

Islamophobia and Pedagogical Complexities: Developing Inclusive Learning Spaces

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Abstract

Islamophobia presents complex challenges in Western societies, leading to racial discrimination and violence against Muslims. This paper explores the interconnectedness and interactions between racism and Islamophobia, as Islamophobia is conceptualized as a form of racism in the literature. Specifically, it explicates racism and its different manifestations. It also deals with the intricate complexities of racism and Islamophobia in school settings and presents effective pedagogical approaches that teachers can incorporate into their curricula to develop students' social and political awareness through critical media literacy while fostering positive relationships among them based on mutual respect and appreciation of their cultures.

Introduction

Islamophobia has risen dramatically in the West since the 9/11 terrorist attack upon the US (Al Atom, 2014; Housee, 2012; Mahrouse, 2010). Unfortunately, police-reported hate crimes against Muslims in Canada increased by 151% between 2020 and 2023 (Statistics Canada, 2024). Islamophobia has negatively impacted the lives of Muslim communities in the West. It has become a critical issue in the West with the intensifying attacks against Muslims, such as the Chapel Hill Shooting in the US in 2015, the Finsbury Park van attack in the UK in 2017, the Quebec Mosque Shooting in 2017, and the Afzal Family massacre in Ontario in 2021. In North American schools, Muslim students reported experiencing marginalization, discrimination, and Islamophobia (Bakali, 2016; Halabi, 2021; Hossain, 2017).

Scholars argue that Islamophobia is a form of racism, as it involves “the co-constitution of race and religion” (Ahmed, 2018, p. 281; Love, 2017). As such, Islamophobia is conceptualized as a form of “structural racism” where Muslims are “othered” based on the differences in their religion, race, ethnicity, culture, and physical traits (Abbas, 2019, p. 58; Bravo López, 2011; Lauwers, 2019). Islamophobia reflects the complexities of human relationships that affect Muslim communities in Western communities in myriad ways.

The growing diversity in Western societies, resulting from various waves of immigration over the last century, has increased racial, ethnic, and religious diversity in schools (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013). The complex relationships arising from this heterogeneity within educational settings complicate the lives of students. Given the rise in Islamophobia in these societies, Muslim students are particularly impacted negatively. Unpacking the complexities related to racism and Islamophobia in schools is thus crucial for improving current educational approaches to integrate Muslim students as valuable and productive

members of their learning communities. This article tackles this “messiness” by examining the constructs of racism and Islamophobia while proposing various pedagogical approaches to addressing these issues in schools.

Our study had the following objectives:

- 1) to understand racism and explore its various conceptual forms
- 2) to explain Islamophobia and its various forms
- 3) to analyze anti-racism education and its characteristics, and examine how it informs anti-Islamophobia education
- 4) to propose pedagogical approaches that can be effectively used to challenge Islamophobia

In this paper, we first discuss the intricacies of racism and its various forms. Next, we explain the concept of Islamophobia and its different manifestations in the West. Then, we elaborate on anti-racism education and present different pedagogical approaches to addressing racism and Islamophobia in classrooms.

Methodology

We reviewed the relevant literature by searching for literature on racism and different forms of racism. We used databases available in the McGill University library, such as ProQuest, ERIC, EBSCO, DOAJ, Taylor & Francis, WorldCat, CRKN, Springer, and Google Scholar. We used the following key search terms individually and in different combinations: racism; systemic racism; structural racism; conscious, unconscious, and dysconscious racism; colorblind racism; Islamophobia; anti-racism education; anti-racism pedagogy; anti-Islamophobia education; anti-Islamophobia pedagogy; challenging racism; and challenging Islamophobia. A large number of articles, books, and book chapters came up during our initial search using these key terms. We narrowed our search to select 61 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. The selection criteria included the themes that were relevant to the objectives of this article (23 about racism, 14 about Islamophobia and Islamophobia as a form of racism, and 24 about pedagogical approaches).

