

A Phenomenological Study Of Non – Verbal Communication Of Female Muslim Students At Evangelical Presbyterian College Of Education, Bimbilla

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Abstract: *This study examined how female Muslim students employ non-verbal acts to communicate at the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla. The study adopted the qualitative approach with 20 respondents using the purposive sampling technique. The method of data collection was interviews and focus group discussions. Identity negotiation theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. The study revealed that Muslim women communicate at the College by constructing their identities around Islamic culture; veiling, use of residential facilities and handshaking prescriptions.*

Ahmad (2013) reveals in her study that job opportunities and marriage prospects increase for Muslim women when they access tertiary education and that development of communication skills, intra and inter group relationships are shaped when Muslim women receive higher education. Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa have lower educational attainment, on average, than their Christian counterparts (Izama, 2013). She further notes this disadvantage in formal educational attainment varies across space and time. She also posited the disadvantage dated back to the period of colonial domination. Communication is a key factor in the day to day activities of individuals and groups including female Muslim students of the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla (EPCoE).

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The experiences of Muslim women and their identities in higher education remain sublimated within broader studies on issues centred on inclusion, exclusion, and widening access for non-traditional entrants based on social class and to some extent, ethnicity (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). Lambert, Perrino and Barreras, (2012) explored the challenges of female education in Ghana and highlight some benefits accruing to females when they attain higher heights in education. However, there exists minimal literature on Muslim women in higher educational institutions, and in particular in Christian mission institutions in Ghana. This study therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining how female Muslim students communicate in Christian Mission Colleges of Education in Ghana.

RESEARCH QUESTION(S)

- ✓ How do Muslim women communicate at the EPCoE, Bimbilla?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM WOMEN

According to Ahmad (2013) several opportunities accrue to Muslim women when they access higher education and these include; greater confidence, self-awareness, and self-esteem, getting knowledge, increase marriage prospects, social benefits such as getting friends from other places and other religions. It is inferential to conclude from Ahmad's conception that education leads to the overall development of all the social domains of the individual especially, women.

Adusei-Karikari (2008) observed that gender inequity remains an obstacle both in developed and developing countries. Considerable efforts therefore, have been made to highlight the experiences of women in higher education in developed countries rather than in developing countries. The experiences of women in higher education are a reflection of the experiences of women in society. Governments need to consult with local constituents to provide support to community-based education and training programs, which will work to recognize the value of women's education. Sirin and Fine (2008) cited in Ashley et al, (2011) researched into the identities and experiences of Muslim American youth which included college-aged participants. According to the results of their survey, 88% of the college age participants reported at least one act of discrimination because they were Muslims. The Open Society Foundations (2015) reports that even though, wearing of a veil / niqab is a personal decision for many of the women in Britain and America, the overwhelming majority of women report experiencing harassment or abuse at least occasionally because they are spotted wearing a face veil or the normal veil. In their study they found that a headscarf ban appears to hinder the identity development of these women and causes them to question their worth and place in society, as well as their commitment to their religion. On college campuses, residence hall environment plays an important role in the students' experience. Ashley et al (2011) found how other non-Muslim students in the residence halls of universities in the United States of America make Muslim students feel segregated and stereotyped and this leads to the heightening of their awareness of the Muslim identity. Dialogue provides mutual respect among people and if Muslims dialogue with their neighbours, there will be peace and tranquillity. Ashley et al (2011: 33) states,

Discussion of expectations between roommates before and during college is an important part of creating a residence hall space that is welcoming to student needs. Muslim students with roommates expressed concern about religious and cultural practices that may have been different than those of their roommates (p. 33).

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Russell (2009) describe Intercultural Communication as the sending and receiving of messages across languages and cultures. Intercultural Communication could therefore, mean the negotiated understanding of meaning in human experiences across social systems and societies. At the EPCoE, Bimbilla, Muslims, non-Muslims, and those who believe in other religions live and attain education on the same environment. The need to co-exist and ensure peace and productivity among students of the college is significant. This could be achieved through intercultural communication. "Research has shown that different cultures have different cultural values and this may cause confusion and conflict between people from different backgrounds" (George, 2012: 10). There exist cultural disparities in the way individuals relate and an example is the issue of privacy. Islamic teachings prescribes how Female Muslim students should handle issues about privacy. Zhang (2013) says that in western culture it is deemed inappropriate to interrogate someone on his or her age

