



Short Communication

Are We Doing Enough to Stop Bullying of Muslim Students in Public Schools?

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Abstract

Promoting diversity and employing programs that advocate tolerance and plurality must be equally important to educators and policy makers. Unfortunately, Muslim students nowadays are faced with bigotry and bullying at an alarming level. These students are in desperate need for help to fight against racial discrimination and bullying at their schools. The author of this study investigated the volume of empirical research in education literature that addressed bullying against Muslim students in U.S. public schools using GALILEO, an online library search system, and Google Scholar search engine. Results showed that less than 0.1% of the searched literature on bullying addressed Muslim students. This study also investigated educational policies and strategies to combat bullying against Muslim students as well as the commitment of educators and policy makers to eradicate such phenomenon.

Keywords: Muslim students, bullying, Public Schools, Diversity, Plurality, Tolerance

1 Introduction

Incidents of bullying against Muslim students in U.S. public schools are rarely investigated by researchers; hence risking understanding the psychological impact on the well-being of the bullied students. In addition to negative images and covert discrimination against Islam in certain media outlets, Muslim students are enduring bullying at their schools on a consistent basis. According to a 2016 report on Islamophobia by UC Berkeley Center for Race and Gender (CRG) and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), more than 55% of Muslim students in California have been victims of Islamophobic bullying at schools (CAIR, 2016). A study conducted by Baadarani (2016) showed that Muslim students in high schools experience bullying at a rate of 53% compared to a national rate of 20%. The study also revealed that religion is a predictor variable that hinders the development of cultural identity of Muslim students due to bullying and harassment. Sirin and Fine (2007) reported 85% of Muslim students experienced discrimination because of their religion and ethnical background. Most of these students did not report these incidents and chose to deal with bullying on their own. The result was a prominent increase in anxiety and degradation in their social and behavioral development.

The purpose of this study is to assess the current state of research in relation to bullying against Muslim students and the counter measures, if any, that are deployed by policy makers and educators to confront such bigotry and injustice. It also proposes a framework of guidelines and strategies by which all stakeholders can benefit from when dealing with Muslim students who are at risk of being bullied.

2 Theoretical Framework

Establishing a robust program that teaches pre-service teachers anti-bullying strategies has been a challenge to teacher preparation programs

within the general education setting due to curriculum requirements and resistance to buy-in of such programs by various stakeholders (Gorsek & Cunningham, 2014). Furthermore, bullying has not been found to be connected to one specific cause (Swearer-Napolitano, 2011). However, researchers identified a list of factors that can be attributed to the abnormal behaviors of bullying, such as poor social skills, aggression and violence towards themselves and others, hyperactivity, and difficulty with academics. Bullies may also show greater hostility, physical tantrums, or even disengagement from reality (Coolidge, DenBoer, & Segal, 2004).

Rock, Hammond, and Rasmussen (2002) advocated the use of empathy to reduce all types of bullying behaviors, while Maarouf and Jones (2016) proposed empathy as an intervention method to combat bullying of Muslim students. Ramarajan and Runell (2007) proposed the use of cooperative learning model to reduce prejudice in students and to address developmental appropriateness and multiculturalism in classrooms.

The author of this study posit that empathy, relational pedagogy, and cooperative learning models that were proposed in prior research can be coalesced by implementing motivation strategies that engage students and ensure successful outcomes. Motivation is a broad subject that is covered by many theories and can be looked at from five viewpoints – behavioral, humanistic, cognitive, social-cognitive, and socio-cultural (Woolfolk, 2011). The benefits of implementing motivation techniques in any classroom setting are well documented in the literature (Urduan & Maehr, 2009; Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006; Nichols & Utesch, 1998).

3 Methods and data Sources

The author used GeorgiA Library Learning Online (GALILEO) to search for peer-reviewed publications and Google Scholar search engine to find relevant work addressing bullying against Muslim students. GALILEO is Georgia's online virtual library system established in 1995 by the Board

of Regents of the University System of Georgia. It is used by more than 2000 institutions and accesses over 100 databases indexing thousands of journals, magazines, ebooks, government publications, etc. (GALILEO, n.d.). Google Scholar is a free search engine that provides a simple way to search for abstracts, articles, books, and other scholarly research (Google Scholar, n.d.). Although its search options are limited, Google Scholar can perform deep web search accessing scholarly research across the world.