Qualitative content analysis strategies were employed to analyze and synthesize the literature. Specifically, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify the overarching themes in this paper. During the analysis process, the salient concepts in these articles were identified in relation to the objectives of this literature analysis. For example, the conceptual foundations of racism and Islamophobia, and their various forms, were explored, as well as various pedagogical approaches offered in the literature to address these issues in the context of secondary education. Similar concepts were grouped into broader themes discussed in this paper. Furthermore, key arguments emerging from the selected articles, relevant to the objectives of this paper, were analyzed and synthesized. The conceptual framework of this paper was informed by the first author’s experience of teaching against Islamophobia in his English as a Second Language class and the second author’s scholarly research about Islamophobia.

What is Racism?

Although physical differences do not qualify distinctions into biological races, the social construct of race remains prevalent in human societies, with racism serving as a means of discrimination, belying scientific evidence against the concept of race (NHGRI, 2018; Sussman, 2014). Racism is a systemic (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; 2021), institutional (Faucher, 2017), and structural ideology (Erick, 2022; Faucher, 2017) that consciously, unconsciously (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Faucher, 2017), and dysconsciously (King, 2015) targets racial, cultural, religious, and/or gender identities (Grosfoguel, 2016; Moran, 2023) to produce hierarchies that favor certain groups and discriminate against other groups (DiAngelo, 2016; Faucher, 2017). Racism remains a significant challenge to the principles of equity and equality, which are foundational to Western democratic values. It is an ideology rooted in negative and inherited beliefs about other racial and/or ethnic groups (Banton, 2018; Faucher, 2017). Racial practices are systemically entrenched in individual and societal practices that challenge any attempt to create an inclusive society.

Racism has three dimensions: individual, societal, and global. Individual racism is represented by individuals' racial practices against "Others" that are based on inherited hate, hostility, and/or negative stereotypes about another individual who is different from the in-group (Faucher, 2017; Urquidez, 2020). Societal practices are a manifestation of systemic racism that targets other racial, cultural, religious, and/or gender groups through the implicit and explicit practices and policies guaranteeing the superiority of one group and the inferiority and exclusion of other groups. In general, racism is the ideological practices that are based on negative inherited stereotypes to target others and produce hierarchies within society (Lynch et al., 2017; Moran, 2023). The global aspect of racism can be seen in colonialism, which includes various racial aspects (Go, 2004). This is clarified in Said's (1994) concept of *Orientalism*, which refers to the Western perception of the East. In contrast to the West, which Said refers to as "the Occident," Said's Others represent uncivilized, inferior, exotic, unknowledgeable, and irrational people who need the Occident to lead and govern them. This notion demonstrates the alleged racial superiority of the Occident or Europeanness over Orientals or non-Europeans and legitimizes the Europeans' colonization of Others to civilize them. Thus, colonizers justify their actions, which involve brutal enslavement, re-education, controlling their resources, and managing the production of knowledge to avoid any potential resistance (Said, 1994).

Racism is usually conceptualized from a white/nonwhite perspective, which is mainly based on a Western point of view (Duany, 2016; Pressgrove, 2013). However, it is crucial to extend the concept of racism to include other binaries based on religions, ethnicities, etc. and not limit it solely to the white/nonwhite binary to understand various manifestations of racial discrimination. Developing our thinking about various forms and factors contributing to racism will result in broadening our understanding to consider factors beyond race alone. As such, racism is an ideology that not only pertains to race but also encompasses other forms of exclusion, leading to hierarchies, inequality, and inferiority. It can take many forms, which are discussed in the next section.

Different Forms of Racism

Racism manifests through conscious, unconscious, and dysconscious policies and practices that perpetuate inequality, creating hierarchies that privilege certain groups over others based on class, race, and culture (DiAngelo, 2016; Faucher, 2017). Faucher (2017) differentiates between four forms of racism: “classic” (p. 408), “aversive” (p. 410), “colour blindness” (p. 409), and “structural” (p. 410) racism. Classic racism refers to overt, explicit, conscious forms of racial discrimination justified through pseudoscientific theories that were common in the 19th to the early 20th century. There are two types of classic racism: “closet” and “tolerant” (Faucher, 2017, p. 408; Ikuenobe, 2011, p. 171). Closet racism means harboring racist feelings privately without openly expressing them due to strong external motivations, such as strict anti-racism policies. On the other hand, tolerant racism means holding racist beliefs and occasionally expressing them while coexisting with other racialized groups because these groups are perceived as not having a considerable impact on society. Furthermore, classic racism was employed as a tool to justify colonization, where European powers occupied and exploited non-European territories, considering the people there as the “Others” who were inferior, uncivilized, and opposite to the civilized Western people (Said, 1994).

