in a new environment. Nawrin, who is from

Bangladesh, concurs with Zara concerning the differences in the two learning environments, and that the new environment requires adaptation.

Most of the people [who teach in Bangladesh] don't look [from] the creative way; it's all memorising. Here in Ireland lecturers give you credits for your creativity; like you understand, you learn and then you show your creativity. I think it is better way to develop your inner self. (Nawrin, F)

It is evident in participant reflections that research skills, as well as creativity, are factors with which the students were not familiar with previously, and they are expected to incorporate these into their learning. The overall impression of the IMS regarding the quality of education in Ireland in comparison to their home countries is identified as a higher standard. A swift transition into this particular research, teaching and learning culture poses a challenge for the IMS. However, the participants so far have suggested they wish to benefit from this challenge and succeed in Irish HE.

### **7.5.2 Written Assignments**

The interviews pinned down another major challenge from the perspective of IMS regarding their adaptation to the curriculum in DCU. Written assignments, apart from the research skills the IMS have to improve, emerge as a strong factor in students' transition experience. The reported difficulties regarding the written assignments largely concentrate on the command of English language, organisation of thoughts in written form, and the actual unfamiliarity with the practice of writing as form of learning and assessment. Sada proposes that it is challenging for international students to complete a written assignment in the Irish HE system. Moreover, the stylistic differences stemming from the use of language in every culture make written assignments identity markers for international students due to their distinguishable features.



[If] the written assignment is in Arabic, I'll do it in two, three hours and I'll finish it, but in English we need to understand the assignment [first] and start to write, develop our writing, [edit] it. Especially here when you write something you have to think [like an] Irish student because when we write the lecturer will quickly know you are Arabic student, this is how the Arabic normally think and write and explain. They know if an Irish [student] wrote this or an international student. (Sada, F)

The stylistic issues clearly pose a challenge for IMS just like any other international student in the Irish HE system. This also emphasises the dominant approach in the delivery of Irish HE institutions, which is based on a certain way of thinking, structure of thought, and expression. The different learning styles are identified by the staff members. However, in technical and official terms, these differences are not incorporated into the delivery of education in, at least, DCU in Ireland. This is one of the debated topics in the literature and Sheridan (2011) in her study, which examines the academic literacies of international students in DCU, also points to the assimilative paradigm of education in the institution. She adds that international students are expected to assimilate in order to be successful in it. This is a crucial discussion, whether the learning styles of the international students should be incorporated directly into the curriculum, or the assimilation should be further encouraged and supported through side and pre-degree programmes. Especially, considering the debate around what purpose the internationalisation of HE should serve (Dunne 2009), and whether the very conceptualisation of globalisation of HE essentially imposes Anglo-Saxonisation of third level education (Vandermensbrugghe 2004); the remarks of IMS come timely and insightful. As it stands after analysing the data, DCU adopts an assimilative approach towards the delivery of education, and a multicultural approach towards the campus diversity. Alia supports this view by stating that even though she came from a different education system, she is expected to adapt to the

delivery and learning in the Irish HE system, which consequently lead her to study more in order to keep pace with the curriculum.

In every assignment, it is challenging at the beginning but when you start working on it and when you finish it, it is easy. Back in Saudi Arabia, the exams [were] choice and here we have to write. It was challenging for me because it's been a long time since I [have written] in Arabic and in English so I started writing and practicing, also focusing on memorising; memorise the spelling, because spelling is really hard. Okay I can [make] some spelling mistakes because I'm international student, but the examiner, the word must be readable for him. (Alia, F)

As is apparent in the quotation, Alia still draws from her learning habits which might have been fossilised, and might be quite challenging to unlearn in the new education system. She practices more in order to adapt, nevertheless, she slips back into her habitual way of learning when she can. During this adaptation period though the international students are not left on their own, and supported through a compulsory pre-degree programme, which they are required to complete before commencing their respective discipline unless they pass the English language proficiency exam, i.e. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). These pre-degree programmes are designed to introduce international students to the education system in Ireland so that the necessary academic transition is facilitated. The next section discusses the role of pre-degree programmes in IMS' cross-cultural adaptation to Irish HE, and DCU more specifically.

### **7.5.3 The Role of Pre-degree Programmes in Cross-cultural Adaptation to the Irish HE Curriculum**

It emerged from the interviews that the participants are required to take an additional, yet compulsory pre-degree course regardless of their discipline in order for them to become fully eligible to proceed to third level education in Ireland. This is represented

within the codes '*Having Done Foundation Course (8)*', and '*Having Done or Doing Pre-Masters Course (3)*'. These pre-degree programmes are considered time consuming, irrelevant to the actual content of the degree programme, and poorly balanced between English and other subjects by the participants. To illustrate this point better, Sada argues she was not able to find balance between the core modules and her English course commitments.

[In] English language we have a lot of quizzes, exams and ten per cent for each during twelve weeks, but we have other course like Finance. We could not balance them because the English course need[s] a lot of work and a lot assignments and we need to work for core modules. It is tight (Sada, F)

It is evident that the pre-degree course Alia attended posed a challenge for her to be able to meet the requirements, particularly with regards to English language competency. Malika, at this point, takes the discussion further by suggesting some amendments to the curriculum and the delivery of the pre-degree courses.

[M]y idea of HE is an education or a university where you can really find everything you need under an education part, that starts from reaching the lecturer when you want [and stretches out to] knowing all the submission dates, all the amount of work you have to do, learn [in advance] how to tackle all these issues [as] an IS. I think DCU has a weak point. What I found in the pre-master's programme was, if I have to suggest, I [would] just divide pre-masters because it's very confusing and it's not relating to you[r] following course. It's a mix and it's not very focus[ed] on the course you have to [do] after. I think they really need tell you [you] have three courses in the first [semester]. [Also] they need to tell you how to do an essay properly. They need to tell you 'okay the introduction is this', [and] how to analyse, where is a weak point, where is a strong point in an article. I think this is what they need. By doing this you're gonna familiarise yourself with the world that you're gonna find in the books you know; not just English or grammar, you need also somewhat to taste the essence of masters itself. (Malika, F)

Malika's criticism highlights the inadequacy of the pre-degree course in covering the actual materials or subjects of the respective discipline the students are enrolled for. Malika does not feel she was substantially prepared for the challenges she had to tackle

in the Master's degree programme and Irish postgraduate education system by these compulsory programmes. Moreover, she argues that the programme itself is confusing for students, as well as highlighting the focus put on English courses. This is a compelling and contradictory argument since the students also report written assignments, and in that, English competence, as one of the most challenging issues in Irish academia. However, the pre-degree course, which is made compulsory, and puts a special emphasis on the subject English, is still considered ineffective and time-consuming. It is then imperative for the host institution, namely DCU, to investigate the delivery and outcomes of the pre-degree programmes in order to evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes, and also identify factors that lead students to report such dissatisfaction.

#### 7.5.4 Language

As discussed in the above paragraphs, participants' participation in class is valued in Irish higher education. This curricular approach leads to language-related challenges identified as competency, accent, psychological barriers.

Table 7-4: List of codes relating to Language within the data

Category:	Language
Codes:	Irish accent/English being difficult/challenging (16)
	Feeling comfortable using English in academic settings (12)
	English being a challenge in academic life (7)

Participants previously identified written assignments as a challenge in Irish academia, which has an English dimension to it. In this section, as illustrated in the codes in Table 7-4., the focus is largely on the use of the spoken language. This entails both receptive and productive skills since participants identify the Irish accent particularly as challenging, which is concerned with their receptive skills, as well as using English in classroom settings, when they are required to participate in classroom activities or presentations, which concerns their productive skills. Twelve students report being comfortable using their English in academic settings, while a majority of them suggest they struggle with the Irish accent.

B: So, if we talk about your academic life, have you come across any challenges so far?

L: Probably the English because most of the Irish lecturers speak fast so it's kinda hard to catch up with them. So, it's kinda challenge. (Layla, F)

B: Do you feel comfortable using English in classroom settings?

F: Yeah, but sometimes, at the beginning, people talk very fast. So, I can't catch them. I can't yeah. Now yeah, it's better than the beginning. At the beginning, I couldn't catch what they are talking.

B: Do you find Irish accent difficult?

L: Not difficult but at the beginning quite strange. Because I used, before I came here, to listen to the American accent. So, when I came here, I noticed the difference between the two languages. So, at the beginning was really strange for me, but I like it, yeah. And now it's very normal for me. Because I [am] used to listening every day, every time. (Farah, F)

B: Do you ever struggle with Irish English?

M: Yes, I do, it's the accent so much, because I feel that they whisper sometimes. I can't really identify. That's why I was afraid of asking questions, because it's embarrassing you know sorry what did you ask me? (Malika, F)

B: Do you yourself feel comfortable using English in classroom or academic settings?

T: Yeah, I am confident about my English skills yeah. I don't know sometimes I told you difficult for me. I told you it's probably the accent or something like that. (Tahu, M)

When I start here, it's just... it's maybe kind of psychological thing you know, new lecturers, new people and new accent. It's all English

but it's new, it's a bit different than the English I know from America. And it's a bit sometimes it goes fast. (Baha, M)

The data point to a decline in terms of participants' initial struggle with the Irish accent as they spend more time in the host culture. Nevertheless, a number of students still identify English as a challenge particularly in academia due to anxiety that is associated with the use of productive skills.

B: Do you feel comfortable using your English in classroom settings?

I: Not really, specially in presentation or something, I'm afraid to you know give the other people speaking because the majority is fluent so I feel like my English is not that good. I'm not comfortable to really speak. (Inbar, F)

If I have to do an oral presentation I have [not] any kind of fears, very easy even though you're in front of other students, and even though it takes me twice to prepare myself because of the English. You don't want to make mistakes, but I don't have the fear to show my thoughts in front of other people. (Malika, F)

The quotation illustrates the situation clearly. The participants are required to pass English proficiency tests prior to commencing their degrees; therefore, English competency is achieved on paper. However, when it comes to emotions associated with the use of language as well as the spoken English in the host country, language emerges as a more complex phenomenon than it appears on paper. One important thing to note here is the fact that the anxiety resulting from the unfamiliarity with the spoken English in the host context declines in time since participants' exposure and familiarity with the colloquial language increase as they spend more time in Ireland. This suggests that Irish English is a temporary challenge largely encountered in early stages of the sojourn. The challenge of improving productive and receptive skills on campus, and particularly in the classroom as part of the curricular activities, remains among the participants.

## 7.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed DCU as the host institution with reference to the interviews with the participants. From the data, two distinct and broad themes emerged to be discussed. These are the campus environment and the academic sphere. In the campus-focused of the discussion, the reflections of the participants reveal that:

- Institutional support creates a positive climate for cultural diversity,
- This is achieved through an approachable, accessible and resourceful international office, availability of spiritual space (i.e. praying, socialising, mindfulness events), and last but not least, the presence of active clubs & societies.
- A high level of institutional completeness is positively associated with a multicultural campus
- Geographical recognition and inclusion of religious diversity on campus does not impede the institutions' secular approach to education

On the academic front:

- The participants reflect on a rather assimilative approach adopted by the host institution towards learning,
- This is particularly salient in the non-discriminatory approach of the lecturers between the host and the international students, as well as the new set of skills that the international students are expected to acquire in the new educational setting,
- The lecturers' awareness of the culturally diverse classroom facilitates the acquisition of essential skills for international students to be successful in the Irish HE.

- Participants' religious identity does not affect the academic outcomes of their sojourn.

The role of pre-degree programmes is reviewed as well, and the discussion points to a mismatch between the curricula of these programmes and the students' needs and expectations, as well as a reported inadequacy of these programmes to prepare IMS – and perhaps other international students as well- for the degree programme ahead. Following the review of the host society and the host institution from the lens of IMS, the next chapter now focuses on a crucial aspect of study abroad, namely intercultural communication experiences with the host and other international students on campus.



## RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT ON CAMPUS

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### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews IMS' relationship development with other students on campus and is the last of the findings chapters of this thesis. The analysis so far focused on participants' perceptions of culture, identity, the host society and the host institution. This chapter now focuses on IMS' experiences of both mono and intercultural contact particularly on campus and reviews the factors that facilitate the two types of relationship development. The interviews with the participants reveal that there are two major relationship development types taking place in DCU; 1) intercultural, 2) mono-cultural when culture is defined as 'a system of shared symbols and meanings' (Keesing 1974:79), as explained in Chapter 3. In additional reference to the discussion of identity in Chapter 3, Gudykunst (1998) states "[o]ur cultures influence our communication and our communication influences our cultures"; therefore, incorporating the communication dimension into the investigation of sojourn experiences of a particular group of people is imperative in order to paint a holistic and complete picture.

### 8.2 Relationship Development on Campus

This section investigates the relationship development of IMS on DCU Glasnevin campus. The interviews suggest that intercultural relationship development is positively facilitated by i. 'Learning' which is closely linked to 7.5 'Curriculum', ii. 'Openness' (8.4.1), and iii. 'Predispositions'<sup>70</sup> (Kim 2005, Kim and Gudykunst 2005)

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<sup>70</sup> Predispositions is used by Kim (1988, 2001, 2005) in her integrative theory of intercultural communication as a 'background' (1988:128) of the individual while entering communication. The data

(i.e. age, education & family, stereotypes) (8.4). Intercultural relationship development is, on the other hand, largely hindered by ‘Culture Distance’<sup>71</sup> (see 6.2 and 9.4 also), ‘Homophily’<sup>72</sup> which is closely linked to the discussion of ‘Nationality’ (5.2) and ‘Religion’ (5.3) in Chapter 5. The relatively salient factors that hinder intercultural contact are identified as ‘Temporary Nature of Stay’ and ‘Workload’ (8.6.1) from the perspective of IMS. Interventions within the curriculum such as ‘Group work’ and ‘Timetable’ (8.7) additionally emerge as factors facilitating intercultural relationship development. Additionally, it is identified that IMS reflect on these experiences as they are exposed to them throughout their sojourn, therefore, a category entitled ‘Reflections’ (8.8) is added to the core category of ‘Relationship Development’ discussed in this chapter. The factors that are presented in Figure 8-1 are identified as facilitating intercultural contact, however, these factors do not necessarily ensure a long-term friendship among the students that grouped as presented in Figure 8-2. Nevertheless, it is hoped that these factors, which facilitate intercultural contact, will lead to some level of meaningful intercultural exchange as part of the study abroad experiences of IMS.

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shows evidence for some background factors that impact IMS attitudes towards intercultural contact. Refer to the theoretical discussion chapter for a detailed discussion (9).

<sup>71</sup> Culture distance is theorised by Berry et al. (2002:361) as a concept used that “refer[s] to how far apart two cultural groups are on dimensions of cultural variation”.

<sup>72</sup> Homophily mainly operates on the principle similarity breeds connection (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001). It is adopted in this thesis in order to explain the mono-cultural interaction as a result of perceived similarities among students, as well as what emerges from the data as constructs of this perceived similarity. An extended discussion of the theoretical concept will be conducted in Chapter 9, however, it is useful to unfold it here with reference to the data.

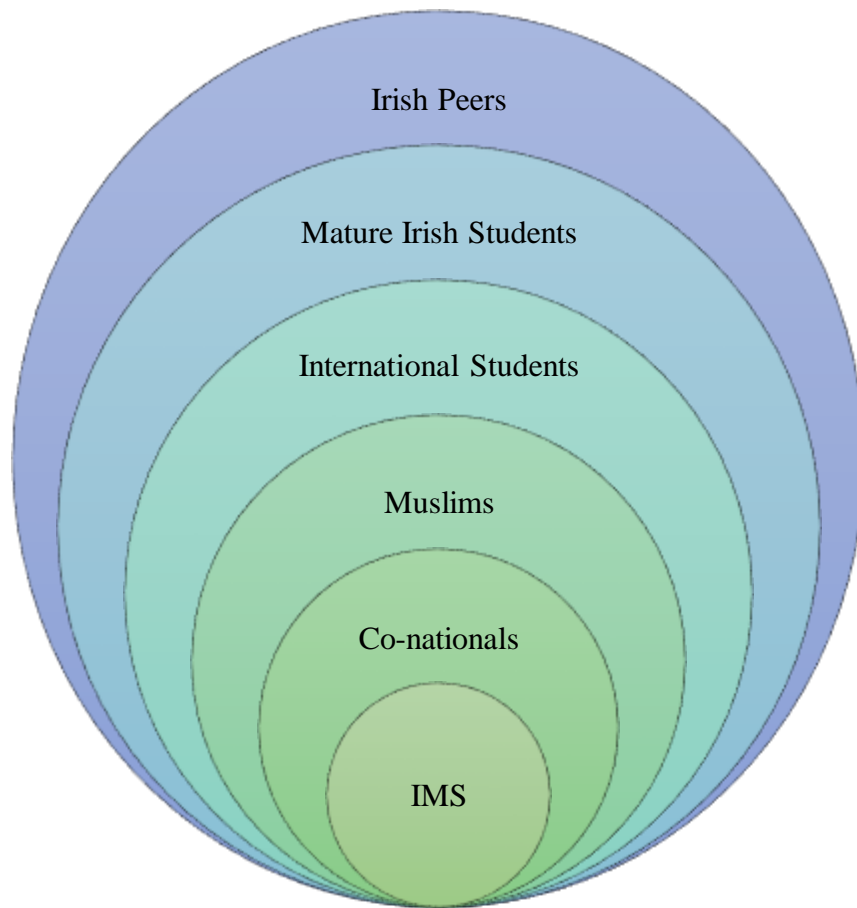


Figure 8-1: Grounded Theory (Onion) Model of IMS' Relationship Development on Campus (student groups)

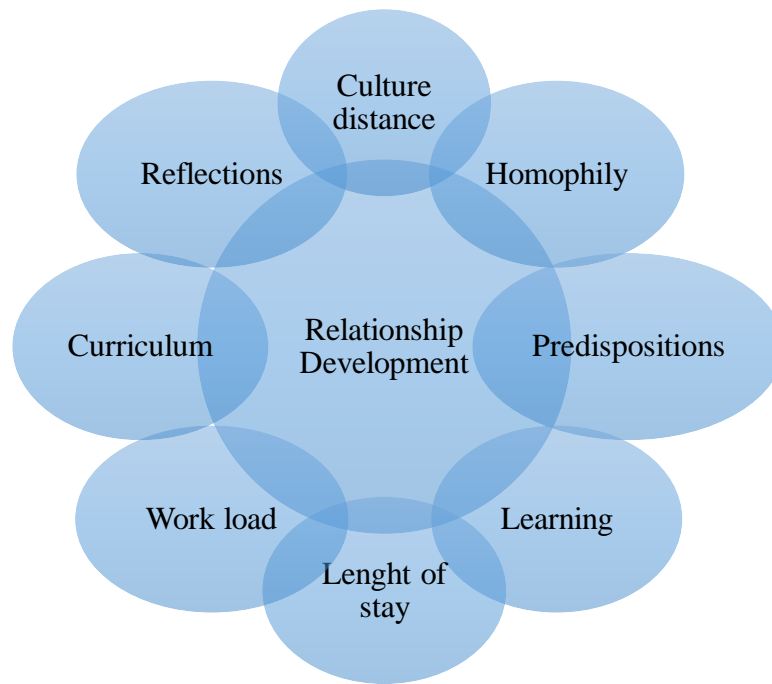


Figure 8-2: Grounded Theory (Flower) Model of Relationship Development on Campus (factors)

### 8.3 Culture Distance

Culture distance is already explored in 6.2. as one of the categories of IMS' perceptions of the host culture & society. In the section, culture distance is largely defined by religious practices, food & drink, gender norms, and infrastructure in the host country. In relation to the discussion in Chapter 5, which covers the fundamental lines of perceived culture distance from the perspective of IMS, this section shifts the focus to the relationship development between students on campus and the impact of culture distance in relation to this. The list of codes concerning culture distance is presented in Table 8-1 below:

Table 8-1: List of codes relating to ‘Culture Distance’

Category	Culture distance
<b>Codes</b>	Not drinking as a barrier for socialising (4)
	Preferring non-alcoholic beverages when socialising with college friends (2)
	Preferring to go home at early hours (2)
	Socialising outside drink-oriented activities (1)

As is evident on the table, food & drink pervades the data when participants point to the culture distance as a barrier for intercultural contact. Fatima gives a compelling example of why she would consider not drinking alcoholic beverages as a barrier for socialising with the host students in particular:

F: There's mostly Irish people there so I didn't really make a lot of friends there. I made only like few with international students. I made friendships with Irish people but not that much.

B: Why would you say that?

F: Cause, I wouldn't go to bars and drink and stuff. I feel like if they go out and stuff, they're gonna go there. So, you know our friendship wouldn't be that compatible outside the university.

Fatima also associates this barrier with the presence of religion in Muslim students' life and a conservative outlook which is particular to Muslim students in her opinion:

B: Do you feel non-Muslim international students go out or socialise more with Irish students?

F: Yeah, they would actually. There is a bit of a difference because you know we're kind of preservative [conservative] cause of you know religious stuff. But like non-Muslims, they wouldn't have that much of preservative [attitudes] so they would go along with them.

According to Fatima, non-Muslim international students have a better chance of socialising with the host students, since they may not be as conservative as the Muslim students. Here, conservative is used in a way to emphasise religion's role in an

individual's life and values. In 5.3., Islam already emerged as the participants' lifestyle, and they suggested their values and even daily doings tend to be Islam-centric. Fatima connects abstaining from alcohol with religious obligations, and this becomes a barrier as well as encourages her to suggest a Muslim and non-Muslim dichotomy in the axis of conservatism. Additionally, even though participants largely indicated Islam's role in their life in 5.3, it could be deduced from this quotation that 'Islam being participants' lifestyle' might have an indirect effect on relationship development on campus since it separates IMS with an Islamic lifestyle, from other students who do not have this outlook or a related value system.

Following a direct question during the interview with Layla, she states abstaining from alcoholic beverages and activities that involve those is not only considered as a barrier for socialising by Muslim students, but also by the Irish students:

B: Would you say they [the activities Irish students are involved] are drink-oriented?

L: Yeah! they drink a lot!

B: Would you see this as a barrier between your Irish peers and you?

L: Probably yeah, mostly because when they hang out they drink, and us Muslims we don't. So, I think that's a barrier.

B: Do you also feel that they [Irish students] see this as a barrier too?

L: Yeah, I think so.

It is interesting to discover that Layla thinks Irish students consider Muslim students' abstaining from alcoholic beverages as a barrier for socializing with them. Thus far, lack of participation in the food & drink culture of the host society suggests a clear link to Islam being participants' lifestyle. In the light of the participant quotations, Islam and its value system might function as a binding factor among Muslims, but act a barrier for intercultural contact, particularly with non-Muslim students. In close

relation to food & drink culture comes the dress culture. That is the female Muslim students' headscarf practice and its implications on relationship development on campus. This subject, as mentioned in the introduction of the section, was discussed as part of culture distance in Chapter 5. In the section below, the discussion will focus on the campus friendship experiences of female Muslim students particularly in relation to their attire.

### **8.3.1 Headscarf Practice and Its Impact on Relationship Development on Campus**

Table 8-2: List of codes identifying headscarf as a barrier for intercultural contact

<b>Headscarf as a Barrier</b>
Headscarf identifying religious preference (12)
Worrying about wearing the headscarf (8)
Being asked questions about the headscarf (7)
Headscarf affecting campus experience (4)
Seeing headscarf practice as a problem (4)
Believing gender makes difference in Muslim student experience (2)
Male students hesitating to approach head-scarved female students (1)

Prior to data collection, it was envisaged that the practice of wearing a headscarf, which is followed by the majority of the female students who participated in this study, would emerge as one of the major factors that affect female students' experiences in the Irish context. Indeed, the practice of wearing a headscarf and its meaning for female participants' in order to describe their identity & culture are discussed in Chapter 4 in detail. Certain implications of headscarf practice are also discussed with

reference to female students' perception of the host culture and their cross-cultural adjustment in Chapter 5. The data suggests the headscarf might become a barrier between IMS and non-Muslim students (both international and host) for three major reasons: i. perceived cultural distance between the head-scarved females and the non-Muslims, ii. pre-conceived ideas regarding female students who wear the headscarf iii. head-scarved students' reaction to the questions they receive from non-Muslims. Farah mentions her anticipation regarding how her headscarf would be perceived by the non-Muslims in the host context as presented in Table 8-2.

B: Have you ever come across any negative incident?

F: Of course, there is but maybe I forgot them! In the college, you mean?

B: Anywhere.

F: Maybe there is but not very strong ... maybe just you feel it; like, not like something strong, [and] not always, just at the beginning when I came here because I was quite worried [about my headscarf]." (Farah, F)

She does not specify nor can recall a negative incident anecdote relating to her headscarf practice, therefore identity, however, she does state that her headscarf is a culture marker, which might signpost a certain type of lifestyle, set of values and commitments that could be different from what is considered common and usual in the host environment. The awareness of Farah around the visibility of her religious identity, the dominant values in the host culture, and how her visible religious identity might be perceived and interpreted by the members of the host culture is evident in her statement, particularly when she points to her concern regarding her headscarf prior to her study abroad experience in Ireland. As discussed in the excerpt below, on campus, the headscarf emerges as a potential handicap for intercultural relationship development, particularly with the host students.



F: Yeah. if there's a drinking activity, I wouldn't go.

B: Would you rather not explain this to a group of people?

F: They actually understand that. Maybe that's why they don't try to make friendships. They know that we don't drink. They sometimes actually ask me when we're having conversation would you ever drink, and I'll go like no (smiles).

B: They can identify you?

F: Yeah, from the headscarf.

B: Do you think that ever affect the way other students approach you?

F: Yeah, I feel like they wouldn't engage a lot with me. because you know they have their own hanging out and stuff you know or clubbing like teenagers so, but they would be fine with me like normal. (Fatima, F)

This is a compelling statement put forward by Fatima in order to explain the role and impact of the practice of head-scarf on campus for female IMS. It is clearly expressed by Fatima that she does not consider engaging in a social activity that involves drinking. This consequently leads her to segregate herself from her peers in social activities that clash with her values. In Fatima's view, this stance is additionally mutually shared by the members of the host culture and other students who are able to socialise around activities that involve drinking, which draws a clear line between the female Muslim students and other students on campus. She continues to explain how the visibility of Fatima's headscarf as a culture marker makes her peers, particularly from the opposite sex, more conscious about approaching her in her own words.

B: Do you feel your headscarf affects the way students approach you?

F: Yeah it would, they'd definitely be more conscious maybe because of you see some Irish guy hug some girls but they wouldn't do that to me of course. They'd be more cautious cause we don't, you know. (Fatima, F)

It is evident from the lived experiences of the female participants that the headscarf is regarded as a message sent from the wearer to the other person, and this message is

sent and received simultaneously prior to the actual conversation, which might result in prejudice in communication.

As a counter-argument to what Fatima states her relationship development is with other students—particularly the opposite sex, Nawrin (F) argues that her religious identity does not foreshadow her individual self during her experiences on campus:

I think people first see my personality rather than my religious beliefs. They don't look at me as I'm a Muslim girl, they look at me as Nawrin.

It is, however, important to note here that Nawrin does not follow the head-scarf practice. Evidently, she is perceived as an individual before she is perceived as a member of a particular religious group, therefore, she does not report the impact of her female Muslim identity on her intercultural contact experiences. Nawrin's remarks are significant in illustrating the issue from two different perspectives, and confirming the role of head-scarf practice as a potential barrier and source of prejudice in cross-cultural communication in DCU.

Last but not least, Tahu's reflections will be incorporated into the discussion here in order to multiply perspectives, and be able to support the argument further. According to Tahu, the very essence and purpose of the veiling is conveying a message to the other people around females, which he suggests is some type of protection:

I'd be wearing [headscarf] to protect myself, to protect myself from the others abusing me. and I think, I feel it's a good thing for girls to cover their hair. As you know there is, especially these days, lots of sexual abuse, harassment going on. People when they see the girl covering herself they wouldn't pay attention to her, but when you see a girl not wearing properly, they would be going for that girl. (Tahu, M)

The practice of wearing a headscarf thus far emerged as a potential handicap for a meaningful intercultural contact to take place between the female IMS and the students

from non-Muslim cultures (males in particular). Even though the participants' visible cultural identity might pose challenges for intercultural contact, it might predict a mono-cultural relationship development on campus for female students in particular, and IMS in general. In the below section, homophily (see 8.3.2) which is conceptualised as the main pillar of mono-cultural friendships on campus is explored.

### **8.3.2 Homophily and Its impact on Relationship Development on Campus**

Homophily mainly operates on the principle similarity breeds connection (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001) as noted in 8.2. It is adopted in this thesis in order to explain the mono-cultural interaction as a result of perceived similarities among students, as well as what emerges from the data as constructs of this perceived similarity. An extended discussion of the theoretical concept will be conducted in Chapter 9, however, it is useful to unfold it here with reference to the data. The list of codes indicating homophily among students are presented in Table 8-3:

Table 8-3: List of codes relating to homophily among different student groups on campus.

<b>Homophily on DCU Campus</b>	
<b>Ease of communication</b>	<p>Mutual culture making contact/communication easier and appealing (11)</p> <p>International students being easier to communicate with (7)</p> <p>Finding it easy to contact/communicate with co-nationals (2)</p> <p>Irish students seeing European students similar and easier to contact (2)</p>
<b>Mutual culture</b>	<p>Hanging out with co-nationals (10)</p> <p>Mutual culture making contact/communication easier and appealing (10)</p> <p>Making friends with co-nationals (8)</p> <p>Seeing Islam/ Muslim as overarching identity/culture (7)</p> <p>International students sticking together (6)</p> <p>Living with same sex co-nationals (6)</p> <p>Making friends with Muslims (4)</p> <p>Socialising with Muslim students (3)</p> <p>Preferring to work with co-nationals unless assigned by the lecturer (2)</p> <p>International students sitting in the front rows in class (2)</p> <p>Seeing international students as family in Ireland (1)</p>
<b>Lack of interest</b>	<p>Host culture students not taking interest in learning about/contacting other culture students (11)</p> <p>International students being more open to intercultural contact than the host students (9)</p>
<b>Security</b>	<p>Feeling more comfortable speaking English among international students (1)</p> <p>Feeling safety and comfort with co-nationals (1)</p> <p>Seeing international students as family in Ireland (1)</p>

As is evident in the table, homophily is largely underpinned by ‘Mutual Culture’, which is in a clear interplay with ‘Ease of Communication’ indicated by overlapping codes such as *‘Mutual culture making contact/communication easier and appealing (10)’*. It is also indicated by the participants that being attracted to mutual culture while forming friendship groups is not exclusive to Irish students on campus, Inbar proposes a different perspective into the discussion by referring to a European identity:

I think the other European students, French Germa[n], they are okay with the Irish, they're friends with them, so I don't know, maybe [they are] culturally similar. (Inbar, F)

This is a significant statement from Inbar as it indicates that Irish students are perceived to go beyond their cultural sphere demarcated by nationality; however, their behaviour is still dominated by perceived similarities. Inbar asserts that Irish students approach the ‘culturally similar’ even when they step outside their homogenous Irish circle. Students coming from European countries, according to the participants’ observations, appear to be the favourable cohort of students by their Irish peers for intercultural contact. This type of cultural similarity also relates back to what Malika – a participant from Italy born to Egyptian parents- highlighted in Chapter 5. She emphasised the role of her European background in her transition into the Irish host culture because she felt more connected to the European everyday life. The rest of the participants also drew heavily on their nationality and religion while they were discussing their cultural identity in the Irish context, and Islam’s role was evident in these discussions in terms of organising their daily lives.

Consequently, both the IMS and the host students draw from their cultural background while describing themselves, and demarcating their friendship zones. The pattern shows itself in living arrangements as is evident in the code *“Living with same sex co-nationals (6)”*. This indicates a high level of homophily based on nationality, language

and gender in living arrangements outside host families. Even though being pulled towards the culturally similar is evident among all groups of students on campus, there are differences that underpin this behaviour. The interviews reveal that IMS believe host students are inclined to socialise with their co-nationals who are in the same age group, or what they perceive to be culturally similar to themselves when it comes to relationship development. Whereas IMS tend to engage in intercultural contact despite the evident lack of contact with the host national students. This could be explained by the sojourner status that was discussed in Chapter 5, which is identified as strongly related to participants 'Expectations & Objectives' (5.5.1) in the Irish HE that involve improving their English skills (5.5.3) and contribute to their self-development.

In further problematising the effects of mutual culture on relationship development on campus, the participants were encouraged to reflect at a deeper level on their experiences. The following sections take a closer look at these four elements listed in the above table.

### **8.3.3 Ease of Communication, Mutual Culture and Security**

Ease of communication that is predicated on mutual culture and/or language emerge as a factor within homophily on campus, which goes hand in hand with the monocultural friendship tendencies host students have according to the IMS. Students on both sides of any dichotomy suggested by the participants (host – international, Muslim – non-Muslim) are identified to be pulled towards the 'culturally similar'. Nevertheless, IMS with their sojourner status in the Irish HE system report a higher level of interest towards intercultural communication (see 8.4.1). 'Ease of Communication' emerges from the interviews as an influential factor in the direction of relationship development. In other words, finding communication 'easy' between

the parties due to a level of mutuality (i.e. language, religion, culture) increases the likelihood of contact between those parties. Malik explains how this pull effect works when he reflects on his thoughts regarding mono-cultural communication.

When you meet another [person], like a new guy from your country, you know it's easy for you to understand that guy, the language [is] not English, and you know what the culture they came from, so it's easy for you to understand that guy. (Malik, M)

He outlines the inner dynamics of the process and explains how communication is made easy by a shared culture and language. According to Malik, when one is familiar with the cultural identity of the person they are engaging with, this is a less stressful situation in terms of 'understanding' the person one communicates with. This relates back to the perception of Irish students' attitudes towards friendship and communication on campus and how their pull towards the similar is interpreted as 'being close' or 'not interested' in intercultural contact by the participants. Similarly, Sami argues cultural similarity underpinned by an ease of communication would be a favourable type of contact for him.

I think I prefer to work with someone I know already; it would be more comfortable for me to present my ideas and stuff. Naturally, I would go for Omani students but I have no problem with working with international students. (Sami, M)

He argues he would naturally be drawn to people he already knows, which might mean a friend, a member of a religious belief he holds, or a co-national. However, he then elaborates on what he actually means by 'knowing' someone and specifies the concept to first co-nationals, which in this case is Omani students, then the international students. From Sami's quotation, we can derive that feeling comfortable in communication is a major factor in determining who the students are contacting on campus both mono and interculturally. In that sense, the co-nationals are described by

the IMS as the most comfortable and favourable option for communication, followed by other students (or student groups) who are not necessarily from the same country but share some level of mutuality, such as being an international student, being a sojourner, or not speaking English as first language. This is also evident in the code “*International students sitting in the front rows in class (2)*”.

### **8.3.4 Colloquial English Being a Challenge in Intercultural Contact**

It is also important to note that participants stated they find Irish English challenging at times, which closely relates to ‘ease of communication’. The code ‘*Irish accent/English being difficult/challenging (12)*’ for instance highlights participants’ experiences with the host culture language, or particular accent.

My weakness was in Irish accent only. (Amber, F)

Some of the students aren't from Dublin, and I have difficulty to understand them. But when I told them can you just slow down and speak slowly, they're really nice. They accept what I say and they do what I say so. (Inbar, F)

B: Do you ever struggle with Irish English?

M: Yes, I do. It's the accent so much. Because I feel that they whisper sometimes. I can't really identify. That's why I was afraid of asking questions. because it's embarrassing you know [to say] sorry what did you ask me? (Malika, F)

Some words you didn't understand, or maybe the accent! You know the accent is kinda difficult sometimes to understand. Maybe they're fast in talking. (Tahu, M)

It's all English but it's new, it's a bit different than the English I know from America. And it's a bit, sometimes it's goes fast (Baha, M)

Irish accent, yes! ... The sound, it's so difficult. (Zara, F)

When looked at from this perspective, the gap between the IMS and the host students grows even wider and deeper if the relationship development on campus among the students is analysed through the prism of ‘culture’ and ‘language’. The Irish accent



emerges as a barrier between the participants and the host students from the perspective of the participants since they associate it with a difficulty in communication and anxiety as opposed to ease of communication and comfort with their co-nationals and international students. Another good illustration of how ease of communication might become a favourable choice for the participants is conveyed by Alia:

Because here in DCU as I told before I'm [sur]rounded by Arabic people because I feel safety and comfort with them. If I didn't understand this lecture, I will ask them. They will translate it for me, or I will translate it to them in Arabic. (Alia, F)

As can be seen in Alia's quotation above, mutual language, Arabic in this case, and culture (sojourning in a different environment) pull co-nationals together on campus. She further explains that she actually gains benefits out of this relationship regarding her workload and responsibilities in the Irish HE system as an international student. Alia's circle of co-nationals does not only offer her safety and comfort but also assists in overcoming the challenges –particularly academic- she comes across in DCU. Inbar (F) further comments on the issue and she argues:

[Friendship with co-nationals] has its benefits, cause sometimes when I don't understand something or miss some lecture or something, it's easier to talk with them and to explain what happened to me. (Inbar, F)

She concurs with Alia regarding how mutual language becomes a favourable tool for communication with the ease and comfort it offers for the members of the group. Thus far the data reveal that students –regardless of their country of origin- are inclined to gravitate towards the culturally similar, which is conceptualised as the Homophily Principle (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954, Rogers and Bhowmik 1970) in detail in Chapter 9. This pattern is caused largely by an ease of communication and mutual culture both at an interpersonal and intergroup level.

