

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**FEMALE MUSLIM STUDENTS IN MISSION SCHOOLS:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY AT EVANGELICAL  
PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, BIMBILLA**



**JULY, 2017**

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**A THESIS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA  
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FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF THE MASTER  
OF PHILOSOPHY (COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES) DEGREE**

**JULY, 2017**

## DECLARATION

### STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, **ISSAH SALIFU**, declare that this Dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has never been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE: .....

DATE: .....

### SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby, declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of Dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: .....

SIGNATURE: .....

DATE: .....

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my father Jakpafil-Naa Azumah Salifu Sugri, my mother, mma Fuseina Alhassan Balma and to my children, Issah Suhuyini Zaidan, Issah Azumah Heirideen, Issah Anisa Bitamiya and Issah Ismael



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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the pre-college and college experiences of female Muslim students of Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla. The study adopted the qualitative approach where 20 respondents were sampled using the purposive sampling technique. The method of data collection was interviews and focus group discussions. Gender and identity negotiation theories were used as the theoretical framework for this study. The study showed that female Muslim students of the college do not aspire to leadership positions due to several factors that militate against them. The study also revealed that Muslim women at the College constructed their identities around Islamic culture including veiling and handshaking prescriptions. The study further found that Muslim women experience cultural difference, non-Islamic socialization engagements and liberation. The study concludes that female Muslim students pre-college and college phenomenological experiences led to feelings of inclusion and exclusions at different levels, cultural difference, and partial religious liberation.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides the background to the study, outlines the problem statement, and lists the objectives and research questions that will guide the conduct of the study. The significance, scope and organization of the study are also stated.

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

##### **1.1.1 Gender and patriarchy in education**

Women comprise more than half of the world's population (DiGeorgio-Lutz, 2002). However, they are often discriminated against socially, politically and economically in many ways (Lambert, Elizabeth & Elizabeth, 2012). Gender equality refers to equality of opportunity to employment and, access to education in a society in which women and men are able to lead equally fulfilling lives without fear or discrimination (Henshall, 2004). It is however worth noting from the foregoing discussion that patriarchal tendencies tend to breed gender discrimination, and one of the key setbacks of women empowerment is male dominance at home and at workplace. The issues about patriarchy differ in form from community to community, religion to religion, and culture to culture and these acts, according to Haq (2000), “pervade political, economic, legal, socio-cultural and religious structures around the world.” Eisenstein (1984, p.162) notes that “patriarchy as a system of male domination shapes women's relationship in politics. It transforms males and females into men and women and constructs the hierarchy of gender relations where men are privileged”. The development of gender equity can result in the high participation of women in the social and economic arenas - leading to a morale boosting of women in

education, politics, economics and religion, and this in effect can lead to a free and fair society.

For an individual to live a healthy and fulfilling life, his or her rights must be protected. Education has a profound effect on girls and women's ability to claim their rights and uplift their status in society and these can manifest in economic independence and political representation (Department for International Development, 2005). Lambert, Perrino and Barreras, (2012) argue that when women attain higher education, the benefits that are accrued is for the whole of the society but in the case of their male counterparts, it is not always the case. They further revealed that female attainment of higher education leads to massive reduction in child and maternal mortality. As gender issues have become a matter of concern in relation to access to education, what female Muslims go through, how they go through their experiences and how they are able to construct and negotiate their identities in colleges of education in Ghana is of outmost interest to the researcher and therefore, the focus for this study.

Half a billion Muslim women inhabit approximately forty-five Muslim majority countries, and another thirty or more countries have significant Muslim minorities including countries in the developed West (Najwa, 1999). According to Abusharaf (2006), Muslim women have come to live under an extremely conservative patriarchal gender-based system that embraces Islam and Shari'a in its most reactionary and intransigent form regarding Muslim women. Examples include; Iran, Sudan, and Northern Nigeria. In majority Islamic societies, Muslim women are striving not only to attain basic human needs and rights, Muslim women are using Islam to demand gender equality via a more liberal reading of

the Holy Qur'an and Islamic jurisprudence, new civil liberties, and new relationships to the outside world (Afary, 2004).

In the discussion of Islam, Muslim women, and gender equality controversy has continued to swirl around the historical inferior position of women. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, This right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance" (United Nations, 1948). However, to achieve full gender equality in a meaningful and authentic way, equality under the law is simply not sufficient. The historically ontologically inferior position of women's social roles, cultural and traditional context must be taken into account.

### **1.1.2 Educational empowerment of Muslim women**

The advocacy on the empowerment of women gained prominence since the "UN Declaration of the Decade of Women" in 1975. This led to increased attention and action on women's concerns, whether in the form of consciousness-raising or skills acquisition, (UNESCO Institute for Education, 1995). Dr Kwagyire Aggrey is reported to have said "when you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation." This explains that educating a female has a trickle - down effect; it reduces both child and maternal mortality and improves the financial standing of women. As Brookfield (2013, p. 6)) says; "The education of girls and women has been proven beneficial in a number of different aspects of life. An educated woman is more likely to have fewer children, who will most likely be healthier and escape child mortality."

Education generally leads to the holistic development of all the domains of individuals. Men and women have their prospects in life enhanced through education. Habib (2005) says that Muslims perceive education to include any process of shaping the potentialities of the maturing organism, be it formal or informal. The formal education could be a deliberate conduct of training in formal environments-structured syllabus, structured examination and certification whereas informal education is constant interaction with the environment which is not conscious. Through education, Muslim women become economically empowered and their financial status appreciates positively (Herz & Sperling, 2014 cited in Brookfield, 2013). As Brookfield (2013) says “Providing girls one extra year of education beyond the average boosts eventual wages by 10-20 percent (p. 7).” Brookfield (2013) further argues that the education of women reduces poverty drastically. This explains that no matter the cost of education, parents, religious organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, government and any interest group should be interested in the education of girls and women as that improves the economic well-being of the feminine class. 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, but this disadvantage in formal educational attainment varies across space and time (Izama, 2013). This disadvantage according to Izama (2013) dates back to the period of colonial domination when major primary providers of formal education were Christian missionaries.

During the period of colonial rule, Muslims were often prevented from attending these schools, or Muslims did not allow their children to attend these schools for fear of conversion into the Christian faith. The situation seems the same in Ghana according to Stephen (2007) where he outlines several reasons why Muslim parent are adamant when it comes to encouraging female education. He argues that parents' interest in bride wealth is one of such reasons why parents withdraw their girl students from school. Alhassan (2000) conducted a study on Traditional Socialisation and Women Empowerment in the Tamale Metropolitan area and also found that some Muslims in the past did not encourage female education because they had the misconception that girls lead promiscuous lives when they receive formal education and that boys turn to do better when they acquire higher education. He added that the higher women climb the academic ladder, the lower their number decrease. Abukari (1996) (cited in Alhassan 2000) says that Muslims in the Nanumba traditional area used to withdraw their girl-children from school to be given out for marriage in which instance they the parents benefited in the form of wealth. Ghana statistical Service (2010) indicates that the number of women in the tertiary institutions in Ghana have increased upwardly as compared to the past when population of women especially Muslims was highly negligible. It further indicates that the gap between men and women in terms of enrollment at the tertiary educational institutions is no longer vast as compared to the past.

### **1.1.3 The status of women in Islam**

The status of women in the Muslim world has been the subject of considerable study and debate, often provoking polemics, nourishing prejudices, and evoking stereotypes that are often disconnected from a far more complex reality (UNNESO, 2006).



According to Ali (1989), the Qur'an and hadith see men and women coequals and therefore, address them in the Qur'an as such without discrimination against any of the sexes in terms of social difference or biological make up. As the holy Qur'an states:

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise For them all has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward (Quran 33:35).

However, Muslims around the world, especially, those from the Arab states in particular hold a certain traditional view on the role of gender in society. They believe that a man is responsible for work outside of the home and for providing a secure and safe life for his wife and other family members, while a woman takes responsibility for inside the home, looking after her husband and children, and providing love and warm-heartedness for the family. This worldview has nothing to do with Islamic principles (Abu-Ali & Reisen, 1999; AlMunajjed, 1997; Fanjar 1987; Zant, 2002: cited in Ahmad, 2013). For instance, the social life of the people of Saudi Arabia is divided by men into two separate worlds: the public world and private world. The public world is the area of businesses and political activities which is the man's domain and the private world is the home which is the domain of women (AlMunajjed, 1997). In conducting an analytical study of Developing Gender Equality in Pakhtun, Naz and Chaudhr (2011,) reveal,

Pakhtun culture is practiced with high zeal where men are mostly dominating the political structure. Women are barely available with political powers while men dominate and monopolize such activities. Mostly politics is regarded as men's job where men's wisdom, rationality

and intellectual power is considered as inferior decisions are prioritized and welcomed. In addition, women's wisdom, rationality and intellectual power is considered as inferior in the course of politics where their mobility is mostly restricted (p. 264).

This study is about the experiences of students who are Muslim women whose culture as Ghanaian Muslims is synonymous with the life in Saudi Arabia where men and women have distinct roles by virtue of their biological make up. The social construction in which men and women operate in separate worlds, has its roots from *Ired*: a term used by the early Muslims of Saudi Arabia. According to Patai (1983), the concept of *Ired* appears to have a secular value rather than a religious one. The term does not appear in the Quran, but it existed among the Pre-Islamic Arabs and has been mentioned in Hadith (the prophet's speeches). The term *Ired* places emphasis on chastity and that for women to live chaste lives, they need not mingle with their male counterparts. Baki (2004), in supporting this assertion, says that the indigenous inhabitants of Saudi Arabia are more sensitive to *Ired* than to anything else, and therefore, will do anything humanly possible to maintain gender separation in the Saudi enclave.

From the Islamic perspective, women especially mothers should be honoured more than men or fathers (Jamal, 1979). He exemplified this with an illustration of an interaction between one Muslim and the prophet of Islam

O Messenger of God, who among the people is the most worthy of my good company? The Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) said, your mother. The man said then who else: The Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) said, your mother. The man asked, Then who else? Only then did the Prophet (P) say, your father. (Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

And in another instance, the Prophet says "Paradise is at the feet of mothers (p. 10)". This is to further emphasize the honor and dignity of females in the Islamic religion. Given the marginalization that Muslim students may face and the prevalence of Christian privilege on campus, it is likely that the female Muslim may go through identity crises among the dominant and majority groups who are Christians. Muslim women may encounter contradictory expectations in the various mission colleges as opposed to expectations within their community of faith, leaving them to make choices and decisions that students from the dominant group are never asked or forced to make. A few examples of these decisions may be: whether to leave class or not to leave class if time of prayer falls during a lecture, whether marry or not to marry at a young age if pressure from family or community is suggesting that one does so, and whether or not to wear a hijab.

There is a plethora of literature, theories, and models available on the identity development of college students (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010), but very little of this research and literature focuses on Muslim women. Theories on the identity development of Muslim students will not be found in racial and ethnic identity theories because Islam is a religion, not a race, ethnicity, or nationality. Spirituality and faith identity development is, however, one aspect of social identity development (Evans, et al., 2010). Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) wrote about the importance of sensitivity to others' faiths on college campuses. It is observed that religion not only defines us in terms of our participation in practices and membership in certain communities within the context of our societies, but it also defines us in relation to God and the universe. Sensitivity to this important aspect of the identities of people from all faith traditions will make college campuses less alienating places for them. (p. 23)

Sensitivity toward Muslim students' religious and faith development is necessary and not currently being given the attention it deserves. While all Muslim students may face more difficult identity challenges during their college-going experience than Christian students, it is believable that Muslim women may face even more challenges than Muslim men; a situation of which student affairs' professionals may not be aware or understand. Through this study, my intent is to begin to explore what Muslim women go through in higher educational institutions.

The African society is in fact, structured on a traditional historical view of gender roles that existed so many hundreds of years ago. A traditional worldview often creates a masculine society in which gender separation is prominent and there are quite different roles for the sexes (Marcus, 2005). In many African communities, authority and domination are vested in men and they have the power over women and can exert influence in whichever way they the masculine group deem fit. Kabasakal and Bodur (2002), in expatiating the idea of gender opine that gender was not an organizing principle in the African societies before colonialism, even though there may have been other forms of social inequities. According to them, systematic patriarchy of African societies has occurred through colonialism, the introduction of Islam and Christianity and the process of state formation.

The Muslim woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century however, cannot continue to be restricted by outmoded cultural practices from accessing education-formal, non-formal and informal. Earlier, there was a huge gender gap between males and females in the educational institutions in Ghana. However, the gender gap decreased in primary school years, changing from 36.16% of primary students being female in 1960 to 44.43% in 1968. The gender gap remained large in secondary schools, with 22.04% of secondary students being

female in 1960 to 25.88% of secondary students being female in 1968 (Lambert, Perrino & Barreras, 2012).

In Ghana, the social life of Muslims seems like that of the Muslims of Saudi since their beliefs sync with each other. The practice among Muslims is that men and women are assigned roles based on their sexes. Men work outside the home to provide security and foodstuff for their families whereas women are responsible for preparing food, caring for children and the elderly, provision of water and 'inside the house roles' such as sweeping the compound and baths, cleaning utensils and disposal of waste. In all these, Muslim parents consider the education of men as a priority than the education of women (Alhassan, 2000).

The 1992 constitution of Ghana states that individuals have equal rights to education irrespective of their faith, religion or ethnicity. This declaration opened the opportunity for individuals from all groupings including those at the peripheries and the marginalized communities to have full access to formal education. It could be inferred that the monumental increase in enrolment by Muslim students in Christian Mission educational institutions resulted from the gains made by the Girls Education Unit (Lambert, Perrino & Barreras, 2012). They further argue that more awareness creation and inclusion of females in the educational institutions saw a further boost with the creation of the Girls Education Unit (GEU) in 1997. The Girls Education Unit specifically, tasked itself to finding remedies to increasing problem of low enrolment of the feminine class into higher education institutions. It created an action plan that included steps such as promoting female role models, improving the safety of schools, building female sanitary units, educating boys and men about how to treat women, improving reproductive health

knowledge, providing food programs, providing incentives for female teachers, making inroads for attitudinal changes towards females in educational setups. Scholars have argued that women and men experience higher education differently and that social relations within the educational institutions depict inequalities in the operations of power as is evident in the statistics of access, employment, decision-making bodies, welfare and capacity to access research and professional opportunities (Bennett, 2002).

