Niqab and Religious Identity: The Perspectives and Motives of Niqab Utilization among Female Students in UNKAFA, Gresik

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Abstract

The use of niqab in educational realm consistently evokes controversy and leads to ongoing debates nationally and internationally. Furthermore, the use of niqab in educational settings can lead to the possible emergence of the negative stereotype and stigma. Several previous studies concluded that understanding the motives and perspective behind the niqab use is crucial for minimizing the appearance of such stigma. This study holds significant interest as it will involve in-depth exploration of the niqabi student's perspectives, examining their motives and the formation of their religious identity within this specific institutional context. Using qualitative research method, this study explored 20 female students from UNKAFA, Gresik. The result of study revealed that among UNKAFA female students, there are two primary religious perspectives on niqab: permissible and Sunnah. Regarding the meaning of the niqab among these students, at least five primary interpretations emerged: submissive attitude toward the university, religious expression, manifestation of self-identity, tool for enhancing confidence, and fashion expression. Concerning the motives, there are at least two main types those are social and individual motives. This research also concludes that the majority of informants stated that the niqab is not a manifestation of their religious identity, but it is merely a submissive attitude toward campus policy. The finding also indicated that textual practices mediated by an appropriate authority are capable of vitalizing Qur'anic values and reinforcing the effort toward the living qur'an within student's daily lives at pesantren-based university. This study academically contributes to enriching the specific practice of living qur'an inside pesantren-based university, individual religious perspectives, motives, and multifaceted meanings attributed to the niqab and highlights the complex interplay of social influences, personal beliefs, and construction of religious identity.

Keywords: Niqab, Religious Identity, Motive, Experience, Female University Student

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INTRODUCTION

The use of face-veiling (niqab) within public sphere and educational institutions remains a perennially contentious topic, provoking debates both within and beyond national borders. In public sphere, several European countries like UK, Spain, Denmark, France, Austria, and Belgium implemented a ban on wearing of the face-veiling because it is perceived as a symbol of patriarchal oppression and religious radicalization (Zempi, 2019; Yeste, et.al, 2020; Hancock & Mobillion, 2019). Other countries like Egypt and Indonesia do not implement a ban for their female citizen on wearing the veil in public sphere (Qibtiyah, et. al., 2023). These two sides of arguments proved that face-veiling is debatable topic giving rise to two different opinions in each country. If a kind of regulation can be issued by a supreme authority of a state, it also can be enacted within smaller institutions inside the state such as the educational realm.

In educational realm and within the context of Indonesia, several higher education institutions have imposed a ban on the utilization of niqab on campus. The reason for these bans are varies including efforts to preserve a conducive academic climate, concern over anti-pancasila ideologies, and its disruptive characteristic toward teaching and learning process (Kurniawan, 2018). On the other hand, niqab-wearing students within higher education often face various stereotypes and prejudices from both peers and surrounding community (Alim & Azani, 2024; Kistoro et al., 2020; Pasa & Yaqin, 2024). Consequently, the ban on niqab can be seen as a protective effort issued by higher education aimed at reducing such stereotype and prejudice.

Responding to several reasons of niqab prohibition aforementioned, a number of arguments used to justify the prohibition in fact are resisted by several academic researchers. The reason for the association between niqab and anti-Pancasila ideology have been critically examined with studies indicating no inherent correlation between niqab and nationalism, radicalism or anti-Pancasila ideologies (Dzuhayatin, 2020; Kistoro et al., 2020; Kumaini et al., 2024; Pirol & Aswan, 2021). Regarding stereotypes and prejudices, comprehensive

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understanding combined with niqabi students' efforts to engage in open and friendly interactions can contribute significantly to the reduction of negative stereotypes (Pirol & Aswan, 2021; Samsu et al., 2025). These academic researchers seemingly take a stance against the prohibition of niqab utilization in higher education due to their findings. Among the aforementioned reasons, there are at least other two factors requiring further exploration, whether niqab utilization may reduce the conduciveness of academic climate or disrupt the teaching and learning process.