For the GALILEO search, the author limited the results to only peer-reviewed articles. The search started with using the word “bullying” and then an “AND” Boolean operator was used to add the following words in the following order: “public schools”, “United States”, and “Muslim students”. For Google Scholar search, the author used Google Scholar search box with the same order of adding words as was done with GALILEO search. Google Scholar is not as robust as GALILEO when it comes to search options and the use of Boolean operators. Results from both search methods were constrained to articles that were published post 9/11 attacks (2001 to 2017). The author finally screened the titles and abstracts of the last GALILEO and Google Scholar searches and obliterated the articles that were deemed not relevant to the topic of this study.

4 Results

Sadly, we do not know much about the role of race or religion in bullying since there has not been adequate academic research in this space (Swearer-Napolitano, 2011; Abada, Hou, & Ram, 2008). Nevertheless, it is well documented in the literature that Muslim and Jewish students are subjected to more bullying than other religions and students of color are bullied more than White students (Schools' Toolkit, n.d.). Abo-Zena et al. (2009) stated that “Hostile behavior and bullying in school settings is a common reality for Muslim students, evidenced by incidents of discrimination that have occurred nationwide in the classroom, in the cafeteria, during extra-curricular activities, and on the school bus...” (Abo-Zena, Sahli, & Tobias-Nahi, 2009, p.5).

Table 1. Number of Articles Using GALILEO and Google Scholar Search Engines

Search Word/s	GALILEO	Google Scholar
bullying	120,604	269,000
+ public schools	62,992	70,300
+ Unites States	42,436	40,500
+ Muslim students	96	1,250
relevancy to topic	24	182
% of articles discussing bullying Muslim students	0.057%	0.449%

Number of articles related to bullying

Table 1 shows that GALILEO search yielded 120,604 articles related to “bullying”, 62,992 articles related to “bullying in public schools”, 42,436 articles related to “bullying in the United States public schools”, and only 96 articles related to “bullying in the United States public schools against Muslim students”. Images 1 to 4 show screenshots of the results for each of the searches. After further review of the 96 articles, the author determined that there were only 24 articles relevant to the topic of this study. This number constitutes only 0.057% of the total peer-reviewed articles that discussed bullying in U.S. public schools system (24 out of 42,436).

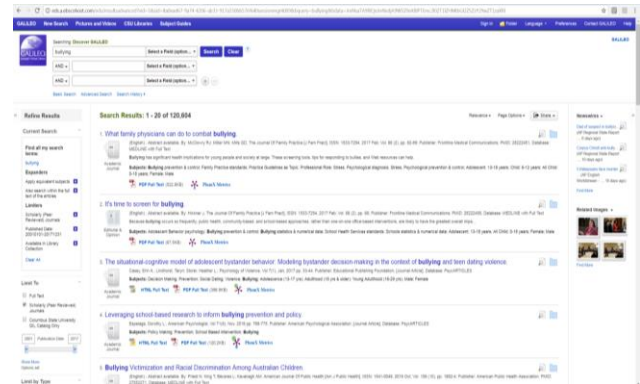


Image 1. GALILEO search “bullying”

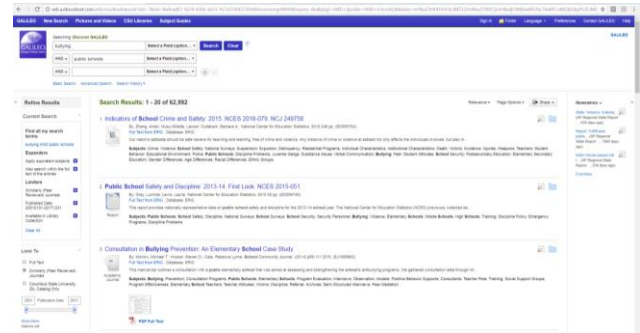


Image 2. GALILEO search “bullying AND public schools”



Image 3. GALILEO search “bullying AND public schools AND United States”