The colleges of education admit students from all religions, ethnic groups and from both of the sexes. According to the Tertiary Education Statistics Report (2013), the colleges of education in Ghana admit an average of 9,000 trainees and turn out at least 8,500 trained teachers each year. Sixty percent (60%) of this number which represents the majority are men and the remaining forty percent (40%), represents females who are the minority in terms of their numerical strength. The report further explains that though the colleges are now tertiary, the seminarian-type discipline is still enforced. The code of ethics which contains the rules and regulations of the colleges are still enforced- attendance, dressing, exeats, feeding of students three times daily still take place with students responding to bells, doing keep-fit exercises, fetching water and junior students serving their senior colleague students, weeding and cleaning the compound are still practices students perform on the campuses. Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla is located in Bimbilla, the District capital of the Nandom North District in the northern region of Ghana. It prepares diploma in Basic education teachers to teach at the basic levels of education in Ghana. Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla was established in 1962 as an initial four- year certificate 'B' Men's Teacher training college and was later converted into a mixed sex college in the mid-sixties. Though a Christian

mission college, constitutional provisions have made it possible for Muslim women to gain access into the college. All attempts to gather information from the college administration about the Muslim-non-Muslim ratio proved futile as the administration has not categorized students in terms of their religious affiliations. The researcher finally had to settle on the Ghana Muslim Students Association (GMSA), E. P. College branch, for these categorization. The information from GMSA indicates that female Muslim Population in the college as at October 2016, stood at two hundred and ten (210). At the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla, all students except those on the internship programme for teaching practice, live in the residence halls provided by the college. The residence halls are the dwelling place of students (women) of the colleges. Students from diverse backgrounds come together with colleagues in the residence halls, giving them opportunities for social discourse and communication with people whose backgrounds are different from their own (Ashley et al, 2011). As Muslim students transact both their educational and private lives on the college campus, they interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. Muslims who are from a distinct cultural setting interact with non-Muslims who are equally guided by their cultural beliefs. Gao (2006), explains that cultures differ in the way they are expressed. The Muslim students manage to communicate with those who understand or have little understanding of the Islamic religion. The communication acts of individual cultures vary and what may be socially acceptable in one culture may be detested in another culture – for instance acts of greetings, hand gestures and the level of honesty vary from culture to culture. For example, a Muslim woman may not accept a handshake from any man except her husband but a Christian woman may accept handshakes from men who may necessarily not be their husbands. This

affects the lives of the women and finding out how they are affected could contribute immensely to the development of women education in Ghana. A Muslim student's perception of the residence hall climate is determined by a number of factors, including ethnicity, culture, and religion (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton Pendersen, and Allen 1998). Female education is considered one of the known problems and crucial issues in education. Carolyn (1995) says that education is considered as a basic human right and a key to achieving the goal of equality, development and peace.

Ali and Bagheri (2010) say that Islam is a monotheistic religion informed through the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) and the writings of the Qur'an, and followers of Islam are called Muslims. Despite institutional regulations, female Muslim students want to practice their religion accordingly and at the same time access education.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Among studies that have focused on Muslim women's higher education experiences are an earlier publication by Ahmad (2001) which focused on the motivations and experiences of Muslim women behind university studies in Britain. Housee (2004) also studied South Asian Muslim women's university experiences after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack of the United States of America, highlighting areas of commonalities and differences among seven South Asian female students, three of whom were Muslims. Christine Asmar's (2014) survey of Muslim student experiences in Australian universities represents how Muslims, as a student group, display a strong commitment toward academic achievement and, especially in the case of women, toward their faith. Odejide (2007) examines the experiences of women in highly gendered Nigerian university drawing attention of the world to what the woman can do in a highly gendered society. Ashley et al (2011), look at



the experiences of Muslim students in a residence halls in the United States of America where racial factors affect Muslim students.

For the most part, though, the experiences of Muslim women and their identities in higher education remain sublimated within the broader studies on issues centered 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) explore the challenges of female education in Ghana and highlight some benefits accruing to females when they attain higher heights in education. Adeline and Zafar (2013) investigate Gender Discrimination and Social Identity with Experimental Evidence from Urban Pakistan. Their study revealed that gender discrimination depends on the social identities of the interacting parties and that gender discrimination is not uniform in intensity and nature across the educated Pakistani society and varies as a function of the social identity of both individuals who interact.

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 the lived experiences of Muslim women in Christian Mission Colleges of Education in Ghana.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To examine the pre-college experiences of female Muslim students at the Evangelical Presbyterian college of education, Bimbilla.
2. To examine the experiences of female Muslim students at E.P College of education, Bimbilla.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The study seeks to address the following questions

1. What are the pre-college experiences of female Muslim students at E.P College of education, Bimbilla?
2. What are the experiences of female Muslim students at E. P College of education?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is of immense benefits to individuals, groups and the larger society. In the first place, the findings of this study will provide information for female Muslim students to negotiate and mediate their identities in any educational institutions they find themselves.

Again, the study will offer both policy makers and implementers the opportunity to include gender, religion and intercultural communication in the formulation and implementation of educational policies for tertiary institutions in Ghana.

Also, it will also help in improving the relationships between Muslim students and other students from other religions in the college.

Finally, it will add up to the existing literature on Muslim women in educational institutions in Ghana and the world at large.

#### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

This study will discuss the pre-college experiences and college experiences of female Muslim students of Evangelical Presbyterian College of education, Bimbilla. Students of the college can be classified into several categories but this work will focus only on female Muslim students who have lived experiences of the college environment. Under the female

Muslims, students who have attended mission Senior High School, single sex schools and mixed schools will be used as research participants. This study is limited to only female students of Evangelical Presbyterian College of education, Bimbilla who have lived in the college for at least a year and only fifteen female students will be used for this study.

### **1.7 Organization of the Study**

The study has five interrelated chapters. Chapter one contains the background to the study which gives an overview of what the study is about. It presents Muslim women in higher education from the global perspective through to the Ghanaian context. It also contains the specific research objectives that will guide the conduct of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the scope within which the research will be conducted and the organization. The chapter two of this study critically examines the review of the related literature which includes: gender, intercultural communication, female education, non-verbal communication acts, culture, and some operational definitions of some concepts that will be used in this study. The theories of gender and identity negotiation (Ting-Toomey, 1985) will be used to interrogate the issues in this study. Chapter three is focused on the methodology. Methodology looks at the methods and tools the researcher will employ to gather the data and to do the analysis of the findings. The research approach is qualitative research, the design, is a case study, population constitute female Muslim students at E. P. College, Bimbilla, sampling technique is purposive, sampling size of fifteen participants, data collection is basically, interviews and focus group discussion and data analysis will be thematic. Chapter four looks at the findings and discussions of the issues that come up from the interviews and focused group discussions. The issues will be discussed under the various themes that will be identified in this study. The theories in chapter three will be

used to make sense of the themes identified and that will provide the basis for which chapter five will be discussed.

The last and final chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the related literature that has been reviewed in an attempt to satisfy the demands of the research questions. The reviewed literature is on global perspectives on the experiences of women in higher education, experiences of women in education in 6+Ghana, non-Islamic institutions, low numbers of women in education, culture and intercultural communication. In an attempt to examine the lived experiences of female Muslim students, the theory of Gender has been adopted and this chapter succinctly discusses it. Identity Negotiation theory has also been adopted to enable the researcher assess how the Muslim students construct and negotiate their identities in the colleges of education.

#### 2.1 Global Perspectives on the Experiences of Women in Higher Education

It has been argued that women constitute slightly more than half of the world's population, and their contribution to the socio-economic development of society is also more than half as compared to that of men. This is by virtue of their dual role in the productive and reproductive spheres of life (Ballington, 2005; Barry, 2005).

The task of combining motherhood with the demands of an academic life is a challenging one for most women and this militates against their career development in the higher education context which defines relevant experience and merit in ways that favor male career trajectories (Bagihole, 2002). Currie, Thiele and Harris (2002) (cited in Adusah-Karikari, 2008) opine that economies that have been globalized, depict aggressive masculine work cultures and this makes work so burdensome for a wife and a mother to

endure. Work environments are not so friendly to the feminine class and therefore, work output largely is affected and sometimes, females are compelled to back out from jobs that appear attractive to them.

According to Davies, Lubelska and Quinn (1994), the feminine class are seen as outsiders in academia and are disadvantaged by a system in which differing values and interests are seen to be so little or of no importance. Odejide (2007) on her part critically examines the experiences of females in gendered academic institutions in Nigeria and reveals that female students are sometimes considered as “children” and that they suffer from name-calling.

As she states,

Closely related to relegation of female students to the background was their complaint of being infantilized by female hall wardens.... Less authoritarian treatment of male students by their male wardens and hall supervisors was resented and seen as sexist. Trivializing or labeling of female students was common, for example, in the derisive references to residents of one of the female halls as “butty”, that is, overly westernized, privileged, and not suitable as “wife material (p. 52).

As part of the experiences of women, religious identities paved the way for female students to get academic support in educational institutions, males mostly supporting women and only few outstanding women could support other women in the form of teaching, reinforcing the notion that women can only perform subservient roles (Odejide, 2007). Women leaders, it has been argued, bring distinct personality and motivational strengths to their roles and are more conducive to today’s diverse workplace providing a desired form of leadership (Greenberg & Sweeney, 2005)

Janet (2009) in a study of experiences of women managers found that majority of workers, that is about 61.8% are of the strong opinion that the manager's/manageress' gender does not affect his/her role at the work place at all. This then suggests that the perception about women managers not living up to expectation exist, that negative stereotype should not continue and that 57.2% of the respondents in her study rather preferred a woman as the manageress.

Another aspect of the experiences women go through in both educational institutions and at work places is sexual harassment. Rowell, McBride, and Nelson-Leaf (1996) argue that when advances are made towards women in the form of request for sexual favours or overtures that denote sexual demands either physically or verbally, such conduct should be deemed sexual harassment or when such sexual request are pre-requisite for employment or forms a basis on which one gets a job, a rejection of which may result in decisions affecting the one seeking the job could be considered sexual harassment.

## **2.2 Experiences of Women in Ghana**

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 constituencies to provide support to community-based education and training programs, which will work to recognize the value of women's education. As female education has a multiplier effect on the society, Atubiga (2007) asserts that female students whose mothers had higher education had opportunities and funding to promote their own education to

higher levels and that only a small minority of female students at the university and secondary levels had mothers with no education at all or limited education up to primary school level. The implication of this is the multiplier effect educated mothers have on society - when women have education other family members benefit. It is therefore important for females to be educated beyond the primary school level so that the whole society could become educated and developed. Habib's (2005) findings sync with Mwansa and Osei-Hwedie (1994) when he also found that girls who aspired to higher levels in education are mostly those whose parents had wider secondary or tertiary education. From the foregoing discussion on the experiences of women in Ghana, the educational levels of parents determine the successes of their female wards in school.

### **2.3 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, therefore, inferential to conclude from Ahmad's conception that education leads to the overall development of all the social domains of the individual especially, women. Atuguba (2007) also argues that education provides people with professions such as teaching, nursing, carpentry, salesmanship, and catering just to mention a few. With a profession, the individual earns income that makes it possible for him/her to accomplish the third and fifth foundation of Islam that is giving (regular) charity, which is termed as zakat and the performance of hajj, which involves pilgrimage to Mecca.



Sirin and Fine (2008) cited in Ashley et al, (2011) use mixed methods to research 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. The abuses range from name-calling to physical violence. The report however, notes that women who move around with their husbands/male relations are oftentimes not harassed, an indication that the rights of women is exercised only with the support of men. The report further notes that women who wear veils but speak with the American accent are most likely not going to face the troubles of abusers because the American accent is in itself an empowerment. It can be inferred that women become empowered when they have learnt other languages-language is power and can break barriers such as discrimination and abuse of human rights. Seggi and Austin (2010) researched how female Muslim college students in Turkey are developmentally influenced by a federal law prohibiting veiling. 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. The

study revealed that Muslim students in residence halls are marginalized and stereotyped just because they represent a minority group. Even though the Muslim students feel marginalized, they prefer the fact that non-Muslim students question them about their faith which creates the opportunity for them (Muslim students) to explain the cause and effects of their actions. To the Muslim students, this normally, clears the misconceptions and negative perceptions non-Muslims hold about them. Ashley et al (2011) further found the need for dialogues to be reached between students of different faiths and religions who share residential facilities. As they put it

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).

In conclusion, there is unequal job opportunities for women in parts of the globe and the working environment do not favour the feminine side.

#### **2.4 Muslim Women in Education**

Education is a right to every Muslim and according to Jamal (1979), females have every right to seek knowledge and this kind of knowledge should not differ in form from their male counterparts. He states that the Prophet Muhammad (May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim (p. 10)." Adusah-Karikari (2008) researched into experiences of women in administrative positions and found that one of the key factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in faculty and administrative positions stems from the decreasing number of females who enroll in graduate education. Morley (2005), also asserts that the low numbers of women,

especially at the higher levels of the educational ladder, has been a well-known fact which has persisted for many years. Women constitute the majority of the population in the numerical sense, but their representation in higher education still remains a relatively voiceless minority population when it comes to defining values, goals, and the ever-evolving mission statements (DiGeorgio-Lutz 2002). In sub-Saharan Africa, Christian missionaries who introduced the idea of formal education did not focus on Muslim children and that has explained the wide disparity in the numbers between Muslims and Christians in educational institutions in Africa. He explains that some of the difficulties Muslims face is access to formal education (Izama, 2013). It is significant to note that the Christian missionaries could have done better to ensure a balance in how children were enrolled into schools and that probably could have changed the faith of those who were perceived to be Muslims. Alhassan (2000) in a study conducted in Tamale, a Muslim dominated community in the northern region of Ghana, revealed that Muslim parents prefer the education of men to women and that could be one of the reasons the number of female Muslims look marginal as compared to the men in academic institutions. Prah (2002) conducted a study at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana and in his study, it was revealed that political visibility, statistical representation and concerns of women are mostly not discussed in educational management meetings. He further argues that inequalities in terms of numbers of men and women in education could be traced to the colonial era when the focus was on male education. Megan et al (2012) also postulate that female education progresses at a snail's pace in the educational life of females because of some factors: financial problems, cultural disposition, early marriages, unfair treatment in the classroom and sexual harassment. Bennett (2002), however, thinks that power relations in the

educational institutions is responsible for the slow rate at which women advance in education and dilates further that policies of the institutions bring about inequalities in the admissions of women. The study explains that managers/manageresses of educational institutions do not consider gender friendly policies in educational establishments within which women acquire knowledge. Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah (2013) reveals that majority of the number of students who gain access into the colleges of education are males and this summarises why females record low numbers at the colleges of education leading to the gender imbalances in term of access.