### 8.3.5 Religion as a Construct of Ease of Communication and Mutual Culture

At an intergroup level, religion emerges as a significant aspect of mutual culture; therefore, ease of communication, since being Muslim is strongly associated with one's lifestyle (*Islam being a lifestyle 10*). Religion additionally discussed in close relation to 'Nationality' in 5.2. Consequently, when the participants refer to ease of communication with their co-nationals, this comes to represent a linguistically and a religiously harmonious community as well.

Table 8-4: List of codes indicating religion as a construct of ease of communication and mutual culture

<b>Religion as a Construct of Ease of Communication and Mutual Culture</b>
The Interfaith Centre helping socialise (15)
Islam being a lifestyle (10)
The Interfaith Centre being a hub (9)
The Interfaith Centre making campus experience better (5)
The Interfaith Centre facilitating intercultural contact (4)
Islamic society helping socialise (4)
Making friends with Muslims (4)
Socialising with Muslim students (3)
The Interfaith Centre being used for events (1)

As is evident in the codes presented in Table 8-4, the Interfaith Centre has a significant role in facilitating religion as a cultural construct among Muslim students on campus.

To illustrate this point further Lina expresses the Interfaith Centre's pivotal and hub-like role in bringing the Muslim community together:

I know some Saudi girls, I met them in the Interfaith Centre. I am happy that they are always together. I always see Saudi girls in a group together. (Lina, F)

Similarly, Sami states that prayers function as a tool to bring the Muslim community together, and the Interfaith Centre makes this possible on DCU campus.

They [Islamic Society] would organise a day for us to meet there for football maybe, just internationals. I think they announce it after prayers sometimes. (Sami, M)

He additionally emphasises the international student community as a separate group from the host nationals in and around the Interfaith Centre. This points to the role of mutual culture in relationship development, and both religion's and sojourner status' role in perceiving a mutual culture. Motivations for intercultural contact challenge this prevalent attraction particularly from the perspective of international students, since the participants consider and value cross-cultural learning as part of their sojourner experience in the Irish HE. The pull between the international students is also due to the perceived similarity as a result of their sojourner status in the host context. In the case of the host students, however, the participants find them to be largely closed to intercultural contact.

### **8.3.6 Irish Peers' Homogenous Friendship Tendencies**

Closely linked to Homophily Principle, Inbar suggests her Irish peers appear as culturally homogenous groups, and this might become a barrier for intercultural communication on campus in the quotation below:

[F]irst day I came [to the class], the Irish, they just made groups together, they already introduced each other to each other so we

felt like we were a little bit isolated. They didn't really show it but that's how I felt. It's like they always hang out together. When we're in a group or something, they just speak in a group, but when we finish the group meeting it's like they're just 'hi' when we see each other in the class or something but we don't speak really too much. They are not interested. (Inbar, F)

The statement of Inbar is significant in shedding a light on the discussion that took place in above paragraphs and actually illustrating a classroom scenario, where the class is virtually divided into student groups; one of them being the Irish peers of these IMS. According to her, Irish students are quick to form their friendship groups, and these groups that formed by the Irish do not come across as inviting for the culturally different students, namely the international students. She further comments on the 'small talk' as the common type of communication taking place between the IMS and the host students, Irish peers in particular. It should be noted that Inbar is a female student from Saudi Arabia who practices the headscarf as part of her religious belief. This might lead to a question of whether this could stem from her special status as a head-scarved female student in a predominantly non-Muslim campus. Nevertheless, a similar opinion is voiced by another participant who is a male from Oman.

I don't know I feel like the Irish are not too -how do you say, social with foreigners. I don't [know] it's just my opinion. So that's why I don't have that much Irish friends, maybe one or two. and it wouldn't be that strong friendship, maybe work related. So that's it. (Tahu, M)

Tahu's remarks considering the attitudes of Irish students in DCU overlap with what Inbar articulated previously. It is evident from the experiences of IMS that Irish students in DCU, particularly the age group (19-26) that could be considered as peers of the IMS who were interviewed for this project emerge as a culturally homogenous clique group that is formed at early stages of the college life, and this type of homogenous relationship development tends to continue. Zara reflects similar

thoughts to Tahu and Inbar and compares her intercultural relationship development with the international students and the host students in order to explain the possible factors that might lead to such a distance between IMS and the Irish peers.

Actually, I could talk to mostly with international students because the Irish student[s] only want [to be] together with [their] friend[s]. So, we can't contact with an Irish student out of the groups or out of the work. For example, we can't cha[t] with them and he can't relax [when we are] together, I don't know why, but with international student[s], no, I can cha[t] with international student[s] in the restaurant or in the café, and most of my friends [are] international student. (Zara, F)

Zara concurs with the previous statements of participants, which describe Irish students as in favour of rather homogenous groups formed in the axis of nationality and age, whereas the friendship groups that Zara claims to have with international students on campus represent the opposite of their Irish peers; namely culturally mixed. The quotations so far illustrate a barrier between the IMS and their Irish peers largely stemming from what IMS observe as the attitude of the Irish students toward culturally diverse and heterogeneous friendship groups. The participants underpin a level of avoidance among their Irish peers, and they suggest Irish students are mainly pulled toward each other rather than engaging in an outward movement. The participants suggest this kind of culturally inward behaviour on campus is not exclusive to Irish students. An attraction towards the similar appears to pervade all relationship development on campus as is evident in Table 8-5.

Table 8-5: List of codes pointing to lack of contact between IMS and their Irish peers  
on campus

<b>Lack of Contact between IMS and Irish students</b>
Not making Irish friends (9)
Having work-dependent relationship with Irish students (5)
Not having contact with Irish students (3)
Seeing making Irish friends difficult (1)

### **8.3.7 Age as a Facilitating Factor in Intercultural Communication**

Age emerges as a factor facilitating intercultural contact from the interviews. The participants state they feel more comfortable contacting mature (outside the age of 19-26) Irish students on campus, and that mature Irish students are perceived to be more open to intercultural contact with the participants. Whereas participants' Irish peers are perceived to be rather culturally homogenous groups that do not necessarily take an interest in getting engaged in intercultural contact with the IMS outside small talk in the classroom, or group work members of which are assigned by the lecturers.

I think, older people are more open than younger people. You can see that, I think in my experience in the host family and if you go to town for a cup coffee, in the café beside like an older man, she or he would talk to you, communicate with you, share stories or experiences.

So I think I see that communicating with the mature students is much easier than communicating with younger students.

If I had a question about something, from my side I prefer to go to a mature student and ask them. Cause they will help more, they will try their best to help than younger students. (Malik, M)

If they are old, they respect you and they looking for something new and beautiful in their life.

I feel more comfortable to speak or to have a conversation with the old rather than to have like in my age or others or teenager. (Amber, F)

But the old people, the Irish old, no I prefer to speak with them so much. Because give me opportunity to practice my English, to practice how to conversation in a good way. (Zara, F)

Table 8-6: List of codes relating to openness of mature members of the host society to intercultural contact

<b>Openness of Mature Members of the Society to Intercultural Contact</b>
Older people being more open to communication (8)
Age determining host culture's attitude (7)
Younger people being less interested in IC (5)
Associating being young with lack of intercultural awareness (3)
Describing host culture's attitude based on age (2)
Preferring to speak to mature students when seeking help (2)

The data presented in Table 8-6 suggest mature Irish students are perceived to be more open and interested in intercultural communication by the participants. The participants also indicate 'Ease of Communication' with mature Irish students, which is underpinned by 'good English' or 'easy English' and corresponds with 'Colloquial English being a challenge in intercultural communication' explored in 8.3.4. One of the reasons the participants cite to explain why they might perceive mature Irish students to be more open to intercultural contact, particularly on campus, is being helpful towards them besides 'good English'.

## **8.4 Predispositions**

Predisposition is used by Kim (1988, 2001, 2005) in her integrative theory of intercultural communication as a ‘background’ (1988:128) of the individual while entering communication. The data shows evidence for some background factors that impact IMS attitudes towards intercultural contact. These are presented as ‘Openness’, ‘Education and Family’, and ‘Stereotypes’ in Table 8-7:



Table 8-7: List of codes relating to sub-category Predisposition

<b>Predisposition</b>	
<b>Openness</b>	<p>International students being more open to IC than host students (10)</p> <p>Being open to influence and change (9)</p> <p>Feeling inner drives to engage in IC (5)</p> <p>Taking interest in contacting/learning about the host culture (2)</p> <p>Seeing people's interest as opportunity to challenge stereotypes (2)</p> <p>Describing themselves as open-minded (2)</p>
<b>Education &amp; family</b>	<p>Family being supportive of study abroad decision (10)</p> <p>Family members' previous experience with study abroad as motivation for study abroad (10)</p> <p>Family members having HE degree (7)</p> <p>Coming from a multi-cultural background (5)</p> <p>Coming from a multi-cultural background in home country (4)</p> <p>Having study abroad experience before coming to Ireland (1)</p>
<b>Stereotypes</b>	<p>People having stereotypes about Muslim culture (17)</p> <p>People tending to associate negative images with Muslims/Islam (17)</p> <p>Being asked stereotypical questions (9)</p> <p>Media influencing the way people think about Muslims (5)</p> <p>People asking stereotypical questions about their religion and nationality (4)</p> <p>Muslims being associated with negative images (4)</p> <p>International students being on the black list (3)</p> <p>Having stereotypes about the host culture (2)</p> <p>Other students being critics of their culture/religion/nationality (2)</p> <p>Muslims having to justify their actions (1)</p>

A concept that is closely related to the notion of learning emerging from the data is the participants' reported 'openness' toward intercultural contact. Openness (interest) is discussed as preparedness for change as part of 'predispositions' in Kim's work (1989, 2005). In that regard, the data evidently shows similarity with and relation to the existing intercultural contact literature. The notion is referred to as 'openness' and 'interest' due to the fact that this project uses a grounded theory approach for data collection and analysis. For this reason, the analysis and coding have to stay as close to the data as possible. In other words, the researcher adopts the participants' conceptualisations in presenting the data analysis and findings rather than rendering the emerging notions and themes into the literature conceptualisations. The links with the existing theories, however, as aforementioned, will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 9.

#### **8.4.1 Openness**

Openness and interest were highlighted by the participants throughout the interviews as significant factors for an individual to have in order to get involved in intercultural contact. The significance of openness was salient particularly in reference to their expectations from study abroad since the participants stated they considered study abroad experience to be beyond education.

I would expect from HE. Yeah! To get higher education, to learn more, to explore stuff that I don't know about. Of course, help me develop myself, my personality, my involvement, like communication with people. (Malik, M)

The benefit is studying and doing my bachelor, [but] not only this as well, but there are the friends, nationalities. Chinese, Phillipine people, not only the certificate. Because I can get any certificate from my country as well, but I can't get, I will not be able to get different nationalities, different thinking, different people. (Farah, Table 8-8F)

My idea is always go out and maybe come back ameliorate your situation or your town from this point, increase the knowledge and the notions of the other parts. (Malika, F)

I think maybe if I stayed in Oman, I could not get the experience and the knowledge I had now. (Sami, M)

The notion of openness and interest additionally emerge as a favourable push factor for intercultural contact among host students too from the perspective of IMS. To put it in other words, the data does not only suggest that the more open IMS are toward intercultural contact, the more engagement took place; it also suggests the same correlation for host students and other international students. IMS implied throughout the interviews that they found international students to be more open to intercultural contact, whereas the host students are rather *closed* groups that do not necessarily show a tendency toward culturally mixed friendships as presented in Table 8-8.

Table 8-8: List of codes comparing the host students' and international students' openness toward intercultural contact.

Host students	International students
Host students not taking interest in learning about/contacting the guest culture (11)	International students being more open to intercultural contact than the host students (9)
Host students not being open to intercultural contact (9)	International students being easier to communicate with (9)
	International students sticking together (6)
	Socialising mostly with international students (2)
	Feeling closer to other international students (1)
	Feeling more comfortable speaking English among international students (1)
	Seeing international students as family in Ireland (1)

This is a significant finding since it suggests intercultural contact on campus does not always revolve around the axis of nationality, religion or language as the major constituents of culture. The impact of sojourner identity as explored in 5.5 could be observed in the development of intercultural relationships among international students in this chapter. Through sojourner identity, culture is conceptualised around the perceived similarities rather than observable, statistical and demographic differences. Students feel pulled towards perceived similarities, which then in this section could be operationalised as a 'mutual openness' (mutual interest) in getting engaged in intercultural contact. This argument is, however, not to reject the idea that

students also feel gravitated towards the objectively, observable and demographically similar (mutual culture). On the contrary, this argument offers a new understanding of the relationship development on campus from the lens of IMS, which is dominated by an idea of the culture consisting not only of shared values, history, language, ethnicity, religion, but also a level of perceived mutuality as a result of a sojourner identity.

### **8.4.2 Education and Family**

Participants' families and their previous education emerge as part of predisposition that positively affects intercultural contact on campus. That is, if a member of the family previously studied abroad, has a positive attitude towards diversity and different cultures, or if previous education encourages a multi-cultural outlook. Additionally, the family support provides a strong impetus to study abroad:

My dad finished his Master's degree in the UK. So, I learnt from his experience before I came here. (Malik, M)

I just wanted to study abroad, and my dad kept on telling me to study abroad because it's like much better. Yeah, that's why I chose. (Farah, F)

B: Has anyone recommended you Ireland?

F: Actually, my dad studied abroad, but he studied in America so I've always wanted be outside. I don't want to study inside

B: So, you have someone in the family...

F: And even my cousin is studying abroad as well. and some of my friends and people I know. (Fatima, F)

He [father] studied in UK, and he was happy with that. That's why he encouraged me. Also, probably because my friends wanted to study abroad as well. (Layla, F)

My father had studied Italian in Egypt and he won a course in Italy. So he went there alone before. (Malika, F)

First of all my sister had scholarship ... she got accepted from DCU before I came here. (Baha, M)

My uncle and my dad came to England the same time for PhD, but my dad decided to go back home but my uncle stayed so. (Nawrin, F)

As is evident from the quotations, IMS openness towards intercultural contact is partly motivated by their family & education. This is a compelling finding since it reiterates the significance of the context an individual is raised in order to value diversity and intercultural contact. It is also important to realise home country dependent factors such as religion, education, family are not only effective cultural carriers for Islamic values but also global. Participants' families' positive impact on their attitudes toward intercultural contact additionally resonate with the discussion of sojourner identity as well as their Muslim identity that took place in Chapter 5. This interplay indicates a multi-layered and fluid identity type for IMS, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

### **8.4.3 Stereotypes Regarding Muslims**

Negative perceptions regarding participants' Muslim identity was explored previously in 6.5. However as discussed, compared with contexts in Europe and elsewhere, racism did not emerge as a strong topic of discussion. The participants only pointed to teenage behaviour outside campus, which they considered as a negative incident based on their identity and referred otherwise to Ireland as a welcoming and friendly host country (see 6.3) In close relation to this prevalent perception among the host society regarding Muslims, stereotypes among non-Muslim students on campus regarding the participants' religious identity emerge as part of the dispositions prior to intercultural contact.

Table 8-9: List of codes pointing to existence of stereotypes regarding Muslim identity

<b>List of codes relating to ‘Stereotype’</b>
People having stereotypes about Muslim culture (17)
People tending to associate negative images with Muslims/Islam (17)
Being asked stereotypical questions (9)
People asking stereotypical questions about their religion or nationality (4)

Stereotypes regarding participants’ religious identity, as presented in Table 8-9, do not necessarily stop students engaging with each other through various ways such as timetable or group work. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these stereotypes might have an impact on the depth and breadth of the relationship development (see 9.3.4 Social Identity Theory, 9.7 Contact Hypothesis). Additionally, the stereotypes contribute to the forming of the Onion model of contact based on student groups on campus as presented in Table 8-1, since when coupled with other factors such as culture distance and homophily, stereotypes significantly impede intercultural contact among student groups located on the remote ends of the model.

The language college or centre I was studying, you know, you meet different people there and they ask you different questions about you background and your culture and religion. Cause you know they hear about these stereotypes and they will ask about what is going on, is it real or is it not. (Malik, M)

I think there is lot of people is confused about Islam, because they say this one [is] Muslim, why [does] he do that, and they [Muslims] have to answer him. Islam is not that person. If anyone make something good, okay that [is] Islam, if anyone make something bad, that [is] not Islam. That's because he [is] a bad Muslim, like any religion. You can find somebody good, somebody bad. (Musa, M)

There is a difference obviously whether people, you know the way they dress, they would ask me. They confuse a lot Oman with Saudi Arabia. You know it's okay back in my country [Oman] if you don't

want to wear a headscarf. It's fine. But they think I should, it is compulsory and I am forced. You know they confuse a lot of things. (Fatima, F)

When I met other students, Irish or from other country, they always ask us question about my country, my culture or my religion, or lots of questions. I think it's a really good opportunity to introduce them to, to get them healthy information about our culture. So, I think that's the important thing for me, I think to get them right information about us. (Inbar, F)

She was like we heard a lot about Islam. She said we heard about Saudi Arabia and how they cut their arms and these stuff which is all wrong ideas in their head. So, I talked to her, I explained to her, and she said now I see, I understand. Yeah, I would say most of the people here or any European country, non-Muslim countries, they do have the ideas in their head. They just judge us without knowing us. (Lina, F)

The quotes clearly point to pre-conceptions regarding Islam as a religion and what it entails for Muslims, regardless of their gender, in terms of their practices and values. Interestingly, stereotypes held by the non-Muslim against Muslim people find resonance in an anti-western and racial rhetoric among the participants as well.

I never ask people about their religion and why you do that in your religion. you drink alcohol, you have relation with different women, I never ask that! Because it's not my business to ask them! (Sada, F)

People always told me that Western people are too much racist. (Tahu, M)

People put us in different worlds. They say oh Muslims, they don't say us or our people. (Nawrin, F)

Similar to non-Muslim students' prejudice or pre-conceived ideas regarding Muslims, the participants also articulate their stereotypical expectations from non-Muslim individuals and societies. It is particularly evident in Tahu's comments when he states his idea of 'western people' has been shaped to be 'racist' as a result of what he has been exposed by other sources. This, however, does not discourage the participants from engaging in intercultural contact. On the contrary 'cultural ambassador role'



emerges from the data as a motivation for intercultural contact in close relation to the stereotypes held by non-Muslims regarding Muslim identity and values.

## **8.5 Representing Culture (Cultural Ambassador)**

Representing culture, or in other words, being a cultural ambassador in the new environment emerge as a push for engaging in intercultural contact for IMS. Being seen as cultural ambassadors is in close relation to ‘Stereotypes’ that were discussed in section 8.4.3. This might be due to the fact that Muslims draw attention from international media, and is a topic of both academic and political debates.

In recent years, attention has grown even larger with the civil war in Syria and what followed as the mass movement of Syrian citizens fleeing from war-torn cities towards neighbouring countries and the EU. It is important to note that the interviews took place between Autumn 2014 and Spring 2015, therefore before Summer 2015, which witnessed the largest ever flow of refugees from predominantly Muslim cultures seeking asylum in Europe. Hence, the topic was not discussed during data collection. However, the media attention and coverage had been escalating as a result of the instability in the region at the time of the interviews. Students also made references to the discourse particularly in media and how the current media discourse on Muslims can cause to create negative images, which is evident in Musa’s (M) quotation:

I think that because media now in the world [is] against Islam, because they are looking for something about Islam, very small but media make it very big. That's why people sometimes hate Islam, didn't like Islam because [of] the media. (Musa, M)

Musa’s remarks here are closely associated with the section ‘6.5 Negative Perceptions of Muslims in the Host Society’, as well as Chapter 4 where participants’ cultural identity was explored. It is clear, even when looked at from different perspectives, that

IMS are regarded as a homogenous group by the media, and media's approach has a certain level of impact on people's perceptions outside Muslim geographies, which encourage people to see Muslims as a homogenous entity.

The representation of Muslims in the media and its effects on people's thoughts and attitudes toward Muslims amalgamate into each other on campus and lead to maintenance of a grander Muslim identity stereotypes –if not prejudice- which consequently leads to strengthening of ethnic/cultural identity among IMS in an environment, where they are regarded as representatives of a particular culture. This is clearly illustrated in Diya's quotation:

You know when you're from different cultures, especially if you're Muslim, sometimes you face some questions about our culture, your religion, so you need to be wise how you [can] deal with these questions. (Diya, M)

The issue Diya addresses in the quotation was discussed in greater detail in 5.4. as 'Negative Perceptions' regarding Muslims. Here, Diya's emphasis on '*especially* Muslims' point to a level of curiosity among host nationals or non-Muslim students towards Muslim communities and their way of life. This curiosity among students during intercultural encounters puts the IMS in a cultural ambassador position, which encourages maintaining and strengthening cultural identity besides Islam's nature and requirements from its believers as previously discussed in 5.3.1, 5.3.3. Additionally, the Interfaith Centre encourages Muslims to socialise together, consequently increasing their visibility on campus as an in-group. In other words, the participants maintain their religious identity, in particular, in new environments, which provides a level of visibility in terms of what they do as a community. This couples with the media's inclination to present Muslims as a rather homogenous group, and leads the members of the new environments to perceive them as members of a larger culture.

Consequently, non-Muslims approach Muslim students as members of a larger religious group rather than as an individual first. Fatima illustrates this point in her quotation below:

B: Do you feel like you are representing something?

F: Yeah sometimes I feel like that because usually it is a basic human instinct to judge you based on your religion; so, if you're gonna do something, they will be like, all Muslims do that, but it really depends on the person, but I feel like I represent my country and my religion. When they ask the basic stuff about my religion and they would be shy like 'sorry'... Once I start explaining stuff they do ask a bit more but not that deep unless we're really close and stuff. (Fatima, F)

It is evident in Fatima's reflections on how she is perceived during intercultural contact; as a cultural ambassador who is expected to provide answers and explanations to questions. The data suggests the majority of the participants -22 out of 23 to be precise- internalise this as one of their roles and responsibilities during relationship development on campus, particularly when it is intercultural. Fatima further suggests coping with this volume of inquisitiveness around her identity that occurs during intercultural encounters actually improves her intercultural communication skills.

F: You'd tolerate people more. sometimes you think you're open-minded and you see someone that's from a different culture, different religion, and that would you know kinda criticise your religion. You might be intolerant to that, and you would feel really angry or whatever. But since you actually know their confusions, you know how to deal with these things. Especially if you're studying abroad you are exposed to other nationalities, other cultures, other religions. So it really helps you. Even in terms of socialising, communicating, it makes you a much more sociable person.

B: When you said open-minded, what you meant by that?

F: You are entitled to what you believe in but you can actually tolerate other people's opinions and whatever even it's against your religion or whatever. You'd be tolerant to that. You'd be able to explain your opinion and if there's something actually clash, you just respect each other, not attack. (Fatima, F)

With regards to how being perceived as representative of a particular cultural group or cultural ambassador could become a push for IMS to engage more in intercultural contact, the participants emphasise the fact that they aim to challenge the perceived negativity around their culture and religious identity, which is also strongly related to their perception of Islam that is proposed to be ‘peace & love’ by the participants as discussed in Chapter 5.

Most of them they're just curious, but I met some that they like asking questions, but I feel like they were criticising something like my country, my religion or so, but just try to give them the right information.” (Inbar, F)

B: So you feel you are representing Islam as well?

M: Yes, I mean I have to explain about Islam.” (Musa, M)

D: I understand also maybe for some students, this is their first experience with people from Saudi Arabia maybe from the Middle East or Muslim people, so it's normal, a new experience maybe you'll have some difficulties with. Then you understand maybe I have a wrong idea or something, like this [is] after a while when you communicate with them [with non-Muslims].

B: How does that make you feel?

D: For us it's a big responsibility ... I think we are a representative of our religion and our culture, so you need to try to be a good example, to give a good example of your religion, your culture. Specially nowadays you know the international media, the movies, they represent a very bad image about Muslims in general, and that I think [it] influence[s] the people in the West, in Europe, in [the] USA. I think we are as Muslims here, when people see how we deal with people, how we communicate with them, we'll give an idea about if that's right or wrong or something like this you know, so you need to take it seriously and to be careful.” (Diya, M)

This is [the] reason [why] I like it, because it's a challenge and you can recognise when we speak with them [non-muslim students] something start[s] to change. Some of them, they told us; ‘I used to, when I watched the movies and these things, I had this strange idea about you, but when I met you and started to

...speak with you and [get] to know about you more I was like surprised, you know, cause I saw something different'. (Diya, M)

As is evident in participants' quotations above, it is a rather common situation for them to be regarded as cultural ambassadors, particularly during intercultural contact as part of their study abroad experience. This does not necessarily pose a threat to relationship development, nevertheless, it is substantially underpinned by pre-conceived ideas regarding Muslims as a community, which might affect the quality and content of contact.

A good example of how these kinds of identity-based questions might impact the content of the dialogues between the IMS and the other students are evident in Alia's remarks:

B: Do you also feel people ask you questions about you and what your culture is?

A: Yeah of course, loads in the school! they ask where I am from? From Saudi Arabia, okay so they start asking about religion, okay 'why do you put this scarf?'. I tell them it's religion thing, he [then asks] 'why?'. In some of the classes, there were girls [that] cover their faces, [in] other [classes] they don't, so [non-Muslim students] come and ask why she cover[s] her face and you don't. [That is] sometimes okay, one time a person ask[s] me [it is] okay for me. I don't cover my face in here or in my country, so he ask[s] me 'do you like it?'. I didn't answer him, and he told me 'you don't want to answer?'. No I don't want to answer, because I think he was impolite to ask if you know that. I am not gonna answer you.

B: How does this make you feel?

A: Sometimes frustrated. One time there was this boy, he was eighteen or nineteen, he was in the school and he was like 'typically Arabic men have four wives'. I told him no, that is a stereotype that we have four wives. Okay, a lot of people are speaking about four wives, but we don't have that. Okay, it happened but it [is] rarely to find [a] man with four wives. Two... it happens, I am not saying it's not happen[ing], and a guy asked me 'why do you say it is not', because it didn't happen! Sometimes I don't answer. One time was enough of these questions, and some other person ask[s] 'why do you put this

headscarf?', [I said] I don't know... sometimes you [are] fed up and you don't want to answer.

B: Would you feel female students' experiences might be different from males then?

A: Yeah of course! Because from my headscarf they know we are Muslim. but the men, no they don't know!" (Alia, F)

The participant Alia is apparently easily recognisable for her religious identity in particular. Consequently, she is easily perceived as a cultural ambassador. However, as the quotation illustrates, she is not necessarily happy with this kind of responsibility at all times. Another good example of how pre-conceived ideas and questions regarding Muslims might dominate the early stages of relationship development in the experience of IMS is suggested by Diya, where he explains that non-Muslim students generally start with an 'idea' in their mind about Muslims. However, this could be prone to change depending on the effort put in by the Muslim student in order to fix this negative image as well as the chemistry between the two people.

I have an actually an example of this. At the beginning, he was living with someone from Korea for example and he used to have this bad idea about Muslims. I don't know how but they were living together. At the beginning, they didn't know each other so he was afraid from friend, my Saudi friend. he didn't want to speak with him, and didn't want I mean try to stay away, you know because they [have] strange ideas about Muslims. But [after] a while, when they started communicating with each other, they became very close friends, and they go out with each other, they eat together, they travel together, so you know this is [happening at] just the beginning you know. When you don't know someone, it's a normal feeling towards the stranger people for you, and new people that we have never communicated before. (Diya, M)

Evidently, students from both genders receive identity-based questions in the host context, which encourage the cultural ambassador role.

## 8.6 Learning as a Motivation for Intercultural Contact

One of the straightforward questions that were incorporated into the interview guide was *'What do you think is the benefit of intercultural contact?'* and it was aimed at encouraging the participants to reflect on the positive aspects of their intercultural communication experiences in DCU. In addressing this question, the participants strongly suggested 'learning' as both their motivation to get engaged in intercultural contact, and the benefit it provides for them. It is linked to 'stereotypes' and 'cultural ambassador role' that was discussed in the sections above since if there are both pre-conceived ideas and communication taking place, this results in new learnings. This is additionally a compelling outcome in many ways. First, the students are in a learner position in the host institution, and as the data unveil, this learner identity does not stop at the classroom door. In other words, IMS take learning outside the academic realm, the classrooms and labs, and continue this in extra-curricular ways such as intercultural contact with the hosts or other international students. Second, it strongly relates to 'openness' as well, since learning indicates an intention to unveil the unknown or challenge the degenerated piece of information. Another aspect of learning links to IMS' 'Expectations & Objectives' from the higher education and study abroad (5.5.1), which also includes personal and professional development. This, as well, offers a holistic approach towards learning –in and outside the class– from the perspective of the participants. Malik suggests a straightforward relationship between intercultural contact and learning.

B: What would motivate you to make international/intercultural friends?

M: I think maybe learning from other culture? Meeting new people. Making more friends.

B: Okay, what do you think about the benefits of making such friendships?

M: Of course you learn from them, different things. (Malik, M)

Malik here states he is encouraged to get involved in intercultural contact with the primary purpose of learning about new cultures. According to him, learning is not only the push factor for getting engaged in intercultural contact, but it also is the outcome of such contact, which he considers to be valuable. His thoughts regarding intercultural contact point to a rather positive attitude, which might then positively impact on the level of intercultural contact he is involved in on campus. Learning related positive reflections on the benefits of intercultural contact might additionally function as a strong factor to outweigh the negative effects of ‘culture distance’ in particular if the aim is to close the gap between cultures through intercultural contact. At this point, Lina offers a compelling perspective on how intercultural contact could function as a vehicle to exchange information between the cultures and how valuable that is to expand one’s knowledge.

[I]t is very interesting to have a friend who speak[s] a language different to your own language and he has like idea[s] different to you. If we sit and talk and shar[e] ideas so that's [a] good thing for everyone because I'm coming from a different country and she is coming from [an]other country. That mean[s] our way of growing is different. We gr[ew] in different atmospheres so we have different ideas and way[s] to see things. When we sit and talk [about] thing[s] I'm giving a completely different opinion to her opinion, and that's very good because we need this. We need to have conversations where all the ideas [are] different. It is good for our knowledge, our ideas and we can see the same problem from different ways. The way how they think is different to mine so. That's very good, it increase[s] my knowledge of things. (Lina, F)

Here Lina openly expresses her positive thoughts regarding intercultural contact when she states it serves the purpose of expanding one’s knowledge through appreciation of different voices. She remarks this kind of cultural exchange triggers and encourages



learning, which then contributes to her personal development and intellectual capacity. Nonetheless, her tendency to essentialise cultures is evident in her description of ‘the other’. She makes strong relationships between the individual and their upbringing, which she considers to be under the influence of the individual’s environment<sup>73</sup>. This also suggests a link with the home country factors discussed under culture and identity in Chapter 5, where the participants strongly related to their nationality, religion and family in terms of how they defined themselves. A similar kind of essentialising is also apparent in Inbar’s remarks when she reflects on what intercultural contact means to her.

I think it's really interesting to know how other people live, how other countries lives you know, what's their culture... For me I'm always curious about these things, about other nationalities. So I think it's really good you know how people think, how people act, how people treat each other you know. (Inbar, F)

Inbar, like her peers Malik and Lina, expresses a positive attitude towards intercultural contact, which she associates with learning when she highlights her interest in expanding her repertoire about the cultures of the world. However, again in a similar vein with her peers, she –whether consciously or unconsciously- describes ‘culture’ as a large and homogenous system with members representing this broader identity. In the field of intercultural studies, both collective (Hofstede 1999, Berry 2005) and individual factors (Kim 2005, Weinreich 2009, Holliday 2010) are considered valuable in examining intercultural contact. A detailed discussion of the individual versus the collective in examining intercultural contact would be beyond the scope of this chapter (see Chapter 9). Nevertheless, it is important to note here that IMS employ

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<sup>73</sup> Even though Lina only refers to a broad word such as ‘atmosphere’ and does not specify what the elements of this atmosphere is, the researcher here used the option of incorporating her interpretation into it and conceptualised it as the environment one grows up in which is constituted by elements such as nationality, religion, culture, ethnicity, family, etc.

a rather collective approach towards defining culture when they associate it with learning since they state it helps expand one's knowledge about other 'cultures'. However, it is their individual motivation, which is conceptualised 'learning' here, that pushes them towards engaging in intercultural contact. Conversely, Sahar mentions the individual in her remarks about how intercultural contact is strongly associated with learning.

You know more, you get more wis[e], you discover the world. The world is made of different languages, different cultures, different nationalities, everything is different in the world. Every person is different than the other, not typical. So while discovering the nationalities, you discover everything. (Sahar, F)

Here, even though Sahar begins expressing her thoughts in the axis of nationalities or languages, both of which are collective phenomenon, she emphasises the fact that while exploring new cultures, she, in fact, explore individuals. This indicates an understanding of intercultural contact both as a collective and an individual phenomenon. Nevertheless, the perception of culture as a collective phenomenon and consequently intercultural contact as a meaningful exchange between the two cultures still pervade the data.

### **8.6.1 Length of Stay and Work Load**

Two relatively effective factors which emerged from the data in relation to contact between students on campus are the length of stay and workload of international students in a broader, IMS in a narrower sense. The length of stay and workload did not come across as strong factors as culture distance or predispositions during the interviews; however, it is useful to note these two factors might impact on the relationship development in a negative way particularly on campus. to illustrate this

point better, Tahu points to the work dependent and temporary nature of friendships on campus below:

It wouldn't be that strong friendship. Maybe work related. So that's it. (Tahu, M)

Amber additionally emphasises the temporary nature of relationships that is based on the work she has to complete with her classmates or group members:

If you ask me about group or friend because we have a work together I wouldn't mind who I work with. Because when I finish the work I finish the relation. (Amber, F)

It is clear from the participant quotations that IMS tend to see contact facilitated through curriculum on campus as temporary and work dependent, therefore, this type of relationship development could be prone to discontinuance. Nevertheless, this does not negate the positive impact of interventions as part of the curriculum such as group work/assignments as powerful tools to facilitate intercultural contact.

## **8.7 Timetable and Group-Work Activities to Facilitate Intercultural Communication on Campus**

During the interviews the participants suggested that intercultural contact was not taking place solely through their individual efforts; institutional interventions such as timetables that bring culturally diverse student groups together under the umbrella of courses as put in Table 8-10.

Table 8-10 List of codes relating to role of timetable and group-work activities in fostering intercultural engagement

<b>Role of Timetable and Group-work in Intercultural Contact</b>
Group work facilitating intercultural contact (10)
Making friends with classmates (5)
Seeing group work as a temporary relation (1)

Group projects as part of the curriculum require an exchange of information between students and encourage them to spend a certain amount of time together as a team in order to achieve the results. Even though interventions are not organic relationships, assigning students the same timetable or the same study group creates an artificial environment that has the potential to facilitate intercultural contact. This offers a significant aspect of relationship development on campus. Following the same timetable under the grand blanket of a course resembles the notion of previously discussed cultural groups on campus and the pull effect that takes place once the perceived similarities start to increase within these so-called cultural groups. Being registered into the same programme, attending the same classes, having the same assignments and responsibilities becomes a 'culture' these students mutually participate in and a 'language' they mutually speak. In other words, when looked at from the paradigm of 'mutual culture', timetable and group work create the artificial cultural pull zone underpinned by shared responsibilities and time.