In fact, Niqab utilization in campus environment did not directly related to religiosity but sometimes affected academic performances and achievements. Several studies indicated niqabi women may face several challenges in achieving academic success (Alim & Azani, 2024; Pasa & Yaqin, 2024), while other studies suggested that it can actually strenghthen academic performances (Kistoro et al., 2020; Samsu et al., 2025). On the other hand, It is widely believed that niqab did not significantly impact the religiosity of female students in campus (Falikah et al., 2022; Rohmaniyah et al., 2022; Safitri, 2022). The use of niqab, therefore, is sometimes either a hindrance or a support. Many studies have indeed revealed that niqab is comprehensively coming from highly subjective individual motives. From these subjective motivations, examining student's motive for niqab wearing from their own perspectives becomes a crucial and ongoing area of study.

Based on previous researches on individual motives for niqab utilization several key reasons are suggested, including niqab as a symbol of individual piety (Ahmad et al., 2021; Kumaini et al., 2024), a medium for da'wah (Safitri, 2022; Suud & Chaer, 2022), a means of self-protection (Suhendi & Wahyudi, 2023), and a form of fashion expression (Nadjib, 2020; Piela, 2021; Puteri, 2022; Setyawan & David, 2021). The niqab is often regarded as a symbol of piety due to the belief that it is a part of religious teachings. However, some individuals contend that a symbol of piety is not only a niqab, but also common Muslimah fashion covering aurat (Rohmawati, 2020). Furthermore, the niqab is considered a medium for da'wah because wearing it, individuals are believed to encourage themselves to be better persons. Conversely, niqab is also viewed as a means of self-protection from other's disturbance while socializing within society. Lastly, niqab functions as a form of fashion expression, given the variety of updated niqab styles prevalent in current modern world. Based on the previous

individual motives, the motives of female students in Universitas Kiai Abdullah Faqih (UNKAFA) are affected by policy issued by campus regarding the use of Niqab. Therefore, the individual motives influenced by several other motives around that individual can be more interesting to be analyzed.

Universitas Kiai Abdullah Faqih (UNKAFA) issued an obligation of niqab wearing for all female students in campus environment. Based on early observation held by the author, this institutional policy was intended to foster both religiosity and academic success among its students. As the university has designated itself as a pesantren-based campus, the reinforcement of religious identity among female students is considered crucial. Consequently, this policy was ultimately issued. However, existing literature indicated two different perspectives; while some studies suggested supportive factor of niqab toward academic achievement, some others stated that there is no correlation between niqab wearing and religiosity. Therefore, this study holds significant interest as it will involve in-depth exploration of the niqabi students' perspectives, examining their motives and the formation of their religious identity within this specific institutional context. This study also will also correlate the motives behind the policy of stakeholders with the motives of individual students regarding their niqab wearing as well as the correlation of it and religious identity. Establishing these connections between these two sets of motives is crucial for achieving the shared objectives.

This study of religious identity will specifically relate to the theory of identity stated by several sociologists such as Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley. As Mead's theory stated, identity is a product of social interaction and developed through undergoing interaction with others (Mead, 2015; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018; Yahya & Rosi, 2023). Through undergoing interaction with other students using Niqab and due to university's policy regarding niqab wearing, identity ideally develops and is constructed. By this universal identity theory, religious identity as a part of identities should also be developed through continuous interaction with other niqabis. If the theoretical frameworks posited by Mead aforementioned are not empirically supported, another concept of self should provide a reinforcing analysis. This concept would assert that each individual's self concept is inherently shaped by the interplay between the "I" and the "Me" (Mead, 2015). On the other hand, Cooley's "looking-glass self" theory will underlie the analysis of university's perception on and female student's response to

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niqab wearing in campus environment. As Cooley stated that self-concept is often shaped by other's perception on individual (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018; Yahya & Rosi, 2023). These two identity theories will specifically function as analytical lenses to investigate the construction of religious identity among niqabi female students at UNKAFA, Gresik. By this background, comprehensive analysis of the meaning of niqab, the motives beyond its use, and its relevance to religious identity from student's perspectives will offer a significant contribution to Islamic higher edication in particular, and to other universities in general. The findings of this study are ultimately expected to contribute theoretically to the understanding of symbolic interactionism, specifically demonstrating how Mead's and Cooley's concept of self provides the impetus for an individual's action. This is exemplified by the "Me" -the social self constructed by external factor such us regulation, and the "I" -the more subjective individual action. On the other hand, while many studies address identity as a merely individual construction, this study uniquely explores the interaction between campus policy and regulation and individual motivation, as well as the consequences for the construction of religious identity. Furthermore, this study will investigate how the relevant verses concerning awrah and the niqab are actualized, practiced, and negotiated within specific context of the pesantren-based university. It is moving beyond mere the debatable legal discourse.