## **2.5 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 Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, 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 student of the college is of outmost importance. 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 find out from someone 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. However, the assertion that age is 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 same city or region but those who do not share the same social group with us. Students of E. P. College of education, Bimbilla come from varied cultural backgrounds. Intercultural Communication is the study of communication across cultural or social groups. Examples of such groups include; 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 E. P. College of education, Bimbilla belong to different sect of the Islamic religion-Sunni, Tijaniya and Ahmadiya. These females communicate among themselves noting these

differences. The females Muslims also communicate with non-Muslims-males and females. As this study is about the experiences of female Muslims in an educational establishment, communication may form part of their experiences. From the above discussions, intercultural communication should give some explanation to controversies such as how people communicate across their cultures.

### **2.5.1 Dominant culture**

According to Gordon (1998), the dominant culture is a culture that is the most influential within a social setting, most powerful in organisations and the most widespread within an entity in which multiple cultures are present. The established languages, religions, values, rituals, and social customs make up the cultures of people. These traits are often the norm for the society as a whole. The dominant nature of a particular culture manifests in how it stands out within the larger community. Hazel and Sally (2000) also posit that 'Dominant cultures reinforce the position of those with economic, political and social power,' and ultimately tend to reinforce male power (p.3). From the above, Dominant culture could be the culture that is supposedly the known one and it has power in its operations. Due to the power this group wields, members of the community may identify and associate with it more than any other culture.

### **2.6 Non-Islamic Institutions**

Non-Islamic educational institutions are made up of public and private teaching and learning grounds that present alternatives to both parents and students to choose which institution to attend and for what reasons attached to such choices (Hassan, 2014). According to Merry (2005), many Muslim parents find it extremely difficult to enroll their kids in non-Islamic schools because they contend that public schools inculcate in Muslim

students customs, behaviour, and un-Islamic ways of thinking and behaving. Hassan (2014), citing Ewert (2013), says that Muslim parents prefer private schools to that of the non-Islamic schools. As he says “literature on Catholic and non-sectarian schools shows that Muslim parents choose to place their children in these schools because of academic programs and extracurricular activities, displeasure with public schools, small class size, and better discipline (p. 155).”

## **2.7 Glass Ceiling**

Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) opines that ‘glass ceiling’ refers to those artificial barriers that impede or prevent qualified person from reaching their full potentials and advancing upward in their organization due to bias. This barrier is so strong that it can visibly or otherwise prevent people, especially women and the vulnerable, from advancing into managerial positions. Glass ceiling otherwise known as glass wall can be explained as the invisible attitudinal and organizational barriers that impede the forward movement of women in institutions. The glass wall only prevents women but not men. As a result men do not face the negative repercussions of glass ceiling (Lian & Wang, 2001; cited in Braimah, 2015). Gyekye (2013) also asserts that “glass ceiling [as a] barrier precludes women from top level jobs on the basis of their status as women. As a result, women are denied the opportunity to be senior managers (p. 7).” Men have lots of opportunities moving upward in an organization at the disadvantage of women because of bias. From the forgoing discussions, it can be inferred that glass Ceiling could result from a cultural belief where men believe that women, traditionally, are made to serve subordinate roles as they may find in their homes where men are served by women irrespective of their age and ability. Again, glass Ceiling could arise from men’s lust for power. Men consider that if

there should be anything like power, they should be at the helm of affairs to exercise it. Poggio (2010) however, finds that in terms of women occupying managerial positions, there appear to be a different story. For instance in his findings, it was revealed that in the education and health sectors, women managers constitute about 60% but in the manufacturing sectors, women are less represented and this could be an indication that glass ceiling may not be that prevalent in both the education and health sectors of the economy. This research in examining the experiences of women, will interrogate whether there exist some artificial barriers that prevent women from aspiring to leadership positions in the college and if so how the women are able to negotiate their identities.

Unlike tangible and visible barriers such as education or requisite work experience, this barrier, commonly referred to as glass ceiling is known to be artificial and less tangible, secured and anchored in culture, society and psychological factors (Jain & Mukherji, 2010). Foley, Kidder and Powell (2002) also corroborate the concept of the glass ceiling by indicating that the barrier is subtle enough to be transparent and yet strong enough to cut members off from upper management positions where high pay and other rewarding benefits abound. According to Gyekye (2013), men are often placed on the advantage side during selection and recruitment into leadership positions. This difference in the criteria of selection encountered by men and women for the same position (managerial) puts women at a disadvantage because of the uneven playing field that characterizes the processes. Two structural barriers are to blame for this: horizontal segregation and vertical segregation. Horizontal segregation is the under (over) representation of a certain group in occupations or sectors not ordered by any criterion (Bettio, Verashchagina, Mairhuber and Kanjuo-Mrčela (2009) or the concentration of women and men in certain professions or sectors of



economic activity. It explains that women study in distinct areas which the labour market does not appreciate and that is the reason why women tend to be concentrated in certain sectors of the economy. For instance, Estevez-Abe (2002) noted that women are more likely to invest in general skills and or in skills that are less prone to deteriorate after not being in use for some time. Men occupy influential positions in organisations that are horizontally segregated while women take up jobs that are lower in status (Francine, Ferber & Winkler, 2002).

Glass ceiling as a concept therefore, put men on the advantage and downgrade women even if they are endowed with knowledge, skills and competence.

## **2.8 Islamic Feminism**

According to Badran (2009), Islamic feminism became known in the 1990s in various Islamic religious locations across the world. She gives a hint that it was from the writings of Iranian scholars such as Afseneh and Ziba who said that both men and women who published stories in the Teheran journal, *Zanan*, which was founded in 1992, made use of the term Islamic feminism to refer to issues relating to Muslim women. Badran (2009) also says that Mai of Saudi Arabia also used the word Islamic feminism in her book *Islam and Feminism* and that Turkish writers such as Yesmin and Ferida used the term in their articles and Nilufer, also used it in her book *The Forbidden Modern* (First published in 1991 in Turkey and later published in English in 1996). Stromquist, (2006) reports that Islamic feminism in Iran is a reform movement that permit dialogue between religious and secular feminists while also opening the door to new possibilities for gender equality and women's involvement in religious doctrine and practice. In the pages of *Zanan*, it was argued that gender asymmetries had a social rather than a natural (or divine) basis, and that much of

what was known as Islamic law constituted patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an and early Muslim history. From the foregoing discussions, Islamic feminism could be explained as the equality of gender that is guaranteed by the Qur'an and hadith. Islamic feminism is "the articulation of a Qur'an mandated gender equality and social justice". Others however, do not call this Islamic feminism but a woman centered rereading of the Qur'an and other religious texts by scholar-activists (Badran 2009, p. 244). El-Marsafy (2014) says that Islamic feminist discourse and practice derives its understanding from the Qur'an, seeking rights and justice within the framework of gender equality for women and men in the totality of their existence. The position of Islamic feminist is clarified when Badran (2009) said "Islamic feminism disillusioned the ethos that Islam is calling for patriarchal authority" (p. 2). Badran (2009) further argued that Islamic feminism is Secular. Meaning it is simple feminism and

Offered arguments demanding Muslim women's rights to education, work and political rights along with secular nationalists, humanitarian rights and democratic arguments. Islamic feminism is generally grounded in the Quran and Islamic practice, and is articulated predominantly (though not exclusively) within an Islamic paradigm (p. 241).

Elsewhere in the western world, it is an advocacy for women's rights but in some Muslim communities, it is seen as an attempt by some non-Muslims to attack the structures of Islam. Badran (2009) offers a distinction between feminism and Islamic feminism pointing out that Islamic feminism differs in its form and function from feminism in the western world. She opines that feminism in Muslim societies, in its most secular versions, has a predominant feature of Islamic religion, a feature which is not visible in Western feminism. Another distinguishing factor she added is that whereas Western feminists generally

advocate for the rights and concerns of women, feminists in Muslim settings are multi-tasked as they struggle with other issues, such as anti-colonialism and attempts to revitalize Islam in their writings. Even though Muslim women are supposed to protect their religion as they advocate for their right place in society, some of them violate the Islamic principles. Aryanti (2012) says that it is not all Islamic feminists who wear veils, their notion is that everyone is free to put on whatever she wants. El-Marsafy (2014) stated that the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) told his daughter that the female Muslim, after her puberty, should only expose her face and hands to any man she can be married to but this is not applicable to non-maharam men. Islamic feminism is generally grounded in the Quran and Islamic practice, and is articulated predominantly (though not exclusively) within an Islamic paradigm (Badran, 2009). Islamic feminism most of the time is misperceived as the struggle between males and females. Aryanti, (2012) however debunks such arguments, describing it as misleading to think that feminism encourages women to challenge men according to a foreign agenda and says it is rather to create a balance between men and women and preserve the ties between them, thereby creating opportunities for women to learn and work for their own empowerment.

Muslim feminists support their claims in favour of women and criticism of patriarchy by citing the Quran, pointing to examples in the life of the prophet and his companions, and criticizing the masculinist misappropriation of religion. Badran considers this type of feminism to be “a middle path between secular feminism and a patriarchal, male-oriented interpretation and practice of religion” (Badran 2009, 219). As women continue the fight for their right place in the society dominated by the masculine class, a wave of religiously-committed women however, rose to the action and,

Challenged the call made by male Islamists that females ought to return to their homes and traditional roles. In contrast, these feminists focused on the role women had to play in building an Islamic culture (p.152).

Secular feminists were not simply engaged in opposing traditional beliefs and practices that they saw as inimical to women. They also challenged those (mainstream) versions of modernist discourse that they conceived as excluding women or being indifferent to their needs and concerns.

In conclusion, Islamic feminism takes the position of liberal feminist where their interest is only on equality between men and women.

## **2.9 Theoretical Framework**

This phenomenological study examines the experiences of female Muslim students and many theories could be employed to explain the findings. The study has however adopted the theories of Gender and Identity Negotiation because the study looks basically at female Muslim students and how they negotiate their identities in a Christian mission college of education.

## **2.10 Gender Theory and Concepts**

Wet, Roux, Simmonds and Avest, (2012) opines that the concept of gender, as opposed to sex, wasn't introduced until the 1970s. Robert Stoller, a psychologist who worked with individuals born with ambiguous genitalia, was the first to point out a distinction between sex and gender. He critically examined the idea of gender and proposed four concepts: sex, gender, gender identity and gender role (Stoller, 1968). Following Stoller's position, Oakley (1972) thought that sex is not a direct product of biological sex and couched a definition for sex as the anatomical and physiological characteristics which signify

maleness and femaleness in humans. She however, explains gender as socially constructed masculinity and femininity. Masculinity and femininity as Oakley indicated are not by biology but by social, cultural and psychological attributes which are acquired through becoming a man or a woman in a particular society at a particular time. Butler (1989) also posits that an individual is not born a woman, the individual becomes one. This view proposes that in gender studies, the term "gender" should be used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities and not to the state of being male or female in its entirety.

Acker (1999) states that gender is a complex embodiment and can be explained as a set of Social relations embedded in a variety of organizational processes-recruitment, training, working, administration and management. He contends that gender relations, structures, and cultures are maintained via performativity. That is everyday social interactions create dominance and submission which determines the roles individual's perform. Adomako-Ampofo (2001) says that gender socialization within the Ghanaian community is conceived from the family where individuals learn that males are taught to be strong and decision-makers in all spheres of life activities and females are taught to be submissive and passive in terms of decision making and implementation. The idea that women are under-represented at the decision-making stage of organisations is a phenomenon that is directly related to institutions that inherited the system from the colonial powers who demonstrated a culture of anti-feminism (Tamale, 1999). Islamic teachings state that men and women are both equal, and Islam accords rights of inheritance and ownership to women. However, there still exist some widespread gender imbalances observed in Muslim societies (Lewis, 2002).

### **2.10.1 Gender stereotypes**

According to Czopp, Kay and Cheryan, (2015), Walter Lippmann brought into limelight the term stereotype 1946 to portray the pictures in our minds that represent the issues about facts and reality and the interpretations individuals assign to pictures and images that are constructed. Jones (1999) explain the idea of stereotype as a set of overly simplified and often inaccurate beliefs about typical characteristics of a particular group. The repercussions of using stereotypes include thinking as if members belonging to a cultural group exhibits similar characteristic features. Indicators such as gender and religion can be associated with people.

Gender stereotypes consist of shared beliefs about the characteristics and attributes associated with each sex (Powell & Graves, 2003). Czopp, Kay and Cheryan, (2015) assert that women are commonly believed to have more communal qualities-“expressiveness, connectedness, relatedness, kindness, supportiveness and timidity whereas men are associated with more agentic qualities-independence, aggressiveness, autonomy, instrumentality and courage.” Stereotypical characteristics attributed to the two sexes not only describe how men and women are (descriptive stereotypes) but also how they should be-prescriptive stereotypes (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004).