[W]e need each other because we have a lot of assignments, group works so [we are] always in touch with [each] other, which is good. (Lina, F)

As Lina (F) puts clearly puts forward in the above quotation, being in touch with the classmates becomes a necessity as a result of shared responsibilities and common

goals, which in this case could be considered as achieving the passing grade for the course. This necessity of staying in touch brings forth a dynamic and longitudinal relationship development type among the students that are registered in the same class.

You know sometimes you have to do an assignment with group and individual so I start to know my classmates. (Baha, M)

Baha comments that group projects might actually initiate the relationship development among the classmates. Therefore, having the same timetable, and being in the same class clearly creates the environment in which the students might have the opportunity to get engaged in communication. Nonetheless, it does not necessarily predict the communication among classmates. The rather homogeneous clique groups on campus were discussed previously in this chapter, where the participants stated their relationship with particularly host students did often not go beyond small talk (i.e. greetings) organically. Albeit, with the incorporation of group projects, it becomes imperative for students to engage in communication with each other, which in this case would be work/course dependent.

I had like school projects in second year more than first year so I had to socialise with Irish people more, had to, maybe say out of the project or the studying area, yeah that was good. (Malik, M)

I don't have that much Irish friends, maybe one or two, and it wouldn't be that strong friendship, maybe work related so that's it. (Tahu, M)

Evidently, the school projects intervene in the relationship development process on campus and indeed push host and international students to engage in communication. However, it is also apparent in the participants' quotations that the communication encouraged by the school projects develops on the axis of curriculum, and is rather work dependent; therefore, time bound. Amane (F) points to the temporary nature of curriculum-dependent friendships on campus:

If you ask me about group or friend because we have a work together I wouldn't mind who I work with, because when I finish the work I finish the relation. (Amane, F)

She regards group work as a temporary relationship with an expiry date. According to her, a group work relationship needs to be maintained until the assigned activity is complete, and the communication ceases once the objective is achieved. She additionally emphasises the fact that she does not mind who she works with as part of a group assignment since the relationship does not go beyond completing the task from her perspective.

This kind of intercultural communication, which is achieved through interventions such as group assignments as part of the curriculum, clearly offers a controversial tool in order to facilitate communication in culturally diverse classrooms. It evidently assists both the institution and the IMS in creating the environment for the communication to take place, nevertheless, its mandatory and temporary nature becomes inadequate in supporting and maintaining meaningful intercultural communication between the parties. Having said this, curriculum emerges as a factor that increases the prospect of relationship development on campus, particularly intercultural. One important point to highlight here is that mono-cultural friendship groups are already identified as a common phenomenon on campus due to a number of factors such as mutual culture, ease of communication, age. When linked to 'ease of communication', the pull between the IMS is inevitable when it comes to group work as well. Therefore, it is essential that HE institutions adopt an internationalised outlook not only for recruiting international students, but also for facilitating communication between and across the cultures and incorporate this outlook into both curriculum and the facilities on campus.

DCU thus far has emerged as a multi-cultural campus with a positive climate for cultural diversity, yet with an academic curriculum that is able to facilitate temporary intercultural contact through tools such as timetable, class/lab, and student group assignments. It is also identified that having a diverse body of students might not always be a sufficient means for intercultural contact to take place, since some lecturers might opt to leave the study group formation to students rather than dictating a list, and this might result in mono-cultural study groups. Alternatively, not all courses and classes may not have the same level of cultural diversity, and this might again lead to formations of culturally homogenous student groups for projects. A good illustration of this point is suggested by Alia (F) in her statement:

[I]t is easier to contact with Arabic [students]. If I [can] choose, I, of course choose [to work with] Arabic, it is easier, if the lecturer pick[s], it's okay, I'll contact [the other students]. (Alia, F)

She summarises the dominance of perceived mutual culture regarding relationship development among students on a culturally diverse campus, as well as the role of institutional interventions to challenge this. Even though organic communication taking place between and across cultures is favourable as discussed in section 8.2 that reviewed IMS openness to and interest in the intercultural interactions, it is imperative for HE institutions to support intercultural contact pedagogically, and in extra-curricular activities as well, if the aim is to offer international education to educate global citizens.

## **8.8 Reflections**

It emerged during the interviews that participants also reflect on the relationship development, particularly intercultural contact on campus following their experiences. This is a significant finding since as argued in 2.2.1 internationalisation of higher

education should go beyond the 'cash cow' approach while recruiting international students, and encourage an environment that facilitates meaningful transformations and developments in students' life. '*Seeing study abroad beyond education purposes only* (36)' emerges as the most densely populated code in the data. To unfold this notion, participant quotations are presented below without the researcher's interruption to respect the flow of their reflections. A discussion will follow afterwards.

It's necessary because you need to approach different minds, not just only from your background, not just only from Irish people, and also because you can learn a lot from them and they can learn a lot from you. And I think it's necessary because you know it gives you an idea of how you want to prospect your life, the way they work, how they work in Italy or in your own town, so how can you improve. My idea is always go out and maybe come back ameliorate your situation or your town from this point, increase the knowledge and the notions of the other parts [of the world]. That doesn't mean that they are better than us or we are better than them, just that we need that progress about education. (Malika, F)

Coming to Ireland was an opportunity for me to get to know, like even though Saudi Arabia is very close us, I had not get the opportunity to get to know Saudi people and other[s] in Oman. But away, here in Ireland, I had the opportunity to make friends with Saudi students. And even we had one friend in the foundation course. She was Japanese so I get to know the Japanese people and the culture, and how to treat people according to their thoughts and personalities, cultures. Because Asian people are different from European people, different from Arab people so. It's expanding my horizon. And also you know the way you have to take responsibilities. Like at home you would be depending on your family. For example, like basic stuff like cooking, washing your clothes and going to the grocery, going to the bank to do things. So here you have to do everything by yourself. Take the transportations, travel by yourself, cook for yourself, to organise your time between. I'm living in an apartment so we have to, for example, every week to clean the apartment so that's a good way, a good thing to learn here. I think this was maybe a turning point in my life. I think maybe if I stayed in Oman, I could not get the experience and the knowledge I had now. (Sami, M)

Being abroad from my country actually changed me. My mother used to tell me that I was naughty boy actually. I wasn't afraid to do anything, experience anything. when I came here, it's like I became more mature. (Tahu, M)



For myself, I think going to study abroad is not just for education purposes. There are other purposes. For example, like the knowledge you get from socialising, and with other people. To be honest, I think when you, if you go abroad to study, graduate and come back just [with] a paper, you have a degree, you haven't done enough. (Malik, M)

I think the benefit I get from the HE, the degree and master and they speak English very well and they take it like an experience, a new experience in my life. (Zara, F)

When you come out of a developing country, even though it is secular and everything, ideas and mentalities are still to be broadened. There is so many things and only education can shape that. You'll be able to think out of the box if you're educated. So I think that's why all the students should go abroad and see cultures outside. So they'll have more acceptance you know. They'll have better mentality that's why I think the fact that I'm abroad now. Whenever I go back home I tell my friends this is this, you know share stories and everything so that they'll learn from me as well. Like experience, learning, spreading the new knowledge and everything I think. (Nawrin, F)

HE mean that it's broadening your world, like you're gonna learn something you haven't learnt before. I had students from various backgrounds, you get to meet different people you know. (Nawrin, F)

As is evident in the quotations, the participants reflect on their study abroad experiences, which include contact with different cultures, responsibilities they take as part of living away from home, and self-development. This is in line with the global citizen argument that was discussed as part of aims of internationalization in Chapter 5. The data supports the notion that global citizenship and intercultural communication competence are essential components and objectives of internationalization in higher education from the perspective of IMS.

## **8.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter investigated relationship development from the perspective of IMS. It identified student groups on campus, the two types of contact on campus (i.e. mono-cultural and intercultural), and the factors that impact types of relationship

development among these student groups and interpersonally. The key findings from the chapter are presented below:

- Relationship development is dependent on a set of both student-specific and context- specific factors
- Relationship development is both mono-cultural and intercultural
- Mono-cultural contact is largely predicted by similarity and distinction
- Intercultural contact is positively associated with expectations from and objectives of study abroad
- Participants' religious identity impacts on the type and nature of the contact on campus
- Cultural diversity does not automatically lead to intercultural contact
- All kind of relationship development on campus is a transformative and reflexive process.

The next chapter will focus on the discussion of findings in relation to grounded theory and relevant theories existing in the literature.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

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### 9.1 Introduction

Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 presented the findings of this research under four category headings: ‘IMS’ Perceptions of Identity & Culture’; ‘IMS’ Perceptions of the Host Society’; ‘IMS’ Perceptions of the Host Institution’; and ‘IMS’ Perceptions of Relationship Development on Campus’ respectively. The findings have been generated through a grounded theory data collection and analysis approach; that is, grounded in the empirical data generated through participants’ reflections on their experiences. Given the scope of the research questions, the findings reflect a comprehensive examination of IMS’ sojourner experience in Irish society and HE. The current chapter serves two purposes:

- to review the findings in order to draw a holistic picture of the outcomes of this research, and discuss how they relate to the research questions central to this study
- to explore how the research findings relate to existing theories and empirical work in the literature.

In doing so, the chapter will allow me to situate the findings in theoretical perspectives, as well as to explore how they could be put into practice for future research. The overall review of findings will be achieved through a discussion of key findings emerging from this project. Following this, a theoretical discussion will take place with respect to the themes examined in the Findings chapters.

## 9.2 Presentation of the Key Findings and the Grounded Theory Model

The questions central to this study, together with the aims & objectives, were presented in 4.2. They are listed here as follows:

- *What are the experiences of international Muslim students (undergraduate & masters) in an Irish university (Dublin City University, Glasnevin Campus)?*
- *What factors impact upon international Muslim students' experiences in the host society and the host institution?*
- *Does religious identity (i.e. being Muslim) have a pertinent impact on the international student experience?*
- *What could IMS' experiences offer internationalisation studies in higher education?*

The data analysis identifies that IMS' experiences can be interpreted through three major domains. These are: 'Identity' which corresponds to Chapter 5, 'Environment' which corresponds to Chapters 6 and 7, and 'Contact' which corresponds to Chapter 8. The findings are presented in Table 9-1.

Table 9-1: Experiences of IMS in an Irish University

<b>IMS' Experiences in an Irish university (DCU)</b>	
<b>Identity</b>	Participants have multi-dimensional identities which are informed by various background factors, and enacted through personal interpretation.
<b>Environment</b>	<p>The environment (host) is defined by degrees of receptivity and distance.</p> <p><b>Institutional support creates a positive climate for accommodation of diversity; however, a multicultural campus does not automatically lead to intercultural contact.</b></p>
<b>Contact</b>	<p>Contact is influenced by identity and environment.</p> <p>Intercultural contact facilitates fulfilment of expectations from and objectives of study abroad.</p>

In Table 9-2, the relevant theories that were identified in the literature following the data analysis are presented. The theories correspond with the category they are listed under.

Table 9-2: List of Relevant Theories in the Related Literature

<b>Relevant theories in the literature</b>	
<b>Identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1988)</li> <li>• Bourdieu's Cultural Capital (1977)</li> <li>• The Concept of <i>Ummah</i> (Deny 1975, Mandaville 2001, Saunder 2008, Archer 2009).</li> </ul>
<b>Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture Distance (Babiker et al 1980, Ward et al 1990, 2001, Pearson-Evans 2000, 2006)</li> <li>• Host Receptivity (Kim 1988, 2005)</li> <li>• Institutional Completeness (Breton 1964)</li> <li>• Multiculturalism – Interculturalism (Taylor 2012, Modood 2005, 2012, Ging 2004, Bryan 2010, Lentin 2012)</li> <li>• Homophily (Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954)</li> <li>• Contact Hypothesis (Allport 1954).</li> </ul>
<b>Contact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internationalisation of HE (de Wit 1995, Knight 2004, Andrade 2006, Knight et al 2009, Brown and Jones 2007, Dunne 2011, Ryan 2013, Crosbie 2014, Castro 2016, Holmes 2016)</li> <li>• Intercultural Communication Competence (Deardoff 2004, 2012, Byram 2006, 2008)</li> <li>• Intercultural Personhood (Kim 2008, 2015).</li> </ul>

The data reveal that IMS experiences are not independent of their identities, the environment, and the type & nature of contact. This finding overlaps with previous studies reviewed in section 3.2, particularly with Stevenson's (2016) study, where she concludes religious students' notion of being and identity has a significant impact on how they define themselves and their relationship with their environment and others. In this thesis, the notion of identity is constructed by various background factors as discussed in Chapter 5. The major constructs are presented as the country of origin (nationality), religion, family, gender and sojourner identity, all of which have a significant impact on how the students define culture. Identity-related concepts are listed under student-specific factors that have an impact on IMS' experiences in Table 9-4. The environment is defined by culture distance and host receptivity by the

participants both in Chapters 6 and 7, and this corresponds to a multicultural environment particularly at institutional level on campus. In relation to the previous research reviewed in section 3.2, it is notable to mention that marginalisation was identified as one of the most common problems Muslims face in their host environment (Shammas 2009 et al.). In this thesis, the environment is identified as multicultural and welcoming as opposed to the previously reviewed empirical research on Muslim students. The findings emerging from this part of the data are listed as context-specific factors in Table 9-3. Contact occurs both in mono-cultural and intercultural form. Both mono-cultural and intercultural contact are predicted by similarity and distinction. However, intercultural contact is closely linked to the realisation of expectations from, and objectives of, study abroad. This association is closely linked to sojourner identity examined in Chapter 5. Intercultural and mono-cultural contact are influenced by students' predispositions, and stereotypes have an inevitable impact on the type and nature of the contact. Even though stereotypes and language skills come into play when participants aim to engage in intercultural contact, participants associate a value of self-development with intercultural contact.

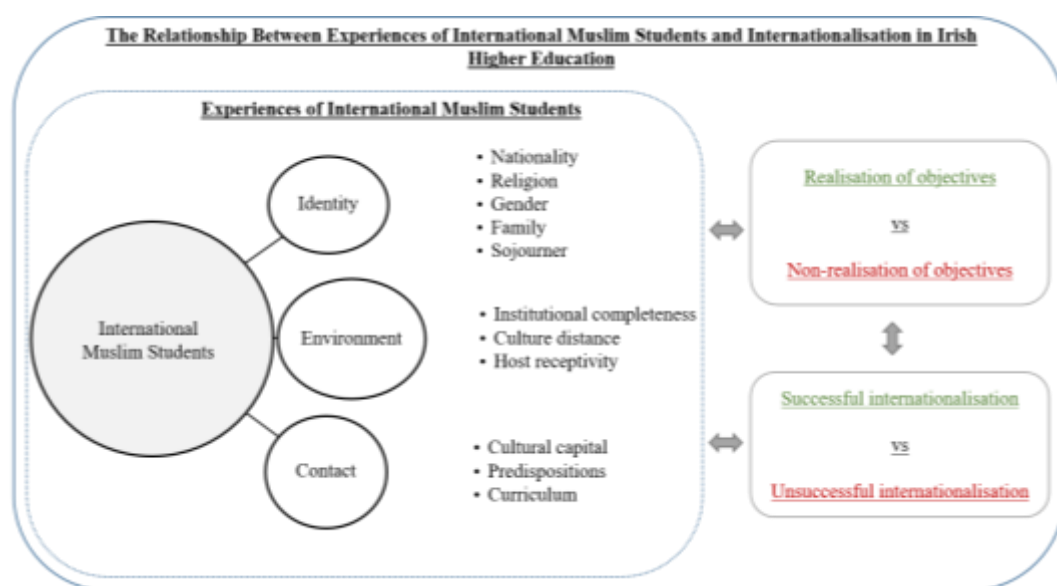


Figure 9-1 Grounded Theory of IMS' Experiences in an Irish University

In Figure 9-1 the grounded theory model of this research is presented. The left-hand side visualises the main pillars of IMS' experiences as Identity, Contact and Environment. Beside each of these main domains, the related categories are listed. These are the factors that constitute the core areas of IMS' experiences. As we move towards the right-hand side, the relationship between the constructs of IMS' experiences and internationalisation of Irish HE becomes apparent. The correlation between the relation/non-realisation and successful/unsuccessful internationalisation indicates a dependent relationship as is indicated by the arrows and colour. This relationship follows a cyclical movement. Realisation of objectives (in green) by the IMS, for instance, is linked to successful internationalisation in Irish HE as a favourable outcome of the process. In a similar vein, the case of a non-realisation of objectives (in red) by the participants is most likely to lead to an unsuccessful internationalisation as an outcome in the Irish HEI concerned (i.e. a multicultural campus leading to separation, and separation leading to lack of interaction and lack of interaction leading to failure to improve English or gain insights into the host culture). Following a reverse path, a successful internationalisation leads to realisation of objectives from the perspective of IMS, which has positive implications on how identity, environment and contact interact with one another in the experience of the students.

Table 9-3 and Table 9-4 were created in order to visually summarise the underpinning factors in relation to Identity, Environment and Contact. The tables divide the factors examined throughout the thesis into two as context-specific and student-specific factors.



Table 9-3: List of Context and Student Specific Factors Identified in This Study

Context-specific and Student-specific Factors Explored in This Study		
Context specific		Student specific
Host country	Host institution	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceived culture distance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Participating in mixed gender spaces</i></li> <li>○ <i>Participating in greeting gestures (physically)</i></li> <li>○ <i>Lack of participation in food &amp; drink culture</i></li> <li>○ <i>Perceived negative conceptions of Muslims by host country</i></li> <li>○ <i>Way of life based on values and worldview</i></li> <li>○ <i>Way of life based on infrastructure</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Negative incidents based on identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Verbal abuse by teenagers outside campus</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Host receptivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Welcoming</i></li> <li>○ <i>Friendly</i></li> <li>○ <i>Safe</i></li> <li>○ <i>Non-racist</i></li> <li>○ <i>Host families</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Good experience with international office</i></li> <li>○ <i>Praying in the Interfaith Centre</i></li> <li>○ <i>Socialising in &amp; around the Interfaith Centre</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Relationship with Academic Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Approachable, accessible, non-discriminatory</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Research skills &amp; creative thinking</i></li> <li>○ <i>Pre-degree programmes</i></li> <li>○ <i>Transition</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student (in)groups on campus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Co-nationals</i></li> <li>○ <i>Muslims</i></li> <li>○ <i>International students</i></li> <li>○ <i>Mature Irish students</i></li> <li>○ <i>Irish peers</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Table 9-4: List of Student Specific and Host Country Factors Impacting on Contact

<b>Factors impacting on IMS' contact experiences in the host society and the institution</b>	
<b>Student specific factors</b>	<b>Host country factors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Predispositions</li> <li>• Culture distance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Nationality</li> <li>○ Religion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Islam being way of life</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Female Muslim identity</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Family &amp; upbringing</li> <li>○ Homophily</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Sojourner identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Expectations and objectives</li> <li>○ Length of stay</li> <li>○ Learning</li> <li>○ Reflections</li> <li>○ English language proficiency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Colloquial English</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ International Office</li> <li>○ Interfaith Centre <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Recognition</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Respect</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Well-being</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Inclusion</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Sense of belonging</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Timetable</li> <li>○ Group-work</li> <li>○ Work load</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Perceptions of Muslims <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ International/national media</li> <li>○ Curiosity</li> <li>○ Stereotypes</li> <li>○ Cultural ambassador</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Table 9-3 and Table 9-4 put emerging key factors from the data analysis into two related perspectives: context and student-specific. While the grounded theory model conceptualises the relationship between the experiences of international Muslim students and internationalisation in Irish higher education by using categories of Identity, Environment and Contact, the tables help cluster the underlying factors of this relationship as context-specific and student specific. As seen in Table 9-3 “Perceived culture distance” for instance, is examined as part of the category “Environment” in the thesis and has an impact on how the participants’ experiences are shaped. The smaller units of data that lead to a “Perceived culture distance” are

listed under the concept in italics. This helps summarise the key findings and points discussed throughout the findings chapters and elaborate on the main categories that were included in the grounded theory model. The next section will examine the key findings under ‘Identity’, ‘Environment’ and ‘Contact’ in relation to relevant theories in the literature in line with the grounded theory approach adopted.

### **9.3 Identity**

The data analysis revealed multiple dimensions of identity from the perspective of IMS and lead to the finding *participants have multi-dimensional identities which are informed by various background factors, and enacted through personal interpretation.*

Firstly, the discussion will seek a theoretical framework to explain the interplay of various factors shaping identity and how these various factors are additionally underlined by an individual interpretation process. A brief discussion of identity took place in 3.2.1 in order to review the previous empirical studies on Muslim students. The following paragraphs will have more focused approach to the discussion of identity in the light of findings of this study, and will bring the discussion to a conclusion by explaining how the finding of the research could be explained or add to the existing theories on identity. The first section will explore identity perspectives and dimensions.

#### **9.3.1 Identity Perspectives and Dimensions**

Martin and Nakayama (2010:163) usefully list three perspectives to look at identity from. These are “social science”, “interpretive” and “critical”. According to the social science perspective, identities are both socially constructed in forms of group membership and are created by the self. An individual has multiple identities and they are inseparable from culture. The interpretive perspective places a special emphasis on communication with others and explains identity as a dynamic process of negotiation, creation, construction, and deconstruction (Ting-Toomey 2005). Similar to the interpretive perspective, the critical perspective defines identity as a dynamic process, however, with the distinction of taking social and institutional structures into account and tapping into the areas of justice and freedoms. The critical perspective

emphasises the inequality between ascribed identities, and asks in what contexts, under what conditions individuals identify with certain groups.

In addition to the perspectives, there are social and cultural dimensions of identity (Martin and Nakayama 2010). The most salient of these dimensions emerging from this study are national, religious and gender in relation to the students' background; a sojourner in relation to the new context in the host environment, and personal identity which was coded under 'Participants' Relationship with Islam' in 5.3.1 and 'Predispositions' in 8.4. IMS chose to operationalise nationality as their identity marker when asked to reflect on what culture means them (5.2). In line with grounded theory principles, the data analysis was conducted in close relation to data and the participants' words were used to formulate the codes and categories instead of borrowing terms from the existing literature. This, therefore, led to use of 'nationality' as a term to define participants' dimension of identity. Nevertheless, it should be noted that use of nationality when it comes to identifying with a cultural group, its norms, values, customs and behaviours could be problematic, since it might actually signal an 'ethnic identity' (Martin and Nakayama 2010).

When looked at from a social science perspective, *'Describing Culture Based on Nationality (28)'* unfolds as the culture and value system associated with the society of a particular country of origin. In other words, even though participants use the word 'nationality' to refer to their cultural background embedded in the society they were raised in, they, in fact, refer to their ethnic identity which is based on a shared culture, norms, values and behaviours.

Religion reflects another significant dimension of participants' identity (5.3). However, a question arises here as to how one's religious identity can clearly be

separated from ethnic identity, similar to what was discussed regarding the organic relationship between participants' nationality and ethnicity. It could be argued that if ethnicity is based on three major elements as "common descent, common history, common homeland" (Green 2006:2), religion cannot be considered as part of an ethnic identity that is as grand as to include all participants of this study coming from different descents, histories and homelands.

This approach towards operationalising the religious dimension of identity would exclude Italian and Bangladeshi participants who do not necessarily share the three major elements with students from Oman or Saudi Arabia as mentioned above. Nevertheless, when looked at from a constructivist paradigm, ethnicity could be defined as "fluid and endogenous to a set of social, economic, and political process" (Chandra 2007:1), and appear to be inclusive of all participants under a religious identity. Considering religious identity as part of ethnicity is a significant point to understand the concept of *Ummah* that will be discussed in the section below. It is also a reference point to Benhabib's (2002) culture paradox, in which she places culture in the intersection of similarities and shared elements of a group but is wary of the potential heterogeneity within the cultural groups.

Gender identity was established in close relation to religious identity during the interviews. That is, 5.3.2. Female Muslim Identity shows how participants draw from their religious identity to reflect on their gender identity. Specifically, the practice of wearing a headscarf, norms and values of female Muslims found resonance in participants' understanding of Islam (5.3.3). This suggests that religious and gender identity are in interplay with each other (Nasir and Al-Amin 2006). Martin and Nakayama (2010) suggest our gender identities are constructed under the influence of our cultural environment. Therefore, participants' gender identity cannot be examined

independently of their nationality and religion, which brings the discussion to whether this could be considered as participants' ethnic identity. The data shows evidence of participants' tendency to discuss gender identity in close relation to religion, therefore, gender identity cannot be examined independently of one's ethnic identity.

Personal identity is considered to be a reflection and an epitome of all identities and is considered to be multi-layered (Martin and Nakayama 2010). This understanding of personal identity finds resonance in the findings of this research since IMS draw from a number of background factors (i.e. nationality, religion, gender) to define themselves. Additionally, this understanding of personal identity, as a sum of various background factors, corresponds with Bourdieu's Cultural Capital, which represents the total assets an individual possess that are outside financial measures, such as education, upbringing and language skills (Bourdieu 1988). It is evident in the data that participants draw from family and upbringing, their education background and their sojourner status when constructing their identity during the interviews. Therefore, the data gives evidence of a cultural capital that participants bring with them while entering the new environment in the host culture. This cultural capital includes their ethnic identity, defined as shared culture, values, norms, traditions and behaviour (Kim 2005), and their sojourner status. Besides, participants' individual interpretations (5.3.1, 5.3.3) of these background factors and to what extent they come into play while defining themselves corresponds with the notion of personal identity, since "identity serves as a bridge between culture and communication" as quoted above.

### 9.3.2 The Notion of *Ummah*

One significant implication of how participants discussed dimensions of identity is the notion of *Ummah*, particularly on campus. According to Denny (1975:34) “[w]hen the term *ummah* appears in the Qur’an, it refers to human community in a religious sense”. It is considered to be the “ethical, linguistic or religious bodies of people who are objects of the divine plan of salvation” (Rudi 1954 as cited in Denny 1975). In modern day literature, it is referred to as the transnational Muslim community (Mandaville 2001, Archer 2009). Saunders (2008:304) argues that *Ummah* resembles nationhood rather than religion in its modern form and concludes that “*ummah* functions as a nation; however, its membership does not fully reject competing national identities (i.e. Persian, Arab or British) nor does this membership necessarily avert internal divisions (Sunni versus Shi’a, moderate versus fundamentalist, etc)”. In the onion model of relationship development, which was presented in Chapter 8, the closest circles to IMS are identified as co-nationals followed by Muslims. Therefore, the Muslim participants in this study display a tendency towards a mono-cultural community based on faith, which resonates with the ideology of *Ummah* that predicts Muslim-centred network behaviour.

The findings also point to the presence and location of the Interfaith Centre as the main hub for this kind of mono-faith social network, as discussed in 7.4. The fact that the majority of the participants come from Arabic-speaking countries increases the likelihood of *Ummah* to form on campus. The data indicates that *Ummah* is built on ethnic or cultural identity and is fostered by the cultural capital of the participants. It is striking to explore this relationship on campus, since the challenge of intercultural



communication is still evident in DCU among student in-groups formed on the axis of different elements of culture and sets of values.

The findings additionally challenge Hofstede's (1995, 2005, 2011) cultural dimensions on the grounds that *Ummah* is not constructed upon nationality, but on an ethnic identity that is a blend of nationality, religion, and cultural capital of students. Even though *Ummah* might predict a collectivist behaviour in line with Hofstede's dimensions, the behaviour is liberated from national borders from the perspective of IMS participated in this project, and spans across all Muslims sojourning as international students in Ireland.

In examining the literature, it is identified that previous studies additionally confirm this type of transnational union among Muslim immigrants or expats (Mandaville 2001, Archer 2009), Muslim or Arab students on campus (Shammas 2015), as well as the role of the mosque as a hub for socialising (Muhammad, Woodlock 2010, Ozyurt 2010). As an example, Abu-Rayya et al. (2016) find that Muslim adolescents coming from immigrant families in Australia prioritise their Muslim identity over the ethnic (representing the country of emigration in the study) and Australian identity, which suggests similarities with the layers of onion model of relationship in this study. That is, participants in the current study identified themselves most with their co-nationals (who usually share the same religious identity) and Muslim peers. In the current study, nationality came before religious identity. This can, however, be explained by the fact that students interviewed in this project are sojourners in Ireland as opposed to the citizens of Australia in Abu-Rayya et al.'s (2016) study. This might have caused increased levels of identification with their home country among IMS. Apart from this, the notion of *Ummah*, which for Muslims represents a transnational Muslim identity, overlaps in the findings of both studies.

The studies in the literature point to a symbolic meaning of mosque (or praying facility in this context) for maintaining, producing and reproducing Muslim identity as well as signifying membership to the larger community. Archer (2009:329) argues that British Muslims identify themselves as “citizens of the United Kingdom and also part of worldwide community, the *Ummah*, the Muslim community of the faithful”. Similar to this, Mandaville (2010) argues that the philosophy of the Muslim community goes beyond the borders and nations, therefore, indicating a political ideology among the members of Islam for recognition and citizenship rights.

Apart from the notion of *Ummah* among members of the Muslim religion, Ozyurt (2010) specifically focuses on the experiences of Muslim convert women in Australia and concludes that access to the mosque is a significant factor for these females to gain and maintain their Muslim identity. Perhaps most closely related to this study, Woodlock (2010) argues that the mosques facilitate cross-cultural adjustment of Muslim immigrants in the host culture by building bridges with the larger community. However, she notes that this positive impact on the acculturation process of Muslim immigrants largely depends on the Imam’s (religious leader of a mosque) vision of the host country and integration.

### **9.3.3 Muslim Students and Accommodation of Religious Diversity on Campus**

Within a higher education context, Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) reiterate the need for creating identity safe spaces on campus for Muslim students. They identify institutional support as a significant factor for lowering identity threat and increasing well-being, which is evident in the findings of this study (see Chapters 7, 9). The participants in Nasir and Al-Amin’s (2006:27) study associate an institution’s

commitment to accommodate diversity on campus with “small comforts and acts of kindness”. This consequently lead Nasir and Al-Amin (ibid.) to list factors that make campus identity safe/ friendly for Muslims:

- A strong, diverse, and supportive Muslim group on campus
- Professors who are knowledgeable about Islam and positive towards it
- The presence of a broader student community that is accepting of Islam and its practices
- Access to physical spaces that facilitate the practice of Islam without ridicule or judgement (for example having a private place to pray, and wash up for prayer)
- Access to *halal* meals (foods that contain pork and for which meats are slaughtered in a particular way) and the accommodation of special meal times (before sunrise and after sundown) during the month of Ramadan.

DCU campus, as is evident in the findings (Chapter 7, Chapter 9) accommodates all these factors that are identified and listed upon examining a university college in the US by Nasir & Asmir. To elaborate on this further, in Chapter 6, DCU’s receptivity and ‘Institutional completeness’ (9.5.1) were explored within categories such as ‘Institutional support’ (7.2), which entailed the praying facility, halal food on campus, accessible the international office, and the ‘relationship with academic staff’, which emerged as positive from the perspective of IMS. This positive experience with the academic staff based on their identity as well as institutional inclusiveness translates into recognition and respect, and leads to an increased sense of well-being and belonging among IMS within the campus. In line with Nasir and Al-Amin (2006), Dowhower et al. (2005) point to the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century students and reiterate the

importance of accommodation of religious pluralism on campus in order to facilitate the well-being of students.

Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) additionally highlight the interplay between ‘multiple identities’ of Muslim students on campus, and how these students use these identities (i.e. Black, Muslim, freshman, college student, athlete) interchangeably depending on the situation. Nevertheless, these identity-safe spaces on campus can play into the hands of a multiculturalism understood as a separation of cultures on campus. The most significant reason as to why DCU emerged as a multicultural site in which intercultural interaction did not necessarily take place organically from the perspective of IMS is the fact that identity-safe spaces can also function as centres of monocultural socialisation and interaction. It is important for an institution to be wary of the drawbacks of multicultural policies on campus while intending to successfully attend to the needs of students.

Gilliat-Ray (2000, 2005), in a similar vein, highlights the political aspect of the role of the mosques, and argues that they might become spaces of separation if exclusively used by Muslims, and a space of power domination among the religions if designated as a multi-prayer room (i.e. decoration, artefacts, ceremony schedules). In DCU, the prayer room in place is a multi-religion and secular space, accessible to all students. It should be noted, it is supervised by an administrative body that involves secular DCU staff as well as Chaplaincy personnel. Therefore, from the perspective of power, the space is what Gilliat-Ray (2005:287) calls “from chapel to prayer room”. IMS, nevertheless, did not report discrimination, nor marginalisation within the Interfaith Centre in DCU during the interviews. Consequently, the participants’ experiences align more with the findings of Nasir and Al-Amin’s study (2006) where the students

perceive identity safe spaces as tokens of ‘kindness’, which then translate into a sense of well-being and belonging.

The literature suggests that the debate on accommodation and representation of diversity on campus, particularly in reference to religious pluralism, has not reached a consensus thus far (Gurin, et al. 2002, Cole and Ahmadi 2010). Gilliat-Ray (2005) concludes that advertising prayer facilities on campus help universities appeal to and recruit Muslim students. Nevertheless, the university attending to a particular body of students’ needs might trigger a reaction from other student groups on campus (Giliat-Ray 2005), eroding the inclusive nature of an institutional or student identity (particularly in reference to multiple identities theories Tajfel 1978, Brewer 2010). It is, therefore, essential that an inclusive and equal approach towards accommodating diverse student bodies is maintained on campus.

#### **9.3.4 Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory (SIT) situates identity on the premise of social categorisation, and this process is defined as a reflexive self that

[C]an take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications (Stets and Burke 2000:224).

According to SIT, identity is formed and could be examined in relation to a group with which the individual associates themselves; therefore, it could be both objective (demographic) and subjective (contextual, situational). Hogg and Abrams (1988) refer to this process of self-identification with a group as having the knowledge of this group, while Tajfel (1982) additionally suggests identification include values and feelings associated with group membership. In this sense, knowledge of group resembles the impact of Bourdieu’s cultural capital on forming and communicating

one's identity. Consequently, social groups are set of individuals with similar cultural capital coming together to form a group. Another important process in identity formation within SIT is a social comparison, since SIT essentially proposes that people will work to achieve a positive understanding of their social identity (Berry 2002), and this could be made possible through evaluation and comparison. Stets and Burke (2000:225) describe the two processes based on their consequences as below:

The consequence of self-categorization is an accentuation of the perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members, and an accentuation of the perceived differences between the self and out-group members. This accentuation occurs for all the attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, styles of speech, and other properties that are believed to be correlated with the relevant intergroup categorization. The consequence of the social comparison process is the selective application of the accentuation effect, primarily to those dimensions that will result in self-enhancing outcomes for the self.

Social-categorisation is used to describe the process of identification with a set of people based on perceived similarities. This results in a dichotomy of an in-group with similar people and out-group with dissimilar. Following this, social comparison is the process of evaluating the traits of the in-group in comparison to an out-group in order for positive reinforcement of identity within the in-group. This positive reinforcement of identity is considered a favourable outcome of social comparison according to the SIT theorists and is termed self-esteem (Stets and Burke 2000:224). However, Turner et al (1987) warn that the dichotomy of in-group and out-group formation of identity, and associating the positive judgement with the in-group and negative with the out-group, might lead to ethnocentrism.

In the data, it is evident that participants go through a social-categorisation process when they reflect on their identity. They associate with their co-nationals and Muslims through their ethnic identity (i.e. nationality, religion, gender, family), and

international students through their sojourner identity (see Figure 8-1: Grounded Theory (Onion) Model of IMS' Relationship Development on Campus (student groups)). This self-categorisation results in homophilic behaviour (8.3.2) and creates an in-group of Muslims called *Ummah* on campus. *Ummah* is built primarily on religion since it is a transnational community of Muslims, and it entails a common set of practices and values for its members. However, the fact that a large body of students who identify as Muslim come from Arabic-speaking countries adds a language dimension to the in-group described as *Ummah*.

The onion model of relationship development presented in Chapter 7 serves as a good base to explore IMS' social-categorisation process further and what these social categories are constructed upon. The initial two circles of the model, co-nationals and Muslims, are previously explored in relation to *Ummah* in the above paragraphs. The participants' identification with international students is based on language for two reasons; 1) they are non-native speakers of English, 2) they want to improve their English (5.5.3). This creates common challenges and goals for international students to identify with in the host environment. The self- categorisation is also reinforced by expectations from study abroad, which is closely linked to 'English language proficiency' as well 'Expectations & objectives' (5.5.1). Moving on to peripheral circles of the model, we encounter mature Irish students. Participants' self-identification with this group of students is based on their shared predispositions regarding intercultural contact, namely 'openness' and 'interest'. At the outer edge of the model, the Irish peers of participants are located and participants deem this group of students to be the remotest on campus. When we look into the data, it is evident that participants regard their Irish peers as an out-group with increased dissimilarities (i.e. food & drink, mixed-gender spaces).