because that is deemed strictly a private matter. According to him, a western woman considers her age a private matter and therefore, will not want it to be made public. They think that privacy is very important and should be kept a secret. Gao (2006) makes a similar observation when he says that different cultures require different culturally determined conventions which are seen as the appropriate ways of communicating either by way of greetings, eye contact and hand gestures. It is however significant to note the assertion that age as a private matter may not be the case in other cultures. The Islamic culture instead considers nudity as personal private matter which must be observed as such. Gao (2006) therefore, suggests that the study of intercultural communication will not only just resolve the conflicts and misunderstandings among/between people/groups but will activate the impetus of communications among people and open doors that remained closed for generations. When we talk of other cultures, we mean not only those who speak a language different from ours or live in a different country or region; we also mean those who live in the community but do not share the same social group with us. Students of EPCoE, Bimbilla come from varied cultural backgrounds. From the forgoing, it can be argued that Intercultural Communication is the study of communication across cultural or social groups. Examples of such are; inter-religious communication which has to do with communication between people of different religious orientations, inter-ethnic communication referring to communication between people of different ethnic background within the same community, and interdenominational communication involving communication between people of different sects or denominations within a single religion (Bennett, 1998). From the exploratory studies the researcher conducted earlier, female Muslim students at the EPCoE, Bimbilla belong to different sect of the Islamic religion-Sunni, Tijaniya and Ahmadiya. These females communicate among themselves noting their differences. The female Muslims also communicate with non-Muslim-males and females. As this study is about how female Muslim women communicate in a Christian mission educational establishment, communication forms the most crucial part of their experiences. From the above discussions, intercultural communication should offer some explanation to controversies such as how people communicate across their cultures.

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION THEORY

Littlejohn and Foss (2011) explain identity negotiation theory as the theory that explores the ways in which identity is negotiated in interaction with others, especially across cultures. It has its roots from the theory of identity which can be credited to George Hebert Mead. Whereas identity theory focuses on the sense of self, identity negotiation theory focuses on how the 'self' negotiates with different persons in the society (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

Ting-Toomey (1985) is the originator of Identity Negotiation Theory and according to her, "identities or self-reflective images are created whenever we assert, modify, and challenge our own and others' self-identifications (p. 104)." The chief proponent posits that the creation of identity begins early in the lives of individuals in the family setting, where

they begin to internalize various personal and social identities (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

Littlejohn and Foss (2011) explain terminologies in the identity negotiation theory to include; *Personal identities*, *Cultural and ethnic identity*, *Saliency and Value Content*. Personal identities are the characteristics we acquire first in life through our family interactions. It is here, that the initial development of gender identity occurs first and subsequently, it becomes a key component of the individual's social identity. *Cultural and ethnic identity* just like other identities is learnt through social interaction and it is related to some attachment to a larger cultural group – a religious denomination, a region of the country, an organization or age group. This is not explained to mean that one cannot have affiliation with other smaller cultures in a heterogeneous society. Ting-Toomey further argues that value content and saliency are key indicators in this theory. *Value Content* in her view consists of all the kinds of evaluations you make based on cultural beliefs. For instance, placing religious values over academic values is the strength of affiliation we feel in an establishment. How you relate to your cultural grouping whether it is strong or weak, all tell who you are as a person (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011: 105). She further notes that the theory focuses on cultural and ethnic identity and “particularly the negotiation that occurs when we communicate within and between cultural groups”. It is significant to note that when individuals communicate within a familiar cultural group, they experience more “security, inclusion, predictability, connection and consistency but when they interact across different cultures, they may experience the opposite – vulnerability, differentiation, unpredictability and change leading to lack of stability and a possibility of transformation” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). Sterts and Burke (2000) assert that identities are socially inclined, formed and sustained through social interactions with others in social environments.