Vishal, Gupta, Turban and Arzu (2009) conducted a study and found that both young men and women associate entrepreneurs with stereotypically masculine characteristics. They explain that men and women willingly decide which occupation to participate in and this is often self-imposed due to insidious and complex processes rooted in culturally produced and socially learned stereotypes. The study also found that individuals do not attain group membership based on biological sex, but identification with masculine characteristics and

that men and women's entry into entrepreneurship may be enhanced or limited by their perceived similarity to masculine characteristics. From the foregoing discussions, the stereotype of men as muscular, strong hearted and warlike are but one of the ways men are portrayed and women as weakling, caring and loving, all take their roots from gender. People tend to internalize stereotypes as standards of behaviour and as such, do not go beyond traditional perceptions and understanding of who individuals are and what they represent in the real world. The moment people begin to internalize the labels that society has given them, then they will begin to perform such labels. Stereotyping is enacted in a social milieu and therefore individuals in the social environment tend to perform their stereotype in order to gain acceptance or compliance. Females who are aware that technicians are mostly men will settle for the nursing profession and it is common for people to think that every nurse is a female and so does every doctor a male.

Stereotyping could be deemed positive or negative depending on the form it takes or the responses that is elicited. Geoffrey and Julio (2005) posit that positive stereotypes enhance personal and interpersonal relationship. This is because positive stereotype though a fixed label about a group is welcomed by those individuals who have been stereotyped and it is considered worthy. For instance, they state that

As early as 4th grade, female and Black children accept positive stereotypes that reflect their group more favorably than corresponding outgroups (e.g., reading is for girls, sports are for Black people) while simultaneously rejecting negative stereotypes about their group (p. 453).

When members of a group exhibit certain characteristics that are admired by other members who do not belong to the group, such stereotypes are deemed positive. For

instance, when Christians make an observation that Muslims are time conscious when it comes to their prayer times, the feeling by the Muslims is that it is positive.

Positive stereotypes can also improve others' negative impressions of one's group. Agentic and self-promoting women may act in ways that emphasize positive female stereotypes related to communality and dependence in order to maintain others' favorable impressions of them (Becker, Glick, Ilic, & Bohner, 2011). Positive stereotypes affect women a lot and this is epitomized when Fiske (2010) says that women continue to be stereotyped benevolently as emotionally responsive, nurturing, and relational in their performativities.

Geoffrey and Julio (2005) have, however, explained that negative stereotypes bring about low esteem to those being stereotyped and individuals in organisations often times, despise those being stereotyped. When the characteristics of a cultural group is not respected by those outside the group, then such is known as negative stereotypes. For instance, Kettani (2010) analysis of Muslim population around the world gives an indication that Muslims are one of the minority religions in Ghana. Due to this, when Muslims feel that their rights are trampled on, they aggressively try to defend their rights and those observing from outside the Islamic religion tag them as violent and therefore do not respect that characteristic feature. When this arise, it would be described as a negative stereotype.

### **2.10.2 Gender-blindness**

It is the failure to recognise that gender is an essential determinant of social outcomes that impact directly and indirectly on projects and policies in an organisation. A gender blind institution assumes gender is not an influencing factor in projects, programs or policies (Hazel and Sally, 2000). Thus gender blindness is explained as a situation where objectives,



plans and programs in an organization are deliberately developed with no effort to include gender issues that might contribute to the achievement of the organizational plans and aspirations.

### **2.10.3 Gender awareness**

According to Christodoulou and Zobnina (2009), Gender Awareness is an understanding that there are socially determined differences between women & men based on learned behavior, which affect the ability men and women to access and control resources. This awareness needs to be applied through gender analysis into projects, programs and policies. That is; the situation where all players in an organization or institution recognise the importance of gender and its effects on the objectives, plans and programs of such an organisation. Gender awareness may or may not be translated into practice so that a gender-aware institution may not progress to develop gender-sensitive policies and programs.

### **2.10.4 Gender discrimination**

Christodoulou and Zobnina (2009) states that the unequal gender division of labour is gender discrimination where there is an unequal gender division of reward. Discrimination against women in this sense means that women are likely to get most of the burden of labour, and most of the unpaid labour, whereas men collect most of the income and rewards resulting from the labour. She states,

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), approved by the United Nations in 1979, states that “Discrimination against women shall mean distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of

their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field’’. It refers to any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of socially constructed gender roles and norms, which prevents a person from enjoying full human rights (p.5).

Christodoulou and Zobnina (2009) further argues that the systemic discrimination in organisations is caused by policies and practices that are built into the ways that institutions operate, which has the effect of excluding women and minorities. Hazel and Sally (2000) also describe gender discrimination as the systematic, unfavourable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender, which denies the sexes of their rights, opportunities or resources.

#### **2.10.5 Gender division of labour**

Kutateladze (2015) argues that before capitalism was developed into an economic ideology, a patriarchal system had already been established where men were the captains in the labour market and women and children directly under the control of the captains. Through this, men learned the techniques of hierarchical organisation and control which, as capitalism developed, they then used to segregate paid work to their own advantage. Due to the financial muscle men demonstrated, Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) developed the concept of ‘traditional’ domestic division of labour which they explain as a situation where men take the primary responsibility for the necessary financial provision of their family household-via labouring outside the home in exchange for wages while women take the primary responsibility for the management and performance of housework and caring work such as cleaning, laundry, shopping, cooking, and caring for children. Hazel and Sally (2000) explained that gender division of labour is socially determined ideas and practices

which define what roles and activities are deemed appropriate for women and men. They argue that the gender division of labour is considered a natural phenomenon but the fact is that these ideas and practices are socially constructed. Christodoulou and Zobnina (2009) also argues that Gender Division of Labour deals with the allocation of different jobs or types of work to men and women, usually by tradition and custom. She explains also that in feminist economics, the institutional rules, norms and practices which govern the allocation of tasks between men and women, girls and boys, also constitute the gender division of labour, which is seen as variable over time and space and constantly under negotiation. Gender division of labour could therefore, be explained as a situation where labour is organised on the assumption that the roles men perform are specific and includes; provision of bread and butter while women perform domestic duties such as cooking and caring for the young and old.

#### **2.10.6 Gender roles**

Christodoulou and Zobnina (2009) says that gender roles are learned behaviours in a given community, or other special group, that condition which activities, tasks and responsibilities are perceived as male and female. Gender roles may be affected by age, class, race, ethnicity, religion and by the geographical, economic and political environment. Changes in gender roles often occur in response to changing economic, natural or political circumstances, including development efforts. Both men and women play multiple roles in society.

A study by Sullivan (2000) used nationally representative data collected in 1975, 1987 and 1997 to address the issue of change in the division of domestic labour in Britain. She found that in 1997, women still performed the bulk of domestic work (as measured in terms of

time contributed). However, men had significantly increased their participation in domestic work and there was also a substantial increase in more 'egalitarian' couples, especially among the full-time employed. These are seen as socially or culturally acceptable ways individuals expect people to behave in specific situations by virtue of their sex but not necessarily their skills and expertise. Simply put, it is not your worth but your sex. Thus, social definitions of masculine or feminine roles, will determine what functions that person will perform at a given time. These roles are usually created out of over-simplified beliefs that males and females possess distinct physical and psychological characteristics. In higher education, there are prescribed roles that a student, a lecturer, a head of department, a dean and a professor will all, usually, have knowledge about what roles they have to fulfill. However, not all people will perceive gender roles in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities.

#### **2.10.7 Gender sensitivity**

According to Christodoulou and Zobnina (2009), Gender sensitivity means when gender awareness is translated into practices, which results in changes in perceptions, behaviors, plans and activities of institutions and organizations. A gender aware institution is not necessarily a gender sensitive one because awareness may not be translated into balanced educational institution. In fact, gender awareness sometimes lead to resistance, obstruction, conflicts and other practices that inhibit progress in academic institutions. In attempting to make institutions more gender sensitive, policies about gender should be developed to guide the conduct of institutions. The general and specific objectives must reflect the sensitivity of the sexes and this can impact on productivity. Groups and individuals

working to achieve a balanced society should be allocated the needed resources and assigned specific well defined roles.

### **2.10.8 Gender equality**

Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) say that equality can be defined as a state or condition of being the same, especially in terms of social status or legal/political rights. Hazel and Sally (2000) also argue that Gender equality denotes women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere. Christodoulou and Zobnina, (2009) Gender Equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality therefore, implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. It could also imply the fair allocation of resources, opportunities, support and encouragement without any thought or deed reflecting the sexes. It is difficult to achieve gender equality because both men and women have internalized gender roles and has affected the division of labour and other arrangements that may occur in the society. Both men and women dress, eat and attend functions according to their gender. Equality of Gender may not be achieved because of socio-cultural factors that have been with the people for a long time. It equally can be achieved when there is gender awareness and equal opportunities are given to men and women.

### **2.10.9 Gender equity**

Hazel and Sally (2000) say that gender equity denotes the equivalence in life outcomes for women and men, recognising their different needs and interests, and requiring a redistribution of power and resources. The term gender equity is a concept that has its roots from gender equality because institutions and societies have gendered backgrounds and therefore are organized in gendered ways. This phenomenon as it is, makes it extremely difficult for resources as well as opportunities to be allocated to the males and females equitably. Despite this constraints, division of labor, opportunities, access to education and labor market and all other factors that affect the sexes should be the same in terms of quality and quantity. An institution can be said to be ensuring gender equity when aside equal access, both men and women are treated the same ways. People should be rewarded for their worth and not their sex and individuals should know that they can rise into management positions by merit.

### **2.11 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 categories of persons in the society (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

Ting-Toomey 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, Salience 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 salience are key indicators in this theory. *Value Content* 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). 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” (p. 105). 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 identifies 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.

## **2.12 Justification for the Choice of the Theories**

This study adopted the theory of Identity Negotiation to interrogate how female Muslim students mediate and negotiate their identities in the colleges of education; how the research participants observe the Muslim culture within the larger Christian college culture and how they are able to mediate their identities within the college environment. The issues that confront Muslim women explicitly and implicitly constitute their experiences and how they maneuver their ways in the college creates their identities. What normally influences their choices and how culture affects their educational life will effectively be assessed using



the above Theory. Another theory the study makes use of is the Gender theory which is adopted to analyze and make sense of the data collected for this study. The experiences of women that hinges on gendered roles and gendered identities will be looked at through the lenses of the Gender theory. How the female Muslim students portray their identities as women and whether gender issues have been mainstreamed are considered in the study.

### **2.13 Summary**

The literature review indicates that gender issues as well as feminism affect the lives of female Muslims. It also revealed that females are disadvantaged when it comes to taking up leadership responsibilities in organisations. Therefore, female Muslim students at the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla may have their share of this phenomenon. Equally relevant in the literature review is an indication of inequalities in the male-female ratio in terms of gaining access into higher educational institutions. The way and manner individuals from different cultural groupings communicate within and across the cultures has also come up for discussion and Muslim women who are an identified group within a culture cannot be left out as they communicate within and outside their group. As has been explained above, the study relies on the Gender and Identity Negotiation theories to examine issues identified in this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

This part of the study gives a description of the methods used to examine the lived experiences of female Muslim students in a male-dominated Christian Mission College of Education, the experiences they face and how such experiences enable them construct and negotiate their identities in their day-to-day activities. This part of the study further examined the research approach, research design, target population, sampling technique, sample size and data collection methods or instruments. The above was based on the nature of the topic and the principles that guided their selection would be effectively discussed. This chapter of the study also looked at a detailed discussion of the data collection processes, ethical issues, validity and reliability and the summary of the chapter. To examine the methodology of this study, it is better to restate the research questions for the study. The research questions include;

1. What are the pre-college experiences of female Muslim students at E.P College of education, Bimbilla?
2. What are the college experiences of female Muslim students at E. P College of education, Bimbilla?

#### 3.1 Research Approach

Evans (2010) has 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 to be adequately covered. 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 Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, 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. Yin (1998) opines that qualitative research affords social scientists the opportunity to study a given phenomenon because it gives room for flexibility and the attainment of a deeper meaning of the phenomenon. The argument of Creswell (2014) is in tandem with Yin (1998) when he opines that qualitative research deals with interrogating the issues from the perspectives of the research participants using the appropriate procedures and making analysis from the specific themes to the general themes and finally, the researcher doing his or her interpretation of the data and making meaning of it. My ultimate goal in this study is to make sense, interpret, and understand the experiences of Muslim women, how their culture molded them, how the new culture affected them, and how they reduced dissonance when they were interacting with their peers, the academic staff and the non-academic staff. Patton (1985) (cited in Adusah – Karikari, 2009) says qualitative research as an,

Effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions that occur there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future

necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting (p.1).

Crotty (1998) also argues that in qualitative research, the researcher goes beyond the surface meaning of an issue. As he says; the researcher’s main priority should be “gaining an understanding of the text that is deeper or go further than the researcher’s meaning or understanding” (p. 91). Such an understanding will be achieved through the perspectives of the female Muslim student participants. In fact, the most appropriate way to understand the experience of another person is to seek his or her perspectives and this study seeks to interrogate the issues from the perspectives of the female students who experience their lives in the mission colleges of education. Domengan and Fleming (2007) explain that qualitative research focuses on exploring and discovering issues about a problem on hand, because not so much is known about the problem. The researcher assumes a state of ‘unknowing’ and gravitate towards knowing through the respondents. In fact, similar studies have adopted the qualitative approach - Ashley *et al* (2011), conducted a phenomenological study of Muslim students who are residents in the colleges in the United States of America and the research approach was qualitative. Odejide (2007), also conducted a study on women and what they can do in the University of Ibadan which is a male dominated academic institution and the approach the study adopted was also qualitative. Ahmed (2013) researched on Muslim Women’s Experiences of Higher Education in Britain, and the approach she adopted was also qualitative. Braimah (2015) also adopted qualitative approach to conduct her phenomenological study of women in Public Relations in Ghana. The above, which were all phenomenological studies on the

experiences of women and which were conducted in different societies and settings, all employed the use of qualitative research. It is therefore, imperative from the aforementioned that this study which is a phenomenology employs qualitative research to collect data from the participants' natural setting, taking into account how they experienced pre-college life and college life as a phenomenon, interpret and make sense of those lived experiences they have consciously or unconsciously been exposed to in their college lives

### **3.2 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 involves conducting interviews (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). It is significant to note that this study will mainly employ the use of interviews and focus group discussions, hence the justification for phenomenology as the design.