One thing that is significant here is even though mature Irish students share similar values and traditions with participants' Irish peers, they come before the Irish peers in the model. Similarly, even though Irish peers are supposed to share a culture based on age, mature Irish students come before them in the onion model of relationship. In exploring this exception further and with reference to social comparison (Hogg and Abrams, 1988), it should be noted that participants evaluate members of their in-group to be open to intercultural contact (see 8.4.1), whereas the out-group, namely their Irish peers, to be closed to intercultural contact (8.3.6) as opposed to mature Irish students. This perception of Irish peers indicates a perceived in-group favouritism based on predispositions (8.4). Dunne (2009, 2013) also concludes that Irish students construct difference based on largely nationality and age. This study, therefore, echoes and endorses the findings of Dunne's study which focuses on the host (Irish) students' perceptions of intercultural contact on campus.

The data indicate that one major thing that challenges the organic processes of self-categorisations and formation of groups based on the onion model of relationship is interventions within the curriculum (7.5, 8.7). Group work activities or assignments emerged from the data as significant facilitators of contact even though there was no evidence to prove intercultural contact initiated by group work was sustainable. On the contrary, the participants regard relationship development based on group work as temporary and work-dependent. This being said, curricular interventions proved to be facilitators of intercultural contact and to work against the onion model of relationship development on campus. When looked at from a SIT perspective, it is evident that interventions such as group work assignments shift the axis of social categorisation from ethnic identity or predispositions towards academic success, which is in close relation to the sections 'Objectives' (5.5.1) and 'Degree' (5.5.4).



## 9.4 Culture Distance

Culture distance is a concept used to “refer to how far apart two cultural groups are on dimensions of cultural variation” (Berry et al. 2002:361). In section 2, dimensions of culture are discussed as nationality, religion, gender and ethnicity, which are demographic variables, and as personal identity, which is subjective and contextual (Martin and Nakayama, 2010). Hofstede and Pedersen (2002:4) posit that culture “derives from one’s social environment rather than from one’s genes”; therefore ‘a collective phenomenon’, and that “a dimension is an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures” (Hofstede 1991:14). Hofstede initially lists four dimensions, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity and femininity, derived from a large data set collected from employees of a multinational company. In 2001, he added a fifth dimension called ‘Long versus Short Term Orientation’.

Based on measurable dimensions, “the culture distance hypothesis predicts that the greater the cultural gap between participants, the more difficulties they will experience” (Ward et al. 2001:9). The hypothesis is particularly useful in explaining the environment and the perceived culture distance that emerged from the data. The hypothesis predicts that sojourners with a high level of, or increased similarities with the groups in the host environment tend to have a less stressful and more successful integration (Berry et al. 2002, Kim 2005, Ward et al 2001). Whereas sojourners with greater, or increased perceived dissimilarities with the groups in the host environment, tend to experience culture shock (Ward et al. 2005), and acculturative stress (Berry et al 2002) which might problematise the relationship development.

It is evident in the data that IMS experience a level of perceived culture distance (6.2). Perceived culture distance is based on mixed-gender spaces, food & drink, greeting gestures and other factors such as infrastructure of the host city (see Chapter 6). Regardless of the different conceptualisations of culture dimensions, the culture distance hypothesis is germane to the findings of this study. Further explored in the data is the impact of culture distance on relationship development. As is evident in the onion model of relationship development, the greater the perceived culture distance is, the more peripheral the group becomes from the perspective of IMS. This indicates that participants report more frequent contact with students or student groups whom they perceive to be culturally similar (Redmond 2000, Castro 2016, Holmes 2016).

While the culture-distance hypothesis finds resonance within the findings of this research, it should be noted that there might be some problematic areas in its application to research. The culture distance hypothesis is built on the notion that culture can be measured and that measured dimensions are always germane. For that purpose, Babiker (1980) developed the Cultural Distance Index (CDI), and Hofstede later developed an index based on his list of culture dimensions to measure culture distance as mentioned above. However, this approach has been under criticism by numerous scholars researching in the field (see Table 9-5).

Table 9-5: List of Criticisms Directed at Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

<b>Critique of Hofstede's Theory of Cultural Dimensions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultures are grasped by Hofstede's arithmatisation of some employees' answers to survey questions (McSweeney 2002, Baskerville 2003 &amp; 2005, Magala 2004, Myers &amp; Tan 2022, Tayeb 1994, Wildavsky 1989)</li> <li>▪ Representative of a very limited segment of overall national population (McSweeney 2002)</li> <li>▪ Overgeneralised (McSweeney 2002)</li> <li>▪ Conscious responses to questions (McSweeney 2002)</li> <li>▪ Conducted from a western point of view (Baskerville 2003, Magala 2004, Osland &amp; Bird 2000)</li> <li>▪ Conceptual equivalence of items across cultures is not known (Schwartz 1992)</li> <li>▪ One cannot derive the normative ideals of culture from the average of individual responses (Schwartz 1992)</li> <li>▪ The question set is not comprehensive (Schwartz 1992, Harvey 1997, Osland &amp; Bird 2000, McSweeney 2002)</li> <li>▪ Dynamic relations among values are ignored (Schwartz 1992)</li> <li>▪ Hodgepodge of items few of which relate to the intended construct (Robinson 1983)</li> <li>▪ Individualism &amp; collectivism can co-exist (Triandis 1994)</li> <li>▪ An individual cannot be a monolithic totality (Slater 1970, McIntyre 1971, Kondo 1990, Shearing and Ericson 1991, Hollan 1992, McSweeney 1995, 2002)</li> </ul>

The criticism overlaps with the understanding that culture is difficult to operationalise for research purposes (Dunne 2008, 2009), and that it is problematic to measure it based on pre-articulated dimensions. As this study suggests, students shift the axis of culture dimension in order to form new groups depending on the conditions in the environment and their predispositions (see 7.5, 8.7). This is evident in group work

activities and students' positive response to identification with demographically dissimilar, yet subjectively evaluated group. The data emphasise the role of and conditions in the host environment on perceived culture distance and to what extent these impact contact. That is, whether the environment facilitates the conditions in order for new social-categorisations to take place based on subjective evaluations of culture. The next section will aim to explore how perceived host receptivity could function as an antidote to perceived culture distance.

## **9.5 Host Receptivity**

Host receptivity is conceptualised as part of the environment by Kim (2005:148) and refers to “the natives’ openness toward strangers and willingness to accommodate strangers with opportunities to participate in the local social communication process”. It is examined as part of a three-dimensional understanding of the host environment from the sojourners’ point of view. The other two elements of the host environment identified by Kim (2005:152) are host conformity pressure, which is defined as “the degree to which host nationals exert conscious or unconscious pressure on strangers to change their original patterns of behaviour and adopt those of the host culture”, and ethnic group strength that is “the relative status and power that membership in an ethnic group accords” (ibid).

Host receptivity is evident in the data under the categories ‘Welcoming Host’ (6.3) and ‘Institutional Support’ (7.2), which is found to positively correlate with participants’ well-being and sense of belonging in the host environment. However, two things should be noted here; i) host receptivity through ‘host families’ in the data increases students’ well-being and facilitates intercultural interaction. Nevertheless, this type of intercultural contact is outside the participants’ age range and impedes

participants' interaction with their Irish or international peers that could be facilitated by living arrangements, ii) host receptivity in the host institution predicts ethnic group strength in the case of DCU and IMS. That is, the institution manifests its host receptivity by offering institutional support, and the institutional support helps students bolster their ethnic identity by creating identity dominant places (i.e. the Interfaith Centre). To unfold these ideas further, we return to the data.

Host families are discussed as a positive factor in students' transition to the host culture and this predicts a reduced likelihood of persistent culture shock (Ward 2002). In international student literature, living arrangements are found to be significant predictors of intercultural contact among students (Dunne 2009). In the case of this project, participants' lack of interaction with their peers could be due to the fact that they tend to live with host families in the initial stages and their co-nationals (same-sex) later, instead of their international or host peers in university accommodation or in shared houses.

As regards the second problematic area, institutional support is constructed by the presence of the international office and Interfaith Centre in DCU as well as the availability of food in compliance with students' dietary requirements. The Interfaith Centre in particular, creates a space for IMS to conduct their practices, and socialise with similar people. However, this ethnic space also causes segregation within the campus among student groups. This segregation continues to reinforce "us and them" thinking that is the core of Social Identity Theory in explaining contact among different groups. To explain the role of the Interfaith Centre in particular, Institutional Completeness (Breton 1964, 1991) will be used.

### **9.5.1 Institutional Completeness**

Mol (1976:348) suggests “migrants are marginal people... being treated as alien has an adverse effect on the sense of belonging”. In the case of DCU, this adverse effect of being treated as aliens is successfully reversed to an increased sense of belonging through institutional inclusiveness. In that sense, institutional completeness refers to the extent to which culture/ethnic groups are able to independently conduct their systems of economy, politics and social (Breton 1964, Kim 2005). It is clear that institutional completeness is conceptualised from the perspective of a culture/ethnic group within a multicultural environment. The concept has been used to explore migrants’ integration into host societies and their ethnic community strength, and it has been found to be “adaptation-impeding” (Kim 2005:158). That is, the more complete a culture/ethnic group is institutionally, the less reliant they become on the resources of the majority or other culture/ethnic groups. The less reliant a culture/ethnic group becomes, the less urge they feel to integrate into the mainstream system; therefore, Ethnic Group Strength (Kim 1988, 2005) is achieved.

The data shows evidence for this theorisation at an institutional level. IMS report regular attendance at the Interfaith Centre for both for praying and socialising purposes, and in terms of identity politics, the Interfaith Centre signifies recognition and inclusion of a Muslim identity within the social systems and structure of DCU. Kim (2005: 159) posits “strangers with strong ethnic group status ... are likely to be less compelled to accommodate the host cultural system”. As is evident in the onion model of relationship, IMS tend to associate with co-nationals and Muslims more dominantly than other student groups. Clearly, institutional completeness in DCU is causally linked to ethnic group strength from the perspective of IMS and mediates the

relationship development among student groups on campus. As such, while increasing the number of international students on campus may, in theory, suggest increasing intercultural contact among students, in practice, the institutional completeness, which can develop from growing numbers of international students who form an in-group, can, in fact, prevent such contact from happening.

### **9.5.2 Multiculturalism vs Interculturalism**

A discussion of multiculturalism was conducted in 3.2.2. In this section, focus will be placed on the application of theoretical concepts to the findings of this research. The Interfaith Centre, within an institutional completeness framework, clearly indicates a mono-culturally divided use of space on campus within a multi-cultural context. Institutional completeness and ethnic group strength call for further examination of the environment from the theoretical perspectives of multiculturalism and interculturalism. There have been numerous meanings and definitions of multiculturalism (Berry et al. 2007). As mentioned in 3.2.2, in its basic form, multiculturalism is identified as “an orientation that accepts *both* the maintenance of cultural identity and the characteristics of all ethno-cultural groups *and* the contact and the participation of all groups in the larger society” (Berry et al. 2007:375). However, it is critiqued for its failure to facilitate contact between the cultural groups within the same context (Benhabib et al. 2002). Interculturalism is developed and used as a favourable alternative to multiculturalism (Modood 2005). O’Toole (2008:12-13) conceptualises interculturalism as:

Interculturalism could be understood as aiming to address some of the areas that multiculturalists neglected – by consciously and deliberately promoting interaction between cultures and also by incorporating an anti-racism component which was seen to lacking in multiculturalism.

As is implied in the quotes above, interculturalism is a more progressive approach towards living in diversity, since it does not only put an emphasis on dialogue between the cultures but works to resolve structural issues such as racism. In the data, racism as a factor does not necessarily find support among participants, particularly in terms of identity-based incidents, which was discussed in 6.5.1. Instead, the students mention the perceived negative ideas concerning Muslims among non-Muslims in the host society, yet a lack of racism. That is, participants perceive varying degrees of negative perceptions of Muslims and stereotypes regarding Muslims; nevertheless, they refrain from associating racism with the reactions of host society towards them. As much as this indicates a lack of racism based on religious identity targeting Muslims at the time of data collection (see also 4.6), negative perceptions and stereotypes still persist in the society. In this respect, the fundamental difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism is timely. A multicultural society could be achieved with the existence of different cultures in the society; however, an intercultural framework requires meaningful contact between culture groups in equal conditions and with mutual respect.

In Ireland, Ging and Malcolm (2004:127) state:

Irish policy makers and campaigners tend to rely on labels such as “multicultural” or “intercultural” interchangeably, but these terms are highly contested in both academic and political contexts.

They also add that in Ireland, multiculturalism is built on the notion of nationalism, and interculturalism often is applied to education in the form of practices. Lentin (2002) suggests that regardless of their differences the two terms are used interchangeably. Consequently, Ging and Malcolm (2004:127) state both multiculturalism and interculturalism could be best interpreted as Ireland’s “set of political policy responses to cultural or ethnic diversity that are seen as problems”.



Bryan (2010:253) marks the Celtic Tiger era (between late 1990s and early 2000s), in which Ireland saw significant and rapid economic growth, as the beginning of “Ireland’s transition from an out-migration to an in-migration society” (McIvor and Spangler 2014). Following this period Gardner (2004) points to new forms of racism in Ireland based on the changing landscape and due to this, Bryan (2001), Kitching (2010) and Dooley (2015) assert that Irish education policy sought to implement an intercultural education policy.

In DCU, there is evidence in the data that a multicultural approach is adopted towards accommodating diversity outside curricular activities such as group work. Consequently, different student groups and cultures co-exist within the same context and do not necessarily relate to one another unless there is a third-party facilitation. To support this statement, the relationship between institutional completeness, ethnic group strength and the onion model of relationship development on campus will be addressed again. According to IMS, institutional completeness (the Interfaith Centre) increase the likelihood of Muslims socialising together, which in turn increases ethnic group strength. Increased group strength is evident in how IMS rank student groups in terms of frequency of contact in the onion model of contact. When ethnic group strength is increased, a multicultural environment in the host institution is maintained. That is, in line with the examination and critique of multiculturalism above, students co-exist within their culture/ethnic groups. This way, the social-categorisation and self-identification process of IMS with their in-groups, based on particularly ethnicity, as theorised in SIT is reinforced within DCU according to the data. This could have serious implications on meaningful intercultural engagement and when intercultural engagement is impeded, its favourable outcomes such as working against structural racism, reducing prejudice and stereotyping cannot be achieved. In the void of

successful interculturalism on campus, the internationalisation strategy is undermined by the prevalence of strong culture/ethnic in-groups.

## **9.6 Homophily**

Homophily is the concept defined as “similarity breeds contact” (McPherson et al. 2001:415). The concept was first developed by sociologists Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954). Centona et al. (2007:905-906) define the process, as follows:

Homophily is the tendency of people with similar traits (including physical, cultural, and attitudinal characteristics) to interact with one another more than with people with dissimilar traits

In addition to Centona et al.’s (2007) conceptualisation, McPherson et al. (2001:416) emphasise the frequency of contact among people who are considered similar based on certain traits: “homophily is the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people”.

In the examination of the current study, the homophily principle would predict IMS interact more often with international students and Muslim students than their Irish peers based on the shared traits with the former student groups and lack of similarities with the latter. The data confirms homophilic behaviour among IMS (8.3.2) constructed by ‘ease of communication’, ‘mutual culture’, ‘security’ and ‘Irish students’ homogenous friendship tendencies’, which indicates the impact of participants’ cultural capital and identity (social categorisation) on how homophily works. The data, however, additionally challenge the principle of homophily with evidence of predispositions that work to facilitate interaction with students perceived to be culturally different.

First and foremost, homophily principles distinguish between different types of similarity attraction (Gudykunst 2006). McPherson et al. (2001) usefully divide the examination of homophily into both types and sources, and for the purpose of this study, their approach will be adopted. Originally Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) distinguish between status homophily, which is concerned with demographic (i.e. country of origin, age, ethnicity) variables, and value homophily, which is concerned with attitudes, beliefs and values. McPherson et al. (2001) build on status and value homophily and add categories of race and ethnicity, gender, age, religion, education, occupation, social class, network positions, and behaviour to status homophily. It is useful to note that their study dated 2001 concludes religion is not as strong a type of homophily as race and ethnicity. However, within the findings of this study, religion pervades a significant amount of homophilic behaviour among IMS (8.3.2). Gender homophily is evident in the findings of the study, since ‘Female Muslim Identity’ (5.3.2), ‘Impact of Headscarf on Relationship Development’ (8.3.1) emerge as constituents of a shared gender identity among participants, which foster interaction. Even though gender homophily is classified as status homophily, it is also closely related to value homophily. The data suggest gender might predict shared values regarding their dress code (female Muslim identity), socialising patterns (headscarf as a barrier to socialising), living arrangements, and behaviours (i.e. greeting gestures).

Education, occupation and social class homophily is closely linked to participants’ cultural capital. This is particularly indicated in ‘sojourner identity’ and the role of families regarding participants’ responses to intercultural contact and diversity (8.4.1). Network positions explain the effect of core-periphery patterns in relationship developments. The onion model of relationship development underlines the core-periphery pattern in the data. Since the closest circles are considered as co-nationals

and Muslims by the participants, we can suggest the Interfaith Centre plays a significant role in facilitating homophily built on network positions. The network positions and the behaviour homophily are in relation with one another in the data. The participants adopt certain practices, and behaviours which bring them together with people who adopt similar practices and behaviours (i.e. Muslims), and this certainly affects participants' network positions. The Interfaith Centre is consequently identified as a significant geography that facilitates various types of homophily among IMS on campus.

Value homophily should be examined intertwined with status homophily, since the data indicate participants share similar values, attitudes, beliefs and aspirations in close relation to their identity. To illustrate this point further, participants' sojourner identity predicts openness for intercultural contact motivated by the 'Cultural Ambassador' role (8.5), and participants' cultural ambassador role is a consequence of both their sojourner and culture/ethnic identity. Value homophily, additionally helps explain the relationship development among international students. International students do not only share a sojourner identity, but also a degree of values, attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations related to this identity (i.e. degree, English language proficiency, self & professional development). Therefore, when confronted with homophily among host students (i.e. 'Irish peers' lack of interest in intercultural contact', 'Irish students being a close-knit group', 'Irish students preferring to socialise with their co-nationals'), international students experience a level of homophily among each other built on network positions and aspirations. Dunne's (2008, 2009) previously conducted research confirms a high level of homophily among Irish students on campus fundamentally built on nationality and age. It could therefore be deducted that homophily is a prevalent phenomenon on university campuses experienced by different

student groups. The type and extent of homophily, however, could be dependent on the culture/ethnic capital and characteristics of the student group.

McPherson et al. (2001) list causes of homophily as geography, family ties, organisational foci, isomorphic sources, cognitive processes, and selective tie dissolution. The most salient of these are geography, organisational foci, isomorphic sources and cognitive processes in the data. Geography is based on the notion that people tend to make more ties with people near them than the ones distant (Zipf 1949). Even though the technological advancements have decreased the significance of time and space in creating homophilic ties (Kaufer & Carley 1993), geography is still an important predictor of homophily.

In the data, the Interfaith Centre proved to be a space for both praying and socialising given it pulls students with similar ethnic identity and cultural capital towards each other, which corresponds to both status and value homophily. Nevertheless, geography alone is not sufficient to initiate homophilic behaviour among individuals. Otherwise DCU campus would provide the space and time for students to be drawn to each other under a student identity and the onion model of relationship would not emerge from the data. Evidently, students are still divided into ethnic, culture, gender, age groups and there is a preference for certain groups over the others. This indicates that geography alone cannot cause homophily as predicted. Organisational foci and Isomorphic sources (i.e. classroom) fill this gap by suggesting that focused activities create a homophily effect which pulls participants towards each other (McPherson et al. 2001; Feld 1981, 1982, 1984).

This approach helps explain the role of curriculum, timetable, class, and the Interfaith Centre, regarding the causes of homophilic behaviour in the data. Students who are

enrolled in the same programme and attend the same classes with same timetables are more likely to share similar interests and responsibilities if not values. In the data, group work and assignments emerged as powerful tools to facilitate intercultural contact. 'Common goals' is, additionally, one of the factors for positive inter-group contact (Allport 1954). Therefore, the curriculum offers students organisational foci that help facilitate homophily among them. The Interfaith Centre is a space designed to accommodate religious activity on campus. The data also show that IMS use the space to practise certain religious duties, which, similar to the curriculum, creates an organisation foci based on focused activities instead of mere geography.

Cognitive process as cause of homophily is a cogent aspect of the principle since it is closely linked to SIT as well as stereotypes that were evident in the data. Cognitive processes help to understand psychological factors that cause homophily besides the structural factors that have been discussed so far. It is essentially "the tendency to choose to interact with similar others" (McPherson et al. 2001:435). Apart from the structural and geographical causes, human psychology favours the ones who are perceived to be similar to interact with. The same cognitive process could be linked to the social categorisation in SIT. In the data, cognitive processes such as negative perception of Muslims and stereotypes are evident as well as Irish peers' tendency for homogeneous friendships (Dunne 2008, 2009). This indicates 'us and them' thinking from a cognitive point of view, and both encourages mono-cultural relationship development and decreases the likelihood of intercultural interaction. Furthermore, the Similarity Attraction Hypothesis (SAH) is identified to be in close relation to SIT and the Homophily principle in order to explain the findings of this research. SAH predicts people to be more "attracted to others who match their personality and other human characteristics than those who mismatch, an attraction that leads to increased

interaction and attention” (Moreno, Flowerday 2006:190). Gudykunst (2005) suggests similarities between people are predictors of attraction, therefore, communication. From these conceptualisation, SAH corresponds with social categorization of participants based on shared traits or values (i.e. ethnic identity, sojourner status), as well as the notion of *Ummah* among Muslims. The next section will now focus on Contact Hypothesis in order to explain the different conditions of contact and the associated outcomes with such contact from a theoretical perspective.

## **9.7 Contact Hypothesis**

Contact hypothesis was put forward by the predominant psychologist Gordon Allport, who, in his work *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954), emphasises the pivotal role of ‘social categorisation’ in forming our prejudice and normalising from a cognitive perspective. He acknowledges that these types of social categorisations are inevitable for the human mind. Therefore, racial or ethnic essentialism could only be overcome through meaningful contact, which would significantly diminish the existence of prejudice. From the motivational aspect, Allport (1954) argues that if a group has status, then the members of this group tend to maintain and protect the status quo; therefore, act more inclined to disconnect themselves from what they perceive to be minorities or outsiders. This in turn increases bias in intergroup contact and the likelihood of anxiety and threat. Allport’s theorisation of social-categorisation and prejudice during contact resonates with SIT’s theorisation of social-categorisation, self-identification and in-group favouritism (Tajfel 1988, Brown 2000). However, Allport points to certain conditions for contact to be meaningful with a positive outcome to reduce prejudice, and puts an emphasis on equal status for this:

Prejudice may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional support (i.e., by law, custom, or local atmosphere), and provided it is of the sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups. Allport (1954:281)

According to Allport (1954), intercultural communication in an equal environment and status is essential for gross stereotypes to transform into a more distilled individual interpretation since he suggests “[t]he stereotypes act as both a justificatory device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group, and as a screening or selective device to maintain simplicity in perception and thinking” (1954:192). This argument is in line with the discussion on how multiculturalism and interculturalism diverge (see 9.5.2), as well as Appiah’s (2006) conceptualisation of contact with culturally different groups. Appiah (2006) suggests that individuals are compelled to step beyond their cultural territories for intercultural communication and in doing so, respect should be sought to ‘understand’ one another instead of ‘agree’ with each other.

For meaningful intercultural contact to take place, in order to reduce prejudice (positive outcome), Allport (1954) puts forward four conditions:

- 1) Equal status between the groups,
- 2) Common goals,
- 3) Intergroup cooperation,
- 4) The support of authorities, law and custom (Dovidio et al. 2005:271).

When we examine the data to ascertain whether these four conditions are met, we can see that Condition 1 is met under student status; Conditions 2, 3 and 4 are met only through ‘Curriculum’; however, none of these conditions met ensure reduction of prejudice following the contact. Condition 1, 2, 3 and 4 are met in DCU solely to initiate the intercultural contact. Additionally, condition 1 is far from being fully met



given the sojourner versus host, international versus home student status. To further elaborate on these points, the category 'Curriculum' will be examined in relation to Contact Hypothesis conditions for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice.

As explored in 7.5 and 8.7. Curriculum activities are identified as the most powerful tool to facilitate intercultural contact on campus among different student groups. First of all, use of inter-group to define contact is problematic, since the Curriculum also facilitates contact at inter-personal level. Therefore, this study will employ the use of both while discussing 'Curriculum' in relation to Contact Hypothesis. Through curriculum activities such as group work and assignments, the lecturers trigger Condition 2 (common goals) and 3 (intergroup cooperation) among students, who would otherwise identify with different social categories (i.e. ethnic groups, age groups) found within the campus. This indicates a third-party involvement in the process of intercultural contact, therefore, suggests that contact is not voluntary. Considering the outcomes of such involuntary contact, which nonetheless create a framework of common goals and intergroup cooperation, the students report 'Length of stay' (8.6.1) and work dependent relationship development with their host peers on campus. This is a questionable quality of intercultural contact since Allport suggests when the criteria are met, the outcome of contact should work to reduce prejudice. However, the findings of this study suggest that intercultural contact achieved through curriculum does not ensure reduction of prejudice on campus, most likely due to the fact that the group work is of a relatively brief temporary nature.

One significant point concerns the 1<sup>st</sup> Condition, namely equal status. This is again a problematic area, since the students report equal treatment by their lecturers, which is coded under category "Relationship with the Academic Staff" in 7.4.3, yet the same students additionally discuss their sojourner identity in Chapter 5, which is focused on

improving their language skills. Additionally, the participants report they face communication barriers as a result of colloquial English among their host peers. These bring the discussion to a new dimension on equal status based on language skills and student status on campus. Given that the cultural capital of the participants is formed differently than that of host students, this creates a gap to be filled by IMS to succeed in the Irish academia. Their cultural capital includes their educational background and language skills as well. Another notable point to discuss in relation to equal status is participants' ethnic identity. Since participants' ethnic identity, which includes their national, religious, cultural and gender identities, requires certain dietary sensitivities, the participants face an internal barrier to participation in the host culture socialisation (see 'food & drink' 6.2.2). Consequently, IMS do not share equal status both from an ethnic identity and cultural capital perspective with the host students in DCU.

The support of authorities, Condition 4, is worth mentioning with regard to the 'Institutional Support' that constitutes an important category within the data. Institutional support in DCU is a controversial subject, since it both facilitates well-being of the participants, increased sense of belonging among them, and bolsters their ethnic identity by offering a space with the potential to foster mono-cultural contact. Thus when looked at from the perspective of 'Relationship with the Academic Staff' (6.4.3), the category confirms the role of support of authorities to successfully facilitate intercultural contact among students. However, when looked at from the category 'Institutional Support' (7.2), it is evident that the support of authorities might work to impede intercultural contact by reinforcing a stronger culture/ethnic identity. Additionally, the type of contact that has been discussed in this section largely relies on a third-party facilitator such as lecturers, which indicates involuntary contact. When

students are free to decide who to socialise with on campus, homophilic tendencies are evident.

## **9.8 Intercultural Contact and Internationalisation**

So far the analysis and discussion have indicated that DCU and Ireland offer IMS multicultural environments during their sojourn. A multicultural environment is particularly evident on DCU campus, given it is a geographically smaller institution than Ireland as the context. This calls for a focus on the sub-category ‘Reflections’ regarding intercultural contact, students’ expectations from and objectives of study abroad in relation to intercultural identity and internationalisation in higher education. One of the key findings concludes that participants associate positive outcomes of internationalisation with intercultural contact. Therefore, intercultural contact should be given sufficient attention by both researchers and policy makers in order to maximise the positive outcomes of internationalisation of higher education for students (Üstündağ 2016).

### **9.8.1 Empirical Studies on Intercultural Contact Campus**

Given that intercultural contact is positively associated with a successful internationalisation by IMS, empirical studies in the literature are reviewed in this section. As an example of these studies, Campbell (2011) explores the process and the outcomes of ‘campus buddy’ project implemented at university in New Zealand with thirty students who were paired up as one host one international student. She concludes, although this type of contact felt artificial and forced from time to time, the students were able to gain a continuous intercultural communication experiences which would otherwise be impossible.

Previously, Nasdale and Todd (2006) conducted a study that examined intercultural contact on campus. Their study was built on the assumption that recruitment of international students brings diversity to campus; therefore, intercultural contact occurs. However, the study concludes that intercultural contact is dependent on variables such as the degree programme or dispositions of the students. They additionally find that the level of intercultural contact is dependent on the student status as host or sojourner. The study suggests that the host (Australian) students were less interested in intercultural contact, which is in line with the findings of this research.

Upon identifying intercultural contact on campus as an “issue” (Nasdale and Todd 2006:189), Todd (2006), in a later study, evaluates the outcomes of a programme that was designed to promote and enhance intercultural contact among students. The outcomes suggest that the intervention works to facilitate intercultural contact between particularly international and host (Australian) students. The findings additionally indicate that the intercultural contact achieved through implementation of the programme was extended to the campus since the recruitment of participants was based on students’ living arrangements.

The field of intercultural contact, particularly on campus, points to a dearth of empirical studies that implement and evaluate programmes to enhance intercultural contact among students. Now, the discussion will focus on how participants’ reflections on identity could be used to develop and appreciate an intercultural dimension of identity as well how this could be achieved within an internationalisation framework in the next sections.

## 9.8.2 Intercultural Communication

Samovar and Porter asserts “culture is ubiquitous” (2002:8), which makes it difficult to theorise in many culture-related fields of research. In section 2.3, it was quoted that “identity serves as a bridge between culture and communication” (Martin and Nakayama 2010:162). If identity is the bridge between culture and communication, intercultural communication becomes inevitable as individuals and groups interact with increased diversity of culture around them both spatially and virtually. Pillar (2012:14) comments on intercultural communication as below:

Intercultural communication is a vibrant field of study that is based on widely circulating discourses about culture and cultural difference.

Monaghan (2012:30) similarly points to abundance of use, application, discourse and theorisation of intercultural communication:

Intercultural communication is a field that has taken a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to the question of how people from different cultures interact.

Even though both scholars emphasise the fact that the discourse, theorisation and methodologies are various, they both agree that intercultural communication essentially entail different cultures and interaction. Perspectives on intercultural communication varies in time. When examined chronologically, Monaghan (2012) presents four perspectives on intercultural communication on a timeline; 1900s to World War II in which cultures “were thought of as discrete entities that did not interact with each other” (p:19), 1950s to 1980s in which “intercultural communication emerged from the next step in the process of teaching Americans foreign languages” (p:20), 1990s to 2000s in which “discourse analysis meets intercultural communication” (p:26), and Current Linguistic Anthropology in which “long-term

participant observation, field-work to culture and language” (p:27) are included in the examination. Following further research in the field of intercultural communication, researchers seek to understand whether individuals could become competent in intercultural interactions, although, Deardorff (2012:6) argues that “the term competence is a contested site” in the field of intercultural studies. In an effort to conceptualise intercultural competence, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009:7) put forward the definition below:

Intercultural competence is the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people, who to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world.

This conceptualisation echoes with Kim’s broad conceptualisation of culture in which she proposes culture could be viewed as “potentially open to all levels of groups whose life patterns discernibly influence individual communication behaviours” (1998:12). Kim’s (1998) definition is so inclusive as to include all dimensions that could have the potential to make a difference, such as nationality, religion, ethnicity, race, family, education, personality. Consequently, according to Kim’s point of view all contact has the potential to be intercultural.

This is a useful approach in order to understand the dynamics of the contact that is taking place among Muslim students from different countries on campus (particularly in the Interfaith Centre), which is evident in the data (see the onion model of relationship). Participants classified nationality as part of their identity and culture besides religion in Chapter 5. Additionally, ‘Participants’ Relationship with Islam’ (5.3.1) indicates multiple understandings and practices of Islam even among Muslims. Kim (2008:360) also conceptualises culture identity broadly to be inclusive of or to be used interchangeably with “other terms commonly used in both in international and

domestic contexts such as national, ethnic ethnolinguistic, and racial identity, or most generic concepts such as social identity and group identity”.

This study so far used both ethnic identity and social identity in the discussion chapter, and discussed that the dimensions of an ethnic, culture or social identity overlap both in the literature and in the data (i.e. nationality, religion, family & upbringing, individual interpretations, sojourner status, age, values, expectations, objectives, predispositions). Upon identifying that culture, ethnic and social identity are used interchangeably in the literature (Kim 2008), the discussion can continue with Kim’s theorisation of intercultural personhood that corresponds with a highly prominent sub-category relating to relationship development on campus; ‘Reflections’.

The sub-category ‘Reflections’ (8.8) is built on participants’ ultimate understanding of sojourn experiences, which is embodied in substantial code ‘*Seeing study abroad beyond education purposes only (36)*’, and it leads to the key findings listed in the chapter summary; “all kind of relationship development on campus is a transformative and reflexive process”. Even though there are different sub-categories such as ‘Expectations & Objectives’, ‘English Language Proficiency’, ‘Cultural Ambassador’ that work to facilitate intercultural contact, and barriers for such contact were articulated throughout the interviews, such as ‘Culture Distance’ and ‘Stereotypes’ (see Table 2), participants deem study abroad (sojourn) experience to be reflexive process to varying degrees. This reflexive process is associated with positive outcomes of internationalisation by the participants as presented in key finding 4 of this project.

### **9.8.3 Intercultural Competence**

As regards the fuzzy use of culture (Dunne 2008) and intercultural and competence, Deardorff (2012) usefully reviews models of intercultural communication competence

as: compositional, co-orientation, developmental, adaptation, and causal process. Compositional models include Hamilton et al (1998), Toomey and Kurogi (Facework-Based Model of Intercultural Competence 1998), Deardorff (Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence 2006) and Hunter, White and Godbey (Global Competencies Model 2006), which lay out the “basic scope and contents that a theory of intercultural communication competence needs to incorporate” (Deardorff 2012:15). However, compositional models come short theoretically in explaining the relationship among these elements.

Co-orientational models include Fantini (Intercultural Interlocutor Competence Model, Worldviews Converge Model 1995), Byram (Intercultural Competence Model 1997), Kupla (Intercultural Competence Model for Strategic Human Resource Management 2008), Rathje (Coherence-Cohesion Model of Intercultural Competence 2007). Co-oriental models emphasise the underlying factors that facilitate adjustment; nevertheless, they fail to account for the ambiguity present in much of the interactions (Deardorff 2012).

Developmental models recognise that “competence evolves over time, either individually or relationally, or both” (Deardorff 2012:21). These models include King and Magolda (Intercultural Maturity Model 2005), Bennett (Developmental Intercultural Competence Model 1986), Gullahorn and Gullahorn (U-Curve Model of Intercultural Adjustment 1962). Adaptational Models tend to consider adaptation process as part of the criteria to become competent. These models include Kim (Intercultural Communicative Competence Model 1988), Gallois et al. (Intercultural Communicative Accommodation Model 1988), Berry et al. (Attitude Acculturation Model 1989), Navas et al. (Relative Acculturation Extended Model 2005).



Last but not least, causal path models include Arasaratnam (Model of Intercultural Communication Competence 2008), Griffith and Harvey (Intercultural Communication Model of Relationship Quality 2000), Ting-Toomey (Multilevel Process Change Model of Intercultural Competence 1999), Hammer et al. (Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Model of Intercultural Competence 1998), Deardorff (Process Model of Intercultural Competence 2006), and Imahori and Lanigan (Relational Model of Intercultural Competence 1989), and they present intercultural communication competence as a “theoretical linear system, which makes it amenable to empirical tests” (Deardorff 2012:29).

The abundance of theoretical models indicates how complex the processes and systems involved in intercultural communication competence are. Nevertheless, Kim states “many of the current theories in social psychology and intercultural communication address such individual variations in cultural and ethnic orientations” (2008:362). For the purpose of this project, the discussion will be based on Kim’s theorisation of Intercultural Personhood. In close relations to the approaches and aims of internationalisation that was discussed in Chapter 2, Intercultural Personhood fits in the empirical evidence obtained from IMS.