Ting-Toomey (2005) conducted a research entitled *Identity negotiation theory; Crossing cultural boundaries* and explained that when individuals maintain a sense of self noting the identities of others and allowing them to have their own sense of self - identities, then they are engaging in what is referred to as *functional biculturalism* and that when individuals are able to shift from their cultures mindfully and easily, then such an individual has become a *cultural transformer* (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). The last issues Ting-Toomey (1985) notes in this theory are *intercultural competence* and *negotiation skills*. Under intercultural competence, she identified knowledge, mindfulness and skills. Identity knowledge is an understanding of the importance of cultural/ethnic identity and the ability to see what is important to others. Mindfulness means being habitually and consciously aware of the identity of others, and negotiation skills refers to the ability to negotiate identities through careful observation, listening, empathy, nonverbal sensitivity, politeness, reframing and collaboration.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. RESEARCH APPROACH

Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton and Renn (2010) have reasoned that because qualitative methods or designs pay particular attention to studies in contexts especially where cultural differences play a major role, it allows subtleties and hidden nuances that are not sufficiently captured in other methodologies such as quantitative research. This is to say, the depth of the issues under study are critically examined in qualitative studies. In order to successfully conduct a study into the lived experiences of individuals or groups, as in the case of female Muslim students at the EPCoE, the approach that was deemed appropriate was the qualitative approach. Qualitative research is an approach that explores and understands individuals' meanings that are ascribed to social phenomenon or human problems (Creswell, 2014). He further argues that in conducting qualitative research, the researcher tries to explore the reasons for acts, commissions and omissions. This study interrogates the experiences of female Muslim students, how they encounter communication as a social phenomenon and how they understand the college environment where they seek knowledge.

B. DESIGN

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), in phenomenological studies, “we gain insight into people's motives for action by engaging them through their acts - primarily, acts of speaking.” The design for this study is phenomenology and its choice is premised on the topic which looks into the lived experiences of female Muslim students in their natural environment and this was done by engaging the participants to talk about their actions and what informs their actions.

Creswell (2003) sees phenomenology as a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involve the interviews (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). It is significant to note that this study mainly employed interviews and focus group discussions, hence the justification for phenomenology as the design.

a. PURPOSIVE SAMPLING

Given (2008) explains “To say one will engage in purposive sampling signifies that one sees sampling as a series of strategic choices about whom, where and how one does his or her research.” He went further to postulate that “purposive sampling is synonymous with qualitative research (Given, 2008). From the above, one can say that purposive sampling is when the researcher identifies individuals or groups who are available for the research and with whom he or she can get the information that will be rich enough to satisfy the objectives of the study. Patton (2002) asserts that the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. This study is on phenomenology and the focus

is experiences of the female Muslim students. Hence, purposively sampling the participants afforded the researchers the opportunity to dig into the issues beyond his own knowledge and understanding and to enter into the world of the participants in order to gather rich information. As Patton (2002: 230) puts it: "Information rich-cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry".

C. SAMPLE SIZE

In deciding the sampling size, researchers "sample persons, setting, activities, and so on until a critical threshold of interpretive competence has been reached" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

For this study, a total of twenty (20) participants were selected from the population using purposive sampling. Muslim students who lived in the College within the past two academic years and are still students of the college were selected. Eight of the participants had their pre-college education experiences in the Senior High Schools (SHS) were day schools, 8 other respondents were drawn from students who had their pre-college educational experiences in the boarding school. The remaining four were drawn from Christian mission schools. In all, 20 respondents were used for the interviews and FGD. The twenty interviewees were split into two groups for the focus group discussions. The focus group and the interviews were both used for the purpose of triangulation.

D. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Interviews and Focus Group Discussion were employed by the researchers as the data collection instruments. The researchers used an interview schedule to facilitate the conduct of the interview.

a. INTERVIEW

Patton (2002) contends that qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowledgeable, and should be able to be made explicit. The researchers conducts the interviews with the aim of using its outcomes as the findings. An interview guide provided consistency in the case-specific questions while enabling flexibility to develop a conversational style (Patton 2002). According to Rapley (2004), interviews, are by their very nature, social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and prospective) accounts or versions of their past (future) actions, experiences, feelings, and thoughts.

b. FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Frey and Fontana (1991: cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), in citing) assert that even though there exist other groups such as; Delph groups, brainstorming groups and others, the most reliable and time tested group interview in qualitative research is the focus group discussion. Masadeh, (2012) describes focus group as a small group of six to ten people led through

an open discussion by a skilled moderator. This study focuses on Muslim women and in constituting the focus group, the participants were female Muslim students who have similar characteristics and who have lived in the college for at least a year. The focus group needs to be large enough to generate rich discussion but not so large that some participants are left out. At least, it should be six and at most twelve members (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

E. THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is one of the techniques employed by qualitative researchers to analyze the data of a given study. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a descriptive qualitative approach that is independent and mainly describes "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). They posit that in analyzing data, the researcher should place premium on what has been found at the research site and report it as such without other categories from elsewhere influencing it. The researcher in this study equally did same so as to come out with findings that are unique to the female Muslim students at E. P. College of Education, Bimbilla. Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) also say that due to the independent and reliable nature of thematic analysis, qualitative researchers should familiarise themselves with it. It is significant to note that this study which is about communication of female Muslim students revealed findings that can be trusted and used for academic and developmental purposes. This study is flexible and requires the use of thematic analysis as Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that thematic analysis is flexible and a useful tool that provides detailed account of data.

F. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researchers in conducting the study, took into consideration some ethical issues. These include; confidentiality and consent. The researchers explained to respondents of the research in unambiguous terms the purpose of the research and the intention to interview them and also constituted them for focus group discussions. The researchers also informed respondents about the need to record interviews and focus group discussions and transcribe them for analysis. After these preliminary activities, the researcher sought the consent of the respondents to conduct the interviews and the focus group discussions. The respondents were also assured of their confidentiality since they were Muslim students in a Christian Mission College of education because religious matters are considered sensitive. The respondents were informed that their names will not be used instead, they will be identified by codes generated by the researcher. Respondents were made to sign two consent forms, one to be kept by each respondent and the other to be kept by the researcher.

G. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity and reliability are key components of any good research. Creswell (2014) thinks that what is referred to as validity in qualitative studies cannot be the same in a

quantitative studies. He says that validity is achieved from three perspectives; the researcher's point of view, the participant's and the reader's point of view. "Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (Gibbs, 2007) cited in Creswell (2014, p. 254). Creswell (2014) further argues that for a qualitative research to be valid, the study should make use of a variety of data collection instruments. This study made use of both interviews and focus group discussion so as to cross check the authenticity of the various responses. According to the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association and National Council of Measurement in Education (1999), reliability is the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretation of test scores entailed by proposed uses of tests. The emphasis is on how trustworthy the results of the findings are but not the procedure used in arriving at the results. Basically, the findings that the study comes out with is rationalized through theory and to what uses such findings are put is the core mandate of validity. Merriam (1995: 52) suggests that the validity of qualitative research rests on three factors; "if I am trying to build a hypothesis rather than test them, if I am trying to understand a phenomenon rather than "treat" it, if I am interested in the participants' perspectives rather than my own". This study sought to understand the experiences female Muslims from the commentaries they gave about life before college and life during college.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

How female Muslim students communicate is the result of development in their communication skills. The study found that gaining entry into the college has improved the communication competencies of female Muslim women in diverse ways. Respondents say they have developed the skills to communicate effectively with people within and outside the Islamic religion without any fear of offending sensibilities of others within or outside their group. Respondents also affirmed that their speaking skills - grammar has developed tremendously. For instance, Ahmad (2013) opines that Formal Education enables Muslim women to communicate effectively in both speaking and writing. This findings therefore, corroborates Ahmad's (2013).

I respect the Islamic faith, the 'aqidah', the 'tawheed' and the 'fiqhihi' and because of that I hardly interact with people who are new. But as time went on, I was able to learn their likes and dislikes, what made them happy and what made them angry. I also learnt what they liked most and what they will never tolerate. This gave me the opportunity to live freely with other Muslims and non - Muslims in the college (R1).

Sterts and Burke (2000) assert that identities are socially inclined, formed and sustained through social interactions with others in social environments. The Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education typifies a social environment where respondents indicate their improvement in communication and how that has positively affected their communication within and across the Islamic religion. The respondents assert that it

is part of the 'Sunnah' of the prophet of Islam (Peace Be upon Him) to relate well with people irrespective of their religion, ethnicity or language. The fact that respondents say they communicate effectively across their culture goes to confirm what Ting-Toomey (2015) referred to as *functional biculturalism*. She explains this term to mean a situation where individuals are able to maintain a sense of self, noting the identities of others and allowing them to have their own sense of self-identities. For there to be effective communication, then it means the interlocutors have identified and respected each other's identities.