Giorgi (1970) cited in Broom (2011), posits that phenomenological psychology recognizes that a person is a historical being and experiences are part of his or her constitution. Whatever experiences the individual might have gone through in both the immediate and remote past will all constitute his or her history. The researcher will investigate the histories

of these female Muslim students in the college environment - what the events were, how those events occurred to them as Muslim students and how those experiences helped in facilitating the shaping of their identities in the performances of their duties as students, as women and as Muslims.

### **3.3 Sampling Techniques**

This study interrogates the lived experiences of individuals who are in the minority group in their natural environment. The sampling techniques that is used is purposive sampling. The researcher purposively sampled the participants and interviewed them in order to get rich data. Sampling technique directs researchers to know whom to observe or whom to interview (Lindlof & Tailor, 2002)

#### **3.3.1 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 researcher the opportunity to dig into the issues beyond his own knowledge and understanding and to enter into the world of the participants in order that he or she will gather rich information. As Patton (2002) 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” (p. 230).

### **3.4 Population**

Population is the total number of subjects, people, concepts or phenomena the researcher is interested in studying or researching about (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009). The population for this study is students of Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla. . Even though the administration of the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education has records on students’ enrolment, it could not furnish the researcher information on statistics of students in terms of their religious affiliation. The researcher had to rely on information from the Ghana Muslim Students’ Association and from their records, the Evangelical Presbyterian College of education enrolled the following number of students for the past three academic seasons; in the 2014/2015 academic year, a total of 446 students were enrolled and out of the figure, Muslim students were 181 and female Muslims were 83. In the 2015/2016 academic year, 790 students were enrolled and the number of Muslim students were 392, female Muslims were 127. Enrolment figures of students for the 2016/2017 academic year stood at 483 with Muslim student population of 197, out of this, female Muslims are 89. What the enrolment figures depict is that female Muslim students fall within a category of a minority religion and within the minority group, they again find themselves in a sub-category of a minority group and what does it mean to belong to the minority group within a dominant Christian environment? The target population is female Muslim students of the College of Education which is located in the northern region of Ghana.

### **3.4.1 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 will be selected. Eight of the participants had their pre-college education experiences in the Senior High Schools were day schools, eight other respondents were drawn from students who had their pre-college educational experiences in the boarding school. The remaining four were drawn from mission schools. In all, fourteen respondents were used for the interviews after which the six remaining were added to the fourteen interviewees. The twenty interviewees were splitted into two groups for the focus group discussions. The focus group and the interviews were employed for the purpose of triangulation.

### **3.5 Data Collection Instruments**

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

#### **3.5.1 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 researcher 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. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) posit that interviews are particularly “well-suited to understand the social actor’s experience and perspective” (p. 173).’ In conducting a study into the lived experiences of people, knowledge about their experiences is acquired through the stories they tell; the accounts they give and the detail explanation they provide. That is to say, their experiences are couched in the narrative style, providing the logical and chronological sequence of events in their lives and making details of the available examples about their live stories. This study examines the experiences of women, what they have personally encountered before gaining entry into the college and what they have encountered in their quest to acquire knowledge and skills formally and informally on the college environment. The key instrument that was adopted was interviews for the data collection. Kvale (1996) considers interview as interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. An interview schedule was used to enable the interviewer (researcher) probe the issues with the interviewees (participants). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) say that interviews allow research respondents to “express and contextualize their true feelings rather than having them pigeon-holed into boxes and with little or no opportunity for contextualize explanations” (p. 43). Through interviews, respondents respond to questions in ways that satisfy the curiosity of the researcher. Interview schedules are best suited for qualitative studies that call for a more structured approach, such as respondent and focus group studies (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The researcher made use of the respondent interview that

enabled participants to tell their own stories. The respondent type of interview is deemed more appropriate for phenomenological studies as exemplified by Lindlof and Taylor (2002) when they cited Lazarsfeld (1944). The goals of the respondent type of interview includes;

- (1) to clarify the meaning of common concepts and opinions;
- (2) to distinguish the decisive elements of an expressed opinion;
- (3) to determine what influenced a person to form an opinion or act in a certain way;
- (4) to classify complex attitudes patterns;
- and (5) to understand the interpretations that people attribute to their motivations to act (p. 178).

Since this phenomenological study seeks to examine the lived experiences of individuals in their natural setting, the goals of the respondent interview enabled the researcher to satisfy the requirements of the research questions. When individuals are telling their stories, there is the tendency for them to forget parts of the stories but with the help of interviews, those parts that otherwise would have been ignored will be unearthed. The study also made use of the narrative interviews. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002) narrative interviews are used to capture and explain meticulously, issues pertaining to a phenomenon. Both the personal narrative interviews and the organizational narrative interviews are applied in communication but this study made use of the personal narrative interviews. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), in personal narrative interviews, “the stories are often told in relation to cultural discourses of race, class, gender, sexuality and other politicized identities” (p. 180). Here, the researcher used a blend of both the respondent type of interview and the personal narrative interview so as to gather information that enriched the data for this study. Ashly et al (2011) used four participants when they conducted a study into the lived experiences of Muslim students at the residence

halls in the United States of America and that informed my choice of twenty participants for the interviews in this study.

### **3.5.2 Focus group discussion**

Lindlof and Taylor (2002), in citing Frey and Fontana (1991) 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). Marczak and Sewell (2007) consider it as a group of interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator, who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue. If the participants in the focus group do not exhibit similar characteristics, or interest, there may be conspiracy of silence which may affect the validity and reliability of the study. The questions that were asked were structured such that they spread from specific issues to general themes. The discussion was moderated by the researcher and participants who were not able to articulate their experiences on the one - on - one interview, were able to form their opinions and thoughts based on the presentations of their colleagues in the group. Every participant took ownership of what was being discussed and that motivated them to be forthcoming with information. The researcher sought to achieve two main purposes by

constituting the focus group discussion and that was to interview participants in groups to achieve the ‘group effect’ and in the group discussion, research participants are often energized and stimulated “by the ideas and experiences expressed by each other” (Carey, 1994, cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). As they state;

Focus group researcher often seeks one (or both) of two kinds of effect. First, some studies aim to achieve complementary interactions. In this mode, the members broadly agree on an expressed view and add their own observation and shades of interpretations to the view. Alternately, focus group studies can set up the possibilities of argumentative interactions (p. 182).

Krueger and Casey (2000) on their part also explain focus group as a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain views on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Participants took part in the discussion at their convenient time and venue. The discussions began with questions from the researcher who was the moderator. The group shared their experiences on the issues that were tabled by the moderator. He asked same questions just as he did during the interviews sessions. The focus group discussions were done to confirm or disconfirm the issues that emerged from the interviews. The focus group discussion session was recorded and transcribed, developed into themes for analysis and discussions.

### **3.6 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) see 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 here 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 abreast themselves of it. It is significant to note that this study which is about experiences of female Muslims revealed findings that can be trusted and used for academic and developmental purposes. This study is flexible and required the use of thematic analysis as Braun and Clarke (2006) assert, thematic analysis is flexible and a useful tool that provides detailed account of data. The researcher interrogated the issues in order to get the truth out there and that informed his choice of thematic analysis as the approach to analyze the data. Sandelowski (2010) explains that using the “factist” perspective is appropriate in data analysis as it makes findings more accurate and a truthful representation of the reality on the site.

The researcher after collecting the data, transcribed both the interviews and focus group discussions and read through to get the details of the work. Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) suggest that in thematic analysis, researchers should transcribe the interviews and read through the whole work in order to make sense with it. The researcher read through the transcripts several times and categorized the issues and developed them into themes. The researcher first organised the themes and after examining the themes, some sub-themes emerged. Both latent (developing categories) and manifest (developing themes) are employed to conduct detailed analysis of data (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013).

### **3.7 Data Collection Processes**

The processes in the data collection were elaborate and herculean since the participants were purposively sampled. The researcher conducted the interviews and focus group discussion sessions at the convenience of the respondents. The researcher purposively sampled the participants from the students of Evangelical Presbyterian College of education, Bimbilla. The selection process of the research participants first of all considered students who were from Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla and who were female Muslims who have lived in the college as students at least for more than a year. The researcher made phone calls to each of them and discussed with them his intention to use them as participants for a research work that was basically looking into the lived experiences of female Muslim students in the colleges of education. The expectation of the researcher was fulfilled when all the participants expressed interest and this feat achieved, motivated the researcher to meet the participants individually to confirm their interest in participating in the research. It took about a week for the researcher to meet the participants. After meeting with them, the day, date, and time was fixed for the interviews bearing in mind lecture hours and prayer times for the participants since they were both students and Muslims who will not sacrifice anything for their prayers. The interviews were conducted within a three - week period. Within the interview period, the researcher interviewed four participants in all. The interviews were conducted in the languages department office of the college. Each of the interview sessions lasted between thirty and forty five minutes and the interviews were made very interactive. This enabled interviewees to give out information freely. The researcher used the respondent interview type and it made participants talk about what they have gone through or what they have

experienced (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The interview schedule was also used and questions that were asked were structured such that they led to broad themes or titles. The researcher again, employed both the directive interview and closing interview recommended by Lindlof and Taylor (2002) where the researcher used the directive interview to lead participants to answer questions that unearthed the various issues the researcher put into themes and the closing interviews guided the interviewer to ask questions that enabled participants talk about issues that they normally would not discuss with the opposite sex except their husbands or sexual partners. The researcher in an attempt to get a rich and more credible data, also conducted focus group discussion with six participants in each of the two groups that was constituted. The researcher scheduled the time with participants and assured them of confidentiality. The seating arrangement of the meeting was organized in a horse-shoe formation and bottled water was made available for participants. The Languages Department office of E. P. College of Education, Bimbilla was where the discussions were held and the researcher who was the moderator made himself a “blank slate”-he appeared not to know anything about Muslim women or did not allow his biases to affect the issues that came up during the discussion. The discussion commenced and participants fully cooperated and the issues about their culture and the college environment were discussed, how college education impacted their communication behaviors, how gender as a communication phenomenon affected women in the college, how their pre-college experiences informed the choice and decisions female students made in their academic life. Other related communication issues of life; leadership, personal development, culture and interpersonal relationship dominated the discussions. The Focus Group Discussions lasted for one and half hours (90 minutes) each. The duration for the

focus group discussion is in accordance with the assertion of Lindlof and Taylor (2002) that focus group discussion should last for ninety minutes, an hour or two hours and participants actively participated by providing information to the researcher who acted as the moderator for the discussion session. The researcher recorded the proceedings using a recording allreli devise and Tecno C8 mobile phone. He also wrote down the key issues that surfaced during the interviews and focus group discussions. After that he transcribed the interviews and focus group discussions and returned the transcribed interviews to participants to confirm or disconfirm their responses. After the respondents had seen the transcribed versions of the interviews, the specific issues that came up during the interview and in the focus group discussions were categorized into themes for analysis and conclusion by the researcher.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher in conducting the study, took into consideration some ethical issues. These include; confidentiality and consent. The researcher explained to respondents of the research in unambiguous terms the purpose of the research and the intention to interview them and also constitute them for focus group discussions. The researcher also informed them about his intention 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 and also 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.

This exercise was to ensure that respondents were not compelled to take part in the research and to also provide a legal instrument for them to exercise their rights by going to court in case any of them felt that the items on the consent forms were infringed in the process.

### **3.9 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) 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” (p. 52). This study seek to understand the experiences female Muslims from the commentaries they gave about life before college education and life during college education.

### **3.10 Summary**

Chapter three critically examined the methods the researcher employed in gathering the data for this study. It also explained qualitative research approach and design and why the researcher employed those for the study. The methodology systematically outlined and discussed the methods which have been stated above—research approach was qualitative, research design; phenomenology, sampling technique was purposive, population was students of Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla, the sampling size was twenty female Muslim students. The data collection instruments that were adopted for this study were interviews and focus group discussion, data analysis was thematic, an elaborate discussion was done on the data collection processes, ethical issues, validity and reliability and a summary of the main items in this chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter gives a presentation of the findings, discussions and analysis of data collected from the interviews and focus group discussions on the experiences of female Muslim students of the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla. Also, this chapter examines the outcome of the data gathered in relation to the theories of Identity Negotiation and Gender as well as relevant literature. The researcher has adopted some codes in the form of a mixture of the letter 'R' and some numbers to help protect the anonymity of respondents of the study. The codes have also been generated to give each and every respondent a unique identity.

The research questions below guided the data collection process.

1. What are the pre-college experiences of female Muslim students at Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla?
2. What are the college experiences of female Muslim students at Evangelical Presbyterian College of education, Bimbilla?

**RQ1: What are the pre-college experiences of female Muslim students at E. P. College of Education, Bimbilla?**

This research question was framed to bring to the fore the experiences female Muslim students encountered before gaining entry into the Christian mission college of education. From the interviews and focus group discussions, the respondents revealed their pre-

college experiences as encompassing; *Cultural Influence, Job Opportunities, Females in sports, fear of delayed marriages, Liberation, Cultural Stereotype and Domestic Roles.*

#### **4.1 Cultural Influence**

The study found that before female Muslim students gained entry into E. P. College of Education, Bimbilla, the non-Islamic form of culture influenced and shaped how they dressed, related with males and conducted themselves with specific reference to their prayer times. Some of the respondents attended Christian Mission Senior High Schools and secular educational institutions where they were compelled to dress and act in ways that did not resonate the Islamic culture. The non-Islamic culture shaped their lives in the sense that female Muslim students readjusted their mode of dressing and behaving to reflect the non-Islamic environment. According to Merry (2005), many Muslim parents find it extremely difficult to enroll their kids in non-Islamic schools because they contend that the non-Islamic schools inculcate in Muslim children un-Islamic customs and behaviours. For instance, R1 had this to say,

When I was in S. H. S., we could not dress the Islamic way. Everybody dressed without veils and the school uniform too was not to go down your knees too much. We could not live like we are Muslims. We played with the boys the way we can't play with them in the house. At times, we would not be able to pray at the right time. At school, the senior girl students will send you and you can't get time to do your own things. Because of what I saw at the secondary school, I didn't want to attend a mission school again.