The analysis of data shows that the current approach to internationalisation in DCU is a blend of activity and ethos. Curricular activities emerged from the data as positive factors for intercultural interaction among students. Additionally, DCU emerges as a diversity friendly campus in line with ethos approach. Apart from the ethos approach, DCU’s approach to diversity corresponds with Nasir and Al-Amir’s (2006:27) list to make campus identity safe and friendly. As the discussion so far suggests, participants’ construction of identity is not independent of their environments (Cultural Capital, Bourdieu 1978), (Social Identity Theory, Turner 1988), (Cultural Identity, Kim 2007,

2008), and a multicultural environment (Modood 2005, Taylor 2012) offers the space for both maintenance of cultural identity (Institutional Completeness, Breton 1964) and intercultural contact (Allport 1954). However, the challenge evident in the data is the reduced opportunities for intercultural contact among students based on factors such as identity, stereotypes, and culture distance in the absence of third party facilitators even though intercultural interactions and the benefits associated with it are positively linked to a successful study abroad experience, thus, internationalisation.

#### 9.8.4 Intercultural Personhood

Kim's intercultural personhood model (2008) represents a transformative and reflexive process similar to that of the participants in this study as suggested during the interviews.

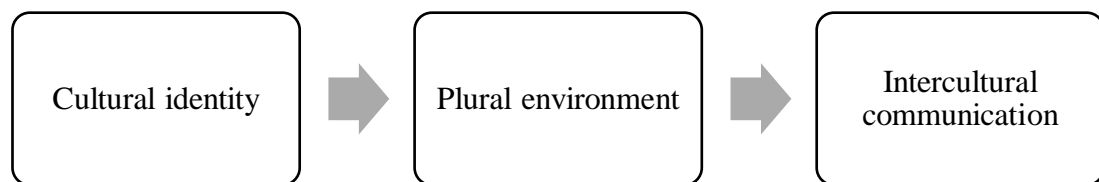


Figure 9.2. Stages and Components of Kim's Intercultural Personhood

Individuals and groups in the society have cultural identities that indisputably lead to plural environments. In these plural environments, intercultural communication becomes a necessity. Kim (2008:361-362) identifies 'positivity bias' (In-group favouritism in SIT, Tajfel 1988) and 'oversimplification' (Prejudice in Contact Hypothesis, Allport 1954) as two key factors detrimental to intercultural identity transformations in pluralist societies. She, however, proposes that individuals undergo

a process of acculturation-deculturation, stress-adaptation- growth and finally identity transformation (2008).

The evidence in the data is not rich enough for a claim as strong as transformation; however, participants clearly indicated that their experiences in the Irish HE are reflexive. That is, the participants do not only associate expectations and objectives with study abroad, they also reflect on to what degree they were able to fulfil these expectations and objectives. This is a positive indication for higher education institutions to implement an internationalisation policy that aims to encourage and facilitate an intercultural personhood.

Recent studies in the field of internationalisation, student mobility, intercultural education and intercultural contact suggest empirical evidence for limitations of a multicultural campus and lack of interaction among the students (Üstündağ 2016, Castro et al 2016, Holmes et al 2016,). Research also indicates that a university class should be based on a curriculum that reinforces social justice in order to educate the global citizen (Crosbie 2014). Although the terminology is still subject to use interchangeably, the underlying philosophy of internationalisation repeatedly denotes intercultural dialogue as well as a global understanding of existence, respect and justice. IMS' experiences that constitute the empirical data of this research project call attention to similar issues in Irish higher education. The findings of this project should work to encourage stakeholders to incorporate the notion of intercultural personhood within internationalisation framework at universities.

## **9.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed the thesis structure, presented the key findings and the grounded theory model, and reviewed the theoretical concepts that are relevant to the findings.

It emphasised the role of identity and environment in sojourner experience within the framework of internationalisation and concluded that in order to achieve a successful internationalisation, intercultural contact should be an objective and facilitated.

- It is identified that *Ummah*, which is the transnational union of Muslims, is a prevalent phenomenon among IMS in DCU. A strong *Ummah* on campus is likely to increase the level of Homophily among Muslim students.
- The drawbacks of a multicultural campus are identified as Homophily, Ethnic Group Strength, as well as the prevalence of prejudice and stereotypes (as discussed in Contact Hypothesis). The advantages of a multicultural campus are explained through the theoretical lens of Institutional Completeness, Host Receptivity and framework of Internationalisation of HE.
- It is explained that even though Culture Distance is salient in the experiences of international students on host campus, the Cultural Capital is a significant resource in order to drive students toward engaging in intercultural contact.
- An Intercultural personhood framework is recommended as a framework for HEIs to challenge the Culture Distance, Homophily and Institutional Completeness on campus that is identified in this study, and to benefit from students' cultural capital as a resource for intercultural contact.

The next chapter concludes the thesis with an overview and evaluation of the study, as well as the limitations of the current research and recommendations for future research.

## CONCLUSION

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### 10.1 Introduction

This chapter does an overall review of the thesis in relation to its findings and discussion of theories. It evaluates the research conducted with reference to the thesis' contribution to the existing knowledge. Recommendations for the future direction of research are also be put forward in this chapter.

### 10.2 Review of Chapters

This project was designed to explore experiences of IMS in an Irish university with the research question “*What are the experiences of international Muslim students in an Irish university?*”. It identified identity, environment and contact as main pillars of their experiences. This study additionally focused on identifying the barriers and factors that facilitate IMS' cross-cultural adjustment and communication in the host institution and the host culture; whether religion has an impact on this process, and how internationalisation in DCU is perceived by the IMS. It employed a grounded theory method within a qualitative research framework, and used interviews in order to collect data.

Chapter 1 introduced the project and presented an overview of the thesis. In Chapter 2, contextualisation took place with reference to the internationalisation of higher education, international students and Muslim students in Ireland. The chapter discussed rationales behind internationalisation of higher education and approaches towards recruiting international students in higher education. It critiqued the approach that prioritises revenue generation, and advocated that internationalisation of higher education should account for international students' needs in the host institution

besides aiming for educating the global citizen (Noddings et al 2005) and intercultural persons (Kim 2012). The chapter reviewed the internationalisation practices in Ireland with reference to the Higher Education Authority, their publications and policies. It then moved onto Muslim students' experiences both outside and within Ireland, while pointing to the rising number of students coming to Ireland from countries with sizeable Muslim populations. The chapter consequently identified a gap in the literature and crystallised the research questions. Chapter 3 introduced and elaborated on the research design. The chapter reviewed qualitative research, and examined grounded theory as the methodology of the study. It advocated for the use of interviews and explained in detail what interviewing techniques were used. The chapter then presented the data analysis process in detail, and concluded with reflexivity.

In Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, findings of the study were presented. Each chapter reviewed one core category that emerged from the data analysis. Within the respective chapter, the core category was reviewed in relation to its constructs and the codes these constructs contain. In Chapter 4, the core category was entitled Perceptions of Identity and Culture; therefore, the discussion revolved around how IMS defined themselves during the interviews. Constructs such as Nationality, Religion, Gender, Family, and Sojourner were unfolded in this chapter. In Chapter 5, the focus shifted to how IMS perceive the host culture and society, which is closely linked to the core category discussed in Chapter 4, since the students' perceptions of their culture and identity relate to their perceptions of the host culture & society. Culture Distance, Negative Perceptions of Muslims, and Host Receptivity were explored in this chapter. In Chapter 6, the participants' perceptions regarding the host institution were examined. Within the chapter, Institutional Support, the role of the Interfaith Centre on campus, and how the perceived institutional support might relate to the participants' well-

being, were presented through respective constructs. Additionally, the Curriculum was analysed from the perspective of the participants. Chapter 7 included an examination of Relationship Development on campus from the perspective of the participants, and introduced the onion and flower models of relationship development indicating student in-groups on campus as well as the factors impacting on formation of these relationships among the student groups. The chapter additionally presented constructs such as Predispositions, Curriculum, Culture Distance, and Homophily in an effort to explain the relationship development on campus.

Chapter 8 reviewed the research questions with reference to the emerging findings and drew a conceptual model of experiences of IMS in an Irish university with reference to the interdependent relationship between the participants' experiences and internationalisation in the Irish HE. In an effort to substantially theorise the subject matter, the model emphasised the key roles of identity, environment and contact in study abroad experience, revealed that successful internationalisation was correlated with realisation of objectives by the participants, and participants' objectives in the Irish HE could not be understood without reference to their cultural capital, predispositions, the host environment factors and their contact practices. Besides the grounded theory model, the chapter presented tables that listed student and context-specific factors which played a role in IMS' experiences. These tables helped explain the challenges the students encountered as well as the factors that positively impacted on their cross-cultural adjustment. Chapter 8 additionally reviewed theoretical concepts from a number of disciplines in order to discuss findings with reference to existing theories, and add to the empirical value of them.

### **10.3 Contribution to the Knowledge**

This study makes a significant contribution to the existing debate on internationalisation of higher education, accommodation of diversity on campus, particularly regarding religious pluralism, and examination of intercultural experiences of Muslim sojourners. The paragraphs below will address these contributions respectively.

Firstly, this study contributes to the literature and debate on internationalisation of higher education Ireland by identifying drawbacks of a multicultural campus. It foregrounds the role of the praying facility on campus to facilitate IMS' transition, socialisation and well-being. The study additionally highlights the role of the curriculum as a powerful tool to encourage intercultural communication among different cohorts of students on a multi-cultural campus. It concludes that religious pluralism cannot be neglected within examination of diversity and while recruiting international students since religion finds a strong resonance in how Muslim students define themselves and culture. Therefore, sidelining religion in accommodation of diversity on campus might consequently lead to a lack of recognition and inclusion. This being said, a multi-cultural campus might impede development of intercultural relations by offering segregated spaces on campus.

Secondly, the experiences of IMS are identified with reference to both positive and negative circumstances. This includes perceived host receptivity, the role of host families and institutional support as part of positive, and identity-based incidents as part of the negative. Despite the fact that Ireland emerges as a non-racist host context from the perspective of IMS, negative conceptions regarding Muslims exist in the society. The study additionally offers empirical evidence for the barriers and



facilitators concerning cross-cultural adjustment and communication of IMS in the host culture and host institution. Among the barriers, culture distance is evidently the most significant, and among the facilitators, host receptivity as well as the host institution's commitment to the accommodation of diversity emerge as the most significant factors. The impact of culture distance is experienced differently by both sexes, and these gender-specific factors are presented in findings and in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

Thirdly, the notion of *Ummah*, which is conceptualised as a transnational Muslim community (Mandaville 2001, Archer 2009), is explored on campus, and how this notion unfolded in IMS' practices and values as sojourners in the Irish host country context. The study critiques and offers evidence to refute the categorisation of Muslims as a homogenous group. It identifies differences in practices and values among Muslims based on their country of origin and family as opposed to diluting it to an idea of national cultures (Hofstede 2005), and proposes being Muslim entails diversification within the community and is prone to different interpretations. Nevertheless, the transnational nature of *Ummah* has a binding power by offering an overarching and inclusive Muslim identity within itself.

Fourthly, this project confirms the usefulness of qualitative research methods in exploring the lived experiences of individuals who identify with a particular cultural group. Within a qualitative framework, the application of grounded theory enabled the actual remarks of participants to find resonance in theorisation of the subject matter. These lived experiences in the words of the participants are also used to illustrate the theoretical concepts reviewed in the discussion chapter, which help link the empirical evidence of real life phenomenon to the theoretical tenets of the literature. Following

the discussion of contribution of this study in the above paragraphs, the attention now turns to the evaluation of the study.

#### **10.4 Evaluation of the Study**

The evaluation of the study will be conducted in reference to Charmaz' (2006) criteria she proposes in her book "Constructing Grounded Theory". Charmaz (2006:182-183) introduces four criteria which are presented as 'credibility', 'originality', 'resonance' and 'usefulness'. Charmaz (2006) additionally proposes a set of questions with each element of the evaluation criteria. In the below paragraphs, the study will be evaluated with reference to Charmaz's criteria and their respective set of questions.

Credibility:

- Has your research achieved intimate familiarity with the setting or topic?
- Are the data sufficient to merit your claims? Consider the range, number, and depth of your observation contained in the data.
- Have you made systematic comparisons between observations and between categories?
- Do the categories cover a wide range of empirical observations?
- Are there strong links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis?
- Has your research provided enough evidence for your claims to allow the reader to form an independent assessment –and agree with your claims?

Following a carefully designed data collection strategy, the data was analysed with rigour and in transparency with the assistance of data analysis software programme NVivo. The data collection resulted in a rich data set, which improved the scope and

depth of the research. The constant comparison, particularly in the axial coding stage of the data analysis enabled the relationships and links to be built within the data, consequently leading to empirically supported concepts and relationships.

Originality:

- Are your categories fresh? Do they offer new insights?
- Does your analysis provide a new conceptual rendering of the data?
- What is the social and theoretical significance of this work?
- How does your grounded theory challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices?

With regard to originality, this study is a pioneer in its own niche, which explores the experiences of IMS in Ireland. Therefore, the findings of this study offer novel insights into the broader field of internationalisation of higher education and intercultural studies. The current research identified DCU Glasnevin Campus as a multicultural space. It introduced the incorporation of the notion of *Ummah* into an examination of Muslim sojourners, students in particular, cross-cultural experiences while confirming its applicability in education and intercultural context. The study additionally identified specific barriers Muslim students encounter in the Irish context, the campus climate for this body of students, as well as the student groups on campus from the perspective of IMS.

Resonance:

- Do categories portray the fullness of the studied experience?
- Have you revealed both liminal and unstable taken for granted meanings?
- Have you drawn links between larger collectivities or institutions and individual lives, when the data so indicate?

- Does your grounded theory make sense to your participants or people who share their circumstances? Does your analysis offer them deeper insights about their lives and worlds?

The scope of this study has been broad enough to account for gender, age and different nationalities within a particular religious community, therefore it offers a holistic understanding of IMS' experiences in the Irish context, while paying attention to the nuances. As stated in section 4.7 and 4.7.1, the researcher actively engaged in reflexivity throughout the process in order to avoid taken-for-granted assumptions as well as to ensure grounding the findings in the data. Consequently, the findings echo what the participants articulated their experiences were during the interviews, and with the help of grounded theory processes, participants' remarks and lived experiences are situated within theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Usefulness:

- Does your analysis offer interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds?
- Do your analytic categories suggest any generic process?
- If so, have you examined these generic processes for tacit implications?
- Can the analysis spark further research in other substantive areas?
- How does your work contribute to the knowledge? How does it contribute to making a better world?

The findings of this research and the grounded theory model it offers could be applied to other university campus examinations in order to inform on internationalisation practices and the students' cross-cultural experiences. Besides, the model could be used to test Muslim minority groups' experiences in the Irish context in order to

compare and identify overlapping or different factors. The findings could be used to inform on future policies and practices in the internationalisation of higher education and accommodation of diversity in host institutions.

### **10.5 Limitations of the Study**

The sampling of the study is limited due to the fact the research only took place in one campus, which is DCU Glasnevin in this case. The students were not exclusively picked from each school and programme to represent a broader diversity. As a result of snowball sampling strategy and limited means of recruiting participants, the demographics regarding disciplines were dependent on the students' availability at the time of the research.

The study additionally has time limitations since the data collection took place in the academic year of 2014/2015. This means that the participant interviews were conducted prior to the Syrian refugee crisis that peaked in Europe in the summer of 2015, as well prior to the at times racialized discourse relating to both the UK referendum on leaving the European Union and US presidential election. The pre-crisis data might lack nuances which might be relevant to international Muslim students' experiences. Although not direct, a changing image of Muslim immigration could have pertinent, albeit negative, impact on participants' perception of the host culture (Chapter 5).

Another time related limitation is the changing landscape in Ireland. The changing landscape could as well be considered in close relation to the aforementioned refugee crisis that affected approaches to internationalisation, immigration and minorities (in particular Muslims) at various levels (i.e. civil, political, military, legal, social) in Europe; however, it is also closely linked to recent developments in Ireland regarding

hate crime. Currently in Ireland, there is no hate crime legislation in effect. European Network Against Racism in Ireland (ENAR Ireland) is the branch of a larger European-wide network of ENAR and works not only to fight against racism in Ireland but also to bring hate crime legislation in effect. For that purpose, ENAR Ireland has been publishing quarterly reports on racism since 2013<sup>74</sup>. The organisation also worked in collaboration with Hate and Hostility Research Group (HHRG) in University of Limerick to publish findings on their research conducted to explore racism and experiences of victims of hate crime in Ireland as well as drafting a bill proposal in order to advocate for hate crime legislation in Ireland.

Given that the data collection on racism and hate crime only dates back to 2013 in Ireland, and there is no legislation on hate crime as of yet, the changing landscape and a significant increase in the numbers of reports of discrimination based on religious identity between year 2012 and 2015 in factsheets published by European Commission could be due to this lack of data. That is, the spike in Ireland's score in racism and discrimination based on identity, religious in particular, does not necessarily indicate a sudden change in the perspective and approach of the society, but a lack of available data at the time.

When we look at the findings of this study, racism does not emerge as a significant factor in participants' experience, and the students tend to define Ireland as a welcoming, safe and friendly host. In that sense, findings of this study challenge the increasing prevalence of racism in Ireland. Nevertheless, as a limitation, this study is

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<sup>74</sup> iReport Racist Incident Reporting System came alive in 2013 authored by Shane O'Curry and Dr Lucy Michael. Access to system is online through the website or partner organisations [<https://www.ireport.ie/>, Accessed 12/10/2016]. A live data report can be found on the website [[https://www.ireport.ie/live\\_data\\_reports/](https://www.ireport.ie/live_data_reports/), Accessed 12/10/2016].

exclusive to the experiences of DCU students who may not necessarily live in deprived community areas, which are prone to property damage or graffiti (Carr 2016), and are located away from the city centre, in the north of Dublin. These limitations regarding the location and participants of the study were noted in the Methodology Chapter in detail.

## **10.6 Recommendations and Future Directions**

Following the discussion on limitations of the current study, future research should focus on a cross-discipline and cross-campus examination of Muslim students in Ireland. That is, the scope of the research should be extended to major universities/institutions with sizeable Muslim student population and active Islamic societies, such as Royal College of Surgeons Ireland (RCSI), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), University College Dublin (UCD), as well as the universities/institutions outside Dublin such as National University of Ireland Galway (NUI), University College Cork (UCC) and University of Limerick (UL). It is essential that research focuses on the role of these Islamic student societies in experiences of Muslim students. In this study, the Islamic society and the praying facility are identified as major influences on students' socialising habits and preferences. In a cross-university research, the focus should be placed on the role of Islamic societies, praying facilities as well as identifying the differences and to what extent these differences impact students' experiences.

It is also suggested that PhD & research students' as well as Irish national and non-Irish national Muslim students' experiences are taken into consideration in future research. In the current study, the participants largely came from Europe and Gulf countries. Different countries of origin should be accounted for in the future research

as well as national/ethnic differences (i.e. Malaysia, Pakistan, Turkey). In that sense, an intersectional approach could be adopted in the design of a future project. A more holistic study is required for a comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of Muslim students experience in Ireland.

Besides the experiences of Muslim students in Ireland, future research should focus on internationalisation policies of HEIs in Ireland, explore whether a multicultural campus is a prevalent phenomenon in Irish higher education, whether HEIs have multicultural or intercultural policies, and ask to what extent an intercultural curriculum is implemented in third level institutions.

## **10.7 Conclusion**

This grounded theory research indicates that IMS' experiences offer valuable insights into internationalisation and intercultural education in Irish higher education. It is identified that participants' experiences take shape in three major yet interrelated areas; identity, environment and contact. It is useful to identify these three main pillars of IMS experiences as sojourners in Irish education since they have the potential to inform on the design of future research.

This study offers evidence for the multicultural campus that is practised in DCU, reiterates the need for more inter-personal and inter-group interaction among students from different cultural/ethnic backgrounds, and advocates for an internationalisation framework underpinned by intercultural education and intercultural personhood (Üstündağ 2016). This internationalisation framework does not only focus on international students; it places as much emphasis and value on internationalisation for host students. DCU emerged as a multicultural campus from this study based on student groups' socialising preferences, habits and spaces. A multicultural campus has



the danger of reinforcing a separation culture on campus and maintaining this as the status quo. As is stated in Chapter 2, rationales and approaches to internationalisation vary; however, ideally an internationalisation framework should aim to work on student, national and institutional levels (Knight 2004, Castro 2016) as well as in cognitive, affective and behavioural domains.

Given the current, and future status of Ireland as an immigration receiving multicultural country with a vision to become a research hub and successful economy, it is imperative that Irish higher education implements an effective intercultural education in order to educate the global citizens who are equipped with the skills and predisposition to thrive in the multicultural environments of today.

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## Appendices

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### Appendix A Forms and the Interview Guide

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#### 1. Plain Language Form

##### *Introduction to the study*

This research is undertaken by Ms Buse Gamze Ustundag who is a PhD Candidate in School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies under the joint supervision of Dr Veronica Crosbie and Dr Ciaran Dunne, and it is funded by the Irish Research Council. Its working title is *an investigation into the college experiences of international Muslim students (undergraduate and Masters) in an Irish university*. Ms Buse Gamze Ustundag can be contacted at [buse.ustundag2@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:buse.ustundag2@mail.dcu.ie).

##### *Aims and objectives of the study*

This study aims to explore the college experiences of international Muslim students who are enrolled in an undergraduate degree programme in Dublin City University with respect to gender differences. It aspires to identify factors impacting upon Muslim students' college experience and develop a conceptual model to explain Muslim students' transition from one culture to another in an educational setting.

##### *Details of involvement in the project*

The participants will be required to meet the researcher for an approximately one hour face to face interview at least for one time upon reading the plain language statement and signing the consent form. The interview will be conducted through English and will be audio-taped for transparency. The interview will be conducted by the researcher only and anonymity of the participants will be ensured through use of

pseudonyms. The researcher might request a follow-up interview. The participation is on voluntary base and the respondents are subject to withdrawal from the study at any point they wish. There will no penalty for withdrawal from the project.

***Potential risks to participants arising from participation in the study***

No potential risk is envisaged to involvement in this study.

***Benefits to participants***

This research aims to highlight the individual experiences of Muslim students in Irish Higher Education and the factors impacting upon these lived experiences. There is a body of research conducted in Ireland with regard to international students and intercultural contact on campus; however, this project aspires specifically to underpin the factors facilitating Muslim students' college experience so that inform on a more multicultural curriculum and foster intercultural contact on culturally a diverse campus.

***Protection of confidentiality***

The data analysis will be done by the researcher alone. The participants will be identified only by pseudonyms during the dissemination of findings of the study. Every effort will be made to protect the anonymity of the respondents. Interview transcripts will be stored in a secure place by the researcher and only the researcher will have access to this information. The data collected will be disposed of within five years of the initial date of collection.

If participants have any queries or wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary,

Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee,

c/o Office of the Vice-President for Research,

Dublin City University,

Dublin 9.

Tel 01-7008000

## **2. Participant Consent Form**

Dear student,

As an international Muslim undergraduate/Masters student enrolled in a degree programme in Dublin City University, you are invited to take part in research aiming to investigate the college experiences of Muslim students in Irish Higher Education. This research is being undertaken by Ms Buse Gamze Ustundag as part of PhD thesis in School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies under the joint supervision of Dr Veronica Crosbie and Dr Ciaran Dunne and is being funded by the Irish Research Council.

*Please complete the following (circle Yes or No for each question)*

**Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement Yes / No**

**Do you understand the information provided? Yes / No**

**Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes / No**

**Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes / No**

**Do you agree to have your interview audiotaped? Yes / No**

Please be advised that participation in this study is completely voluntary and any participant might withdraw from the study at any point. There is no penalty or negative repercussions for withdrawing from the study.

All the information that is gathered as part of this study will be treated as highly confidential, and no names will be used in any form in the published research. All the information collected will be stored in a secure place where only the researcher has access to.



If you have any queries, please contact me on 00353 85 827 85 49, or e-mail me [buse.ustundag2@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:buse.ustundag2@mail.dcu.ie) .

***If you agree to take part in this research, please complete the below:***

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

***Participant's signature:***

***Name in block capitals:***

***Date:***

### **3. The Interview Guide**

#### **Interview Questions**

##### **Theme 1 ~ Participant Information**

- What age are you?
- Where are you from?
- What course are you in?
- What year are you?
- How long you have been in Ireland for?
- How did you decide to come to Ireland?
- Can you tell me a little about why you chose DCU?
- What influenced your decision to come to Ireland for higher education?
- Are you availing of any funding opportunities?
- How does that make you feel?
- Do you feel under pressure?

##### **Theme 2 ~ Social Life in DCU**

- Can you tell me a little about your social network in DCU?
- Who do you socialise with in DCU (to what extent do you socialise with host students/other international students/cultural peers)?
- Who are you friends with in DCU?
- What is your social life like in DCU?
- What do you do on campus when you are not in class?
- Where do you hang out most?
- What would you say is the most important when choosing your friends?

##### **Theme 3 ~ Sense of Identity**

- What does being an international student/studying abroad mean to you?
- What culture would you say you are?
- What does religion mean to you?
- Would you consider yourself religious? Why?

- Do you feel you belong to a certain region/group of people/culture/language/religion?
- Do you feel more comfortable with your cultural/religious/ethnic group?

#### **Theme 4 ~ Thoughts on Host Culture**

- How would you describe the host culture here?
- What do you think Irishness means?
- How would you describe Ireland?
- How would you describe Irish culture?
- What are Irish people's attitudes towards you from your perspective?
- Are they different on campus/off campus?
- What is your contact level with the host culture?
- Is the level different on campus/off campus?
- Do you feel influenced by the host culture?

#### **Theme 5 ~ Academic Life**

- Who do you generally prefer to sit with in the classroom?
- Does your course involve group work activities? If yes, who do you prefer to work with?
- What is your experience of Lecturers (without naming names)?
- Do you feel comfortable using English in classroom setting/academic environments?
- What challenges have you come across in an English speaking classroom?
- Is culture a topic that is ever discussed in your classes?
- What difficulties you can say you encounter in terms of culture?

#### **Theme 6 ~ Thoughts on the Institution**

- What do you think about your study experience in DCU?
- What is the benefit of studying in DCU for you?
- Are you aware of the International Office on campus? Have you ever gotten in touch with them?
- What do you think about your School Office? Have you ever needed to contact them?

- What is your overall expression of the campus facilities? (prayer rooms, cafeteria, food, etc)
- Are you a member of a club & society on campus?

### **Theme 7 ~ Intercultural Contact and Motivations**

- Do you make friends from other religions/cultures/nations?
- What would motivate to make intercultural/international/interethnic friendships?
- What do you think is the benefit of making such friendships?
- Do you make such friendship on campus or off campus?

### **Theme 8 ~ Religious Practice**

#### ○ Females

- What does being Muslim mean to you?
- What does veiling mean to you?
- Would you ever consider quitting the practice of covering your hair?
- What is your reasoning in cover your hair?
- Do you identify yourself with your headscarf?
- Do you feel that your religious identity affects how others perceive & engage with you?
- How often do you pray?
- Do you feel comfortable about practicing your religion in DCU?

#### ○ Males

- What does being Muslim mean to you?
- Do you identify yourself with your religious attire?
- Do you feel that your religious identity affects how others perceive & engage with you?
- How often do you pray?
- Do you feel comfortable about practicing your religion in DCU?
- What are your thoughts on females' practice of veiling?

### **Theme 9 ~ Perceptions of Higher Education**

- What does university mean to you?

- What do you expect from higher education?
- Do you have different expectations from higher education in Ireland?
- How would you describe your expectations from higher education in Ireland (DCU)?
- Have you ever experienced any critical incidents based on your identity?

## **Appendix B      Data Analysis (List of Initial Codes, Focus Codes & Emerging Themes)**

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### **1. List of Initial Codes (NVivo, Alphabetical Order)**

1. Age determining host culture's attitudes
2. Americans being nice at individual level
3. Americans having paranoias about immigration
4. Applying to come to Ireland, not the college
5. Applying to DCU from home country
6. Associating adaptation and integration problems with being Muslim
7. Associating awareness with education level
8. Associating being a human being with the capacity to make mistakes
9. Associating being young with lack of cultural awareness
10. Associating France with anti-Islam attitudes
11. Associating HE with learning and self-development
12. Associating headscarf with conservative
13. Associating Ireland with freedom
14. Associating learning with opening one's mind
15. Associating openness to intercultural contact with time and experience
16. Associating study abroad with learning and experience
17. Associating strict interpretation of religion with unsociable behaviour
18. Avoiding co-nationals in order to speak English
19. Avoiding hand-shake after the 1<sup>st</sup> time
20. Avoiding revealing nationality in the US
21. Being a good person as a criterion for college friendship
22. Being a mature student making it easier to get into DCU
23. Being a member of the Islamic Society in DCU
24. Being a mother causing stress/pressure in academic life

25. Being a Muslim not a requisite for making friends
26. Being able to communicate with Lecturers
27. Being afraid to speak in the classroom
28. Being among the first (time) class in a programme
29. Being asked stereotypical questions
30. Being asked questions about the headscarf
31. Being aware of the presence of International Office on campus
32. Being bilingual
33. Being funded by the home country government
34. Being happy in Ireland
35. Being happy to represent their culture
36. Being happy with/in DCU
37. Being happy with campus facilities
38. Being happy with foundation experience
39. Being interested in experiencing new things
40. Being interested in intercultural contact
41. Being involved in Islamic Society's management
42. Being member of a society
43. Being open to friendships (intercultural too)
44. Being open to influence and change
45. Being raised in a secular environment
46. Being seen as representative of a culture/religion/nation
47. Being self-funded
48. Being the only international student in the course
49. Being used to wearing headscarf
50. Being work-focused
51. Believing but not practicing
52. Believing gender makes a difference in Islam
53. Believing gender makes a difference in student experience

54. Believing in right and wrong
55. Believing learning in HE should be student's responsibility
56. Believing religion entails tasks and duties
57. Believing religion needs to be adapted to today's world
58. Benefiting from group work
59. Benefiting from living with the host family
60. Benefiting from study abroad experience in DCU
61. Big companies in Saudi Arabia preferring study abroad degrees
62. Blood determining home country
63. Calling host family as host mum out of respect
64. Campus facilitating intercultural contact
65. Canada being in the top choices for study abroad
66. Canadians being more familiar with immigration and diversity
67. Changing behaviour not to embarrass the person
68. Changing behaviour to avoid negative impression
69. Changing ideas after coming to Ireland
70. Changing religious habits in Ireland
71. Choosing a different school upon guidance
72. Choosing DCU for academic reasons
73. Choosing to do English course outside Dublin to avoid mingling with co-nations
74. Classmates being the first people to get to know in DCU/Ireland
75. Clubs and societies helping socialise
76. Coming from a developing country
77. Coming from a multi-cultural background in home country
78. Coming to DCU with a group of friends
79. Comparing Canada and Ireland
80. Comparing Czech Republic to Ireland
81. Comparing DCU to other colleges in Ireland
82. Comparing education system in home country and Ireland



83. Comparing head-scarved and non head-scarved females
84. Comparing Ireland and home country
85. Comparing Ireland and Italy
86. Comparing Ireland to France
87. Comparing Muslims grown up in Islamic context to non-Islamic context
88. Comparing the UK and Ireland
89. Comparing the US and Ireland
90. Completing undergraduate degree in home country
91. Considering to stay in Ireland for work upon graduation
92. Considering religious as religious
93. Considering themselves as religious
94. Course determining the country for study abroad
95. Course having mostly Irish students
96. Course not involving group activities
97. DCU having a partnership with a college in home country
98. DCU library not having enough books
99. DCU respecting cultural and religious differences
100. DCU website being easy for international students
101. DCU welcoming international students
102. DCU welcoming international students
103. Describing culture as mosaic
104. Describing culture as reflection of oneself
105. Describing country as representation of country
106. Describing culture based on attitudes
107. Describing culture based on dress code
108. Describing culture based on food and drink
109. Describing culture based on geography
110. Describing culture based on nationality
111. Describing culture based on nationality and religion

112. Describing culture based on religion
113. Describing culture based on traditions
114. Describing culture based on ways of thinking
115. Describing culture based on one's upbringing
116. Describing host culture's attitudes based on age
117. Describing identity-based on ethnicity
118. Describing Italy very religious
119. Describing mother as weak
120. Describing self-development as involvement
121. Describing self-development based on change
122. Describing self-development based on communication skills
123. Describing self-development based on learning
124. Describing themselves as European
125. Describing themselves as Muslim
126. Describing themselves as open-minded
127. Doing English course in DCU as part of pre-masters
128. Doing extra work to understand lectures
129. Doing Friday prayers
130. Doing religious practices at home
131. Doing the same course with co-nationals hindering intercultural contact
132. Drinking alcoholic beverages
133. Education system being different in home country that it is in Ireland
134. Encountering negative incident
135. English being a challenge in academic life
136. English being a reason for study abroad
137. English competency being a prerequisite for commencing the degree
138. English competency being part of the scholarship conditions
139. English speaking countries attracting international students for language
140. Exchanging information with classmates

141. Expecting an increase in number of international Muslim students in Ireland
142. Expecting adaptation/integration problems
143. Expecting learning from higher education
144. Expecting more than education from study abroad
145. Expecting study abroad to broaden their horizon
146. Expecting to have culture shock/adaptation problems upon returning home
147. Expecting to socialise with other nationalities during study abroad
148. Family being supportive of study abroad decision
149. Family influencing their decision
150. Family living in home country
151. Family members having higher education degree
152. Family members' previous experience with study abroad as a motivation
153. Family members studies or studying abroad
154. Family not being part of a national or religious community
155. Feeling close to Turkish culture
156. Feeling accepted by the host society
157. Feeling adapted to the host country
158. Feeling alienated in the host country
159. Feeling annoyed/frustrated with stereotyping questions
160. Feeling boundaries in communication
161. Feeling closer to other international students
162. Feeling comfortable in Ireland
163. Feeling comfortable practicing their religion in DCU
164. Feeling comfortable using English in classroom
165. Feeling comfortable with the scholarship scheme
166. Feeling cultural differences
167. Feeling homesick
168. Feeling influenced by the host culture
169. Feeling inner drive to initiate intercultural contact

170. Feeling isolated
171. Feeling more comfortable speaking English among international students
172. Feeling more comfortable when encouraged by the lecturers
173. Feeling more connected to European way of living
174. Feeling responsible for religious duties in Ireland
175. Feeling safe in Ireland
176. Feeling safety and comfort with co-nationals
177. Feeling strange that people don't treat them as Muslims in Ireland
178. Feeling the need to gain certain marks because of the scholarship
179. Feeling the need to go back home for family
180. Feeling the need to study more because of scholarship
181. Feeling unable to express themselves in English
182. Co-nationals helping one another
183. Finding it easy to contact/communicate with co-nationals
184. Foundation course being a prerequisite for commencing the degree
185. Foundation or pre-masters course being more intercultural than the actual course
186. Getting to know different cultures through study abroad
187. Going to mosque for Friday prayer
188. Government scholarships in home country being more available each year
189. Government recommending to stay with host families
190. Group work facilitating intercultural contact
191. Growing up in a Christian context as a Muslim
192. Hand-shake being a problem
193. Hanging out with co-nationals
194. Having a big Muslim community being involved in the mosque
195. Having a flexible approach toward wrong doings and mistakes
196. Having a personal interpretation of what religious is
197. Having a work-dependent relationship with the Irish students
198. Having academic challenges in the Irish HE

199. Having aims and objectives
200. Having better English in language school than in DCU
201. Having difficulties in adapting to HE in Ireland
202. Having done English as undergraduate degree
203. Having done English before commencing the degree
204. Having done English course outside DCU
205. Having done foundation course
206. Having done/doing pre-masters course
207. Having done undergraduate in home country
208. Having done undergraduate in Ireland
209. Having expectations from HE
210. Having family in Ireland
211. Having good experience with Lecturers
212. Having good experience with the School Office
213. Having good experience with International Office on campus
214. Having good intercultural experience with older people
215. Having group projects/work/assignments
216. Having less number of international students in home country
217. Having multiple choices for study abroad
218. Having no preconception about Ireland prior to application/arrival
219. Having no idea about the host culture
220. Having stereotypes about the host culture
221. Having study abroad experience prior to coming to Ireland
222. Having taken IELTS to commence the degree
223. Having three choice of countries in government scholarship schemes
224. Higher education changing students
225. Headscarf affecting campus experience
226. Headscarf identifying religious faith
227. Host family making transition easier