Aversive racism refers to hidden racial practices against other racial groups (Atkin, 2014, p. 117; Faucher, 2017). It is divided into two subcategories: “less-than-conscious racism” and “unconscious racism” (Faucher, 2017, p. 409). The less-than-conscious racism involves people who might be unaware of their racial practices or have “false consciousness” (p. 410) and advocate for a post-racial era. However, their racial practices become visible when their social status is threatened or challenged (Faucher, 2017). Furthermore, they often do not perceive their racial practices as racism, which leads to more discriminatory practices. On the other hand, unconscious racism is based on inherited and unconscious beliefs individuals may have and unconsciously influence them to stimulate racial prejudice without any intention to hurt other people (Faucher, 2017). Also, unconscious racism is influenced by the culture that prefers one group of people over other groups, which is influenced by stereotypes and specific misconceptions about other racial groups. Furthermore, any complaint about racism is frequently reframed as an act of racism itself, placing the responsibility on minorities for its existence. Understanding aversive racism is crucial to examining systemic racism and analyzing embedded racial practices within society against various ethnic, gender, and religious communities.

Color-blind racism has emerged as a prevailing racial ideology and a set of practices that maintain racial inequalities against people of color and other racial minorities (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Faucher, 2017; Moran, 2023). It perpetuates these inequalities by leaving such practices unchallenged under the false pretext of blaming victims for their circumstances (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Furthermore, Whites, under the pretext of color-blind policies, deny the existence of systemic racism. For them, the victims should work harder to overcome their difficult situations. It argues that white individuals interact with other people based on their individual traits and skills rather than on a racial basis to maintain prevalent racial policies and rules. Color-blind racism provides room for individuals to move from explicitly expressing their racial comments and practices to performing their racial practices implicitly. Therefore, color blindness

rationalizes inequality and perpetuates racial practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). As such, it becomes a tool to contextualize systemic and institutional racism through hidden, unconscious, and structured practices within institutions (Moran, 2023; Doane, 2017). Also, color blindness frames diversity as a focus on individual differences rather than examining the broader context of this diversity, which does not challenge systemic/institutional racial practices (Doane, 2006, 2017).

Systemic racism refers to the entrenched discrimination that occurs within the policies, practices, and cultural norms of institutions and societal structures, which perpetuate racial inequalities and discrimination against certain racial groups (Banaji et al., 2021; Faucher, 2017). It manifests through unequal access to resources, opportunities, and services based on racial profiling, affecting various aspects of an individual's life. In other words, the system is designed to formulate policies that favor one group of people and marginalize others. This impacts the entire societal structure and influences individuals' behaviors and racial perceptions, both consciously and unconsciously. Furthermore, systemic racism is based on the combination of institutional, societal, and individual practices that together permeate inequality and racial hierarchy within the society (Banaji et al., 2021). Also, systemic racism should not be attributed to individual practices, as this overlooks the other factors that contribute to creating a discriminatory system. Additionally, it is crucial to understand the smaller practices of systemic racism to comprehend the broader concept. In other words, individual racial practices are inspired by broader social norms that either follow the institutional rules or are impacted by inherited stereotypes. Together, these elements create a system that discriminates against other racial and cultural groups.

The concept of *dysconscious racism* is also useful in understanding how racism manifests itself in societal practices. King (2015) defines dysconscious racism as:

A form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race as compared to, for example, critical consciousness. (p. 113)

In other words, it is an uncritical acceptance of racism that is based on a superficial understanding of racial practices, which results in not recognizing these practices. Therefore, individuals avoid challenging the root cause of racial practices, which leads to maintaining them as norms rather than recognizing them as forms of racism. Also, understanding dysconscious racism helps in challenging the conventional ways of conceptualizing racism (socially, structurally, and individually). It should be based on ideological thinking that moves beyond a superficial understanding of racial practices to investigate the roots of racism.