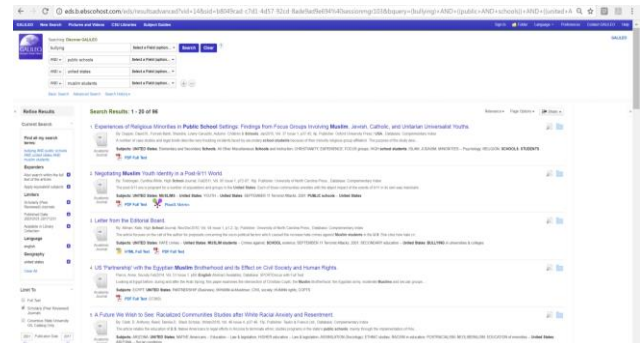


Image 4. GALILEO search “bullying AND public schools AND United States AND Muslim students”

The Google Scholar search yielded 269,000 articles related to “bullying”, 70,300 articles related to “bullying in public schools”, 40,500 articles related to “bullying in the United States public schools”, and 1,250 articles related to “bullying in the United States public schools against Muslim students”. Images 5 to 8 show screenshots of the results for each of the searches. After further review of the 1,250 articles, the author determined that there were only 182 articles relevant to the topic of this study. This

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number constitutes only 0.449% of the total articles that discussed bullying in the U.S. public schools system (182 out of 40,500). Most of the Google Scholar results related to bullying of Muslim students were web pages that were deemed by Google algorithm that they are “scholarly”. It is noteworthy here that the accuracy of the free service of Google Scholar search engine has been questioned by some researchers in regards to its lack of screen for quality and vulnerability to spam (Beel & Gipp, 2010; Oliver, 2010; Kulkarni et al., 2009).

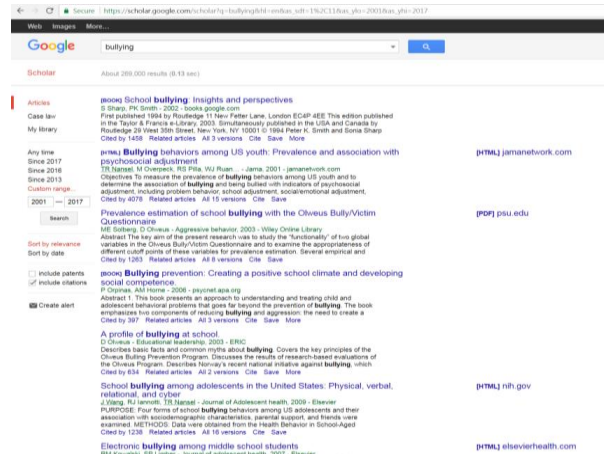


Image 5. Google Scholar search “bullying”

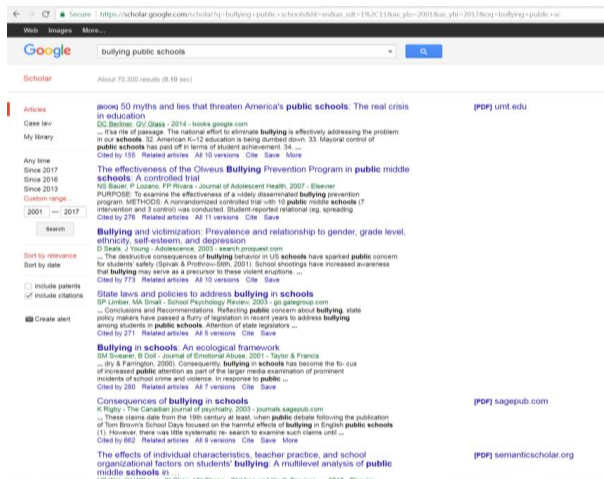


Image 6. Google Scholar search “bullying public schools”

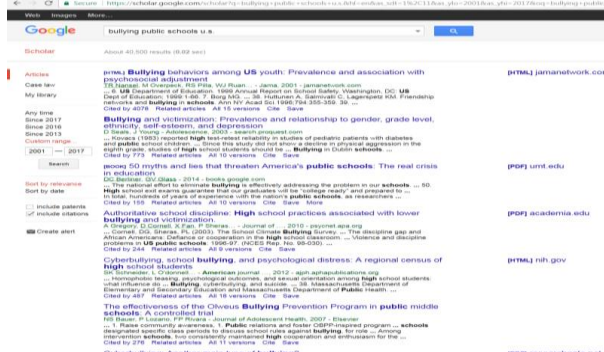


Image 7. Google Scholar search “bullying public schools U.S.”