Using qualitative research, this research studies the motives beyond niqab wearing, the experiences with it regarding enjoyment and inconvenience, and its contribution to the construction and development of religious identity among female students at UNKAFA, Gresik. Qualitative research was selected due to its function to understand a phenomenon, an individual's perspective or experiences, and the surrounding social context (Denzin & Lincoln, 1996; Moleong, 2000). These explorations will be examined through in-depth interviews and observations. Interviews were conducted with 20 female students from UNKAFA, Gresik. Additionally, observations were carried out when female students were on campus, outside campus, and within the pesantren environment. The author asked the subjects on their comprehensive experiences regarding niqab utilization inside and outside campus. In order to analyze the result of interviews, researcher used Miles & Huberman's qualitative data analysis which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verifying (Miles et al., 2014). .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Qur'anic Perspective and Classical Fiqh Discourse on Face-Veiling (Niqab)

The Qur'an employs several terms concerning the concept of veiling, notably hijab, jilbab, and khimar (Ramadhan et al., 2025). From these foundational terms, two additional expressions—niqab and burqa—later emerge as specific forms of veiling developing through interpretive traditions. The appearance of niqab and burqa reflects diverse scholarly understandings regarding which parts of a woman's body must be covered. Some scholars hold that the face is among the parts to be veiled mandatorily, while others maintain that it is not mandatory (Begum, 2025; Hikmawati et al., 2021). The Qur'anic verses most frequently discussed in this regard include Surah al-Nur (24:31) and Surah al-Ahzab (33:59).

Surah al-Nur (24:31) instructs believing women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty. Although the verse does not explicitly mention the term "veil," it is widely interpreted as a directive encouraging modesty through appropriate dress. Similarly, Surah al-Ahzab (33:59) commands: "O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies." These verses collectively underscore the Qur'anic emphasis on modesty and the importance of preserving women's dignity. However, neither verse specifies the particular form or style of covering to be used. This textual openness has allowed diverse interpretations among Muslim jurists and communities across time and place (Chowdhury et al., 2017; Rohmah & Prawoto, 2020).

Within classical Islamic jurisprudence, the term niqab comes from Arabic, meaning a cloth or garment covering a woman's face. Discussions about the niqab are inseparable from the issue of the limits of a woman's aurat, specifically whether the face is part of aurat that must be covered. Differences in opinion among scholars on this matter demonstrate the breadth of ijtihad in understanding religious texts and social context surrounding them. The majority of scholars from the Hanafi, Maliki, some Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools of thought argue that a woman's face and palms are not considered aurat and therefore do not have to be covered.

Al-Marghinani from the Hanafi school of thought stated: "The entire body of a free woman is aurat except for her face and palms" (Al-Marghinani, 2008). A similar view was

expressed by al-Baji from the Maliki school of thought and Imam al-Nawawi from the Shafi'i school of thought (Al-Baji, 2009; Al-Nawawi, 2017), as well as Ibn Qudamah from the Hanbali school of thought (Qudamah, 1992). Majority views confirm that the law of covering the face is not mandatory, but is permissible as a form of caution or modesty. However, some other scholars from the Shafi'i school of thought argue the opposite, that the face is part of the aurat that must be covered in front of non-mahram men. Syarqawi, for example, states: "The aurat of women outside of prayer from the view of foreign men is their entire body, including the face and palms" (Al-Syarqawi, 1987). This difference shows that there are two main schools of thought in fiqh: one emphasizing openness as part of social welfare, and another emphasizing protection as a form of personal piety.