Scholars argue that dysconscious racism is a result of "White miseducation" that maintains misconceptions and societal prejudice (Anderson et al., 2018, p. 6; King, 2015). Furthermore, not only does it fail to create a space for a positive change, but it also justifies racial inequality to perpetuate the status quo by uncritically accepting racial societal norms introduced in textbooks. King (2015) explains that dysconscious racism manifests in three categories: (1) historical determinism linked to slavery, (2) systemic issues like poverty, and (3) macrosocial understandings of racial inequity. Dysconscious racism based on these categories leads to miseducating students, preventing them from critically

engaging with complex issues involving discrimination against various racial, ethnic and religious groups. Furthermore, it leads to restraining students' awareness of the historical context of racial societal norms (Anderson et al., 2019; Ginther, 2015; King, 2015). In the next section, we will discuss Islamophobia as a form of racism (Gholami, 2021; Love, 2017).

What is Islamophobia?

Incidents of racial violence and hate speech towards Muslims in North America have intensified since 9/11. Negative views of Muslims and Islam are common in Western countries, and they are seen as an out-group who do not belong to the West (Helbling, 2012; Kalkan et al., 2009; Verkuyten et al., 2014). Moreover, they are seen as a different religious and cultural group as "Muslims' religious beliefs and practices, cultural orientations, and ethnicities have long made them different in key ways from the Judeo-Christian mainstream" (Kalkan et al. 2009, p. 1). This perspective fuels Islamophobic discourse, which perpetuates harmful stereotypes and misrepresentations of Muslims and Islam as antithetical to Western values while influencing societal narratives, legal frameworks, and institutional biases (Beydoun, 2018; Housee, 2012; Kozaric, 2024). Consequently, Islamophobia is far from being a new form of prejudice. It deepens and sustains entrenched biases rooted in Orientalist ideology, portraying Muslims as a threat to Western civilization and as incompatible with secular states. Furthermore, Islamophobia is the belief that Islam is inherently violent, incompatible with the West, and linked to terrorism (Beydoun, 2018; Kozaric, 2024).

Beydoun (2018) differentiates among three forms of Islamophobia: private Islamophobia, institutional Islamophobia, and dialectical Islamophobia. Private Islamophobia is characterized by violence directed against Muslims or those perceived as Muslims by individuals and/or non-formal institutions. Institutional Islamophobia refers to the systemic discrimination against Muslims or those who are perceived as Muslims through government laws, policies, and practices that portray Muslims as a threat to national security. It leads to reinforcing prevalent stereotypes and legitimizing the marginalization of Muslims, fostering suspicion and enabling both societal and individual discrimination. Dialectical Islamophobia examines how institutional Islamophobia provokes private Islamophobic practices. In other words, it refers to the influence that state policies exert to demonize and dehumanize Muslims, which consequently intensifies individual hatred and violent actions against Muslims, placing them in an ongoing cycle of suspicion.

Many scholars advocate for addressing racism, including Islamophobia, starting in schools. As such, a number of studies have explored the ways this can be done in our schools (Arneback & Jämte, 2022; Zaidi, 2017; Zine, 2004) to effectively challenge racism. The next section examines anti-racism education.

Anti-Racism and Anti-Islamophobia Education

Unlike multicultural education, which talks about celebrating diversity in different cultures without challenging the status quo or examining the roots of racial discrimination (Housee, 2012; King, 2022), anti-racism education focuses on addressing inequities and inequalities within a society, which manifest in conflicts of power among different groups through individual and institutional practices (Dei & McDermott, 2014). Therefore, anti-racism education aims to deconstruct and challenge racial discrimination within a society by not only correcting the misreading of other racial groups but also re-examining the way race and racism are formed within society (Thompson, 1997). Notably, anti-racism education delves deeper to examine the roots of these racial practices that are entrenched in societal norms on individual, structural, and institutional levels (Lynch et al., 2017). It values the voices of marginalized people by creating a space for them to tell their stories, talk about their lived experiences, and engage in counter-storytelling against prevalent misconceptions about them.