Respondents explained that there were instances of cultural subversion when they were at the pre-tertiary academic institutions. Muslim girls are supposed to dress to cover all their body parts except the face and in some instances, their wrists and ankles. However, when

they gained entry into those institutions, they could neither put on veils nor wear the long dresses to cover their body parts as prescribed by the Islamic religion. Many Muslim parents prefer secular educational institutions to that of Christian academic institutions. This and many other reasons account for Muslims non-preference for Christian Mission educational institutions (Hassan, 2014). The non-preference for non-Islamic schools is all because Muslim parents fear their wards can be influenced by the Christian practices and beliefs. As R2 stated,

My brothers and sisters were against my decision to attend Bimbico and their reason was that I will change my ways of behaving, I will behave like those who do not believe in Islam. Even though I didn't believe in whatever they were telling me, I could remember a lady who used to stay in our area and dressed as Islam allows but quickly changed when she got admission into E. P. College. But one thing that I really could not understand was whether the college changed her ways of doing things or she decided to change because many young women change to suit the modern world. But in all, I still had that fear that Bimbico could change my life in terms of my religion.

The responses indicate that individual Muslim women who gain admissions into the E.P College think and believe that the college culture can impact negatively on their religious lives and this is evident in the experiences the respondents shared during the interviews

#### **4.2 Expectation of Job Opportunities**

Brookfield (2013) explains that education leads to poverty reduction and by extension creates jobs for women. That is to say, when women acquire higher education, their prospects in job acquisition become brighter. Atuguba (2007) also argues that when women attain higher education, they are able to secure jobs such as teaching and nursing. The study

found that female Muslims enter college because of the expectation that job opportunities will abound at the time of their completion of the prescribed course of study. It is imperative to note that job opportunities become available to Muslim women when they go through higher education. The respondents of this study explained that one of the key phenomenon that they encountered before gaining entry into the college of education was perception of job opportunities. The Muslim women explained that job opportunities were a pre-college experience each of them had encountered and that the drive to attain college education was anchored on the expectations that diploma in basic education will lead to job acquisition. They revealed that some of them wanted to be in the college because of the ready job market that was available. Here, the idea of Islamic feminism is expressed. The traditional Islamic duties of the Muslim woman is restricted to the home but in this instance, female Muslim students think that it was within their rights to work outside the home without infringing on the Islamic jurisprudence. R5, shared her experience with her colleagues in a focus group discussion,

I must say that I have never heard someone say that College education does not bring work. Everybody says education brings work and there are a lot of examples in and around our homes about people who have attended college and how they are faring in their respective work places. The women who are teachers are happy with their work and one can see that they are encouraging other women to also attend college. My childhood dream was to become a teacher because I was told the problem is entering college but not how to get a job because once you enter college and pass all the prescribe courses, then you must be sure of your posting to where you will teach before you finally complete school.

There is always that force that drives individuals to enter into professions and it could be the pull or push forces. In this particular instance, the pull factor is what is at display. The

quest for jobs appear to be the overriding factor that stimulates the interest of Muslim students to want to enter into the colleges of education. The following is the experience R10, shared during the focus group discussion,

We are all aware that when you succeed in college education, then you can be rest assured that you will get a job and that can even help you to climb further the academic ladder. As far as I am concerned, I decided to come to this college because I know I will get a job after completion. These days, there are no jobs and when you make the mistake of entering into the University or Polytechnic, then you are most likely to wait for a job for God knows when. Teaching is good for me so why will I go searching for work that does not exist when I know the easiest way to getting a job is to enter college.

The pre-college experience under this sub-heading is indicated by all the respondents that education positively transforms the lives of individuals especially, women. The above revelations expose that even before female Muslim gain entry into the E. P. College of Education, Bimbilla, the idea of subversion is hatched. Females think that the traditional domestic roles such as working in the home, are assigned to them by virtue of their sex should be rewritten as they seek to acquire teaching jobs that will enable them work outside the home.

#### **4.3 Fear of Delayed Marriages**

Ahmad (2013) revealed in a study that Muslim women experience a significant increase in their marriage prospects when they attain higher education. This research finding shows that one of the pre-college experiences that respondents expressed during the interviews and focus group discussions was fear of delay marriages. The respondents explained that before they came to the college, one of the issues that they encountered was the idea that

seeking higher education delays marriage. This by extension delay child bearing which, according to them, is the primary reproductive responsibility of every Muslim and that any Muslim who holds the ‘aqida’ of the Islamic religion should not shirk any of such responsibilities. The Islamic belief and practice is that a woman after adolescence should marry, serve the husband and make children. However, respondents express that the quest to climb the academic ladder is something that will certainly defer their marriage. The phenomenon of delay marriages is something that will subvert the reproductive functions of women which is child bearing. Parents as part of their responsibilities, reinforce this notion by encouraging the girls to marry early R9 said,

One of the things that brought fear into my heart was my fear not to marry early. Some of us are already grown and to enter college means one will have to wait for an additional three years which I thought was difficult. Some people told me that when I enter college many men will despise me because they will think I know a lot to challenge them and in our culture, a woman is supposed to be submissive. If as a Muslim woman, you will not be attracted to men because you have education, then it means you the woman will continue to wait until such a time Allah’s blessings come your way. When I also consider being in college and in marriage simultaneously, I can’t see how I will be able to manage education and marriage at the same time.

The fear for delayed marriages is experienced by all respondents as they expressed that a Muslim woman in Ghana, especially, those from the Northern Region are supposed to be married when they attain a certain age in life. If she does not marry and engages in any form of sexual encounters, such a conduct is deemed sinful according to the dictates of the Islamic religion and her parents will partly share the sins. Her parents will share in the sins because she is still under their tutelage and they (parents) must facilitate the processes



leading to her successful marriage. Marriage is mandatory in Islam and one's religion is considered incomplete if he or she does not marry after attaining adulthood. R5 says,

Though my parents wanted me to attend a college, they equally wanted me to find a man of my choice before going to the college. My brothers advised me to marry because college education may make me appear a bit complex. They say I will not want to allow any man who is not highly educated to marry me and to them, the period that I will attend college plus the period that I will spend searching for a guy will cumulatively delay my marriage. My brothers even cited two other ladies in our village whose age mates have more children than them because of delay marriage which resulted from their long stay in school.

The above experience-fear of delay marriages is a gendered conception which is in tandem with the postulation of the Identity Negotiation theory where Ting-Toomey (1985) indicates that gender roles begin from the home which is the primary factor of socialisation (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). Individuals acquire gender characteristics first from the home and it becomes part of them in their entire life. So for the respondents and those around to think the reproductive functions of the woman supersedes any other function of the woman will only be confirming the ideas of Ting-Toomey's that gender roles begin from the home and continue throughout the life of the individual. Again, the fear of delay marriage confirms the reproductive roles performed by women. The primary role of the woman is to reproduce younger ones of her kind that is why Muslims think that women must marry to perpetuate generational growth in terms of increasing the numerical strength of human beings.

#### 4.4 Females in Sports

Beauvoir (1989) opines that individuals are not born women, they become women. As a result of this social phenomenon, sports is made the preserve of males where females who engage in it are considered as having masculine features. The idea that women have got communal qualities which include expressiveness, connectedness, relatedness, kindness, supportiveness and timidity whereas men are associated with more argentic qualities - independence, aggressiveness, autonomy, instrumentality and courage is a stereotypic characteristic (Czopp, Kay & Cheryan, 2015). The study revealed that Muslim women were not encouraged to take up sports as a hobby and a profession at the pre-college level. They are discouraged, tagged, alienated and in some cases misconstrued as individuals who have the intention to be promiscuous. This study found that female Muslim students are often not given the support and encouragement to pursue their careers in sports. From the study, women assert that men think that women who engage in sports develop masculine tendencies such as aggressiveness. The respondents allude to.... that at the basic level through to the second circle institutions, family members including male siblings who are not supposed to exert control over them all discourage females from participating in sports. For instance, R9 says,

My dad stopped me from doing sports and because of his caring nature, I couldn't resist it. My dad said sports is meant for guys and I shouldn't be putting myself into that because it will expose me to guys. Even my cousin, he too, he is the mallam type. One time, I went and did the sports and he stopped talking to me, they thought men will use the sports to take advantage of me. But I knew that nothing will happen to me because I used not to wear the short dresses.

Parents and siblings of female Muslims think that sports has the tendency of making females fall prey to unsuspecting men who will take undue advantage of the women and abuse them sexually. They therefore, contend that sports, especially outdoor games, are meant for men/boys but not for women or girls, a position that is held by gender theorists. For instance, Christodoulou and Zobnina (2009) say that gender roles are not inherited; they are learnt and demonstrated by members of the society or a special group. Such roles are in the form of activities/conditions, tasks and responsibilities are perceived as male or female. So the position that sport is male but not female is a gendered conception.

#### **4.5 Cultural Stereotype**

Jones (1999) says that stereotypes are often untrue and unsubstantiated beliefs people hold about a certain set of individuals, groups and cultures. This was an experience females have lived before entering into college. Respondents explain that their day-to-day interactions with non-Muslims at the Senior High Schools and Junior High Schools showed that female Muslim students are time conscious. They are time conscious when it comes to both academic and non-academic activities. It was also found that they are not the outgoing type and are often considered as timid and submissive. The respondents also revealed that there are instances where non-Muslims see them as violent creatures. In relation to the dress code of the Muslim woman, respondents said there was a lot of misconceptions about their dress code-some people consider it to mean servitude. R10 explains,

Sometimes when I wear my hijab some people especially those who are not Muslims make comments such as; aren't you feeling warm, why don't the men also cover themselves as they ask you to do and so on. Any little quarrel you pick with anybody especially when I was at the Secondary School, the non-Muslims easily will say that Muslims are violent people, we like

fighting. Even though some of these bad remarks didn't go well with me, I tried to just let things go because I didn't want people to really believe Muslims are violent people.

The idea that Muslim women have been stereotyped can best be explained by Muslim women because in all instances they are the victims. They are tagged, named, labeled and in some cases, bastardised. As R6 put it,

You really don't feel the insult until when personally, such bad words are used on you. Meanwhile, those who even make you feel unimportant are not just like you. Those people use all kinds of words on you just to make you feel that you are not as they are. They do so either because you are a Muslim or because you are a woman. Some of them can't do that to the men because the men will not take it easy with them. Is like they fear the men that's why they will disturb only us the women.

Berry and Wilcox (2015) report that women in America and in Britain face one form of abuse at least occasionally for wearing a veil/'niqqab'. The report further indicates that men do not face so much of such abuses like their female counterparts in some parts of the Western world. This study also finds similar revelations as men are not so stereotyped and verbally abused like women. The experiences shared by R10 and R6 confirms the stance of Powell and Graves (2003) who opine that individuals hold shared beliefs about the characteristics and attributes associated with the sexes.

#### **4.6 Domestic Roles**

AlMunajjed (1997) says that the system of male dominance where men assign to themselves economic and charitable vocations but restrict women to 'inside the house' responsibilities is a social creation that is not founded by both the Qur'an and Hadith. The respondents in a focus group discussion indicated that one other key pre-college

experience that they went through before their college life was domestic roles that were assigned to them. Respondents said that they were always assigned ‘inside the house responsibilities’ which ranged from caring for their siblings, preparation of food and maintaining hygiene and sanitation in the home. They explained that unlike their male counterparts who were not given such roles, they were constantly asked by their parents, siblings and other family relations to do such roles that are confined to their home. R3 in a focus group discussion said,

Before I came to the college, I was made to believe that no matter who I was, preparation of food was my basic work. I was taught to prepare food as early as eleven years. Being the only female child of both parents, my parents used to send me to go to the market to purchase foodstuff and ingredients then when I get to the house and I will start the preparation of food till she comes back to join me. Both my elder and younger siblings will not take part in the cooking at all; they were not even taught how to cook because cooking was not their work. Only we the females cooked and washed the utensils. On some occasions when two of my siblings wanted to help me to pound fufu, they were warned not to do so because that was not their job, their job was to work on the farm not in the kitchen.

Similarly, R12 shared her experience in the same vein but indicated that she didn’t see anything wrong with serving food at the dining hall because she was brought up to believe that women are to serve men no matter their status and age. She says,

I used to serve food on our table in the boarding school in Tamale as a junior student till even when I became a senior. When I was a senior, at times junior male students sat for me to serve them their food when the only female junior student on our table did not turn up for dining. Even the girls in the school knew that they were those who were supposed to serve food

in the dining hall and the school girls' prefect was always seen punishing girls who failed to serve food in the dining hall.

Domestic roles of women as expressed by respondents which consistently dominated the interviews and focus group discussions make sense of the position of Stella (1985: cited in (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011) when she argued that gender roles are taught in the house and continues throughout the life of the individuals. Domestic roles of women as a phenomenon falls within the auspices of the gender theory. Here, the roles that individuals perform by virtue of their sex is captured under gendered roles.

## **RQ2: What are the College experiences of female Muslim students at E. P. College of Education, Bimbilla?**

The College experiences the Muslim women revealed they had had during their stay in E. P. College of Education, Bimbilla were explained to the researcher during the interviews and the focus group discussions cut across many areas. The researcher therefore, categorized the issues into themes and they include: *Personal Development, Culture, Student Politics, socialisation, and Females in Sports*. These issues are interpreted using the Theory of Gender which looks at the roles individuals play based on their sex; and, Identity Negotiation Theory which discusses how individuals negotiate their identities. Although many of these experiences were mediated as benefits and overlap, I have drawn these distinctions because they most closely match the experiences reported by the respondents of the study.

### **4.7 Personal Development**

As it has been indicated earlier in this chapter, personal development deals with development of Communication Skills and Enhanced Confidence. Tyrer and Ahmad

(2006) say that many Muslim parents often share in the educational and career aspirations of their female Muslim students. Female Muslim students cited several factors that informed their decisions for entering into higher education; the reasons ranged from “personal interest, career aspirations, financial stability, personal independence, and greater respect and choices when thinking about marriage (p. 12).