Meanwhile, in social contexts outside of worship, scholars from the four schools of thought provide varying legal details. Hanafi scholars, some Shafi'i scholars, and Hanbali scholars view the use of the veil as permissible, while Maliki scholars consider it makruh (disliked) because it is considered excessive in religion. Some Shafi'i scholars even consider it sunnah (recommended) or wajib (mandatory) in certain contexts (Rohmah & Prawoto, 2020). These differences show that the ruling on the veil is highly dependent on intention, social situation, and motive for wearing it. In the modern social context, the classical fiqh debate on the niqab needs to be read more broadly, taking into account the realities of society and the principles of maqāṣid al-syarī'ah. The diversity of opinions among scholars shows that Islam allows room for different expressions of religion, including in the way people dress. Therefore, the application of the law on the veil should not be coercive, but rather a personal choice of piety that is maintained within the framework of social tolerance. Moderate attitude and mutual respect for differences of opinion are keys to ensuring that religious diversity continues to reflect the value of raḥmatan lil-'ālamīn.

2. Student's Religious Perspective on Face-Veiling

Based on interview data, students at UNKAFA expressed two primary religious views regarding the use of niqab: permissible (Mubah) and Sunnah. The majority of students interviewed (75%) considered niqab permissible, while 15% viewed it as Sunnah. None of the students stated that the niqab is mandatory (wajib). These perspectives are slightly different from the majority of scholarly opinions categorizing at least three perspectives on niqab

utilization: mandatory (wajib), Sunnah, and permissible (Mubah) (Qibtiyah et al., 2023; Rasyid & Bukido, 2018; Setyawan & David, 2021). This data is also interesting because the majority of niqabis typically consider the niqab Sunnah (Kumaini et al., 2024). However, at UNKAFA, the predominant perspective among students on niqab is permissible (Mubah). This differing perspective directly influences students' behavior regarding niqab wearing off-campus and within their communities. Students believing that niqab is Sunnah tend to continue wearing it off-campus or in the external settings. Conversely, those considering it merely permissible are more likely to put it off when socializing off-campus or within society.

The two perspectives on niqab among female students reflected their awareness of the scholarly debate surrounding its status. Interestingly, these differing student opinions do not lead them to the internal debates among them. Instead, students' choices regarding niqab are based on their personal approach to religious practice. Informants indicated that the institution grants students autonomy in their private religious expression particularly once they return to their own communities. Furthermore, the university's requirement for niqab is not intended to standardize religious views (i.e., whether it is mandatory, Sunnah, or permissible) among students; rather it addresses an underlying institutional concern beyond the mere obligation of niqab.

The two perspectives revealed among females in UNKAFA concluded their understanding of debatable status of niqab wearing among religious scholars. In fact, these different opinions are not even a matter of debate among students with different perspectives. Student's perspective of face-veiling use is chosen based on their private choice on the way of performing their religion. The institution itself, according to the informants, gives the freedom of choices on their private attitude on religion off-campus especially after they are coming back to the society where they live in. Regarding the obligation of wearing face-veiling in university, it is not an effort to uniform the religious perspectives (it is Mandatory, Sunnah, or Permissible) among students, but there was another issue beyond this face-veiling obligation within institution.

The preceding data becomes particularly compelling because several informants revealed that their understanding of niqab as a debatable topic originated from their teahcers at the pesantren. These educators explicitly stated that, given the various law (hukm) on the niqab,

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students were granted the freedom to choose their specific choice while coming back to the society/home. The decision regarding the legal status of niqab was considered a private matter for the students, free from any interventions, including their teachers. An informant further elaborated, stating, "the asatidz (teachers) explained the various law on the niqab, but we, as students, were given the freedom to choose whichever status we preferred. However, specifically on-campus, this is not a matter of religious law, but rather a regulation established for the campus environment" (interview, NSD, 2024). This statement indicated that the different perspectives on religious law of niqab are indeed influenced by the social context prevailing within pesantren environment.

The data aforementioned further reveals that the pesantren where the informants studied is not solely doctrine-based; rather, it leans toward a modern pesantren model tending to offer freedom in choosing among various law alternatives. As is generally known, modern pesantrens are not also the centers for the creation of religious doctrines, but also for providing legally permissible religious options (Pasi et al., 2020). In fact, many pesantren currently adapt or integrate both traditional (salaf) and modern systems (Minarti & Isroani, 2022). Given these characteristics and models of pesantren, the emergence of diverse perspectives and differences is natural. This statement is further elucidated by one subject stating, "my friend and I never debated which niqab law is more correct because we were already aware of the various differing opinions" (interview, AAS, 2024). Such an approach, characteristic of a modern educational system, consequently mitigates prolonged discussions regarding these variances. As a result, individual choices are normalized, preventing them from instigating extended debates.