- 228. Higher marks being advantage for the government scholarship
- 229. Home country government scholarship not pressuring the students
- 230. Host culture lacking awareness about other cultures
- 231. Host culture not taking interest in learning about/contacting other cultures
- 232. Host culture taking interest in learning about other cultures
- 233. Host students not being open to intercultural contact
- 234. Immigration being an issue in Italy for economic reasons
- 235. Intercultural contact helping liberate
- 236. Interfaith Centre being a hub
- 237. Interfaith Centre being used for events
- 238. Interfaith Centre facilitating intercultural contact
- 239. Interfaith Centre helping socialise
- 240. Interfaith Centre making campus experience better
- 241. International Office being accessible for students
- 242. International Office keeping track of international student grades
- 243. International Office keeping advice and guidance for students
- 244. International Office offering help to international students
- 245. International students having to spend more time on studying
- 246. International students sticking together
- 247. International students being easier to communicate with
- 248. International students being more open to intercultural contact than host students
- 249. Ireland being welcoming for immigrants
- 250. Ireland not having a long history with immigration
- 251. Ireland resembling the UK
- 252. Ireland's friendly image attracting international students
- 253. Irish accent/English being difficult/challenging
- 254. Irish accent being a barrier for contact
- 255. Irish authorities respecting cultural differences
- 256. Irish culture being described as drink-oriented

- 257. Irish culture being described as complex
- 258. Irish education being more interactive
- 259. Irish higher education being research based
- 260. Irish higher education curriculum being more challenging than in home country
- 261. Irish higher education introducing different learning styles
- 262. Irish higher education valuing participation in class
- 263. Irish people avoiding religion talk
- 264. Irish people having full idea about Libya
- 265. Irish people not asking religious questions
- 266. Irish people respecting cultural/religious differences
- 267. Irish society accepting difference
- 268. Irish students seeing European students similar/easier to contact
- 269. Irish students not being willing to speak in class
- 270. International students going through same experience
- 271. Islam being a lifestyle
- 272. Islam being controversial
- 273. Islam being difficult
- 274. Islam being part of identity
- 275. Islam meaning peace and love
- 276. Islam organising daily life
- 277. Islam teaching how
- 278. Islam teaching right and wrong
- 279. Islamic society being active
- 280. Islamic society being open for everyone
- 281. Islamic society being Sunni-oriented
- 282. Islamic society helping socialise
- 283. Islamic society members being strict/conservative
- 284. Italian education system respecting cultural and religious differences
- 285. Language being a challenge in academic/social environment

286. Language being a problem
287. Learning from group-work
288. Learning from other cultures as motivation/benefit of intercultural contact
289. Lecturers advising/guiding international students
290. Lecturers being aware of presence of international students
291. Lecturers being helpful toward international students
292. Lecturers not differentiating between host and international students
293. Lecturers respecting cultural/religious differences
294. Libyans marrying Irish
295. Living in the country parents migrated to
296. Living on campus
297. Living off campus
298. Living on campus facilitating intercultural contact
299. Living with same sex co-nationals
300. Living with the host family
301. Making friends with classmates
302. Making friends with co-nationals
303. Making friends with co-nationals hindering intercultural contact
304. Making friends with Muslims
305. Making friends based on chemistry
306. Making intercultural friendship on campus
307. Making more intercultural friendship as years progress
308. Making suggestions for DCU
309. Male students hesitating to approach head-scarved female students
310. Media influencing the way people think
311. Mosque being remote
312. Mother having doubts about study abroad
313. Mother tongue making communication/friendship easier
314. Moving out with classmates



- 315. Muslim people/community being strict
- 316. Muslims being associated with negative images
- 317. Muslims having o justify their actions
- 318. Mutual culture making contact/communication easier/appealing
- 319. Mutual culture making contact/communication easier/appealing
- 320. Not being able to find a place to pray outside
- 321. Not being able to study abroad without a family member
- 322. Not doing foundation/English course
- 323. Not drinking as a barrier for socialising
- 324. Not encountering negative incident based on identity
- 325. Not expecting culture shock upon return to home country
- 326. Not feeling comfortable speaking English in classroom
- 327. Not feeling influenced by the host culture
- 328. Not feeling related to Ireland/Irish people as first impression
- 329. Not feeling safe
- 330. Not going to the mosque during college time
- 331. Not having contact with Irish students
- 332. Not having contact with Irish students outside group work
- 333. Not having English/good English before coming to Ireland
- 334. Not having many co-nationals on campus
- 335. Not having transition/adaptation problems
- 336. Not making Irish friends
- 337. Not minding who to sit with in the classroom
- 338. Not minding who to work with in group work
- 339. Not spending time on campus outside class
- 340. Not wanting to work with anyone for group work
- 341. Not wanting to work with Irish students in group work
- 342. Not wearing a headscarf
- 343. Older people being more open to communication

- 344. Older people speaking nice English
- 345. Students being critique of other cultures/religions/nationalities
- 346. People asking stereotypical questions about their culture/religion
- 347. People having stereotypes about their culture/religion
- 348. People misinterpreting Islam
- 349. People tending to associate negative images with Muslims/Middle East
- 350. Perceiving adaptation as not so complex
- 351. Perceiving the scholarship as an achievement
- 352. Perceiving the scholarship as an advantage over other students
- 353. Planning to continue with their studies
- 354. Practicing English as a motivation for intercultural contact
- 355. Praying five times a day
- 356. Praying in the Interfaith Centre
- 357. Praying not interfering with lectures
- 358. Praying on Fridays
- 359. Preferring non-alcoholic beverages when socialising with college friends
- 360. Preferring to do English course outside Dublin to mingle with other nationalities
- 361. Preferring to go home at early hours
- 362. Preferring to sit with friends in the class
- 363. Preferring to speak with mature students when seeking help
- 364. Preferring to work with co-nationals unless assigned otherwise by the lecturer
- 365. Preferring to work with hardworking people for school projects
- 366. Preferring to work with students they are familiar with for group work
- 367. Preferring to speak English over mother tongue
- 368. Preferring to stay with host family during first year
- 369. Preferring higher education in Ireland over home country
- 370. Preferring intercultural contact
- 371. Preferring to be quiet in the classroom

- 372. Proximity to home country affecting their decisions
- 373. Putting extra effort into college work because of English
- 374. Recommending Ireland for study abroad
- 375. Referring to Islamophobia
- 376. Regarding college friendship as temporary
- 377. Regarding DCU as international campus
- 378. Regarding DCU as internationalising
- 379. Regarding DCU as not very international
- 380. Regarding the course as international
- 381. Relating more to the country they migrated from
- 382. Religious duties not interfering with college work
- 383. Religious facilities making campus experience better
- 384. Religious identity not affecting host culture's attitude
- 385. Representing their culture/religion/nationality
- 386. Respecting cultural differences
- 387. Representing culture as a motivation for intercultural contact
- 388. Returning home as condition of the government scholarship
- 389. Returning home for family
- 390. Study abroad enhancing intercultural identity
- 391. Study abroad for career opportunities
- 392. Schedule hindering social life
- 393. Scholarship as motivation for studying
- 394. School projects helping to socialise more with the host students
- 395. School projects helping to socialise with classmates
- 396. Seeing people's interest as opportunity to challenge stereotypes
- 397. Seeing a balance between religious and national identity
- 398. Seeing America as too far from home
- 399. Seeing America as not good choice for study abroad
- 400. Seeing benefits in females covering their hair

401. Seeing benefits in making intercultural contact/friends
402. Seeing Canadians as more educated people
403. Seeing clubs and societies as useful
404. Seeing college as a mix/reflection of the host society
405. Seeing DCU as higher-ranked than universities in home country
406. Seeing face veil as something strange
407. Seeing friendships on campus as temporary
408. Seeing group work as a temporary relation
409. Seeing higher education as a key step to career
410. Seeing higher education in Ireland as challenging
411. Seeing headscarf as culture
412. Seeing headscarf as part of identity
413. Seeing headscarf/face veil as choice
414. Seeing headscarf practice as problem
415. Seeing international students as family here
416. Seeing Ireland/Irish people as friendly
417. Seeing Ireland as a different culture
418. Seeing Ireland as a good choice for study abroad
419. Seeing Ireland as a non-racist country
420. Seeing Ireland as open-minded
421. Seeing Ireland culturally close to home country (family)
422. Seeing Irish people as patriotic
423. Seeing Islam and Europe incompatible
424. Seeing Islam and religious duties as flexible
425. Seeing Islam/being Muslim as an overarching identity/culture
426. Seeing learning and speaking a different language as a challenge
427. Seeing making Irish friends difficult
428. Seeing Quran as source for Islam
429. Seeing religion as a difficult topic to talk about

- 430. Seeing socialising with the host students as a good thing
- 431. Seeing study abroad as advantage over others
- 432. Seeing study abroad liberating
- 433. Seeing study abroad as the future
- 434. Seeing study abroad experience as a dream come true
- 435. Seeing study abroad experience as character building
- 436. Seeing study abroad experience beyond education purposes only
- 437. Seeing study abroad more challenging for Muslim international students
- 438. Seeing the UK and Irish higher education similar
- 439. Seeing Turkish culture as a mix of West and Islam
- 440. Seeing volunteering good for CV
- 441. Separating Omani culture/identity from other Gulf countries
- 442. Separating personality from religious preference
- 443. Separating religion from culture
- 444. Socialising outside drink-oriented activities
- 445. Socialising with mostly international students outside the class
- 446. Socialising with Muslim students
- 447. Speaking about prevalence of racism against their culture/religion
- 448. Speaking English transition/adaptation easier
- 449. Speaking with host people/culture hindering personality
- 450. Spending time in library outside class
- 451. Spending time on campus outside class
- 452. Spending time with college friends outside the class
- 453. Student clubs and societies helping network
- 454. Study abroad being common among home country students
- 455. Study abroad experience changing behaviour
- 456. Study abroad experience in DCU being tough/challenging
- 457. Study abroad experience changing perspectives
- 458. Study abroad for career opportunities

- 459. Study abroad in Ireland being affordable
- 460. Taking an interest in discovering what the host culture is prior to arrival
- 461. Taking an interest in contacting/learning about the host culture
- 462. Taking interest in other cultures/ languages
- 463. Teenagers worrying head-scarved Muslims
- 464. The number of international students increasing in DCU
- 465. Thinking America is not safe
- 466. Thinking campus facilitating intercultural contact
- 467. Thinking prayer room for Muslims should be bigger
- 468. Thinking religion and politics shouldn't be mixed
- 469. Thinking religion should be practices in individual level
- 470. Time management being a challenge
- 471. The UK not accepting Saudi Arabian students for undergraduate degrees
- 472. Using more English in language school than in DCU
- 473. Wanting to be given the opportunity to choose lecturers
- 474. Wanting to create awareness about their culture/religion
- 475. Wanting to make contact with the host culture
- 476. Wearing headscarf as a norm in home country
- 477. Weather influencing the decision for study abroad country
- 478. Working hard
- 479. Worrying about wearing niqab
- 480. Worrying about wearing headscarf
- 481. Writing in English being a challenge
- 482. Written assignment being difficult
- 483. Young people being easier to influence/educate
- 484. Younger people being less interested in/open to communication
- 485. Zero/low levels of English making transition/adaptation more difficult

## **2. List of focused codes**

### **Category: Identity and Culture**

#### **Nationality**

Describing culture based on nationality (28)

Describing culture based on nationality and religion (18)

*Nationality (home-country) dependent factors*

Describing culture based on traditions (8)

Describing culture based on geography (5)

Describing culture based on attitudes (3)

Describing culture based on dress code (3)

Describing culture based on food and drink (3)

Describing culture based on ways of thinking (3)

#### **Religion**

Describing culture based on nationality and religion (18)

Describing culture based on religion (7)

*Participant's relationship with Islam*

Islam being a lifestyle (21)

Islam organising daily life (4)

Islam teaching how (3)

Islam teaching right and wrong (1)

*Female Muslim identity*

Seeing headscarf or face veil as a choice (14)

Headscarf identifying religious faith (12)

Being asked questions about the headscarf (7)

Seeing headscarf as part of identity (5)

Seeing headscarf as culture (4)

Seeing headscarf practice as problem (4)

Believing gender makes a difference in Islam (1)

Associating headscarf with conservative (1)

*Practices and meanings of Islam*

Praying five times a day (17)

Islam meaning peace and love (19)

Praying on Fridays (1)

**Family**

Family influencing their decisions (25)

Family members studied or studying abroad (8)

Family members having higher education degree (7)

Family members' previous experience with study abroad as motivation (6)

Describing culture based on one's upbringing (3)

**Sojourner identity**

*Expectations*

Seeing study abroad beyond education purposes (36)

Seeing study abroad experience as character building (8)

Seeing study abroad as the future (4)

Seeing study abroad as advantage over others (1)

*Objectives*

Having aims and objectives (29)

Working hard (10)

Being work focused (9)

*Academic Scholarships*

*English Language Proficiency*

English speaking countries attracting international students for language (9)

English competency being a requisite for degree (8)

English competency being part of scholarship conditions (5)

*Degree Programme*

Study abroad for career opportunities (8)

See HE as a key step to career (3)



## **Category: Host Culture**

### **Culture distance**

Seeing Ireland as a different culture (19)

- Food & drink
- Greeting gestures
- Mixed gender spheres
- Other factors (i.e. transportation, house-keeping)

Irish culture being described drink-oriented (9)

Comparing Ireland to home country (7)

Avoiding hand-shake after 1<sup>st</sup> time (1)

### **Perceived hospitality**

Seeing Ireland/Irish people friendly (29)

Seeing Ireland as a non-racist country (17)

- Host families

### **Negative perceptions of Muslims**

People having stereotypes about their culture and religion (23)

People tending to associate negative images with Muslims (15)

Muslims being associated with negative images (3)

People misinterpreting Islam (3)

Muslims having to justify their actions (1)

## **Category: Host Institution**

### **Institutional support**

Being happy with/in DCU (24)

Being happy with campus facilities (22)

- The cafeteria and the halal food
- Other facilities (i.e. gym, library) and the campus climate

### **International office**

International office being accessible for students (16)

International office offering help to international students (16)

Having good experience with international office (12)

International office offering advice and guidance for students (7)

International office keeping track of international students (3)

### **The Interfaith Centre**

Interfaith Centre helping socialise (17)

Praying in Interfaith Centre (15)

Interfaith Centre being a hub (9)

### **IMS' Relationship with the Academic Staff**

Having good experience with Lecturers (15)

Lecturers being helpful towards International Students (10)

Lecturers not differentiating between the host and international students (7)

### **Curriculum**

Comparing education system in home country and Ireland (19)

Irish HE introducing different learning styles (10)

Irish HE curriculum being more challenging than HE curriculum in home country (8)

Irish HE valuing participation in class (2)

### *Research and creative thinking*

- Irish education being more interactive (7)
- Irish HE being research-based (4)

### *Written assignments*

- Writing in English being a challenge (5)
- Written assignments being difficult (3)

### *Pre-degree programmes*

- Having done foundation course (8)
- Having done or doing pre-masters course (3)

### *Language*

- Irish accent/English being challenging (16)
- Feeling comfortable using English in academic settings (12)
- English being a challenge in academic life (7)

## **Category: Relationship Development on Campus**

### **Culture distance**

Not drinking as a barrier for socialising (4)

Preferring non-alcoholic beverages when socialising with college friends (2)

Preferring to go home at early hours (2)

Socialising outside drink oriented activities (1)

#### *The headscarf practice and its implications*

Headscarf identifying religious faith (12)

Worrying about wearing headscarf (8)

Being asked questions about the headscarf (7)

Headscarf affecting campus experience (4)

Seeing headscarf practice as a problem (4)

Believing gender makes difference in student experience (2)

Male students hesitating to approach head-scarved female students (1)

### **Homophily**

#### *Ease of communication*

Mutual culture making contact and communication easier and appealing (11)

International students being easier to communicate with (7)

Finding it easy to contact/communicate with co-nationals (2)

Irish students seeing European students similar and easier to contact (2)

#### *Mutual culture*

Mutual culture making contact and communication easier and appealing (11)

Hanging out with co-nationals (10)

Making friends with co-nationals (8)

Seeing Islam/ Muslim as overarching identity/culture (7)

International students sticking together (6)

Living with same-sex co-nationals (6)

Making friends with Muslims (4)

Socialising with Muslim Ss (3)

Socialising mostly with IS outside class (2)

Preferring to work with co-nationals unless assigned by the lecturer (2)

International students sitting in the front rows in class (2)

Seeing international students as family in Ireland (1)

- *Religion as a Construct of Ease of Communication and Mutual Culture*

Interfaith centre helping socialise (15)

Islam being a lifestyle (10)

Interfaith centre being a hub (9)

Interfaith centre making campus experience better (5)

Interfaith centre facilitating intercultural contact (4)

Islamic society helping socialise (4)

Making friends with Muslims (4)

Socialising with Muslim students (3)

Interfaith centre being used for events (1)

#### *Lack of interest*

Host culture students not taking interest in learning about/contacting other culture students (11)

International students being more open to intercultural contact than the host students (9)

- *Lack of Contact between IMS and Irish students*

Not making Irish friends (9)

Having work-dependent relationship with Irish students (5)

Not having contact with Irish students (3)

Seeing making Irish friends difficult (1)

#### *Security*

Feeling more comfortable speaking English among international students (1)

Feeling safety and comfort with co-nationals (1)

#### **Language**

Irish accent/English being difficult/challenging (12)

Feeling unable to express themselves in English language (3)

Language being a challenge in academic and social environments (3)

Language being a problem (3)

Being afraid to speak in the classroom (2)

Feeling boundaries in communication (2)

Not feeling comfortable speaking English in classroom (2)

Seeing learning/speaking a different language as challenge (2)

Zero/low levels of English making adaptation more difficult (1)

### **Predispositions**

#### *Openness*

International students being more open to IC than host students (10)

Being open to influence and change (9)

Feeling inner drives to engage in IC (5)

Taking interest in contacting/learning about the host culture (2)

Seeing people's interest as opportunity to challenge stereotypes (2)

Describing themselves as open-minded (2)

- *Openness of Mature Members of the Society to Intercultural Contact*

Older people being more open to communication (8)

Age determining host culture's attitude (7)

Younger people being less interested in IC (5)

Associating being young with lack of intercultural awareness (3)

Describing host culture's attitude based on age (2)

Preferring to speak to mature students when seeking help (2)

#### *Education & family*

Family being supportive of study abroad decision (10)

Family members' previous experience with study abroad as motivation for study abroad (10)

Family members having HE degree (7)

Coming from a multi-cultural background (5)

Coming from a multi-cultural background in home country (4)

Having study abroad experience before coming to Ireland (1)

### *Stereotypes*

- People having stereotypes about Muslim culture (17)
- People tending to associate negative images with Muslims/Islam (17)
- Being asked stereotypical questions (9)
- Media influencing the way people think about Muslims (5)
- People asking stereotypical questions about their religion and nationality (4)
- Muslims being associated with negative images (4)
- International students being on the black list (3)
- Having stereotypes about the host culture (2)
- Other students being critics of their culture/religion/nationality (2)
- Muslims having to justify their actions (1)

### *Lack of interest*

- Host culture students not taking interest in learning about/contacting other culture students (11)
- International students being more open to intercultural contact than the host students (9)

### *Cultural ambassador*

- Representing their culture/religion/nationality (25)

### *Learning*

- Learning from other cultures as motivation for and benefit of IC (18)
- Practicing English as a motivation for IC (4)
- Preferring to speak English over mother tongue (3)
- Avoiding fellow citizens to practice English (1)

### *Temporary nature of stay*

- Referring to college friendships as temporary (2)
- Seeing friendships on campus temporary (1)
- Seeing group work as temporary relation (1)
- Not feeling influenced by the host culture (1)
- Considering study abroad as short term experience (1)

### *Workload*

Putting extra effort into college work because of English (2)  
Schedule hindering social life (2)  
Scholarship as a motivation for studying hard (2)  
Feeling the need to gain certain marks because of the scholarship (1)

### **Curriculum**

#### *Role of Timetable and Group-work in Intercultural Contact*

Group work facilitating intercultural contact (10)  
Making friends with classmates (5)  
Seeing group work as a temporary relation (1)

### **Reflections**

Seeing study abroad beyond education purposes only (36)  
Study abroad changing perspectives (19)  
Expecting study abroad experience to broaden their horizon (9)  
Seeing study abroad as character building (8)  
Preferring HE in Ireland over HE in home country (5)  
Learning and speaking a different language changing personality (4)  
Changing ideas after coming to Ireland (2)  
Getting to know new different cultures through study abroad (2)  
Seeing study abroad as liberating (2)  
Describing self-development based on learning (1)

## Appendix C      Sample Interviews

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### 1. Malik Interview (1<sup>st</sup> Interview)

B: Hi Malik, we are going to start with basic information about you. So, what age are you?

M: I'm twenty second ... twenty two.

B: You are twenty two, and where are you from Abdullah?

M: Saudi Arabia

B: What course are you in?

M: Manufacture engineering & business studies.

B: Is it business school or engineering?

M: Yeah, it's between, yeah, engineering and business, yeah.

B: Oh, is it joint degree?

M: Yeah, exactly!

B: Okay, I see. And what year are you?

M: Third.

B: How long have you been here, in Ireland for?

M: Since 24th of October 2010 so I finish fourth, four years and I'm in my fifth year.

B: Did you do foundation?

M: I did foundation, yeah.

B: Was it only English language or...

M: No, I did in 2010 and 11. I did English for 9 months. I took an exam, IELTS if you know it...

B: Yeah.

M: Then, I got accepted in the Institute of Education. It's a... has an international foundation programme. Actually DCU sent me to them. Then, I did my foundation there and came here.

B: Did you your English language studies in DCU as well?

M: No, not in DCU. It was in Malahide.

B: In Malahide?

M: Yeah.



B: Was there a reason for it?

M: No, there was a school, English school there. I like Malahide cause it's a, you could say it's far away from Dublin.

B: Okay?

M: So, I was looking for a place that I would not, like, find many Saudi student[s] there, so I would not communicate them in Arabic. I would use my English my than Arabic. Yeah, that's why.

B: Did you know that you were a DCU student back then?

M: Yes, cause I applied before I came to Dublin. From Saudi Arabia. DCU accepted me. They sent me a publication letter. Nah, umm accept... acceptance letter but, it was under one condition, that I have to finish my foundation programme first, then I can join DCU, yeah.

B: And you chose to do it in a different place because you wanted to mingle with other students?

M: Exactly! Yeah!

B: Okay, that's great. And, how did you decide to come to Ireland? Did you have any inspirations or motivations behind your choice?

M: To be honest, I had like three choices. UK, Canada and Ireland. UK, couldn't do there because I was looking for to get a scholarship from my country, from my government, and I can't go to UK because there are many students, Saudi students there so I will not get the scholarship. So, it was like, you could say it's closed, that's it. [It] has, like, enough students. Canada was, I found the same subjects combined between engineering and business but it was in a city that was so cold and I'm not, I'm not used to that. So, I choose like Ireland and I think it was good choice. Yeah.

B: Okay, very well. And did you specifically choose DCU or just Ireland? How did that work?

M: I was looking for my subjects and I found it in DCU. I found one in Waterford Institute of Technology I think it's called, but [it] was just manufacturing not with business, yeah, so.

B: And, how does that scholarship programme in your country work? Is it offered by the government?

M: Exactly. Yeah.

B: And, what do you need to do to apply and be funded by the government?

M: Firstly, you have to get a certain marks in the high school. Then there are two procedures for the like, medical students and normal students, we call them, two different students. I choose engineering, so, I had to come here, study English, and provide an acceptance letter for college, show them that I achieved certain mark in the IELTS exam, which is an English exam. Then, they would study my case and decide if I can get the scholarship or not. I did, yeah.

B: Okay, oh, that's great. I see it's competitive?

M: Exactly, yeah!

B: Okay, great. How does that make you feel? Does it have any impact on your academic achievements or aspirations? Being funded by the government?

M: It is yeah for the academic. You know you have a scholarship, you have to get a certain marks or you have to achieve a certain level. You can't go under certain level, so we have to study more and more. You are coming here to study so you can. You're looking for like a competitive advantage than the other students back home. So, when you finish you go back and you found, it's easy to find a job for yourself.

B: Is it obligatory to go back?

M: Yeah, exactly, yeah.

B: Is there a time framework?

M: I don't exactly remember but no, the paper I signed indicates that I have to go back my country and work there once I graduate from my college.

B: Okay, great. So maybe, now we are going to talk a little bit about your social life in DCU.

M: No problem.

B: Now that we talked about this, your background, can you tell me a little about your social network in DCU?

M: I'll take you from my first year. When I came for first year I joined DCU with a group of friends. We did the same foundation programme. They were Saudis, so we were like hanging out together. The first year, I spent most my time with them. We were doing the same course I didn't socialise much with other nationalities. But in second year, I joined the Islamic Society in DCU, and I was one of the committee members so I started to socialise more with the guys. You know and I had like school projects in second year more than first year so I had to socialise with Irish people more, maybe, say, out of the project or the studying area. Yeah that was good. Then third year, I knew like the students in my programme, in my course more and more and we start to hang out together. You know, we spent two years together so I know them by their names. They know me. We exchange like information, articles, some projects, and stuff like that, yeah.

B: Oh, great. So, you're saying group works that assigned by the lecturers, that actually helped you socialise with different people?

M: Exactly, yeah.

B: Alright, that's great. So at the moment you're third year and would be able to say have more international and maybe intercultural friendship network in DCU in comparison to your first year.

M: Huh, huh.

B: Okay, great. When you're not in class, say you're not doing a group work, who do you mostly socialise with?

M: Mostly with international students.

B: That's great. Does it really matter that they are Muslims or not?

M: No. Like they go away, I go with this people. Have a cup of coffee after class. They are not all Muslims. I can say, I'd say maybe there ten, maybe three or four of them are Muslim. The other are non-Muslims.

B: Do you have a criteria for choosing friends on campus?

M: You know like friendship-wise, there are different friends, for example close friends or like college friends, so it's hard to get a close friend. For college friends, I just look for good people. That's it.

B: Great. What does being an international student and studying abroad mean to you?

M: Yeah, for myself I think, going to study abroad is not just for education purposes. There are other purposes. For example, like the knowledge you get from socialising, with other people. To be honest, I think when you, if you go abroad to study, graduate and come back just [with] a paper, you have a degree, you haven't done enough. You have to explore things, meet people, other people, learn from other cultures, exchange like information with others, see what they think. They will teach you stuff you don't know or if you think you know everything, they will teach, open your eyes for thing that you never thought about.

B: So, it is expanding your horizon?

M: Exactly, yeah.

B: Okay, that's great. And what culture would you say you are? Do you identify yourself with any kind of culture?

M: I'm sorry I don't get it.

B: Okay, maybe I'll just skip to another question and come back to this later.

M: Okay.

B: Would you consider yourself religious?

M: Religious...

B: What is your concept of being religious? What does it mean to you?

M: Yeah, I could say I am religious. You it depends on the person, how do you define yourself, how do you define being religious. Some of the people, if you don't like socialising with people, just sitting at home and you're praying, this is being religious. I think if you do what you have to do, for your religion, that's it, you're doing the things you have to do and maybe it's hard question but I could say maybe I am religious. I don't know to be honest.

B: When you say as long as you do the things you have to do, did you mean the things in Quran?

M: Exactly, yeah, exactly. You know like I can't really do it one hundred per cent cause at the end I am a human being. You have mistakes, you forget stuff, you do something wrong, but you go back and you correct these things. Yeah, I think so, yeah.

B: Okay, I will try and rephrase my question. Do you feel belonging to any other group other than Islam?

M: You could say there is a balance. Maybe, for example, when you meet another, like a new guy from your country, you know it's easy for you to understand that guy, the language not English, and you know what the culture they came from, so it's easy for you to understand that guy. But, you don't always prefer guys from your country. Because some of them, you know like, it's a chemistry sometimes. You don't, like, feel you wanna go with these guys. You'll be attracted to other guys. I mean good people to hang out with. You know these questions are hard to explain, you know. You have so many words in your mind but you can't explain exactly the thing.

B: You're doing great! You are really able to express yourself well. Now, we're going to talk a little about the host culture. How would you describe the host culture here? What does Ireland or Irish people mean to you?

M: To be honest, when I came, I was applying to come to Ireland, you know you' be thinking about what the environment [is] gonna be there, what's the culture in there cause [for] the nine months I studied English, I was living with the host family.

B: Whereabouts is this?

M: In Malahide. Yeah, I lived the nine months with them. So, I wasn't expecting to get used to their culture. Say, the way they lived, their food, their life style, the way they spend time cause it's you know different from country to country, from culture to culture, but I think I adopt their lifestyle. Cause it's not that complex.

B: Alright. And how would you describe Irish people's attitudes towards you in general?

M: I think it depends on their age, I mean older people and younger people. I think, older people are more open than younger people. You can see that, I think in my experience in the host family and if you go to town for a cup coffee, in the café beside like an older man, she or he would talk to you, communicate with you, share stories or experiences. Younger people are more I think closed. They are not used to maybe seeing an international student, or different cultures. They're not, I think they don't communicate that much, I mean people from my age, as much as the older people.

B: Okay, that's interesting. Would you say young people are more close to intercultural encounters?

M: Well, my experience is, sometimes you have classes with different courses, not my course. So I think I see that communicating with the mature students is much easier than communicating with younger students. If I had a question about something, from my side I prefer to go to a mature student and ask them. Cause they will help more, they will try their best to help than younger students. I don't know maybe you know

in college there are students came from different places, from villages, big cities, they are not used to seeing different students or coming from other countries. So, I think it's a, they like to socialise or to make it with the Irish or people having the same or similar life style or culture.

B: Do you feel influenced by the host culture after all those four years of living here.

M: Yeah, I will say yes. I do. I can see that when I go back to my country in the summer. Usually I go during the summer for holiday. Like, I can see the differences between cultures and I am used to the Irish culture. I can see the differences and I feel attached or more close to the Irish in one of the differences between cultures.

B: Okay, so you feel the...

M: Yeah, I think I feel the difference.

B: Is it a positive influence?

M: Yeah, it is yeah.

B: Do you feel you have to cope with this when you go back?

M: Yeah, I think so. Cause, you know at the end when I graduate it will be like six or seven years I spend my life here in Ireland. And when I go back I spent the seven years between eighteen and twenty-four so, my friend, most of my memories, my college memories, stuff out of college, travelling, friends I met other than Irish friends, you know you had to go back and start a new life again. So I need a time a period after going back to I don't know, maybe to again go back adopt your life style and culture there. Making new friends and get along and get used to their environment there.

B: If it wasn't obligatory, I mean your scholarship, would you consider staying here rather than going back home?

M: Yeah, it would be an option. I would think about getting a job here for one or two years, get the experience and go back home. I have to go back home cause the family are there. Can't just leave them.

B: How does your family feel about your decision of coming here?

M: Yeah, they were supportive, yeah. My dad was, he supports it the most, to go, to come here. You know, moms are weak. They don't want you to leave. But, at the end she was supporting me. It passed by so quickly, you were gonna come back and live here again so it's okay.

B: Do you have any siblings that did this before?

M: Yeah, my dad finished his Master's degree in the UK. So, I learnt from his experience before I came here.

B: Now, we are going to talk a little about your academic life here. If we think about a classroom setting, who do you generally prefer to sit with?

M: It depends on the class. I will say if it's a mixed programme, say business and engineering, I'll sit with my friends. Usually we come together to the class and we sit down together. It would be same guys from my programme.

B: When you are assigned group activities, who do you prefer to work with?

M: I would say, I'd look for people that will work hard for the project. Sometimes you know friends know each other so they will take their time, do delays, and it's a bummer.

B: Is language ever a problem for you?

M: Yeah, it is yeah.

B: In what ways?

M: You know sometimes you can't express yourself. You wanna deliver an idea but you can't pass a boundary. So, it is a problem. Sometimes, I don't know if that's right or not but sometimes I think, changes the personality I think, yeah, the person. You know if you wanna do something but you can't, there is a boundary to do this. So, it depends on the person, of course. If you just stop because you don't have the ability to do it, with time you will just stop trying but if you try, if you don't try it's gonna change you at the end with the time.

B: So, you are saying when you learn to communicate in a different language, you are actually creating a different identity? With maybe different sense of humour, with different expressions?

M: Exactly, yeah! I heard from a friend(s) once. He told me Abdullah in English is not Abdullah in Arabic. He's different person for me. That's why I'm telling you. It might influence or affect the personality of the person.

B: Okay. What about your experiences of Lecturers without naming any names?

M: Experiences with Lecturers is good actually. They know you are international student. They expect the differences. If you told them that I, for example, I don't know that rule, I wasn't aware working that way, they will understand they will give you a second chance. I think they understand and treat you the way they should. But I think there is, in DCU, there is not much differences like made between international and Irish students in terms of exams. If you have an exam, writing essays or something. You know I am an international student, I learn this language, I am not influenced, very fluent in this language. I am not like, English is not my first language. At the end I will not for, let's say, for an essay exam, my writing will not be same as an Irish writing of course. They, I think they don't take this into consideration. Because you know, I don't if you had an exam here, but all students are treated same way. So, I think in other colleges or in for example I heard from the relatives from the US, they, the way they correct the exams, they have different ways of correcting the, let's say the American and the international, or the Irish and the international. Cause they know these students learnt the language before they come to college but the others, they grew up with the language. It's their first language.

B: Okay, I see. Would prefer a university where the differences are observed in terms of English language?

M: Exactly.

B: And you said you have a friend in the US as an example of this. Have you any friends saying the same thing in the UK? I am trying to see if this is a continental thing.

M: UK, no actually.

B: Okay. That was a good point you made, an interesting one. But, in general, do you feel comfortable using English in classroom and in your assignments?

M: Yeah, I do yeah.

B: Okay. What challenges have you come across in an English speaking classroom?

M: Let's say maybe giving a talk, a presentation. Yeah, that would be a challenge. I think about that. And, many times you rehearse and prepare for a presentation I'd be asking myself; if that was Arabic, would you do the same or not? I find easier to do, of course it's my language, my first language, to do a presentation in Arabic than English. Specially, when it comes to memorising the words you have to say, not reading from the slides.

B: Okay. I presume you make a lot of preparation?

M: Exactly, yeah.

B: Okay. Language is one side and in terms of culture, would you say you come across any challenges in Irish HE?

M: Yeah, of course yeah. The education system here is much different than the education system back home. To be honest I'll be honest with you. First year, I failed three subjects out of ten. Three out ten is a lot to be honest and I had to come back and do in August and I would say that because it was different. I didn't know how to achieve and how to adopt to the education system. I was thinking in a way that it wasn't working in a way same as back home. They do have some differences. For example, in DCU, failing a subject. If you fail a subject, you have to come back and do it in the summer. If you fail again, you have to repeat the whole year for one subject. That's the most different, much different. Other one is, for here, you have your timetable ready for you, back home you choose a timetable. There are different lecturers. Sometimes you don't understand from that lecturer. So you can drop the subject and go take another lecturer you can understand from (him or her). But, here you have one lecturer for one subject. I mean for engineering, I don't know other courses. And all students doing the same subject with the lecturer. If you have a problem you have to solve it yourself. You have to work hard and pass the exam. Sometimes it's not good cause if you don't understand from that lecture, you would pass the subject with forty. If you pass the subject with forty, there is sixty you lost. That sixty you lost means that you don't how to solve a problem. Say in mathematics, I don't know how to solve that problems in the marks you lost so if you pass that year and go to another year of course there are stuff depend(s) on the things you lost so I would fail, I would face a difficulty like studying to achieve or to solve that, those problems I lost in second year. But if I have chance to let's say to take my, to change my lecturer I would maybe, I would understand more from another lecturer or something and achieve more higher marks.

B: Okay. So, are you saying the courses are mandatory but not elective? You are assigned the course and the Lecturer?

M: Exactly! If you open the website now, you could see all the subjects you are taking that course with the doctors teaching that course from first year to five (fifth) year.

B: Okay. Back home would that be different? Are you able to choose?

M: Yeah, exactly yeah.

B: Okay. I think it's add/drop system?

M: Yeah. I think it is more American system than Irish, yeah.

B: Okay. Anything you'd like to add here?

M: I can't think about more than these ones.

B: Okay. Would you say HE in Ireland is being more challenging that it would be back home?

M: Yeah, of course yeah.

B: Alright. Now, we're going to talk a little about DCU as an institution. What do you think about your study abroad experience in DCU in general?