Teel (2014) argues that anti-racism education is a form of “social justice pedagogy ... [that] emphasize[s] the urgency of social justice concerns in addition to appreciating the value of diversity” through multicultural education approaches (p. 5). It also addresses racial injustice through developing an inclusive pedagogy that fosters teachers’ agency (Pantić & Florian, 2015). Within the framework of anti-racism education, educators can create a space for students to critically challenge the dominant paradigms in their society that are based on race, class, gender, and religion through celebrating the differences among groups (Dei & McDermott, 2014). It turns educational institutions into spaces that empower students to critically examine the dominant discourse of power within society. It resembles Freire’s (2018) construct of “conscientizaça” (conscientization), which aims to educate the powerless about their rights and the powerful about their discriminatory practices (p. 35). Furthermore, anti-racism education provides a valuable tool for understanding oppression entrenched within societal practices (Deckers, 2014; Simpson, 2006). Also, it creates a space where students can critically understand racial inequity, talk about their experiences, and suggest possible solutions to overcome it (Deckers, 2014).

Muslim students in the West have reported experiences of biased treatment, prejudice, and racism (Abu Khalaf et al., 2023; Bakali, 2016; Halabi, 2021). These experiences impact their emotional well-being, academic achievement, and their ability to integrate into society. They feel marginalized in schools because there are no spaces for them to talk about these issues. At the same time, the majority of teachers tend to avoid topics related to Islamophobia, largely because they have no experience engaging with topics related to anti-racism and Islamophobia (Amjad, 2018; Niyozov & Pluim, 2009; Stonebanks, 2008; Zaidi, 2017). Hence, educational institutions have a moral obligation to include Muslim cultures in their curricula and to develop appropriate pedagogical resources that support Muslim students in dealing with these challenges. Scholars suggest that a fruitful discussion with students about their religious experiences and practices helps deconstruct and challenge negative and preconceived notions that stigmatize what are seen as Other religious groups, thereby creating a safe space for students to talk about their religious identities (Bakali, 2016; Zaidi, 2017).

Drawing on the concept of anti-racism education, anti-Islamophobia education can be defined as pedagogical efforts to address the conscious, unconscious, and dysconscious racial practices against Muslims and those who are perceived as Muslims. It aims to dismantle stereotypes based on negative perceptions of Islam as a religion or Muslims as a religious or cultural group. Furthermore, a critical examination of social inequalities and injustices experienced by Muslims is an essential feature of this pedagogy (Flynn & Marotta, 2021; Gholami, 2021; Housee, 2012). Notably, anti-Islamophobia education is a transformative approach (Zine, 2004) that is based on students' voices, lived experiences, and "ways of knowing" (Stonebanks, 2008, p. 2).

Pedagogical Approaches to Confront Islamophobia in High Schools

The relevant literature mainly tends to focus on anti-racism and anti-Islamophobia education in higher education settings. Alarming, very few studies have examined these educational approaches in schools (Lynch et al., 2017). It is important to recognize that these spaces struggle to incorporate anti-racism topics into their curricula (Heafner & Plaisance, 2016; Stonebanks, 2008), particularly those related to Islam and Muslims (Zaidi, 2017). Teachers often avoid these topics because of a lack of experience and training in these areas (Hossain, 2017; Stonebanks, 2008).

It takes enormous courage, confidence, and ongoing commitment to confront racism in the classroom, as it involves a substantial shift in one's pedagogical approach and practices to address the evolving dynamics of race and privilege (King, 2022; Thompson, 1997). Confronting Islamophobia in school is particularly important to improve our current educational approaches. Teachers' practice is not confined to their classrooms only and needs to extend beyond the classroom (Lynch et al., 2017) to educate students about prevailing racial practices and create a positive impact on society. Below, we share some pedagogical approaches that could be adapted and employed to address Islamophobia, offering ways to navigate the reciprocities of confronting racism and Islamophobia in the classroom. Our goal is to provide examples to support educators in their pedagogical practices that address the messiness and the complexities of racism and Islamophobia.