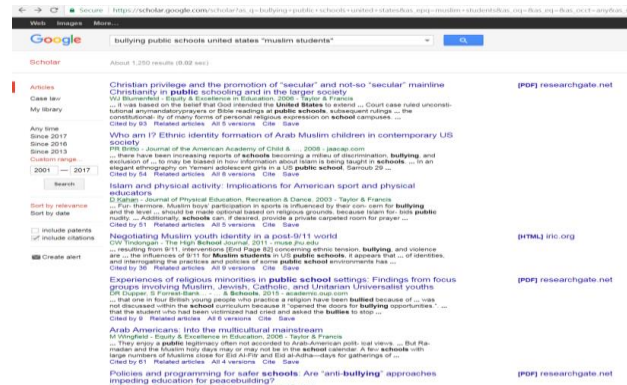


Image 8. Google Scholar search “bullying public schools U.S. Muslim students”

5 Discussion and Recommendation

To address the negative outcomes of bullying against Muslim students, a developmental framework consisting of new legislation and classroom strategies should be implemented by policy makers and educators in order to identify particular periods and modes for intervention. A holistic approach that integrates legislation and teaching strategies would be ideal to avoid any public backlash due to addressing religion in educational settings.

5.1 What Education Policy Makers can do?

Education policy makers must realize the danger of Islamophobic bullying that is taking place in public schools. This growing intolerance against Muslim students must be met with a swift action by legislators to pass tougher laws that respect diversity and teach civil responsibilities. A report by CAIR (2014) demonstrated that Muslim students experience bullying two times the rate of other students and these offenses, regrettably, were committed by their peers as well as teachers. Conceivably, one of the greatest impediments to promote educational policies that confront Islamophobic bullying is the fear of addressing religion at schools. Although teaching religion at schools has been a highly debated topic in our society and in the U.S. courts system, teaching religious diversity has been embraced by the courts and is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. constitution (Ramarajan & Runell, 2007). Hence, education policy makers need to construct a plan that ends offensive behavior towards Muslim students and address inadequacy in protecting these students without being afraid of anti-Islamic sentiment in the public arena.

Unfortunately, the author of this study did not find any empirical research in this space. A government sponsored programs that support and finance sustainable research that aim to derive educational policies based on empirical evidence will go a long way in promoting tolerance and respect for diversity. Furthermore, education policy makers can work with school leaders to implement the following policies:

- Advocate for more culturally effective pedagogies.
- Ensure personal commitment of school leaders and other school management team members and hold them accountable in driving concrete measures that combat Islamophobic bullying.
- Provide incentives to school leaders and teachers who value inclusive school culture and combat exclusion and intolerance.
- Build bridges that connect schools with their communities.

5.2 What Educators can do?

Teachers can apply simple strategies that can make a substantial difference in the life of a bullied Muslim child. Some of these strategies could include giving bullied children a lead job in the classroom, commenting on their religious identity, posting work related to their cultural background, reading books in the classroom about prominent U.S. Muslim individuals who greatly contributed to our country, offering structured exercises that help them to interact with their peers, and keeping a close eye on them so that they do not become victims of frequent bullying.

Unfortunately, first year teachers start their career lacking the proper professional development knowledge to effectively deal with bullying (Craig, Bell, & Leschied, 2011; Bauman & Rio, 2006). During college years, these teachers would benefit from additional training related to anti-bullying strategies, understanding students who are victims of bullying, understanding students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders, and applying strategies to boost positive behaviors and discourage negative ones. Furthermore, teachers should understand the difficulties that bullied students experience in several areas of their academic and social lives such as learning, relationships with their peers, and self-esteem.

6 Conclusion

Educators have a fundamental role in teaching acceptance of each other and in combating intolerance and racial discrimination. Policy makers provide educators the legal means in the field of education to fight against inequality and hostilities against minority groups. If defeating bullying against Muslim students is our goal, then it is our ethical responsibility as educators and policy makers to search and provide the support each child actually needs. The findings from this study indicated that bullying against Muslim students in the U.S. is not well-represented in the literature. The inadequacy of such research will have grievous consequences on the lives of the bullied students. More systemic data collection and research is needed to show what works in combating discrimination against Muslim students and in promoting cultural diversity.

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