3. Student's Motives on Face-Veiling Use

The present section will explore various meanings associated with niqab and the reasons the students choose to wear niqab. Gaining insight into these meanings and motives is essential for comprehending their behavioral patterns concerning niqab, both within campus setting and in external environments

3.1. Meanings of Face-Veiling among Student's

Students at UNKAFA articulated five primary meanings of niqab: submissive attitude toward university, religious expression, self-identity, a tool of confidence, and fashion

expression. The predominant understanding among students is that niqab signifies a submissive attitude toward university. This meaning leads the students to view niqab just as a form of compliance with university regulations. Consequently, off-campus activity, the decision to continue wearing niqab is given back to individual preference, as the students are no longer bound by institutional regulations. Conversely, a minority of students interpret the niqab as a form of religious expression as an informant stated "this niqab is a part of my obedience to syari'a, I also believed that niqab can be a protector for a woman like me" (Interview, LI, 2024). In the same vein, another informant informed that it is a kind of self-identity. These two perspectives are observed among students considering niqab Sunnah rather than merely permissible. Students attributing this meaning tend to consistently wear the niqab both inside and outside the classroom, and they also indicated an intention to continue its use after their graduation.

An informant stated interesting thing; she stated that niqab offers significant benefits, such as enhancing self-confidence. When this was explored further, this informant stated, "for someone unattractive like me, wearing the niqab is more pleasant because of my 'ugliness' is not visible to others. Thus, it really makes me more confident" (Interview, EY, 2024). This statement proves that niqab can be cover the ugliness in the perspective of female students. Many informants also stated that the regulation issued by university is primarily intended to protect female students during interactions with the opposite sex. They noted that in the absence of male counterparts, such a regulation is not enforced. Therefore, the niqab policy is largely perceived as a form of institutional protection for its female students. Although a small proportion of informants also expressed that niqab is a form of fashion expression, this view was held by only a very small proportion of the interviewees. The data summary of female students at UNKAFA can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Meaning of Niqab Wearing among Female Students

No	Informant	Semester	Meaning
1	AAS	3rd Semester	Self-Protection
2	HKFA	5th Semester	a university regulation
3	AR	3rd Semester	Self-Protection
4	EY	5th Semester	Self-protection and a tool for enhancing confidence

No	Informant	Semester	Meaning
5	NS	7th Semester	A university regulation
6	NSD	5th Semester	Self-Protection and university regulation
7	SM	7th Semester	a university regulation
8	PDM	7th Semester	Self-protection on-campus
9	KN	7th Semester	Student's identity
10	AAU	7th Semester	a university regulation
11	MSo	3rd Semester	a university regulation
12	LVFR	3rd Semester	a university regulation
13	SH	3rd Semester	a fashion expression and no correlation with religiosity or attitude
14	ZK	3rd Semester	Self-protection
15	HNM	1st Semester	a university regulation
16	MSa	3rd Semester	Self-protection on-campus
17	FHL	7th Semester	Self-protection
18	LI	7th Semester	Self-protection and a form of obedience
19	IWK	7th Semester	a university regulation
20	KF	1st Semester	a university regulation

The table above indicated several different motives expressed by female students at UNKAFA, Gresik. Several studies concluded that there are at least three meanings of niqab in the perspective of users: self-protection, self-identity, and a form of obedience (Alim & Azani, 2024; Suhendi & Wahyudi, 2023; Zaenuri et al., 2020). Interestingly, numerous studies indicated a general consensus among niqabi women that the niqab has evolved significantly in term of contemporary fashion, thus viewing its use as a form of fashion expression (Dewi, 2019; Nadjib, 2020; Piela, 2021; Rohmawati, 2020). In contrast, the data from this particular study presents a divergence: only one informant or a minority identified the niqab solely as a fashion expression. This disparity can be attributed to the simple styles of niqab worn by UNKAFA students, different considerably from the more elaborated niqab styles often showcased on social media. The findings of this study, indicating that the motive among niqabi students is not solely based on self-protection or regulatory compliance, demonstrate the existence of disconfirming case in the exploration of Individual motives influencing their actions. The use of niqab as a form of fashion expression constitutes this disconfirming case,

proving that the niqab is not invariably associated merely with religious practice or individual piety.