M: I'll say, it was tough. Yeah, it was tough. And I think I'll describe it I'll say, let's say if we can see a curve I'm now going down but I'm working hard to rise the curve up and go up, yeah.

B: Okay. What is the benefit of studying in DCU for you?

M: I think, the challenging atmosphere or the challenging experiences I had taught me a lot of things. I think, this will cause, help me develop me. Start from personality, my career when I graduate, yeah.

B: Okay. Would you consider DCU as an international campus?

M: Yeah, it is yeah. It is international campus.

B: You said, you were making international/intercultural friendships and you don't have to go find them but they were in your courses.

M: Yeah. I can see now that the international students are increasing. Yeah.

B: Even when you compare to your first year (four years ago)?

M: Yeah!

B: Alright, okay, that's interesting. Are you aware of the International Office on campus?

M: Yeah, I do yeah.

B: Have you ever gotten in touch with them?



M: Yeah, I do. I did. In the first year, I received an e-mail from the head of International Office and, we met at the International Office and she was asking me if I, the reason I failed my subjects. She didn't ask me directly why did you fail but she asked if everything is good. She, there is something she could help with.

B: Did you say you got in touch with them or she contacted you?

M: She did.

B: So, obviously she was checking the tracks of international students?

M: Exactly.

B: That's good. Did you benefit from it? How did that make you feel?

M: Yeah, made feel that the international office is there if you need them.

B: Okay, that's good. What do you think about the school office? Have you ever needed to contact them?

M: Not really. I contacted the head of engineering school but for like academic purposes.

B: Was that a good experience?

M: Yeah, it was.

B: What's your overall impression of the campus facilities? Such as the cafeterias, the library, the prayer rooms.

M: To be honest, I am happy at the end. I'm studying in campus. The canteen has halal food, there is the interfaith (Interfaith Centre). They are providing prayer room. Now they moved the prayer room to a bigger room. Father Joe last year, now Father Joe left. But Father Joe last year worked hard to get the bigger prayer room. He was so helpful. They help us to use the interfaith in different occasions and events for the Islamic society. Actually they are very good.

B: Are you a member of any clubs & societies on campus?

M: Yeah, ISOC (Islamic Society), Engineering Society, and the African Society as well. What else... I forget.

B: Okay. Now, we are going to talk a little bit about your intercultural contacts and motivations behind that. Do you make friends with other religions/nations/cultures?

M: Yes, I would.

B: Would it be more often on campus in comparison to off campus?

M: Yeah.

B: So, campus atmosphere is facilitating this for you?

M: Yeah!

B: Where do you live by the way?

M: Campus!

B: On campus! Okay. Which apartments?

M: House seventeen, beside the gym.

B: Does that help too?

M: Yeah, it does yeah!

B: What would motivate you to make international/intercultural friends?

M: I think maybe learning from other culture? Meeting new people. Making more friends.

B: Okay, what do you think about the benefits of making such friendships?

M: Of course you learn from them, different things.

B: Okay. Now we're going to talk a little about your religious practice. You identify yourself with Islam and you say you are Muslim?

M: Yeah.

B: What does being Muslim mean to you?

M: I think, feeling peace.

B: Feeling peace?

M: It is a difficult question to answer.

B: Okay, so I believe you see it as a spiritual thing.

M: Yeah.

B: What does Islam mean to you?

M: I think, for myself, I'm using my religion for myself, for my lifestyle.

B: And what you mean by that? Can you elaborate?

M: Yeah, of course. Let me express this. For example, Islam for me, from the things that Islam taught me, for example time management. You have five times a day or five prayers a day you have to pray so you have to manage your time to have a time management. You divide the stuff or the things you have to do between those prayers. You have to pray in the times or the praying times so it is I could say it's manage the stuff for your day, or divides the day for me. I think it is a, it taught me a lot. For example, I don't pray I have twenty four hours a day and I could manage or divide that day for levels or for stages. And divide my stuff in those levels. For my lifestyle, for my religion, it is divided for me. So I have to put the things to do between those levels.

B: Okay. That's interesting. Would that be a problem for you in terms of your lectures or responsibilities?

M: Not really I think cause the time, the prayer time is flexible. So, it's not we have to pray in ten minutes or if you don't pray in that time, that's it! You musn't! No, time is flexible and you can move the prayer after you finish your lecture or before.

B: Okay. So you never have to leave a lecture and do your prayer and come back?

M: I do actually. Just on Fridays cause I have a lecture on human resources between twelve and two so I have to leave, one to three sorry! So, I have to leave for fifteen minutes to pray on Friday and come back.

B: Your lecturer knows about this?

M: Yeah, yeah. Of course, yeah. I told her.

B: And she was okay with that?

M: Yeah, she was okay and usually it's the same as the break time between the two lectures, yeah.

B: Okay, that's good. Do you feel that, given Irish culture is different from where you come from, your religious identity affects how people approach and engage with you?

M: Not really, in this country, not really. I would say in other countries but in Ireland, no.

B: Do you have any specific countries in mind?

M: Yeah, of course! I would say the United States. You know after the nine eleven, what happened there...

B: So, you'd say it's different in the United States, but you feel more comfortable in Ireland with what you are?

M: Yeah!

B: Did you come across any negative incidents based on your identity?

M: No, not really. I remember last year there was a letter that sent to a mosque or something? That retained Muslims there.

B: Oh, the letter!

M: Yeah, but I am not really sure if that's real or not. Yeah, and I remember once going to the immigration bureau, and one of the guys working there, I think he asked her to take off her face scarf...

B: Oh, burqa?

M: Yeah! Exactly yeah! So, there was I think, I think he forced her to do that. And I think after one day, they sent a letter to the big mosque in Clonskeagh, the Clonskeagh Mosque, and apologising for what happened and saying that it's an individual mistake, we understand what the cultural differences, the religious differences. Cause I read it, the mosque puts the paper in the front gates and more people read and understand that. It's not usually happening.

B: Okay. Do they ever approach and ask you questions about your culture and religion given the fact that Islam is making the headlines in international media?

M: How do you mean? Irish people?

B: Yeah, Irish people or other international students?

M: Yeah, yeah! They did! The language college or centre I was studying, you know, you meet different people there and they ask you different questions about you background and your culture and religion. Cause you know they hear about these stereotypes and they will ask about what is going on, is it real or is it not.

B: An how do you feel about this?

M: I will, I would explain to them what is meaning of something they ask me about or what's the stereotype is not real, it's just a made up story, it's not real.

B: Okay, and you mentioned a big mosque...

M: Clonskeagh, yeah!

B: Do you go there often? Do you go to the events taking place in that mosque?

M: Yeah, but not in college time. Maybe holidays cause it's difficult to go.

B: Would you say there is a big community there?

M: Yeah, there is! There is a big community, yeah!

B: In Islamic holidays such as Ramadan, would you be involved in events?

M: Yeah, but usually in Ramadan and Eid I am back home, so.

B: You go back home?

M: Yeah. It's in the summer.

B: Oh yeah. Alright! How often do you pray?

M: Five times a day.

B: Do you feel comfortable about practicing your religion in DCU?

M: Yes.

B: What are your thoughts on female practice of veiling/headscarf?

M: To be honest, it's a choice. It's their choice of course. At the end, it's their religion. Everybody choose what they want. As I told you at the start, it depends on the person if you practicing or not practicing. And I know different females not wearing the headscarf, but they still practice Islam and wearing the headscarf is not the end. It's not everything in Islam or religion. Or taking off the headscarf is not everything. They might be wearing headscarf but they are not good people, they are not good Muslims! And however they would take off the headscarf, they would be good people, good Muslim. So it's not something that you can judge the person in front of you.

B: Okay. Now we're going to talk about our last theme. I'm going start with a general question again. What does university/HE mean to you?

M: Learning, self-development, achievement, high goals, planning for your life. Yeah.

B: What do you expect from HE?

M: I would expect from HE. Yeah! To get higher education, to learn more, to explore stuff that I don't know about. Of course help me develop myself, my personality, my involvement, like communication with people.

B: Would you expect from HE in Ireland to add to this?

M: Yeah, of course! I am expecting that and I am getting as well! Abdullah in first year is not same as Abdullah in third year. If Abdullah in third year is same as Abdullah in first years, that means I wasted three years of my life cause I haven't changed, I haven't developed myself so I haven't learnt anything!

B: Okay. One last question. I just want you to compare, if you were a college student back home, how would HE be different for you?

M: I would say HE back home would be much easier cause you're living with your family in your own country, with your own people, same people, same lifestyle, no differences, no much differences! Of course there would be different people from different areas but you are from the same country. But however in here different people, different nationalities, different cultures, different education system, more challenging lifestyle or like environment. And you have to work hard to adopt with a different environment and to learn from different people. So it was, if I were to choose again between taking HE back home or here, I'd choose here.

B: Okay. That's nice to hear. Thanks very much!

M: You're welcome!

## **2. Inbar Interview (5th Interview)**

B: Hi Inbar, what age are you?

I: I'm twenty-five.

B: Where are you from?

I: I'm from Saudi Arabia.

B: What course are you doing here?

I: Management and strategy in Business School.

B: How long you have here for?

I: In Ireland, a year for now.

B: Are you doing your masters?

I: Now I'm masters but I've been studying English for nearly a year.

B: Are you on a scholarship?

I: Yeah from my government.

B: How did the scheme work?

I: There is King Abdullah programme, and it's every year. You just apply to it, and majority of people apply to it will be got accepted and go abroad to study, in Ireland or other country.

B: Is Ireland one of the top destinations?

I: Not really cause England they are closing the five years, they're closed. So we just have America, Canada Australia and Ireland who speak English so like people want to study in English, they have those for choices so. Canada just for PhD students, not for undergraduate or master's. So the available countries for undergraduate or master's is America, Australia and Ireland.

B: How long do you have the scholarship for?

I: It depends on the country and the system, but they always leave a gap for language, maximum two years.

B: Where did you do your language, in DCU?

I: No no, it's in private school.

B: Did you have a reason for that?

I: Because DCU language school was full of Saudi students so we had to choose another school. I didn't want to speak Arabic.

B: How did you choose DCU?

I: Actually from the beginning I want to come to DCU because DCU has a partnership with a Saudi university, Nourah university. I think marketing or I don't know what's the field. So I want to come here to take master and go back to be a lecturer in this university, in Princess Nourah. I thought that would be useful to get the certificate from DCU.

B: How does your scholarship make you feel?

I: I'm comfortable with it.

B: Do you have to go back to home country as part of your scholarship?

I: Yeah, I have to go back after studying.

B: Can you tell me a little bit about your social life in DCU?

I: My friends who I hang out most of the time are Saudis so from same nationality, but I do have friends from China, but it's really rare that I have an Irish friend so I just make friends with Saudis and Chinese so, not Irish. There is a French girl I sometimes I hang out with but not Irish.

B: Are those people from your course?

I: Yeah from my course.

B: Would you consider it international?

I: No, it's not like, there's a lot of Irish; just few international students.

B: Why do you think this is happening?

I: Because first day I came, the Irish, they just made groups together, they already introduced each other to each other so we felt like we were a little bit isolated. They didn't really show it but that's how I felt. It's like they always hang out together. When we're in a group or something, they just speak in a group, but when we finish the group meeting it's like they're just hi when we see each other in the class or something but we don't speak really too much. They are not interested.

B: Do you think the other international students feel the same way?

I: I think because I see those Chinese with us, because the course is just international students are Chinese and Saudis and some French and Germany but I see this Chinese students, they are the same, they just make friends with Chinese or make friends with us, with the Saudi. So I don't know, I think it's the same. But I think the other European students, French Germany, they are okay with the Irish, they're friends with them. So I don't know; maybe culturally similar.

B: Would you see hanging out with people from your country as a benefit?

I: It has its benefits, cause sometimes when I don't understand something or miss some lecture or something, it's easier to talk with them and to explain what happened to me. But sometimes because just we spoke Arabic all the time, so I think when I speak English I make lots of mistakes because I'm used to speaking Arabic so I think I need to speak more English also need to communicate with other students not just Saudis so.

B: Would you say your English was more active in the language school?

I: Yeah.

B: What do you generally do when you're not in class?

I: I don't really have time. When I finish the classes and the meetings I go to the library and do my assignments and then I go home. I don't have time to any other activities.

B: What does being an international student mean to you?

I: I think to introduce our culture to other people; so when I met other students Irish or from other country, they always ask us question about my country, my culture or my religion, or lots of questions. I think it's a really good opportunity to introduce them to, to get them healthy information about our culture. So I think that's the important thing for me I think to get them right information about us. And also because my English is really important so having a certificate from an English speaking country is really important for my career so.

B: Do you think there is misinformation going on about your country?

I: Yes, based on the question that they ask me. They always misunderstand the culture or the religion so it's good to explain everything that there is difference between my country, the culture and my religion so it's I don't know. It's a responsibility you know. I just want them to know what's different in our culture and in our religion, because, sometimes it's the same sometimes it's different and they don't know.

B: And what you mean by your culture?

I: I mean Saudi, yeah, and my religion Islam.

B: And what is the difference?

I: Lots of things, about everything, because they felt, Muslims, women in Islam not, how to say in English, not appreciated. That's totally not true. I just wanna explain it's exactly what Islam is, cause driving, my country it's not legal (for women). They thought it's because of Islam that women can't drive. That's totally different thing. It's a Saudi nationality issue, it's not about Islam. There is lots of things to explain, about hijab about everything. They thought that Islam is just about hijab or if you take off the hijab you're not Muslim, lots of things. I feel really responsible to give them right information about what is right and what's not, and what's Islam and what Saudi is, cultural nationality is so.

B: Are you critical of Saudi in that case?

I: It's not like that. In my country, in my culture, there's bad thing and there's good thing so. But I need people to understand that Islam is different than our culture in Saudi Arabia. Okay some of the things we have is from Quran, from Islam, but not everything. So I need just to explain and it's not like that I'm criticising my country but it's, I want my country to change, that's why.

B: What is people's attitudes like in general?

I: Most of them they're just curious, but I met some that they like asking questions but I feel like they were criticising something like my country, my religion or so, but just try to give them the right information. I don't really care if they accept or not. It's like that's our thing, if you want to accept it that's fine, if you didn't, yeah.

B: When I say culture what comes to your head?

I: It's like how you treat each other. It's usually how we treat each other how we treat all people, how we treat women, how we treat everything so. I think that's it. and I think it's all together, I am Saudi and I am Muslim, but it's all together you know, it's just combined.

B: How would you describe the host culture here?

I: They are really friendly, first thing I noticed is really friendly. They are so welcoming, they are nice. They don't, there is no, I don't know how to say...

B: Negative attitude?

I: Yeah! They don't negative attitude because maybe if I were in London if I walk on the street or something, some people just look at me not a good way because I'm wearing hijab. but I don't know what it's called here...



B: Racism?

I: Racism, exactly! So that's the, I think the most important thing for me. I can walk on the street and I feel safe. That's the important thing, and I think they're really really friendly, kind people.

B: Do you have an example for this?

I: Like my cousin, she is doing her masters also but from what she told me, she can't really go out at night. She just can't go to some areas or something. She needs to be really careful. she can't go to the metros and at night, she always have someone speak bad to her. That's never happened to me here so I think I really like that about Ireland.

B: Is she wearing the hijab?

I: Yes.

B: I'm so sorry to hear that. Did you have this image of Ireland before you came here?

I: That's the main thing that encouraged me to come here. They're really friendly people and they don't really treat people based on their nationality, or culture or religion. It's like give me a push, motivation. Ireland has that image.

B: Do you see any difference on campus and off campus in that sense?

I: Here the campus is full of young people, but during the last year I've never met young people. They're always old, from thirty and up so it's a percent that I meet people in the twenties here so it's really different you know how to deal with them. Because they're nice, they're kind but they don't have time to speak to you or something. They always in a rush in a hurry, so it's different than adults or so, older people, mature people.

B: Do you feel more comfortable talking to them?

I: Yes, because really they, you know the way they talk is nicer. They don't, cause people here in university, they always say bad words. But older people, they are really careful about what they are saying. So I think that's a bit nicer.

B: What about the Irish English?

I: Yeah because some of the students aren't from Dublin and I have difficulty to understand them, but when I told them can you just slow down and speak slowly, they're really nice. They accept what I say and they do what I say so.

B: Do you feel influenced by the host culture?

I: I don't know I can't remember.

B: Who do you prefer to sit with in the classroom?

I: No I don't really mind.

B: Do you do group works in your course?

I: Yes, loads of group activities. Sometimes it's good but sometimes it depends on the group. Some people are really bad in group work so. But the lecturers try to pay attention to international student; in every group there is an international student. We can't have two Saudis in the same group.

B: What is your experience with lecturers?

I: I think it's really good. the way that they gave lectures really good, because they speak with us, they just want us to interact with them. It's really interesting to be a lecturer. I really like being there, in the lecture, heard what they are saying, and that's what different with my country because they just read from book or speak without any interaction so, think the way that they are interacting with us, the way they want us to ask questions, I think that's very good.

B: How would you compare HE in Ireland and home country?

I: When I came here DCU, I always compare the education system here and my country. So as I said the way that they interact, the way they make us ask questions, like we have to ask questions. But in my country it's really not important because we just sit and listen to the lecturer and when it's finished we just go out so. I think that's the main reason why I wanna be a lecturer, cause I want to change the way, the education in my country.

B: Do you feel comfortable using your English in classroom settings?

I: Not really, specially in presentation or something, I'm afraid to you know give the other people speaking, because the majority is fluent so I feel like my English is not that good. I'm not comfortable to really speak.

B: Other than language, have you come across any challenges or difficulties in higher education here?

I: I think English is the main challenge for me, cause when we're more supposed to read something for our next meeting. They can just read it one day but I can read it really long time to read something. Sometimes I don't finish the article, the journal so I need more time to read. I'm not as fast as them, and the lecturers are treating everybody the same.

B: Are you happy with this?

I: Not sure because when we write assignments or something, it's really difficult for me to write assignments in English. So it's, I need you know to translate some words, to go and check words and it's really hard work for me to write something in English so. But for other student, they really don't have that issue. They can write it in a one day or two so for me I need a week for one assignment. It's really tough yeah.

B: Are you happy with this challenge?

I: Yeah but when I'm under stress I don't like.

B: What do you think about your study abroad experience in DCU?

I: So far it's really good. I really enjoy the experience; just be another culture and learn from them, it's really interesting, and I really enjoy that. The management in business

school, they're really really good and they treat very nice and very equally. They're always there for us. If you wanna ask for help, I think they always help us. So I think I really enjoy studying here in DCU.

B: What about the international office?

I: Yes I get in touch with them for some letters or something and they are really helpful. When I ask question, because in the first month I had some problem with getting my students cards but they were really helpful. They worked really hard to solve this problem. I think they're really helpful.

B: What is your overall impression of the campus facilities?

I: I use the canteen in business school. I use also the Helix but I've never been in the sports hall. The Interfaith Centre, I use to go there for prayer so. I think it's really nice have a place to have a place we can pray, and it's for all religion so it's really nice. I actually met lots of people there. They're all Muslim but they're not from the same nationalities. So, it's really good experience.

B: What do you think is the benefit of making intercultural or international friendships?

I: I think because I lived twenty-four years in my country so I know lots of Saudis, but I think it's really interesting to know how other people live, how other countries lives you know, what's their culture. For me, I'm always curious about these things, about other nationalities, so I think it's really good you know how people think, how people act, how people treat each other you know. I like it.

B: How often do you pray?

I: Every day, five times a day.

B: Do you feel comfortable practicing your religion in DCU?

I: Yes, very comfortable. Actually, two weeks ago, we had a lot of lockers and it was a mess. Some students talked to the interfaith. They took the lockers out and they cleaned it. That's really great I think. They listen to us they help us. When we had an issue, they tried to solve it for us. I think it's really good.

B: How long have you been wearing the headscarf for?

I: Since I was seventeen I think.

B: What does it mean to you?

I: Because my country wearing the headscarf, wearing the hijab is really something that we have to you know. That's how we raised you know. It's really normal. So I didn't feel anything strange or anything not normal. But when I came here, it's a little bit different. I'm still wearing it in a different country, because I said it's normal, everyone, almost everyone is wearing the hijab. It's part of me; even if you don't wear the headscarf, you have to wear abaya (a black dress), whether you cover your hair or face is up to you. Wearing the abaya is a cultural thing, and people who cover their faces in Saudi Arabia, when they came here, they're afraid to, because people aren't used people covering their faces so. They're afraid that someone will say something to

them so they just wear the headscarf and take off their face veil, but for me in Saudi Arabia and in here I just cover my hair. We also have Muslim families. It's not just about culture, it's also about my religion. Islam is taking huge part in my life so they carry us what to do, it's not like you have to just from nowhere, because we need to understand why we have to. They give us choice but they also teach us what that mean, wearing the hijab so, it's my choice.

B: Would you consider yourself religious?

I: I think so because it's attitude, it's not just behaviour. I think before I do anything I think about it. In Islam is that right or wrong, I always think about it so. I think yeah you can say that.

B: Had any ideas of your religion changed since you came here?

I: Yes, because, you know the Islamic spiritual or something. Here I can't really feel that like in my country. Every day, before I go to sleep I just turn the radio on, the Quran. In my country I never didn't do it because my mum would do it, but here I really miss hearing Quran in the house so. I think there is lots of things changed actually, cause in my country mum told me that you need to pray, go to prayer, it's prayer time, but here no one tell me that. so I need to do it by myself. I feel responsible.

B: Do you think your religious preference ever affect the way people approach you here?

I: Yeah one day, when we first met in groups or anything, they will always hesitate how to say hi or anything you know. They felt like wearing a headscarf I can't speak to them or something, especially men, they always hesitating to say hi or something. but when I say hi and talk to them it's like something melts you know. Also when we're in a group or something, they just want to shake hands. Some of us, we can't do it, we don't want to do it. So it's like, sometimes when I explain they understand, they laugh and say it's fine, but sometimes some of them, they I don't know get a little bit upset yeah. Sometimes it's really weird but I think I really want them to know that. Especially when there is a lot of people, you don't want the other person to feel like embarrassed or something so sometimes I just shake with them. If it's just a few people I explain it, but it's lots of people I don't want people to feel embarrassed so.

B: What does higher education mean to you?

I: First thing I want to specialise in my field because what I studies in my undergraduate wasn't enough for me, and dedication is not that good in my country so. When I came here, in the lecture I feel like I'm really learning you know; something different like when they speak I really understand what they are saying. I think that's what higher education is. I understand what they say and connect it to the real life. I want to go back and teach those students how to really take what I give them, and to connect it to the real life. Also in my old university I never worked with a group so just working with loads of groups now and it's really good opportunity to learn how to manage and how to work with other people you know. I think I learned a lot from working with a group. I've never thought about working in a group but it's really good yeah.

B: Thanks very Inbar!

### **3. Malika Interview (9th Interview)**

B: How old are you?

M: Twenty five.

B: What course are you doing?

M: I'm doing a masters course in International Security and Politics Conflicts.

B: How long have you been in Ireland for?

M: Almost two years.

B: Is this your first year in masters?

M: No, I did a previous course here in DCU, which is the pre-masters in foundation. I did it for six months.

B: Is it language?

M: Yeah English language and you have to do one course of your future masters.

B: Where are you from?

M: I'm from Egypt.

B: Egypt?

M: Yeah, I'm half-half. Both my parents are from Egypt, but I was born in Italy.

B: But you didn't say you were from Italy?

M: Yeah, no I feel, you know my blood, I feel that it's very Arabic.

B: I presume you are bilingual?

M: Yeah, because my parents speak to me in Arabic. sometimes it happens that I answer to them in Italian but this is because it's easier or it's quicker for me.

B: Did you start learning Italian at school?

M: Basically I started from my primary school in Italy so I started there. But I always had the Arabic television at home, or my friends were talking to me in Arabic so. And we were also going every summer in Egypt. So talking to my family and relatives.

B: Your relatives are still in Egypt?

M: Yeah, all of them. It's because my father had studied Italian in Egypt and he won a course in Italy. So he went there alone before, and he started to study translation and then he got a job and he asked my mum to move as well.

B: Do you have siblings?

M: Yeah I have a sister older than me and a brother younger than me.

B: Do they feel the same about their identity?

M: I think myself and my sister yes, we relate more to Egypt, but my brother, I don't think so much. I think it's part of our background but he doesn't speak Arabic very well, but he can understand perfectly. It's just I guess he got into the Italian lifestyle a hundred percent, yeah.

B: Did you do your undergraduate in Italy?

M: Yeah.

B: Why did you choose Ireland for masters?

M: I chose to study abroad specifically because English. and because the career I want to pursue necessitates the language, English. I would be in difficult time if I didn't get a good level of English. Especially because in Italy nobody speaks English. They do but there isn't knowledge of English among people. I decided Dublin because it was affordable for me in economic level and I decided DCU because DCU is the only university which has this kind of masters. In Italy the masters are simply continuation of the undergraduate, slightly more differ. So I wanted to focus on field, not on the idea of the Arabic countries all together like the education system in Italy. We have ten courses per year, introduction of Arabic literature, very generic. I wanted something which was focus on a topic to say okay I know a lot of conflict or I know a lot of literature. I couldn't do this in my university. and I also found very uploaded course like international security. I found this really challenging and excited at the same time. It's such a course that you don't really find easily in other universities, not like political science, not like this.

B: Do you have a scholarship?

M: No, self-funded.

B: Did you choose between England and Ireland?

M: Yeah exactly! Was between England and Ireland. I wasn't really familiar with them. I didn't think England was a better place for me simply because I don't find related with people. I decided to pursue a course here only after my first year here. Because at the beginning I was planning to come here to do a course for English, and then I felt happy and welcome from the country so, I decided to stay. You know I was thinking about the air, the people. I knew from the beginning that I wasn't going to be part of the country in some ways. Whether (whereas) here in Ireland, I found you know very nice people, some sort of family that even if you don't have you feel it's not a country which is just judging you or looking at for you.

B: Can you tell me about your social life in DCU?

M: Unfortunately, I don't have huge social life in terms of social networks, just because I had to focus so much on my studies. Because it's very very difficult for me. I know there is so much going on, and there is so many reasons to make friends, to organise stuff but I just couldn't do it. And I feel I am in a good place to improve my career, because something that I wanted from the beginning, this is definitely a great opportunity for me and I hope I will try both way. I will try to work here or work in my country. Even though I already know that my skills on CV are more valuable in my country. I would consider Egypt only temporarily, just because I had a European culturalisation of the life. It'd be like something against or changing my habits in a

different way that can't suit my personality. So it's basically more an idea of gain work experience but not really to live permanently there. I feel more connected to European every day life.

B: What do you want to do upon graduation?

M: I want to work in an international organisation. There is few in Rome. I think I got that background from my mum. She is working in an international organisation. She works with food, agriculture, environment, very different from me but it's her where I got the idea to think globally, have peace kind of beliefs.

B: Would you consider your course international?

M: It's mostly Irish students.

B: How is your relationship with them?

M: On the friendship level, there's no problem at all. I have so many friends in my courses and I talk to them with no problems. and I feel okay, I feel comfortable. I never had problems with relating to Irish people or have Irish friends.

B: Would you say they are open to intercultural contact?

M: Yes of course! I'd love to do these especially because I've been always curious of. When I did my English course we were in a class with so many different cultures. It was amazing for me to hear their ideas, the way that they live, even their accents, they have different accents. it was beautiful. It was very very beautiful. I definitely recommend it to other students as well.

B: Where do people think you're from?

M: They are so much confused because, my name say something and my accent say something else. Others think that I'm from France or others from Spain, I think because of the look, but nobody guess that I am Arabic. That's so difficult for them. Irish people, they are not familiar with the name Malika, they don't know if it's an Arabic name or not. But as long as I meet any Arabic, he straight away recognise me without even saying my name. They recognise my face, my eyes, always.

B: What do you do on campus when you're not in class?

M: Mostly in the library, spend so much time in the library, or in the Helix. The only weakness, you can find in the library is the books. Because I'm used to work with books, in my university we had a huge library, so many books. specifically books that are in our field. Here I find that there is no such variety of books, for any kind of research, for the essay.

B: What do you do when you can't find the book here?

M: I mostly work with journal articles which is perfect, which is fine. But it's just sometimes you want to show people that you read the book. It's not enough, it's poor of books.

B: You say you are Egyptian but also Italian. Would you also see religion as part of your identity?

M: I think it's similar to the nationality problem or division. I think the religion is part of my culture and it's also something that my parents gave to me. but I think because I lived abroad or I lived in a European country I kind of like follow the rules of the European idea of how the religion, which I think is to believe in something but not really practice even though Islamic religion doesn't allow this, because you have to follow certain rules and it's part of your life every day. I think it's just difficult to follow your religion when it's not in your country. That's my idea because you have just some different timetables, and you are isolated you know you are the only one who have to go some sort of rules or follow some sort of rules. It's actually difficult to apply this kind of lifestyle in a European idea.

B: What do your parents think about this?

M: It was actually a little bit confusing, not confusing but there was a gap you know. We were wondering about our Christmas Eve, because we were learning there in school you know. We were seeing different change of season when everyone is putting the tree at home. You see the changes. We weren't experience that inside house. We weren't really know what was going on, and my parents were telling us that it's not part our culture. This is something about the Christian cultures. They do this because their religion follow this kind of rules and it's not part of ours. Then I think just because you're young and want the same gifts and same tradition that other peoples has. Because it's a little bit sad to listen to as well, listen others people having the dinner. and you feel that you have to organise something or your family has to be compact together and see each other. I've been invited by my friends twice and I loved the idea, but it feels not part of myself. But it's so difficult. I guess I just received some information that they were crashing with you know they were telling us this is a very western celebration. It's not part of our Muslim celebration or religion. So I guess this was the little gap they were trying to hide. Because they were trying to tell us no you can't do this because your religion doesn't allow you to do this, or not that allow you, they don't say that you have to.

B: How was Italian context and what was being a Muslim like in that context throughout your education life?

M: It's very interesting because they are very religious and they have a religious course in their school which I never followed.

B: Were you allowed to?

M: No I was, I don't know basically why but I think because I was from a different religion. We were also having lunch in the school, in the primary school. I just had to request not to eat pork and they were giving me different menu, and you could see you know all the eyes on you. It happened that they had to take off the cross on the wall in my class yeah. just to avoid any kind of problems. Even though I never, or my family never asked for it, like never. But they did it themselves.

B: Have you ever experienced any critical events based on your identity?

M: My family never had never been part of some community. I remember that we were doing Ramadan, doing Islamic celebrities (celebrations) we were going to the mosque where we were meeting friends of my parents, but we never been part of an Egyptian community. Only when I went to university, I found other Egyptian students,



guys, and it's such a different, you know they actually are afraid of you. Because they want to know how you're living your European life, if you wear make-up, if you don't you know there is some sort of seeing one Muslim outside his country. I think so, I felt that. Maybe they were looking at you, you know when they graduate you have the prosecco to celebrate. They were looking at you if you were going to drink or what.

B: Did you?

M: Yes, I did.

B: How would you compare Italy and Ireland in terms of being a Muslim student in both?

M: I think here the difference is because the numbers of people. In Italy you get criticised because not just the number of people but they simply relate them the religion to an issue, like the migration, immigration issue. So you highly get criticised or you listen to this kind of stories. On my side I got really respected and I lived in a host family, Irish host family. I never had any kind of problems with food or my practices. They say to me anything and they were very nice to me so. Also I never heard among the people you know any kind of racism or even you know on the bus, never never never heard of something. Whereas you can find this in Italy, not simply, among them gypsy. You know gypsy or this kind of black people it's easy to hear. Here it's quite different. It's very open-minded.

B: So you feel comfortable with what you are here?

M: Yes, like when you say in Italy you can see that the people are annoyed about you know unemployment issues and they are blaming the immigrant. Even the newspaper or the news on TV like the first lines are immigrants in Italy, this is this is this is, another sheet came on. Here it's quite relaxed. You know even when happen an accident it very emphasised who is it, like who which country, not just a man. A Romanian man, a Poland man. I think because Ireland does not have long history with immigration and also because they are even experiencing the same recession as we are. Like it's different for Ireland, respect in comparison to Italy, yeah there is a huge difference.

B: Would you consider them more attached to their religious or national identity?

M: No I think it's the same. Exactly the same, they are very well patriot you know. Patriotic. Especially when you get to know the idea of other people, and it doesn't really change if you are in the university or there is no difference. You can hear, first of all I blame because maybe because it's very insulting to address to educate a problem because they are coming from the South you know. But it doesn't matter if you can environment. Even in university you can hear stuff like this. It's very mainstream.

B: Would you consider campus is different here?

M: No they don't and you can't even read it through the lines. It was difficult for me whether. I think it's simply you receive it as respect. So even if you don't open the argument, like you're in any part of Italy, if you talk to anyone, the first person that he says to me are you Muslim? Yeah, it's the second question always, because you know I introduce myself, and "oh your name isn't Italian and you speak perfectly Italian!". I

say yeah my parents are Arabic so I'm half Arabic, "ah so you're Muslim?!", But here it's not the same. They're just more, or I don't know, they are just including you in a sort of way that they care of oh beautiful Italy and you are part from Egypt and they tell you two or three words in Arabic, but they don't get into you know the straightforward question.

B: What does being an international student mean to you?

M: It actually more difficult than I thought. It makes me you feel proud of yourself, but at the same time you need to tackle so many problems. Especially if you come from a different education system, from where I come from is highly different. First of all the Italian and the UK system I would say are different on the approach. For example, in Italy you have to follow ten courses, and you don't have this submissions deadlines. So that's you can hear people doing their undergraduates for four years for five years because they can carry those exams as much as they want. The major difference is about the system of the exams. In Italy it's all oral exams. You don't have the same level of analysis that here in the UK system. So you don't have the articles that you have to compare, you don't have the books where you have to analyse. You have just read memorise absorb what these stories or these scholars telling you, and it's basically the lecture is just the lecture where you don't have some sort of debate. You can ask questions of course but it's teacher students, that's it. At the end of the course there is a date of exam and you go and get interviewed from the lecturer itself. Here it's very difficult because you have to first of all write, which I was never never used to and I find it extremely difficult. Because you need to give yourself structure, thoughts needs to be in logic, precise. Whether [whereas] you're talking to someone you can express yourself go around clearly. When you're writing you need to be specific, you need to be evident. When I talked to because I really wanted to know other students from Italy to know how they are doing, if they are struggling as much as me. I talked to the head of the masters, she told me that the Italians always had that problem. So it's something based in our education. If I have to do an oral presentation I have any kind of fears, very easy even though you're in front of other students, and even though it takes me twice to prepare myself because of the English. You don't want to make mistakes, but I don't have the fear to show my thoughts in front of other people. Whether [whereas] if I write down I have so many problems in the structure of itself in the paragraph. It's not constructed this way. That's why I have to spend so much time studying.

B: What are your thoughts on host culture?

M: Okay what I really find here the relationship with the lecturers. Any kind of problem, there is a huge a support here instead of my country. This is something that I find very helpful. If you have any problems, you just need to send an e-mail. They are really comprehensive and they are really understanding. You don't have this kind of support in my university.

B: What is your experience with the International Office?

M: I contact them to ask help for English skills or writing skills. I contact them for a counselling help you know I wanted to defer or abandon so I wanted to ask them some information. They encouraged me to stay. I am happy very much about them.

B: Do you do group activities in your course?

M: Mostly individually.

B: Did you come across any other challenges in higher education here except written assignments?

M: To be honest I did. I think international students can be in a difficult situation in a debate in the class or questions or you know. It's not because you don't want to talk, really really really very much the fear to talk in front of other people, to not being able to fully express yourself. I think this is my wall in front of me. I want to talk, I want to ask or I want to get even more involved but it's feel difficult so I might avoid even if I really want. The problem that it wasn't like this in my pre-masters. Because when I was among other international students it wasn't for me a challenge or an embarrassing moment. My lecturer would say I never saw someone ask so many questions. My brain was always working and I felt so comfortable asking questions.

B: Do you ever struggle with Irish English?

M: Yes, I do. It's the accent so much, because I feel that they whisper sometimes. I can't really identify. That's why I was afraid of asking questions, because it's embarrassing you know sorry what did you ask me? That's the only problem I found here. Especially because they validate your opinion and participation in class.

B: What are your thoughts on DCU and your experience with it so far?