Since mainstream and social media have been used as tools to propagate stereotypes and misconceptions that provoke Islamophobia in the West (Housee, 2012; Zaal, 2012), critical media literacy can empower students to critically analyze "media bias" (Garcia et al., 2013; Hossain, 2017). As such, critical media literacy can effectively stimulate students' critical reflections (King, 2022) on the information disseminated through various media platforms and how it shapes conscious, unconscious, and dysconscious racism. Teachers can also have students assess the portrayal of Muslims versus non-Muslims in the media. Furthermore, they may use real-life Islamophobic incidents reported in the media to "visibilize [conscious and unconscious] systemic racism" and develop their students' empathy toward their Muslim peers (Lynch et al., 2017, p. 135). These activities will enable students to recognize and understand the biased representations of Muslims and Islam in the ongoing discourse across various media sources.

During the first author's experience as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in Canada, he introduced an activity to the students where a student would choose a news story to present and discuss with their peers in class. This activity encouraged the students to analyze the language of the story and critically discuss it within the classroom. It happened that some students chose to discuss topics related to Bill 21 in Quebec (An Act respecting the laicity of the State, 2019) and the Quebec Mosque shooting. The students were encouraged to assess any biases in the news and interpret them in light of conscious and unconscious discriminatory and unjust practices in their community. At the same time, this activity helped them read news from different media sources, discover their peers' perspectives, and understand them through multiple perspectives. It created a rich dialogical learning approach within the classroom that helped the students read the news critically. Also, it introduced a space for the students to better understand their classmates' cultures and values. At the same time, it enabled the teacher to learn about students' perspectives and identify the misconceptions embedded in them to develop appropriate pedagogical strategies to further address them in a sensitive manner. This experience of using critical media literacy in the secondary classroom encouraged the author to delve deeper into this and other practical pedagogical tools for use in K–12 education to address racism and Islamophobia. Below, we present additional pedagogical approaches that can be adapted and implemented in secondary classrooms to address these issues.

Arneback and Jämte (2022) explored 27 Swedish high school teachers' anti-racism education approaches. One of the approaches they found was the *relational actions* (p. 204) approach, which seems to be appropriate to challenge Islamophobia in high school classrooms. The relational actions pedagogy "emphasize[s] the need to foster strong positive relations with and among ... students, characterized by care, respect and solidarity" (Arneback & Jämte, 2022, p. 204). The vital character of the relational actions approach entails building positive relationships with and among students. Building such relationships begins with treating students with respect, valuing who they are, and creating a sense of belonging within the school. Another important aspect is recognizing and celebrating students' cultures, which helps to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. These actions are indeed vital for cultivating a classroom community where students feel valued, engaged, and motivated to learn. Furthermore, recognizing and valuing students' cultural backgrounds in the classroom can help develop their self-esteem and foster a positive sense of belonging. Drawing on this approach, teachers can engage in respectful and candid dialogues with their students about each other's cultures. These dialogues would contribute toward building a better understanding of diverse cultures among students as they discover new aspects of different cultures and dismantle preconceived stereotypes. Additionally, valuing students' cultural experiences can help overcome different forms of racial practices on an individual level. At the same time, it can inspire those who harbor and express racial biases to explore other students' cultural histories, traditions, and values (Arneback & Jämte, 2022). For example, rich discussions based on students' interests about different subjects, such as history, geography, and languages, can be a useful starting point for introducing students to new ideas about other cultures.

The second point of building a positive relationship is recognizing and appreciating students' contributions to classroom activities. At the same time, a sense of empathy and solidarity can be developed among students by learning about each other's lived experiences. This approach can promote empathy and recognition of racial advantage (King, 2022). In addition to stressing the need for positive relationships in the classroom, the relational actions approach challenges "problematic socialization" (p. 204), which stems from harmful social interactions, resulting in social isolation and "a lack of trust in society" (p. 204). Problematic socialization may lead to racial discrimination due to isolation from society. Relational action pedagogy can be used as an effective tool to challenge racialized discriminatory practices. It is not only based on building a positive relationship with students, but it also calls for recognizing students' emotional needs (Arneback & Jämte, 2022; Mattsson & Johansson, 2020). Encouraging students to learn about each other's strengths, talents, and creative accomplishments would benefit students who feel marginalized, isolated, misunderstood, and victimized. In this way, teachers can gain the trust of students who are victims of racial discrimination. Developing students' empathy for each other can promote healthy relationships and coexistence. Also, recognizing privilege is helpful based on Freire's concept of conscientization, which can help the oppressors learn about their discriminatory and oppressive actions.