#### **4.7.1 Developing communication skills**

Another college experience respondents expressed was development in communication skills. The study found that gaining entry into the college has improved the communication competencies of the 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 the sensibilities of others within or outside their group. The respondents also revealed that their speaking skills-grammar developed tremendously. For instance, Ahmad (2013) opines that education enables Muslim women to communicate effectively in both speaking and writing. This findings therefore, corroborates Ahmad’s (2013). For instance, R1 stated in the focus group discussion,

It is true that college education has improved the way I speak. When I first came to this college, I didn’t really open myself to people because I didn’t want to create problems for myself. 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.

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 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.

#### **4.7.2 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 indecent relationship with men, we now move around with them. I make contributions in class in the form of questions and suggestions. Sometimes my friends are surprised that I now speak more than I used to do.

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.

#### **4.8 Liberal Islamic Practices**

Tyler (1870) cited in Avruch (1998) says that culture is a complex structure consisting of parts such as beliefs, knowledge, morals, arts, law, custom, and any other capabilities and behaviors acquired by man as a member of society. The study revealed that respondents experienced some elements of the culture and these include; Veiling, Handshaking and Residential Facilities.

##### **4.8.1 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 but 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 the 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

R5 also said,

I started wearing the veil when I was a child because it is part of our upbringing as Muslim girl. It is good to wear the veil and when you wear it there is that sense that you belong to a good group. You feel that you belong to a group that respect women. I feel secured when I wear it and I also feel that when I wear it, I am gaining more salvation. One interesting thing is that you are not forced to wear the veil but you are encouraged to do it. You are also told the importance of wearing the 'hijab' and the religious benefits of wearing it.

R12 also said,

Thanks to the Almighty Allah that we can now wear our veils in and around campus. When I was at the S.H.S. I couldn't wear even my hijab not to talk about my veil because everything about the school was Christianity. When we were in level hundred also, we could not wear veils to class and official functions in the college. Now we can wear it as and when we want and we thank the GMSA executives for fighting for our rights.

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 gendered because only women put on veils but not men.

#### **4.8.2 Handshaking**

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. When women shake hands with men, such an act is deemed a sin. However, women can shake hands with their husbands and other women and that will not amount to a sin but when they do the otherwise, 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 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 but sometimes the Christian guys when they are to shake hands with you and you say its haram, they will hold your

hands and say it's not haram. Because of that we sometimes shake hands with them so that they can feel free and we can also feel free.

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 other 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 E. P. College of education 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.

#### **4.8.3 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 in their experience 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 are such that individuals do not occupy rooms alone and that more than four stay 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 at the resident hall at all. You find it difficult to hide your nudity. The rooms are congested and you can't partition your corner to prevent other women 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. What is most difficult for me is the way the bathrooms are constructed. 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. The Islamic religion frowns on exposing your private parts to other people. 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.

R7 also said,

Hmm! The toilets are not that good. When the water is not flowing, you are compelled to go to Alafei hospital side and buy water to flash after use and because we are students and do not have money we don't enter the water closet, we enter the bush and sometimes some guys will be haunting us. Sometime, one girl even went to the bush those guys chased her and took her phone. The toilet is really a problem

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. Also, the rooms are designed such that you cannot have a place to do your 'nawafil'-supplicatory prayers especially at night. In an attempt to do 'nawafil' at night, you will abuse the freedom of other roommates.

The above responses on residential facilities indicated that female Muslim students do not enjoy privacy in both their bathrooms and their bedrooms at the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education. The responses also revealed that female Muslims placing of the ablution cans at the washrooms did not create any inconveniencies for the non-Muslims and that Muslims could not also have the luxury of performing supplicatory prayers nightst at 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). Also, the Gender theory is put to test in the issues above. As the women reveal all the above as phenomenon they have practically lived at the Mission College, veiling is gendered-only women veil. Handshaking is equally gendered-women only shake hands with other women.

## **4.9 Student Politics**

Female Muslim students at the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla find it extremely difficult to hold top leadership positions that are gender inclusive. Glass Ceiling as a phenomenon precludes women from top management positions not because they lack the capability and expertise to be there but because they are women (Dorcas, 2013). Glass ceiling only affects women but not men. Women do not aspire to top leadership positions in organisations (Lian & Wang, 2001: cited in Braimah, 2015). Student Political leadership at the College is categorized into two according to the respondents- Student Representative Council and Student Religious Denomination Leadership.

### **4.9.1 Student representative council leadership**

School Leadership according to the respondents deals with portfolios that students hold when they are elected or appointed to serve the interest of both students and the college at large. Their elections/appointments are supervised by the college and the leaders who emerge are christened Students' Representative Council executives. The study found that the Students' Representative Council is always headed by males and females as deputies. Females have the right to contest and hold positions. Women only comfortably hold onto positions that exclusively relate to the affairs of females. For instance, the students' representative council's women's commissioner position and that of the deputy women's commissioner's position are the only ones women comfortably handle in the college. Other areas where one would find females holding leadership positions has to do with the other students' representative council' positions such as treasurer, secretary and others. The students' representative council president is always occupied by males and a lady has never occupied that position in the history of the college. It is however, interesting to note that



the students' representative council's constitution of the college does not exclude women from contesting the student's representative council president's position. The challenge for the female Muslim women is that there are some forces working against their progress to that position. R4 in the interview session said,

Since I came to this college, we have held two Students' Representative Council elections and in both, only men contested for the presidential position. The women only contested positions such as; women's commissioner, secretary, and others. Actually, you will not see people saying that women should not contest but you will hear the men saying that a woman cannot be the Students' Representative Council President. The guys don't say that the girls are having problems they just say women can't lead them. They don't encourage we the women to apply for such positions.

R3 also stated,

There is nowhere in the history of the college that you will hear that a Muslim woman was Students' Representative Council President. When it is getting to elections on campus, you only hear names of the men for the president but for Muslim women, no. People don't even discuss it. If you mention Muslim women in the elections, then you are only telling people to use words that are not good. We hear last three years one lady applied for SRC President but people didn't vote for her.

From the responses, the issue of gender mainstreaming has been inculcated into the electoral system of the college. Gender mainstreaming could be seen as the deliberate attempt by institution to institute gender friendly activities in its administrative and political life. Individuals can participate in the democratic process of the college without any fears that college authorities will disqualify or discourage such an individual by virtue of his or her sex. The Muslim women find it difficult to contest for the president of the Students' Representative Council because contesting and winning such a position would imply that

they are going to rule over men which the Islamic practices oppose. All the respondents expressed a feeling of gender discrimination when it comes to Students' Representative Council elections in the college. As a result, there exists an artificial blockage (glass ceiling) that prevents women from aspiring to the position of Students' Representative Council President at the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla not because they lack the leadership competences, behaviours and attitudes but because they are women in an environment that is largely controlled by men.

#### **4.9.2 Student religious denomination leadership**

The religious leadership as explained by the respondents has to do with leadership within the Ghana Muslim Students Association (GMSA). These leadership positions include; GMSA President, College Imam, GMSA Secretary, GMSA Treasurer, GMSA Organiser, GMSA Financial Secretary and GMSA Women's Commissioner. The top executive positions are the GMSA President and the College Imam. According to the respondents, these positions are only reserved for the men. Here, it is not the invisible hand that prevents the women from aspiring to top executive positions-the GMSA constitution does not allow the females to do so. This confirms the concept of the phenomenon of Glass ceiling. R8 stated,

It is not possible to become the GMSA President because we are told women are not to lead in the religion of Islam. For example, it is unheard of in the history of Islam for a woman to assume the position of an imam when there are women. So we don't even think of that position. As for the GMSA President's position, I think a lady can take that one without causing any problem in the religion of Islam but the question is, will the men allow you?

R13 also added,

How can a woman become the imam in our religion? It's just not possible for that to happen. From our homes where we were introduced to the religion, we were told the position is reserved only for men. Even if the male is the youngest among the women, he will take that position and the women will follow. Nobody who is a serious Muslim will think of a woman becoming an imam. It has never happened and I don't think it will ever happen.

R15 said,

.... It is difficult to tell when it became an Islamic law that women should not be in top leadership positions such as the position of the imam but I believe it became a law from the beginning of Islam. I don't think it is undermining women in Islam, that is the Islamic law and we need to respect it by practicing it. We cannot challenge it as women that is what the holy book and the hadith are saying.

Lian and Wang (2001: cited in Rose, 2015) say Glass ceiling only affect the forward movement of women in organisations to the topmost positions in organisations but not men. This is in consonance with the responses from this study. Except that the findings only reveal that the women themselves think it is not the making of the men that they cannot move up the leadership ladder but the religion they find themselves. Here again, we see the Identity Negotiation Theory at play. The Islamic religious culture that guides and moderates the life and conduct of the Muslim woman do frown on Muslim women taking up top leadership positions especially the position of the imam. From the interactions with respondents, the study found that female Muslim women do not occupy top leadership positions at the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla. It is also revealing to note that whereas women can contest for all SRC positions including

the president, women cannot apply same when it comes to the Islamic religious denomination leadership which is a sub-set of the SRC. Here, gender discrimination is at display whereas there is gender mainstreaming at the SRC level. The study however, assigned different reasons why Muslim women do not occupy top SRC leadership positions and Islamic religious leadership. Whereas the concept of Glass ceiling is the main cause of females' inability to occupy top positions in school leadership, females are not able to move up the religious leadership position in the college because of religious reasons and that of their cultural backgrounds.

#### **4.10 Liberation**

Another college experience that emerged from the interviews and the focus group discussions was liberation. Respondents expressed the view that living free and independent life was a common phenomenon in adult educational institutions. They said that even though they had heard of restrictions with specific reference to liberties before they entered E. P. College of Education they did experience such restrictions. The college which is non-Islamic institution, has been a place where respondents are at liberty to associate and relate with others irrespective of sex and religion. The respondents further explained that E.P. College as an adult institutions was for adults and individuals were not strictly monitored like the basic and second cycle levels of the Ghana Education Service.

In a focus group discussion, R4, had this to say,

As for me, before I came to this college, I heard students are free here, it's not like S.S.S. where you cannot do what you like. I also heard that Saturday nights were reserved for entertainment programmes and students used such time to interact with their friends and entertain themselves. And truly, we are enjoying all these things.

Another respondent, R3 says,

Yeah, my friends who were admitted into training college before me said some students dress in some ways that u can't do at home. Students do whatever they wanted provided they were not breaking the rules and regulations of the college. Now that am a student, have seen that life here is totally different from the other levels. For example, we dress the way like and pick anybody they want as a friend.

Muslim parents believe that non-Islamic academic institution do not offer their wards the best of training as far as attitudes and behaviour shaping are concerned (Merry, 2015). This means that Muslim parents think that their wards may veer off the path of righteousness and, for that matter, their culture of living chaste lives before marriage.

#### **4.11 Socialisation**

Ashley et al (2011) in a study found that Non - Muslim students have inadequate knowledge and understanding of Islamic teachings and therefore, conduct themselves in ways that make Muslim students feel alienated. However, the findings from this research run contrary to the above assertion by Ashley et al (2011). This study revealed that non-Muslims have some understanding of the Muslim culture and do not see Muslims as terrorists, uncivilized and dogmatic. This according to respondents enabled them to make friends from within the Islamic religion and outside the Islamic religion.

Respondents indicated that the relationship between them and other Muslim students was very cordial and they did almost everything together. The respondents also stated that non-Muslims equally had very good relationship with the Muslims students. This created the opportunity for them to make friends from within and outside the Islamic faith in the college.

R4 stated,

I used to go to the mosque with Asana and we attended all school functions together. There were times we went to town together to buy our things on market days. Anytime, one of us could not go to the dining hall, the other will make sure she brings food for the other. We were doing things together and finally, we became friends unconsciously.

R6 also stated,

Being at the college was something I enjoyed so much. The new friends I made from my religion were so good to me. May be probably we are all Muslims and I missed them each time we went on vacation. We could eat each other's food and the feeling of togetherness was just amazing. I enjoyed college life because of my friends and I must say that we are more than blood sisters.

R7 also stated,

I couldn't believe the kind of relationship we had from our non – Muslim student colleagues. They were so nice and most of them were just good. The impression from other places that there is conflict between Muslims and non – Muslim students does not exist here. There is no bad feeling between us and we do things together. Sometimes, it's only our mode of dressing that differentiate us from the non-Muslim.

The responses from the research indicated that even though there exists that disparity in the culture of the Muslims and non-Muslims, respondents are able to negotiate their identities in ways that maintain peace and tranquility between them and it is this feature of both the female Muslim students and non-Muslims that facilitates the crossing of the cultural barriers that might have existed between them. Excerpts of the responses above lend credence to Ting-Toomey's conception that after staying together, individuals attain a state she refers to as Intercultural Competence and Negotiation skills. Intercultural

Competence and Negotiation skills is a state where individuals are able to cross cultural barriers that hitherto could have created some friction between groups of different beliefs and practices. The respondents ability to make friends from within and outside is as result of the identity knowledge they have acquired which makes them understand the importance of both cultural and ethnic identities of their Muslim and non-Muslim friends. Also their negotiation skills enable respondents mediate their identities through careful observation of their own behaviours and the behaviours of friends: listening to them and showing empathy as and when it becomes necessary (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). The respondents also negotiate their identities using nonverbal communication, and showing politeness.

#### **4.12 Domestic Roles**

Although there is gender awareness in the college, certain tasks are reserved for women just by virtue of their sex (Christodoulou & Zobnina, 2009). The study revealed that some role performances are determined and assigned to individuals based on their sex. In performing the various roles in the college, there exists division of labour based on gender. Hazel and Sally (2000) assert that gender division of labour is socially constructive determined ideas and practices which motivate what roles and activities are deemed appropriate for women and men. The study found that roles assigned to individuals are based on their sex. For instance, R5 said,

Whenever we are doing sports, the ladies are in charge organizing food and drinks while the men get the other things organised. We prepare the local drinks and serve during the sports especially, athletics. Like after the sports, we ladies wash the jerseys. Another thing is that when some tutors want to send for food, they prefer the ladies to buy for them. They don't want the boys to buy food for them because the tutors said the boys don't know how to buy food.