ENHANCED CONFIDENCE

Ahmad (2013) claims that Muslim women are able to stand on their own when they acquire university education and that university life impacts positively on the lives of Muslim women. The respondents of this study indicated that after gaining entry into the college one of their experiences is that of enhanced confidence. The respondents admitted during their interaction with the researcher that their confidence was boosted after they gained entry into the college as opposed to the traditional notion that an ideal woman should be submissive. R1 stated,

College life is something that I have not only admired but enjoyed. Many people think it is for the fun of it that we come to the college but I tell you there is more to it. Before I entered college, I must say that I couldn't speak in public. I was so shy especially in the presence of men but today, I can speak my mind and I can stand on my own and do a lot of things. Even though our 'deen' does not encourage close relationship with non-maharam men, we now move around with them.

The above syncs with the gender theory where Christodoulou and Zobnina (2009) posits that a situation of the sort could be the result of Gender Awareness. In this case, the women become aware that the conception that women should be submissive and at the beck and call of men is a social construction. The stage where the confidence level of the female Muslim students is enhanced, they are able to communicate across their social groupings - non - Muslims, men and other actors in the academic environment.

VEILING

Hamdar and Moore (2015) report that wearing of the 'niqqab', that is; the face veil was not so common until the 1990s in Europe. The wearing of the 'niqqab' became prominent in Europe in the 2000s and Muslim women veiled at will. However, this study revealed that Muslim women in the college use veils to construct their identities as a form of how they communicate. However, the type of veils they use is not the niqqab (face veil). Even though the female Muslim students live in a community that is predominantly Christian, they do not face any alienation from their non-Muslim counterparts. R7 stated,

Putting on the veil is part of the life of good Muslim and we cannot do without it. When you cover yourself, you have the sense of feeling protected and satisfied. When you put on a veil, you feel proud as a Muslim and other good Muslims praise you for that act. Even those who do not practice the

religion regularly also appreciate you for dressing like a Muslim. The only problem is that some of the non-Muslims do not feel comfortable with that form of dressing. They will sometimes ask you questions that are annoying but because it is a Christian institution, you can only tolerate them.

The wearing of the veil is an Islamic religious culture and this enables the Muslim woman construct her identity. The women wear veils in and outside the dormitories and this phenomenon is acceptable by all Muslims. This revelation is in consonance with what Spencer – Oatey (2008) sums up as conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour. Veiling is a gendered phenomenon because only women put on veils as form of communication.

HANDSHAKING PRESCRIPTIONS

Handshaking is another Islamic religious cultural phenomenon and it symbolizes friendliness and a sense of peace and tranquility. Men do not shake hands with women and vice-versa according to Islamic teachings and practice. When women shake hands with men, such an act is deemed a sin Islam. However, women can shake hands with their husbands and other women and that will not amount to a sin but when they do the opposite, then they are incurring the anger of their creator. According to the respondents of this study, handshaking affects the way they relate with men, especially Christian students. Respondents say that when they fail to honour handshakes from non-Muslim men, there is the feeling of conflict and mistrust between them. R11, in one of the interview session said,

Whenever we refuse to shake hands with the Christians, some of them think we are 'colo' and some of them don't want to come close to us because they think we are not friendly. Few of them understand our culture and they respect that. In Islam, it is forbidden for a woman to shake hands with men so it is not our making that we cannot do it, it's a religious obligation. Once you believe in the Sunnah and Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH), you must practice it.

R2 added,

Sometimes, people make fun of the fact that we don't shake hands with men but because we want to be with our mates we sometimes shake hands with men in the school. Sometimes we shake hands with men unknowingly. Some of the Christians understand the Muslim culture. Men have the things they do and women also have what they do.

Studies on culture have shown that different values are assigned to the different cultural values that are practiced in our communities and this may cause confusion and conflict between people from different backgrounds (George, 2012). The responses of the respondents above show a manifestation that there was some sort of conflict regarding handshaking but the conflict was not so highly pronounced to degenerate into undesirable situations. As far as Zhang (2013) is concerned, the issue of cultural disparity exists everywhere and that cultures differ from community to community. For instance, he says that in the western world, privacy (age, sexual orientation) is treated as a personal matter but not a public one. However, the cultural disparity that exists between male

students and female Muslim students at EPCoE is handshaking. Whereas men can voluntarily shake hands with other men irrespective of their religious affiliations, Muslim women on the contrary only shake hands with other women. This explains that handshaking is a gendered performativity and in Islam-women shake hands with only women but not men. The other side of this finding is that for the purpose of identity negotiation, female Muslim students shake hands with men. They do so not because it is acceptable in Islam but for the purpose negotiating their identities in the college.

RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

Vasquez and Rohrer (2006) assert that administrators of colleges prefer residential status of students to that of non-residential status of students. Reasons being that students who experience collegiate life as residential students turn to be more engaged in academic activities than those who transact their academic life as non-residential students. The respondents indicated during the interviews and focus group discussions that the use of residential facilities was a phenomenon that they encountered at the college. Respondents say that the way residential facilities were arranged did not reflect their Islamic values. For instance, they say that the design of the bedrooms were such that students are paired and that more than four stayed in a room at a time. The pairing of students is such that both Muslims and non-Muslim students stay in the same room. The rooms are not spacious to enable Muslim women perform their supplicatory prayers at night. The baths equally are not individualized. Many students bath at the same time especially during rush hours. When this occurs, the nudity of female Muslim students are exposed to their colleagues and this according to them is unacceptable in Islam. R14 in an interview stated,

In the house, you enjoy your privacy but here at the college, there is no privacy. You find it difficult to have your privacy. The rooms are congested and you can't partition your corner to prevent other ladies from eying you when you are naked or half naked. As for the men, they don't come to the halls, my problem just has to do with privacy. It is 'unislamic' to expose your private part to another woman so it is difficult to cope with it in the halls.

R8 also added,

Yes I don't feel ok with bathrooms. They have large open space and everybody sees everybody when you are taking your bath. The non – Muslims don't see anything wrong with that but for me as a Muslim, it is very unacceptable. So when I want to take my bath, I either wake up very early or I wait until when everybody is done with bathing before I do it.

Ashley et al (2011) say that Muslim students at the residence in the United States of America find it extremely difficult leaving the ablution can at the washrooms because of fear of non -

Muslims misunderstanding. However, respondents of this study say that they did not find problems of that sort since majority of the non-Muslims who are residents have lived with Muslims before. R10 stated,

When I first came to the college, I thought I will face problems with using the washroom but the reverse happened. I could leave my ablution can on the veranda of the wash room

after using it and none of the non-Christians will complain about my behaviour.

The above responses on residential facilities indicated that female Muslim students do not enjoy privacy in both their bathrooms and their bedrooms at the EPCoE. The responses also revealed that female Muslims placing of the ablution cans at the washrooms did not create any inconveniences for the non-Muslims and that Muslims could not also have the luxury of performing supplicatory prayers at night in the hall of residency. Again, females do not share residence halls with males because halls are categorized as male halls and female halls. The above identities constructed by the female Muslim students which include veiling, handshaking and residential facilities confirm the postulation of the Identity Negotiation Theory which indicates that cultural identities are related to the physical and emotional attachment individuals give to the larger cultural groups they belong to such as religious denomination and others (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). Here, the religious attachment the female Muslims exhibit is manifested in how they veil and the reasons they assign to the act of veiling. Female Muslim students negotiate their identities by accepting handshakes from non-Muslim men, an act the women would not enact in a normal Islamic religious life. From the above, Muslim women gravitate mindfully from their culture towards a new culture in negotiating their identities and this is what Ting-Toomey (1985) describe as cultural transformation (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). Also, the Muslim women do not allow other people including females to see their nudity. However, the design of the residential facilities do not enable the protection of the nudity of the female Muslim students.

To sum it up, the three issues-veiling, handshaking and residential facilities from the responses above buttresses Ting-Toomey's notion that identities are constructed and shaped based on the individual's cultural background. The women have shifted from their culture subtly in order to negotiate their identities and that is how come they sometimes shake hands with men (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

V. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that female Muslim students of Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education are able to communicate across cultures due the awareness of socio-cultural differences that exist in the college.

The study also showed that the interactive nature of the college environment develops the confidence levels of the Muslim women and that also tells how the women are able to communicate within and across the Islamic religion.

The study again showed how veiling, hand-shaking prescriptions and college residential facilities are employed as the key ways of communication for the Muslim women at the Christian mission College of Education.

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