These diverse meaning of niqab among female students at UNKAFA revealed the diverse individual experiences and interaction with others. In this regard, Blumer, a prominent social theorist, asserted that the meaning attributed to an object or situation can vary across individual, contingent upon their unique experiences, backgrounds, and interpretations of a given symbol (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2018; Yahya & Rosi, 2023). He continued that meaning has dynamic dimension depending on experiences faced by individual. Those meanings revealed by students also constructed by the experiences with the face-veiling wearing in responding the mandatory policy issued by the institution.

3.2. Social and Individual Motives on Face-Veiling Wearing

The mandate for female students in niqab wearing appears to be driven by at least two interconnected motives: Extrinsic and Intrinsic. Primarily, the extrinsic motives predominantly drive the decision to wear the niqab among students at UNKAFA. This means that students' choice to wear niqab is not merely driven by individual motive but also by external or social factors significantly influencing their decision. Several elements contribute to this extrinsic motivation, including a submissive attitude toward kyai's order, obedience to campus regulation, restricted social interaction, and obedience to parents. These motives exert considerable influence on the decision to wear niqab. Among these four elements, a submissive attitude toward kyai's orders and obedience to campus regulation are the motives most prevalently stated by female students. This finding indicated that deference to kyai still plays a significant role for students lived and studied in this pesantren-based campus. The figure of kyai maintains a pivotal position in shaping their student's attitudes. This finding also suggested that UNKAFA is a university rooted in pesantren, integrating both modern and traditional educational approaches. As the characteristic of salaf education, there is always a central figure, the kyai playing a crucial role.

The predominant role of extrinsic motives in the decision to wear niqab among UNKAFA students is further substantiated by informant testimonies. One informant explicitly stated, "from the beginning, when I decided to study here, I already knew that I, as a student,

must follow all the kyai's decisions. Because surely no decision made by the kyai will have a negative impact" (Interview, HKFA, 2024). This statement strongly reinforces the notion that the figure of Kyai holds a very central role at UNKAFA, reflecting the traditional authority found in pesantren with a salaf educational model. Conversely, another informant shared, "this campus already set rules about the niqab, so we as students must obey all regulations. I know that it is intended to reduce excessive interaction with the opposite sex, but if there were no such rules, I would not wear it" (Interview, NSD, 2024). This sentiment further supports the finding that the majority of female students at UNKAFA are primarily driven by the extrinsic factors. In addition to the elements aforementioned, obedience to parental directives and the desire to restrict excessive interaction when sharing classes with male students also emerge as significant external motives for the students.

The table below will conclude overall extrinsic and intrinsic motives as well as it purposes in the perspective of female students at UNKAFA regarding their decision to wear-niqab.

Table 2. Motives and Purposes of Niqab Wearing among Female Students

No	Informant	Motives	Purpose
1	AAS	Extrinsic Motive	Submissive attitude toward Kyai's order To focus on education without wondering interaction
2	HKFA	Extrinsic Motive	Submissive attitude toward Kyai's order Restricting interaction
3	AR	Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motive	Obedience to campus regulation Self-protection from slander
4	EY	Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motive	Submissive attitude toward Kyai's order Self-protection from slander More confidence in interacting with others
5	NS	Extrinsic Motive	Submissive attitude toward Kyai's order Restricting interaction

No	Informant	Motives	Purpose
6	NSD	Extrinsic Motive	Submissive attitude towards Kyai's order Restricting submissive interaction with the opposite sex
7	SM	Extrinsic Motive	Obedience to campus regulation Restricting submissive interaction
8	PDM	Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motive	Obedience to campus regulation Self-protection from slander Obeying parent
9	KN	Intrinsic Motive	Self-protection towards negative behavior Upholding dignity of Muslim woman
10	AAU	Extrinsic Motive	Obedience to campus regulation Restricting submissive interaction
11	MSo	Extrinsic Motive	Obeying Kyai Obeying parent
12	LVFR	Extrinsic Motive	Obedience to campus regulation Restricting submissive interaction
13	SH	Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motive	More confidence with niqab Obedience to campus regulation
14	ZK	Extrinsic Motive	Obedience to campus regulation
15	HNM	Extrinsic Motive	Obeying Kyai Obeying parent
16	MSa	Extrinsic Motive	Obedience to campus regulation
17	FHL	Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motive	Minimizing interaction with the opposite sex
18	LI	Intrinsic Motive	A means of worship