M: I think it's good. It's definitely better than where I was used to, like I didn't regret. I know that it's still long road to finish it but until there I am happy. First of all because it open the idea to express my opinion, and it helped me to realise not fear that much of the lecturer. Actually to converse with them or to go and meet him talk to him of his comments and advice. I find very very interesting and helpful the idea that when you are struggling with something there is someone that you can find.

B: What are your thoughts on the Interfaith Centre? Do you ever go?

M: No never. I heard lots about that place but I never been there just because when you are alone, you don't want to go there alone. You don't really want to go there alone. you feel that a friend of yours has to bring you there, and I don't have such a friend here yet. Maybe because all the girls are mostly from Saudi Arabia. I don't know maybe because I don't wear the scarf or maybe because they see me more European.

B: Do you pray?

M: Yeah, I used to pray more often when I was in Egypt. I lost a little bit of my practices here in Ireland. But yeah I do. Same in Italy. I just change my habits. You are mostly in the library so you can't really do.

B: What would motivate you to make international or intercultural contact?

M: I think it's necessary for every course to have it. It's necessary because you need to approach different minds, not just only from your background, not just only from Irish people, and also because you can learn a lot from them and they can learn a lot from you. And I think it's necessary because you know it gives you an idea of how you want to prospect your life, how the way they work, how do they work in Italy or in your own town, so how can you improve. My idea is always go out and maybe come back

ameliorate your situation or your town from this point, increase the knowledge and the notions of the other parts. That doesn't mean that they are better than us or we are better than them, just that we need that progress about education.

B: How was the international student population during your undergraduate in Italy?

M: Because I did Arabic course, we had different nationalities, different backgrounds, like from Iran, from Turkey, so there was a mix but we didn't have so many European students.

B: When I say culture what comes to your head?

M: It comes with religion and I guess the Islamic religion is more than any other religion, part of the culture and part of the day life of everything of person who follow that religion. Because it gives you rules not only for the pray time but how to behave so it's really part of your identity I think. On the educational point of view, I don't it's really related with, like Islam gives you rules for your lives, how to behave, how to pray, not make dangerous things you know, but it's not really related to your level of education, something apart.

B: What are your thoughts on headscarf?

M: I don't have any kind of problems. It's just inherit from my mum. My mum doesn't wear a scarf and she never told me what to do what not. I guess she had always the idea that it wasn't really necessary to cover your hair but was how you really going to express yourself or behave, and she always expressively told me that this is something that you have to decide on your own, and you have to read and think what these sentences mean. It means that you have to cover yourself, the idea of covering yourself without putting any man in an embarrassing situation. So to cover your behaviour mentally more than actually putting the scarf on your face.

B: What does Islam mean to you?

M: Nowadays, I think Islam means controversial concept. For me it has a very simple very light meaning of religion. It's not that heavy, tough to me. I don't feel it so constraints me to do some sort of rules. But I think nowadays Islam means difficult not only in Europe, difficult in every country. I don't blame just the Western idea; I blame also the Arabic idea of Islam. It's a difficult religion and concept itself, and this difficulty is making the life of Islamic people even worse. You have to justify your actions or sometimes you have to show the peace means of your actions.

B: Do you feel you are representing a culture?

M: Yes. it feels that you need add more because for us it's clear, what is written down is clear for us but because re-reading and re-reading every single letter they are concluding what's really there, the whole idea of the book. I don't really think it's highly possible to adapt a book who was written ten thousand years ago nowadays. It's just that you have always have to filter and arrive at the concept itself. It's like reading a book; you need to read the conclusion to understand the whole meaning.

B: When you said you blamed the Arab world, did you mean the interpretations of Islam?

M: I don't mind the different groups from the Muslim religion. Everyone is free to believe to follow which the religion or some sort of ramification that he sees more close to him. But what I blame is the lack of agreement among basic rules which goes against the book itself, the Quran itself. It's all related to make your life better and peaceful. I see the peaceful meaning of religion, it's just difficult to apply. I feel kinda like offended when they say, they describe Muslim people very nice. It looks like you don't deserve to be! Oh he's Muslim, he's such a nice guy you know, he is praying and doing his own thing. You know islamophobia.

B: Do you feel your religious identity affect the way the host culture engages with you?

M: No never. I think they way that they avoid it is just a polite way for not making an embarrassed situation. I think talking about religion make everyone in a difficult position. It's difficult to talk about, but I don't think it's avoiding for a racism way.

B: What does higher education mean to you?

M: My idea of higher education is an education or a university where you can really find everything you need under an education part. That starts from reaching the lecturer when you want, knowing all the submission dates, all the amount of work you have to do, learn from before how to tackle all these issues for an international student. I think DCU has a weak point. What I found in the pre-master's programme was, if I have to suggest I will just divide pre-masters, because it's very confusing and it's not relating you following course. It's a mix and it's not very focus on the course you have to do after. I think they really need to tell you have three courses in the first. You need to know how to do an essay properly. They need to tell you okay the introduction is this, how to analyse where is a weak point, where is a strong point in an article. I think this is what they need. By doing this you're gonna familiarise yourself with the world that you're gonna find in the books you know, not just English book or grammar. You need also someway to taste the essence of masters itself, but for everything else it reached all my [expectations], yeah.

B: Okay, thank you very much Malika!

#### **4. Sahar Interview (20th interview)**

B: Okay Sahar, where are you from?

S: I'm from Oman.

B: How old are you?

S: Twenty years old.

B: What course are you doing here?

S: I'm doing accounting and Finance, and it's my first year, undergraduate.

B: How did you decide to come to Ireland and DCU?

S: It's the scholarship which I get, and I came here. I studied last year foundation in Dorset College.

B: Why did you go to Dorset College?

S: It's from the ministry that sent me to Dorset College. They send students to three places for foundation; institute of education, Dorset College and DIT. They allocate us according to our English level and our maths. If you want to come to DCU you have to go to these.

B: Did you do English as well?

S: No I didn't do English.

B: So you were competent enough before you came here?

S: Yeah because I studied English in my home.

B: Was Ireland your top choice?

S: I kept Ireland in my top choice and then I had the UK and then New Zealand, Australia and then Oman. I chose Ireland because I thought it was safe and people are more friendlier, and my uncle has studied here medicine for seven years before, and he start telling that it's a safe country.

B: When did your uncle study here?

S: It was in the 90s.

B: And when you say safe, what do you mean by that?

S: Like it's different than the UK while walking in the street. In the UK when walking in the street they start telling bad words to Muslim people cause of the hijab, and insulting them sometimes.

B: Did you experience that yourself?

S: No, but I heard from my cousins.

B: Are they students in the UK?

S: Yes.

B: And they come across such negative incidents?

S: Yeah.

B: Was there anybody in the family motivating you to study abroad except your uncle?

S: Yeah it was my uncle and my cousins. Three of my cousins are now studying in the US.

B: If you compare you experience in Ireland to theirs in the us, do you ever talk about this?

S: Yeah sometimes when we are talking they start telling, like one of my cousins told me that he faces a problem once they knew that they are Muslims. And they went to police station because of car. He was driving fast, the police start giving him a fine, he asked his identity, he was a Muslim, he told him go to the Garda (police) station, for

no reason. He has been there for a day and he went back. They were talking about ISIS I think.

B: Going back to what you said earlier at this point, what did you mean by friendly when you were describing Irish people?

S: Like they're helping people a lot. Like I'm living in a host family now, like the woman, I live with a woman, like she always help me and support me in everything. Like last year broke my leg and she was helping me. If I have any problems or anything, i talk to her. She help me and she support me in my studies to get good levels. Also like the bus drivers, the people in the cafe, you see them smiling and happy.

B: What was your motives behind wanting to study abroad except Ireland's characteristics?

S: I was in school and there was a teacher who was motivating us to study abroad to get a good certificate. He always help us search foreign universities abroad and the read their requirements and help us accomplish good results in the leaving cert. I faced a problem in the family. One of my brothers studied in Oman. He got a scholarship to study in New Zealand, but then he felt lazy and he stayed in Oman. He went to a university in Oman, then he start complaining about the studies. He had to study languages, like had to study Arabic, and they gave him his own major. Like he wanted to study accounting but they gave him marketing instead. They forced him to study marketing since he went to Omani university. Two of my cousins went to same university. They wanted to study medicine, and they gave them pharmacy.

B: Do Omani universities do that often?

S: Yeah for example if I choose business, they'll give me any field in business, if I choose medicine, they'll give me any field in medicine.

B: You didn't want this to happen to you?

S: Yeah I don't want anybody to restrict my studies. That's why I felt abroad is better.

B: Do you also see it as an advantageous certificate?

S: Yeah it's an advantage because I've been independent. I know how to tidy my clothes, to clean my room, to manage my budgets, to manage my time between studying and for example cooking.

B: And career-wise as well? Do you think this would put you in an advantageous position?

S: Yeah, for example if I have a certificate from a foreign country and if I came to Oman, it'll be more recognised.

B: You said you live with a host family? Is this encouraged by your funding body, government?

S: In Oman the government put the students in their first year in host families, to learn English. If they're forcing to student to learn a language, to stay in the host family for two approximately. I was supposed to stay for two months and then have to move into

an apartment. Then I decided that the family is more favour and it's more good for me, and I could have more benefits and I could pay rent and the expenses for the heat and gas and everything. So I told that to host and she said that I could stay, and I did and it's my second year now.

B: So you chose to stay with the family because you see benefits in it?

S: Yeah benefits.

B: You mentioned as benefits, financial and safer, at that point, what do you actually mean by safer?

S: For example, if I'm in an apartment anyone could break into the apartment. With host family, in fact she is my mother staying in the house alarmed and everything, and support me as well.

B: How does being a scholarship student make you feel?

S: Sometimes yeah you feel under pressure as an international, as an undergraduate student, because homesick sometimes affect us. You feel homesick so you might have to manage your studies. If you feel homesick you might go away from your studies, so you can't manage sometimes.

B: In those moments do you go talk to your host-mum?

S: Sometimes I speak with her, or call my dad or my mum.

B: Can you tell me a little bit about your social life in DCU?

S: The students I meet in accounting; we are all friends together, and in the class, we help each other. For example, I wasn't there, we have to write, we have to copy from the board. If it's not clear on Facebook, I could borrow a notebook from one of the girls around. Firstly, I felt that we weren't so friendly, but when they [lecturers] started dividing us into groups, assignment groups, I felt we were getting more friendly, we were getting more help, helping each other in working.

B: So, the school projects, group works help you socialise with your class mates?

S: Yeah.

B: And you said at first you weren't socialising at the beginning, what made you think this way?

S: I came from a background that my family used to teach me interact with other students, but I faced some girls, they don't want to talk with Irish students. They would sit next to them for example, say hi to share with them because they feel shy, they don't want to interact with them.

B: Are these Omani students as well?

S: Yeah. So they were telling me no, we feel shy or embarrassed about it sometimes.

B: So there is a bit of a pressure from your friends?

S: Yeah.



B: Why do you think they are feeling shy or embarrassed?

S: Maybe from their background, where they come from, the families.

B: Do you mean the Islamic identity and headscarf by that?

S: Yeah.

B: Do you think their level of English would affect this too?

S: I think English level kinda affect because the Irish people speak fast and sometimes you can't catch the words. I can't understand as well with different accents.

B: If you weren't socialising with other Omani students, would you be more interested in intercultural contact?

S: Making friendships with Irish students here? Yeah! Now in the group assignment, I have two Irish students with me, we work together.

B: Do you have other international students in your course?

S: Yes we do.

B: How is your relationship with them?

S: It's good. We chat. We are on the Facebook page all together so we chat, and they're Muslims as well. There are Muslims in our class, Pakistani and Iranian, we chat with each other.

B: Do you feel more comfortable with other Muslim international students?

S: No it's the same. There's a framework on campus, you know like it's my studies, and I'm friend with everyone. So I treat equal with everyone. And I have friends from other schools as well.

B: How do you make those friends?

S: From the library. Sometimes on the bus together. If I met them on campus by accident, and then I met them in town outside the campus.

B: Who do you mostly socialise with on campus?

S: The accounting and finance [her course] because we are all together.

B: What do you do on campus when you're not in class?

S: I go to the canteen with the girls or go to the library.

B: When you say girls?

S: The Omani girls.

B: Does a person's religious preference matter for you to contact that person?

S: Because the school I went to when I was young, we had Christian people and Hindus. And our teachers, they were British, they were Indian, there was an Irish

teacher as well. So you see them, you talk with them. Once my dad forced me to work in a bank in the customer service. And I was interacting with customers, they were Brazilian, American, they were from different backgrounds.

B: So I presume they support your study abroad decision?

S: Yes they do.

B: What does being an international student mean to you?

S: Like represent our country, our culture as if we are an ambassador who shows our country in a foreign place which we will spend our short term life in. Shows our background as well, our thoughts.

B: And what does culture mean to you then?

S: For example, we have the Omani culture and the Islamic culture. The Islamic culture is like the hijab. You know in Islam you need to shake hands, say salamunaleykum [hello in arabic], and how are you. We're going to interfaith, we have time for prayers.

B: So I see culture for you is a combination of your nationality and religion?

S: Yes, combination.

B: So you think being an international student is like representing your culture, do other students actually come and ask you questions about it?

S: Yeah, even the class once, the communication lecturer, he wanted us to give some contribution. One of the girls said in Oman we do this, we do that. So the students started asking questions. Some of them were reading, some of them wanted to google it. The lecturer was happy to know more about the culture.

B: That's really interesting! And do they ever ask you questions about Islam?

S: No. It's mostly about Oman. But once the taxi driver told me why you wear a scarf. Not the students. Because the students are used to seeing girls walking on campus wearing hijab.

B: Some students said they had difficult time shaking hands with males in Ireland? Would you relate to this?

S: No I'm used to shake hands. No problem.

B: Where do you think this difference between girls come from?

S: Their background and their Islam. It depends. In school they used to teach if you don't want to shake hands with a man, you could do gesture [like a bow].

B: So you don't need to say no. That's great! And how would you describe the host culture and students here?

S: The students are friendly with us. Because both of us learn from each other so. They're friendly like.

B: How do you mean they are friendly?

S: For example, when I am walking, an Irish student approach me and we go to the lecture together. Or in the class like, hi, how are you today, how is the programme, how do you feel about this subject, do you have any problems with it, how is the exam, stuff like that. Chatting.

B: Would you see any difference in this kind of attitude on campus versus off campus?

S: Sometimes on campus people are more friendly. Like outside campus, for example I feel fear. They're able help and they will help but some of them have fear say no and leave. I think it is everywhere.

B: Do you feel influenced by the host culture?

S: Yeah. In Oman we don't drink water from the tap! At the beginning I used to buy bottled water. Also when you're home and you're the youngest, it's slightly different. But you still have the same mentality. You still have some red lines in both countries.

B: And what would be you red lines?

S: Like the manners and the attitudes or behaviours or action or interaction is the same. It won't change. You're gonna stay the same.

B: Are your manners inspired by Islam as well?

S: The hijab? Yeah since we were young we were taught to wear the hijab, long sleeves, some part of our body should be covered. And we got that. Plus, our parents, like this this this in religion and I used to get the idea. For example, me, I reflect the picture of my mother and father, and their attitudes and ethics. They are Muslim as well

B: And what Islam mean to you?

S: It's the thing which god gave us. You can speak with god separately, no one could know. And you feel like happy with Islam. If you're with your prayer, if you're done with your everything have to do, you feel like happy. In Islam we have positive feelings like. If this doesn't happen, so it's good for you. If something hard, even in Quran, you start feeling that it's hard, after certain time, it's gonna be easy from god.

B: So it's like a life style for you, Islam?

S: Yeah it's everything in life.

B: How often do you pray?

S: Five prayers a day.

B: Do you go to interfaith centre?

S: Yeah.

B: How is your experience with interfaith centre?

S: It's good. I feel like meeting with the people in there. For example, when we go to pray we see some Saudis, Kuwait, some different nationalities. You know in Islam we have three different schools, Sunni, Shia, Abadi, sometimes three of us are praying in the same line together. Like in Oman or in our countries, there's different mosque for different schools. When you come here, all the three religions are praying in one room. And sometimes in the same line. And we're chatting with each other sometimes. They set up a group on WhatsApp. The priest there, whenever he sees us he is like hi, how are you. And then he goes god bless you. Also, when we have heavy books or a gift for example for our friend's birthday, we can keep it in the interfaith.

B: So I see interfaith is a place to socialise, is it?

S: Yeah socialise. We met as well like Japanese, and Indian, different religions, boy and girls.

B: Do they also pray there?

S: I think they are there for free coffee and chilling.

B: Is it mostly international students there?

S: I see Irish students couple of times. They're sitting with the students, having coffee and chilling as well.

B: What is your experience with the lecturers?

S: They're friendly I think. Sometimes we have any difficulties or how to approach a question or anything, I could e-mail my tutor and can I call over to your office and they're like yeah yeah. They give me a time and I go and we can discuss. Like my background isn't accounting so first days I was in lecturer's and tutor's office every day. I used to ask a lot and they were happy with it.

B: So they're accessible. How does that make you feel?

S: Very comfortable.

B: Did you have difficulty with language?

S: No. For example, some Irish have different accents. But like after explaining something important, they ask do you have any questions, do you understand, shall I repeat, do I need to put the notes on loop?

B: Would you say they are aware of international students' presence in classes?

S: They treat everybody equally, and I have no problem with this.

B: Did you come across any other challenges in DCU so far?

S: Accounting course, because I don't come from this background. It is difficult for me. I had work a lot. Also economics.

B: Oh okay, other than the subjects, you have no problems?

S: No problem.

B: Are you happy with campus facilities?

S: Yea. For example, the library, the books. I think there are 80-90 students studying this subject and there is only 2-3 books in the library. They are gone, not available, we need to start waiting, waiting, waiting. The computers are also broken sometimes. The hub, everything is there, the bar, the printing...

B: Do you go to the bar?

S: Sometimes to buy juice.

B: Most of my participant would avoid drinking and places where you drink, and they say this affects their communication level with Irish students and limits their friendship. Do you feel the same?

S: Yeah, sometimes. I never go out with the Irish students. When I'm going to the bar sometimes to have food or if I want to buy a fresh juice, smoothie. Also they have halal chicken in the cafeteria. If you buy something, it says if it is halal and it there is pork in this. Once I was buying something and she told me no it's not halal. They tell us, too.

B: Do you ever contact international office?

S: Yeah I used to go a lot in first semester. I needed help like with my timetable and I wanted their advice. They help out to you about the system, the loop page. They also tell us about the workshops, writing work shop in the writing centre in the library. If I have any problems and I need support with my studies, there is development and support centre. They do their best.

B: Did you do the orientation event with them?

S: Yes but I already was familiar with everything because it wasn't my first year.

B: Did you host family help you adapt to your environment? Do you think you benefited from this experience?

S: Yeah, they helped me.

B: And speaking of benefit, what do you think is the benefit of making intercultural friendships?

S: You know more, you get more wiser. You discover the world. The world is made of different languages, different cultures, different nationalities, everything is different in the world. Every person is different than the other, not typical. So while discovering the nationalities, you discover everything so you're gonna be aware. You know the goods and bads, the pros and cons, everything in the world.

B: Would you consider DCU as an international campus?

S: Yes, international campus.

B: Also when you were talking about the library and the books, a question popped into my head; would you see any difference between Irish students and the international students in terms of how hard they work?

S: Yeah there is a difference. Like all of us are different in our studies and approach. And all of us have different level of knowledge. But I feel that the Irish students are more capable because they are prepared from their leaving cert. They have the language skill and they live in like it's their country. They're used to do their own schedule, like sports, heading outside, studying and travelling in between. But with us, we have to be more independent, prepare our own foods, clean our room or clothes, study everything. Even international student with good level of English, they will struggle. Because it's not our language. We need to study more.

B: I am sure you are doing great! Thank you for your participation.

### **5. Diya Interview (22nd Interview)**

B: Abdul, how old are you?

D: I'm twenty-seven.

B: Where are you from?

D: I'm from Saudi Arabia.

B: What course are you doing?

D: Now I'm studying strategy in Business School.

B: Is it undergraduate or masters?

D: It's masters now. I was studying my pre-master last year, now I'm studying my master.

B: Is this your second year in Ireland?

D: No actually, I've been here since September 2011. I was studying English for one year and half almost and after I started my pre-master, foundation year, and now I'm doing my master.

B: Where did you do your English?

D: There is an English school in Dublin.

B: Did you do your pre-masters in DCU?

D: Yeah.

B: Was there a reason for you to do your English outside DCU?

D: No but actually when I came here I asked friends, and they told that school and I started.

B: I was asking because as far as I know there is an English school in DCU but you did not prefer to go to that?

D: No I didn't know about that. I didn't have experience about Ireland so I chose what I knew from my friends.

B: Is your pre-masters course compulsory for pre-masters?

D: Yeah from the Saudi programme we have the fund programme to study English, master in any country around the world. After English you start your foundation year, after you start master.

B: How does your scholarship make you feel?

D: It's a good opportunity for me. Because it's a good opportunity for a person to travel to, to live in another country. To see another culture to communicate with other people. Not just our normal life. Usually we are just communicating with the Saudi people and Muslim people around Saudi Arabia. But now you travel to another country they are non-Muslim. So it's a good opportunity for you to start communicating with people from different cultures, form different countries as well. There is some difficulties but for me [it] is a good experience.

B: So communicating with different cultures, was that the major motivation behind your decision to study abroad?

D: Yeah!

B: And you said there were some difficulties, what are those difficulties?

D: You know one of the biggest challenge is the language. Because I came here my English was very bad. I couldn't speak English. But now I feel better. At the beginning it was like how can we understand these people. Because you know when they speak with you, you can't, it is difficult for you to understand. But after a while you start improving your English and get used to the Irish accent as well. Because you know the Irish accent is a bit strong. When I speak with an Irish person, it is difficult to understand sometimes.

B: Other than this?

D: Maybe in terms of you know when you're from different cultures, especially if you're Muslim, sometimes you face some questions about our culture, your religion. So you need to be wise how can you deal with these questions. Specially questions about some situations in Saudi Arabia, maybe here they have a negative opinion about womans in Saudi Arabia; for example they can't drive. Is it related to religion, or culture, or something like this to explain to them you know about the question about the religion about the culture about the hijab you know. Also some people here, because of the bad image about the Islam in general around the world, sometimes you feel that they don't feel good when you start a conversation with them. Like in the university walking for example, or in collage we have a lot of group work. So some people may find it difficult to work with Muslim people. I don't know maybe because of the media or I don't know. So you feel that sometimes they don't feel good. They speak with you but you feel there's something they don't feel comfortable when they speak with you. So you try to get used to the situation and try to be clever. How can i deal with the situation you know. So this is maybe.

B: When you say this, do you mean Irish students?

D: No in general, non-Muslims. Because here in our college, we don't have just Irish, we have Italy France from different countries. Not all of them, but some of them feel they have some problems you know. And I feel this is normal. Even Muslim people sometimes, when we speak with each other, you can recognise that. Someone from

different faith came to work or live in my country like this, they have problems with them as well. So I think this is normal in each culture you know. So I understand this, I don't have any problem.

B: When you say you have to be clever around it, what do you mean by this?

D: I mean you need to try understand the situation, that this is normal. Because sometimes you will think maybe why, what did I do for you, do I have any problem with you or something like this. But you need to understand that this is the normal in any [culture], this is the natural of human. It's difficult for them to walk with someone who has different belief about life, about god, about these things. Not all people can deal with this in a nice way. If you understand this, you can [cope with it]. You say maybe after a while they will get used to this situation. Because I understand also maybe for the some students, this is their first experience with people from Saudi Arabia maybe from the Middle East or Muslim people. So it's normal. A new experience maybe you'll have some difficulties with. Then you understand maybe I have a wrong idea or something like this after a while when you communicate with them [talking about non-Muslims].

B: How does that make you feel?

D: For us it's a big responsibility. I mean how can you. I think we are a representative of our religion and our culture, so you need to try to be a good example. To give a good example of your religion, your culture. Specially nowadays you know the international media, the movies, they represent a very bad image about Muslims in general. And that I think influence the people in the West, in Europe, in USA. I think we are as Muslims here, when people see how we deal with people, how we communicate with them, we'll give an idea about if that's right or wrong or something like this you know. So you need to take it seriously and to be careful.

B: Have you ever experienced change through communication?

D: Yeah. I have an actually an example of this. At the beginning he was living with someone from Korea for example and he used to have this bad idea about Muslims. I don't know how but they were living together. At the beginning they didn't know each other so he was afraid from friend, my Saudi friend. He didn't want to speak with him, and didn't want I mean try to stay away, you know because they strange ideas about Muslims. But a while, when they started communicating with each other, they became very close friends. And they go out with each other, they eat together, they travel together, so you know this is [happening at] just the beginning you know. When you don't know someone, it's a normal feeling towards the stranger people for you. And new people that we have never communicated before.

B: Would this be a motivation for intercultural contact for you?

D: Yeah. This is reason I like it (laughs). Because it's a challenge and you can recognise when we speak with them [non-Muslim students] something start to change. Some of them they told us I used to when I watched the movies and these things I had this strange idea about you. But when I met you and started to speak with you and to know about you more I was like surprised you know. Cause I saw something different.

B: That must be a really good feeling?



D: Yeah very good you know.

B: You say you feel you are representing your culture and religion, what do you mean by those two?

D: Because we are Muslims and Saudi, for Saudi Arabia people especially have some ideas about how deal with the womans, especially womans. And because of that maybe women can't drive or they have to cover their faces so people they have like a negative idea about this things. But as an opportunity for Saudi students in DCU for example, there's like Saudi womans and the Saudi man in the same university. The international and Irish students recognise us when we communicate with each other. So this give an idea. So this is for the Saudi culture maybe it answers some of their questions maybe about the relationship between men and women in Saudi Arabia. For the religion, Saudi is almost one hundred per cent people are Muslims. They see us as an example when we communicate about our prayers about these things you know, they start to ask about this. Maybe later they recognise you, do you practice, and we say we pray five times. Okay how can you practice every day, because for some people it's too much, five times you know. But sometimes they see a Saudi person going to Interfaith or sometimes we are in a meeting, this happened to me, I say to the guys with me, they are two Irish guys and an Italian girl, I need to go to interfaith to pray and I will come back. When you practice what you say, I think it is more influential just saying you are practicing. That we Muslims need to pray. Okay do you pray or no. I think make difference.

B: Oh okay so when they see it in their daily life, it becomes more normal, than just speaking about it.

D: They can understand it and they can imagine.

B: Would you say you experience as a male Saudi international student be different to that of a female Saudi student?

D: I think so. Some of them maybe they won't be able to, what should I do when I meet Saudi woman. Because for us as men, we are just wearing normal.

B: Would you see yourself recognisable?

D: For us, as male? I think for us, a little bit easier than womans. Womans more because they wear something obvious. But for the man it is normal. I think it is different for them sometimes at the beginning. But after I think it depends on the people. What should I do now as a Saudi female? That depends on the person. And I think it is both [sides]. When you see someone wearing something that you have never seen in your life. I think it is normal you know.

B: How would you describe the host culture and students?

D: For me I feel that Irish people in general especially in public places they are respectful. Maybe it's difficult to make Irish friends but they respect you, they respect your culture, what you believe, these things. They don't try to do something bad for you. Just maybe they stay away. They respect you, do whatever you want but they don't try to be close to you. Just doing the work time, okay we will work together, but after it's just a formal relation you know.

B: What make you feel this way?

D: This is in general, maybe some of them are more close. But so far in general, maybe some of them, as I told you about the bad image, is friends or people around him may recognise that you have Muslim friend or something like this. Maybe it will influence relationships with his friends you know. Because I still believe that the very bad image about Muslims influence this, especially the relationship between the Muslims and non-Muslims. Also some people are not motivated to have friends from different countries, from different cultures. Others maybe, I think these are the two major reasons for that. But still I mean we feel good. I mean we don't have serious problems here in Dublin. In general, we feel we can do whatever we want. Okay we can't maybe have Irish friends, it's difficult sometimes, but for the international it's much easier. For the people okay non-Muslims but they are different countries like France, Italy, Spain these things, I feel there is much easier than to meet the Irish, the host people.

B: What do you think makes it easier with those students?

D: I don't know why but I felt international people from Spain, from Latin America, they are more social. I mean they don't care you Muslim, non-Muslim, it's easy for them. They are easy-going. You can make friends with them easy way. You don't have that difficulties. Maybe because they are not in their countries. They are here so they feel free, they can do whatever they want.

B: So maybe they share the same interests as you as an international student?

D: Yeah! Because they are here now.

B: You say you have been doing group works. Do you feel these group works help you engage more with the host culture and maybe other international students or so?

D: Yeah it helps us to understand more. Of course while we are working we stick with each other about different topics. So you start to understand each other.

B: Who do you mostly socialise with on campus when you're not in class?

D: To be honest for me mostly with Muslim people here, because here [is] not like when I was in my English school. The situation was a little bit different. Because here the most of the students, the males, for me I mean, I usually make friends more with males than females (smiles). The females are a little bit formal. But the males most of them in the college are Irish, it is a bit difficult to stay with them. But for me usually I go with my Saudi friends here. Or sometimes with Muslim people here in DCU.

B: So I presume you go to the Interfaith Centre?

D: Yeah!

B: How often do you pray?

D: Five times a day.

B: Do you feel the Interfaith Centre is a place to socialise as well?

D: Yeah yeah! It's a good place to socialise. If you are interested about other religions, sometimes they do some other programmes inside interfaith. Conversations about different religions, and everybody talk about their religion.

B: Would you be interested in going to such things?

D: Yeah, for me, I try to understand my own faith but also to understand maybe the Christianity. I am interested to understand it more.

B: Why?

D: We are living here now so, you want to know more about people here and about their faith.

B: So I see you describe Irish people as Christians, is there any other way you would describe them as?

D: Yeah also maybe their habits around social life. It's a bit different where they go to communicate with each other. For us as Muslim it's a little bit difficult to go to a bar. I think this is one of the difficulties to communicate with them. Usually they go to socialise to the bar. So for us it's a bit difficult you know because of the religion. Sometimes with the international students for example, we told them that we don't drink these things. If you want we can go for cup of coffee. So we can socialise, we can speak you know. So it's another option for us. But with Irish, I think it is difficult because they like to go, they like drinking.

B: Would you also feel that the Interfaith Centre is helping you make international contact as well?

D: To socialise with the non-Muslim people, I think my experience was better when I was studying at my English school. Because there you can meet the people from different countries and we stay long time together. Maybe four, five hours, so it's a good time to start speaking with them. To know each other. Most of my non-Muslim friends we knew about each other when we were in the school. But here okay maybe different national but Muslims mostly in the Interfaith. I mean you meet some people from Libya, Tunisia, from the USA so yeah multicultural[al] but Muslims.

B: So back in the English course you had more intercultural contact?

D: Yeah even better than the foundation here. Because foundation here most of the students were Saudi. Just maybe few Chinese. But before maybe like Brazilian, Spanish, it was different.

B: What do you think is the benefit of intercultural contact and friendships?

D: I think one of the positive things here to come here to study and communicate with other people is that you open your mind about their cultures and maybe sometimes before it was like the situation on the opposite side. We used to have some stupid ideas about people there and I can't imagine that maybe one day I will have a non-Muslim friend in my life. But when I came here I started to change this idea, and I started to deal with them as a human. Because we used to have bad feeling about them. You don't want to communicate with them. If they became Muslims okay I will start, if they don't, no, I don't care and I don't want to communicate with them or have any

kind of relations. But now for me it becomes normal. We share a lot of things together and we have a lot of similarities you know, in values, in habits. So I don't have any problem to speak with any person, Muslim, non-Muslim. I think also you will learn more. I understand more my religion when I came here to Ireland. When I started communicating more with the non-Muslim people. I had more interest to understand more deeply my religion, and a lot of ideas start to change when I came here.

B: In what ways?

D: Start to change about, we used to say that our religion is an international religion, for all people. But I think before, we used to say this as just words, without understanding the deep meaning about it. But now I started to try to understand my religion as a really international religion. When I try to speak about my religion with a non-Muslim, I try to speak about it as something for us both. This is something for us, this is not like culture or something. When I speak about my culture, this is maybe something special for me, but when I speak about my religion, no it's different. This is something for me and you. I think this is the big change in my mind to look to my religion for all humanity, not just for me. When you understand religion this way, even when you speak with people about it, you speak about it in a different way. Not like something you own. You speak about something, okay I have it but I need to give it to everyone. To let everyone, know about it. And let them talk to us about whatever they want. They accept it or not, this is up to them you know. You can't force people. Just you need to give the idea you know.

B: What does Islam mean to you?

D: I think Islam is a whole life, my whole life. Influencing my spiritual side, my social relations, my habits, a lot of things, I mean, is a way. I need Islam for this life here and the afterlife. Because this will inshaallah guide you to paradise. So I try to take it seriously, try to deal with it seriously. I am trying to understand it deeply. I think this will guide you to good inshaallah.

B: so I see Islam, your religion is a big part of your identity, here would you consider yourself religious?

D: Maybe I don't know because I think there is a conception here about religious. When I say religious person, I don't know priest or something like this. No I consider myself normal person. But I take the things related to religion seriously. I think we all are on the same ship. I look at religion that way. Enjoy your life but don't forget your god, that's my philosophy.

B: Some of my participants told me they see Islam as peace and love, would you also agree with that?

D: I think so, because there is a clear verse in the Quran that god said "I sent you as mercy to the humanity", and Mohammad said I was sent. I think this is enough. Islam is a peaceful religion.

B: Okay let's go back to your academic life a little bit, how would you describe your experience with lecturers without naming any names?

D: I don't face serious problems with lecturers. I think they do their job, they present our courses, they deal with students equally. Also they sometimes do good things

trying to mix students. They know that they [lecturers] have different people from different background so they mix the groups and the team works sometimes. They try to make it not only Irish, they try to put someone from other cultures in order to help us to communicate. For me I think they do a lot of good things. Also I like that they try not to separate between the students. They deal with you as student, not as Irish or Saudi, or different country.

B: How do you manage your timetable with your praying and classes?

D: Maybe I had difficulty at the beginning but then I got used to it. When you have your timetable you know your class and your prayer. Sometimes I go before the class so I try to manage.

B: Do you feel international students have to work more in comparison to Irish students?

D: For the assignments I feel sometimes difficult. Especially when you're working with them. They are all native and they work faster than you. But you try to do your work as early as possible. You are aware of time all the time.

B: If you would like add any other difficulties or challenges you came across in your academic life in here, please do not hesitate to add so.

D: No just sometimes, we have a project, me and another Irish girl. Just in terms of communication, for example if we are together, sometimes they don't understand you. But we try, I am lucky that I'm with a very nice Irish girl, she is trying to help me with these things. So we try to cope with each other.

B: Do you mean the language?

D: Yeah just the language.

B: What is your experience with the International Office on campus?

D: Yeah they are really nice, they are really helpful. You can go to them and ask them. For me I just go for some documents. I e-mail them and they do it as soon as possible.

B: So in that sense, would you feel institutional support in DCU?

D: Yeah!

B: Do you also feel comfortable practicing your religion in DCU?

D: Yeah here because of the interfaith we don't have any problem. You go there, I mean you are free to do whatever you want. We have like a Muslim prayer room. I used to have to do the wudu (ritual washing to be performed in preparation for prayer and worship) in public bathrooms and it was so difficult! Because people look at you what are you doing haha! (laughs)

B: That's very small but very important! Okay, are you a member of any clubs and societies?

D: Just the Islamic society.

B: Okay, I'm going to wrap things up with one last question, what does higher education mean to you?

D: It is a big change in your life, in how you think, how you study, the way you study start to change. Also your lifestyle will start to change, it is a positive difference. Also you start to be independent. Everything depend on you. You should do it, you should manage yourself. No one will try to help you. You help yourself.

B: What does being an international student mean to you then?

D: Thanks god that I'm here, because after coming here I started to my life more seriously than before. To be international, to come to Ireland, and after 3 years of experience here, I started to change a lot of things, my habits, how I look at life you know, and my religion as well. It's a big change and I mean you take your life more seriously than before.

B: Would you see this as a big step for your career as well?

D: Yeah, because in Saudi Arabia, all the big companies prefer the one who speak English and studied abroad than the one who just speak Arabic and did university in Saudi. A lot of the companies in Saudi Arabia, the communication language is English between employees and the staff, English language. So that's good for me.

B: So I presume English was one of the major reasons why you chose Ireland?

D: Yeah!

B: Have you ever experienced any critical incident based on your identity in here so far?

D: No. Just in terms of what I told you before, but other than that, no.

B: Thank you very much!