"Culturally sustaining pedagogy" (CSP) (Cole-Malott & Samuels, 2022; Paris, 2012; Zaidi, 2017, p. 63) also focuses on cultural sensitivity, responsiveness, and sustainable diversity in educational settings. It underscores the importance of developing a pluralistic and diverse classroom where students can celebrate their cultural, racial, and linguistic identity/ies. CSP is a reaction to the "deficit approach" in education (Paris, 2012), which views students' different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as something that should be kept away from the classroom and dominated by the majority language and culture. Therefore, CSP advocates moving from monolingual and monocultural to multilingual and multicultural education to address inequalities and promote social justice in education settings. In other words, it requires moving away from a monocultural curriculum and creating an inclusive curriculum that embraces diverse cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021; Paris, 2012; Prasad, 2015).

Alternatively, "cultural[ly] relevant pedagogy" (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 465) is another approach that not only aims to embrace multilingual and multicultural classrooms but also confronts prevailing power dynamics and investigates the roots of racial inequality. CRP enriches the curriculum with marginalized students' voices, which can help build cultural bridges among students from various cultural backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021; Paris, 2012). Importantly, CRP aims to embrace cultural differences and develop students' critical consciousness. Critical consciousness "describes how oppressed or marginalized people learn to critically analyze their social conditions and act to change them" (Watts et al., 2011, p. 44). Critical consciousness can help students critically analyze individual or systematic biased practices and uncover the roots of racism in them. It can empower marginalized students by helping them celebrate their identities and make their voices heard (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2021).

Zaidi (2017) also proposed incorporating topics that challenge stereotypical narratives about Islam and Muslims, as well as including current issues related to Islamophobia, to diversify their curricula. These diverse perspectives within the classroom create an intercultural discourse focusing on a critical

examination of an issue from multiple aspects. This can also be an effective way to encourage students to critically re-examine issues they may not have found problematic and uncover their unconscious and dysconscious racial conceptions. Zaidi also suggested different ways to incorporate anti-Islamophobic topics into the curriculum. For example, creating a curriculum that uses music as a bridge, such as Karl Wolf's music, which blends Western and Middle Eastern music, can promote cultural understanding. The "Muslim Awareness Week" initiative could also be another activity that helps deconstruct stereotypes about Muslims and Islam (Zaidi, 2017, p. 64).

Furthermore, Zaidi (2017) emphasizes that it is vital to combat Islamophobia by comprehensively reviewing the curriculum and policies to address the evolution of multicultural societies in the West. Therefore, teacher education programs need to focus on preparing teachers to critically engage with racial and social justice topics. Teachers' practices are not limited to their classrooms. It is crucial that teachers gain knowledge of the social and political milieu that creates power structures, which in turn (re)produce racial hierarchies, so they can critically interrogate racial and social justice topics in the classroom. Therefore, teachers' education programs should not only prepare teachers to challenge racism within their classrooms but also extend their efforts beyond their classrooms to challenge racial practices and positively impact society (Pantić & Florian, 2015).

Conclusion

The relevant literature primarily addresses anti-Islamophobia education in higher education settings. This article specifically focuses on ways to confront and teach about Islamophobia in K–12 settings. We have discussed four pedagogical approaches to challenge Islamophobia in the classroom: critical media literacy, relational actions, culturally sustainable pedagogy, and culturally relevant pedagogy. These instructional strategies aim to develop students' political and social awareness (Ghosh & Abdi, 2013) and equip them with the requisite knowledge and skills that they will collaboratively construct to better understand the negative aspects of Islamophobia by connecting it to broader racial frameworks in society (Housee, 2012). Thus, it is vital to integrate anti-Islamophobia pedagogy into the curriculum to evaluate and confront conscious, unconscious, and dysconscious Islamophobic practices.

This analysis has led to significant questions and directions for future research in this area. It is important to explore secondary teachers' perceptions of and experiences with these issues. What obstacles do they face, and how can they be supported in addressing racism and Islamophobia upfront in their classrooms? Furthermore, empirical studies with K–12 students will help illuminate their authentic voices, experiences, and responses to such pedagogical interventions in the classroom.

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