Also R14 stated,

Though we know that men and women are equal, we the ladies still serve food at the dining hall. The guys don't serve food because everybody thinks is the ladies who should prepare food. The only thing is that seniors do not serve food it is only the juniors who serve.

The study found that female Muslim students have knowledge about gender and gender awareness but in their daily activities, roles that are still assigned to individuals are gendered.

#### **4.13 Females in Sports**

Before female Muslim students of Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla gained entry into the college, they experienced sports as an activity that is male dominated. However, after gaining entry into E.P College, the respondents realized that the misconceptions about sports abound at the basic and second circle levels of education. They explained that at the college, they had the liberty to engage in sports from the college level through to the zonal and to the super zonal level. For instance, R9 stated

At the college, I could do sports without any problem. My daddy used to tell me that he was protecting me that when I reach a certain stage in education, he won't control me much. True to his words, when I really entered college, he has never asked me to stop sports. I take part in sports and represent my college in the sports and I have even represented the northern zone for our national competitions.

R3 also stated,

Our parents didn't want us to go out and do sports. Even me, my guy was not comfortable seeing me go to play football and volley ball but now they



don't have problems with me going to do sports. I think they now feel that I am matured enough to protect myself from men and other bad behaviours.

The liberties females enjoy at the college is extended to cover the area of sports. Unlike the other level where parents and other relations are not sensitive to the plight of women in terms of gender equity, the college environment provides that levelled playing grounds for everybody irrespective of your sex and that explains why female Muslim women at the college are at liberty to engage in games and athletics.

#### **4.14 Summary**

Chapter four of this study discussed the findings. The following are the findings of this study: pre-college experiences-Cultural Influence, Job Opportunities, Females in sports, fear of delayed marriage, Cultural Stereotype and Domestic Roles.

College experiences-Personal Development-*Development of Communication Skills and Enhanced Confidence*, Cultural influence-*Veiling, Handshaking and Residential Facilities*, Student Politics-*Students' Representative Council and Student Religious Denomination Leadership*, Socialisation, Domestic Roles, Liberation and Females in Sports. Experiences of female Muslim students were examined from two perspectives-the pre-college and college experiences. The study examined the issues respondents have encountered before their entry into the college and what actually they have experienced at the college. This was done to find out if pre-college experiences were similar/different from lived college experiences. The findings revealed that female Muslims experience cultural influence before they gain entry into the college. There is subversion where the female Muslims seek Job opportunities outside the home. This confirms the position of Islamic Feminism. The study also revealed that sports is gendered at the pre-college level. The study also revealed

that Fear of Delayed Marriage is an experience respondents encountered before their college education. The study also found cultural stereotyping as a pre-college experience. The study revealed that respondents were stereotyped due to how they dressed or related with other non-Muslims. The last pre-college experience this study found is Domestic roles and this falls within the domain of the Gender theory where individuals perform various roles by virtue of their sexual orientation.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This is the final chapter of the study and it sums up the relevant issues that came up for discussion during the conduct of the research. It also presents the conclusion, recommendations and makes suggestions for further researches related to this study.

#### 5.1 Summary

This study examined the lived experiences of female Muslim students of the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla from the perspective of phenomenology. The study was categorised into five chapters. The five chapters variously discussed the distinct parts of the study which collectively revealed the pre-college and college experiences. This study basically employed semi structured interviews and focus group discussions to unearth both the gender and identity issues female Muslim students encounter at the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla.

#### 5.2 Main Findings

Chapter four of this study discussed issues around the pre-college and college experiences of female Muslim students of the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla.

To begin with, the study revealed that female Muslims experience cultural influence before they gain entry into the college. At the pre-college institutions, the dress code of female Muslims does not resonate the Islamic culture but for the purpose of identity negotiation and construction, the females subscribe to other cultures either than the Muslim culture. This confirms the Identity Negotiation theory which postulates that individuals shift

mindfully from their culture for the purpose of mediating their identities (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

Again, the desire to get jobs and work outside the home is the motivation for females entering into college and this is confirmed by the concept of Islamic Feminism which calls for the right to education for Muslim women in the society (Badran, 2009). The women therefore, are gravitating toward subversion. That is, a typical Muslim community culture encourages women to engage only in domestic roles.

Another significant findings the study revealed is sports being stereotyped. Before the women gain admission into E.P. College of Education, they are discouraged from actively participating in sports because it is considered masculine.

Also, the study found fear of delayed marriage as an experience female Muslims encountered before their college education. The Islamic belief of the Muslim women is that their reproductive roles of getting married and giving birth should not be truncated by education. They therefore, live in fear that college education will delay their marriages and this goes to confirm the gender theory that posits that individuals are assigned certain roles by virtue of their sex (Christodoulou & Zobnina, 2009).

Finally, the pre-college experience this study found is domestic roles. The study revealed that female Muslim students performed roles that were similar to the home activities and were brainwashed to believe that the best place for the woman was the kitchen. This falls within the domain of the Gender theory where individuals perform various roles by virtue of their sexual orientation (Christodoulou & Zobnina, 2009).

The study found the following as the college experiences;

First and foremost, the study found personal development as a college experience. These are development in communication and enhanced confidence. Here, the improvement in how respondents communicate in the college and the boosting of their confidence level enabled them to mediate their identities. This confirms the theory of Identity Negotiation which postulates the need for knowledge of one's culture and the culture of others (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

Cultural influence is another college experience this study has revealed through the culture of veiling, handshaking and use of residential facilities. Veiling is done only by Muslim women and that makes it a gendered performativity. The two activities are therefore gendered and religious conceptions which are inherent in the Gender theory. Residential facilities reveal what Muslim women go through at the resident halls in the college of education. The study revealed that Muslim women negotiate their identities by waking up early to bath or bathing late in order to avoid exposing their nudity to other females. Student politics is another phenomenon female Muslims encounter at the college as revealed in this study. The study found that there is gender mainstreaming when it comes to students' representative council elections but glass ceiling barrier negatively affects the upward movement of females to top SRC positions. The study however, found that whereas religious denomination leadership is under the auspices of SRC, there is gender discrimination when it comes to women aspiring to GMSA executive positions. Again, socialisation was found as a college experience. The study revealed that respondents have made friends from within the Islamic religion and outside the religion. This explains the extent to which Muslim women have gained knowledge on the culture of non-Muslims

which helping them to negotiate their identities. Domestic roles as a theme is also found as a college experience. Even though females have become gender aware of the happenings in the college, they still perform roles that are domestic in nature. The study also found that Muslim women become liberated when they experience college education. They take their own decisions and act freely without fear of reprimand from males. This confirms the position of Islamic feminism which states that men and women live their lives according to the interpretation of the Qur'an from the female perspective (Badran, 2009). The second but last experience this study found is around the theme of Females in Sports. The study found that at the college level female Muslim women engage in sports to any level they wish without any restrictions from the college and individuals around them.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This study sought to find out the pre-college and college experiences of female Muslim students at the Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education. The findings of this study revealed that female Muslim students of Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Bimbilla live the following experiences;

The study showed that female Muslim students develop in communication and their confidence level enhanced. The study therefore concludes that effective communication enables female Muslims to mediate their identities. This confirms the identity negotiation theory (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

Again, the study showed that female Muslim students construct their identities by wearing veils, shaking hands with men, and making friends from within and outside the Islamic religion and these fall within the domain of the identity negotiation theory (Littlejohn &

Foss, 2011). Student politics is another phenomenon female Muslims encounter at the college. The study showed that there is gender mainstreaming in students' representative council elections but glass ceiling affects the female Muslims. It is significant to note that the study showed that whereas female Muslims cannot contest for the religious denomination leadership positions, they can contest for Student Representative Council' selections. Again, the study showed socialisation as a college experience which enabled women negotiate their identities. Domestic roles is also found in the study as a college experience. Even though the females have become gender aware, they still perform roles that are domestic in nature and this confirms the Gender theory. The study also found that Muslim women become liberated when they experience college education. They take their own decisions and act freely without fear of reprimand from males (Badran, 2009). This confirms the position of Islamic feminism. Not all, this study showed that Muslim women engage in Sports. The study showed that female Muslim women engage in sports at the college without any restrictions from the college and individuals around them.

Finally, the study showed that female Muslim students are enthusiastic about working outside the home, a factor that motivates them to seek higher education.

#### **5.4 Limitations**

The Focus Group Discussion sessions came with some challenges including participants coming with their friends to the discussion session with the notion that it was all a Muslim affair. Another challenge that the researcher encountered was the perceived power participants thought the moderator wielded since he was a tutor at the college where the research was being conducted. Also, the researcher found it difficult getting literature on Muslim women at the Mission colleges of education in Ghana. Despite the myriad of

challenges the researcher faced in conducting this study, a lot was accomplished for further research.

### **5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies**

To conduct further studies, the following suggestions are outlined: the implications of the experiences of female Muslim students on language learning should be considered. Again, the study should include female Christian students in order to get their perspectives on their lived experiences in mission schools. The experiences of both male and female Muslim students equally could reveal the gender situations in the educational institutions in Ghana and also present accurate interpretations of gender issues in mission schools. Again, the study could be replicated in a secular educational set up.

### **5.6 Recommendations**

From the discussions and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations will improve the lot of female Muslim students at E.P College of education;

1. The college authorities should encourage female Muslim students to contest top Students' Representative Council positions and organise sensitization programmes on gender issues. The female Muslim students should also muster courage to contest top SRC positions.
2. From the perspectives of Islamic feminism, female Muslims should seek unbiased interpretation of the Qur'an so as to remain relevant and contribute toward national development and cohesion.
3. More amenities should be constructed to cater for the diversity among the religious practices in the college.



4. Muslim women should seek the interpretation of the Quran and hadith from the feminine perspectives. This will enable them construct their identities without fear of breaking Islamic rules.
5. Social and academic programmes should be instituted in the college to sustain the cordial relationship that exists between female Muslims and non-Muslims.



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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

My name is Salifu Issah, an Mphil student at the communication and Media Studies department of the University of Education, Winneba. Am conducting a study on female Muslim students and would like you to share your perspectives on the topic with me.

#### *Pre-college experiences*

1. What is your name?
2. How do you dress at home?
3. Has your dressing at home reflected your sex?
4. Are you into sports?
5. How did your parents, teachers, and siblings relate to you when you were engaged in sports?
6. (a)What is the name of the senior high school you attended?  
(b)Was it a mission school or secular?
7. How did the senior high school change your mode of dressing as a Muslim woman?
8. How did you live with Muslim and non-Muslims in the school?
9. How did you live with men at home and in the senior high school?

#### *College experiences*

1. How do you dress at the college?
2. How has your mode of dressing been influenced by your being in college?
3. How has your mode of veiling been influenced by being in college?
4. How are the residential facilities in the college?
5. How does that affect you as a Muslim?
6. How do you deal with hand shaking?

## APPENDIX B

### GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

My name is Issah Salifu and a student at the Communication and Media Studies Department of the University of Education Winneba. I am conducting a study on Muslim women would like us to have a discussion on your experiences as Muslim students.

#### *Pre-college college*

1. Before you entered college, how were you treated as woman / girl who was interested in sports?
2. How did you experience leadership?
3. How did you portray yourself as a Muslim woman / girl?
4. What were the roles assigned to you at home and in school?
5. How did you see leadership in girls / women?

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#### *College experiences*

1. How did you involve in sports at the college?
2. What roles did you perform as a woman?
3. What are the issues around student leadership in the college?
4. How do you portray yourself as a Muslim?
5. How do relate with non-Muslims?
6. How do you find the residential facilities at the college?

## APPENDIX C

### OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

**Management** – this refers to the top hierarchy of the college and it includes; the principal, vice principal, students’ affairs officer and his assistant, academic affairs officer and the college accountant.

**GMSA** – this is an acronym representing the Ghana Muslim Student Association and it is the umbrella body that represents fight for the rights of the Muslim students. It has branches in all second circle and tertiary institutions where there is Muslim student presence.

**Patron** – this is a position held by a senior member who is a Muslim. He counsels and direct the affairs of the GMSA.

**Women’s Commissioner** – this position in GMSA is held by a female Muslim student who is either appointed or elected. The college as an institution also has women’s commissioner whose role is to represent all females at the students’ representative council.

**Fiqh** - Islamic jurisprudence or the science of religious law in Islam, covering all regulations of religious, political, civil and social life; and family, private, public and criminal law.

**Jilbab/Jelbab** - generic term for a woman’s outer garment (shawl, cloak, coat, wrap), which covers the whole body except the face.

**Hadith** (plural hadiths) words attributed to the Prophet Muhammad; the second-highest source of authority in Islam after the Qur’an.

**Hijab** - a piece of cloth worn by observant Muslim women to cover the hair, ears and neck, leaving the face uncovered.

**Deen** - religion.

**Abaya** - a loose, simple outer garment – it's the same as a jilbab.

**Aqidah** - the core Islamic creed or articles of faith, including all matters related to the six pillars of the faith (God, his names, his attributes, the angels, the prophets, the Day of Judgement and predestination).

**Mahram** - a relative whom a Muslim man or woman cannot marry: one's parents, siblings, children, nephews and nieces. A Muslim woman who wears a hijab or niqab does not need to cover herself in front of mahram relatives. Respondents reported that wearing the niqab in front of their non-mahram relatives, i.e. uncles, cousins or brothers-in-law, had often triggered tensions in the extended families.

**Salat** - the act of prayer.

**Sunna** - an established custom, normative precedent, conduct or cumulative tradition typically based on the Prophet Muhammad's example.<sup>6</sup> A religious practice deemed sunna is considered as non-compulsory, but there are several degrees attached to it; for example, a practice can be qualified as sunna muakada (strongly recommended) or sunna mustahaba (just recommended).

**Polyamory** - This refers to the love relationship in which individuals engage in multiple relationships. The key assumption of this terminology is that it is possible for one to love more than one person or one can live in multiple love relationships and maintain them. In polyamory, emphasis is placed on love, intimacy and trust.