No	Informant	Motives	Purpose
			Self-protection from negative behavior
19	IWK	Extrinsic Motive	Obedience to campus regulation
20	KF	Extrinsic Motive	Obedience to campus regulation Minimizing interaction with the opposite sex

Source: Interview data analyzed by researcher

Beyond the extrinsic motives aforementioned, intrinsic motives also underpin the choice to wear the niqab among female students at UNKAFA. These intrinsic motives are rooted in the understanding of the niqab as a symbol of worshiping god and an effort to preserve the dignity of Muslim women. Such intrinsic motives have been articulated by one informant explained, "I believe that the law on niqab is Sunnah, so because it is Sunnah, I utilize it. It's not due to campus policy; rather, I see it as a Muslim woman's identity" (Interview, KN, 2024). This data indicates that the use of niqab consider as a recommended (sunnah) action. The overall finding of this study indicates that only two perspectives exist among UNKAFA students regarding niqab: sunnah (recommended) and mubah (permissible). Crucially, no data within this research suggested that the Islamic regulation on niqab wearing is wajib (mandatory) or makruh (disliked). This is demonstrated that the students adhere to the opinions of some Shafi'I and Hanafi scholars, with no one adapting the Maliki opinion which classified it as makruh (disliked). From the outset, this informant was convinced that the niqab represents a virtue for Muslim woman. Additionally, the niqab is also believed to be a means of self- protection against various disturbances both inside and outside campus.

The intrinsic motives for wearing niqab, driven by a desire for greater piety or personal improvement through religious observance, also appear to influence students' attitudes. This particular motive is representing an individual's pure religious choice. Consequently, for these students, wearing niqab is not merely an act of compliance but it is also an expression of their deeply effort in practicing religion by their own religious beliefs. This intrinsic motive, called an individual motive of wearing niqab, is a primary factor among minority of students at UNKAFA. This is aligned with Weber's perspective stating that several actions chosen by individuals are motivated by value they believe in. Weber also stated that value can be a driving

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factor to guide individual to act based on several values believed (Weber, 1947; Yahya & Rosi, 2023). The willingness to be a better person based on religious perspective in fact construct student's action in the use of niqab. Interestingly, these individual motives have typically been reported as more prevalent than social motives in several previous studies concerning niqab wearing (Ahmad et al., 2021; Kumaini et al., 2024; Suhendi & Wahyudi, 2023; Suud & Chaer, 2022). However, the finding of this study indicates that individual motives are not the primary driver for the majority of female students at UNKAFA.

While individual motives are primary focus for minority of UNKAFA female students, extrinsic motives are central for the majority. Extrinsic motives in this study are called social motives. This is because social motives are not solely shaped by individual choice but are also influenced by external or social factors. These factors can include campus policies, Kyai's teaching, and teachers', parents', or other influential figures' suggestion. Social motives frequently drive the decision to utilize the niqab among niqabis (Alim & Azani, 2024; Qibtiyah et al., 2023; Zaenuri et al., 2020). However, a key distinction in this research is the finding that social motives can sometimes influence individual option, rather than merely a response to external influences. In essence, the integration of social and individual motives contributes to an individual's behavioral action.

The distinction between individual and social motives aforementioned also sheds light of the comfort levels associated with niqab wearing. Interestingly, despite the majority of students attributing their niqab use to social motives, only 7% reported discomfort, while 21% expressed comfort. The remaining, and majority of UNKAFA students participated in this study indicated a neutral stance on comfort and discomfort. Interview data corroborated these findings. Even with the predominance of social motives, feeling of comfort or discomfort was not prevalent among the female students. This neutrality appears to stem from students' agreement with efforts to mitigate excessive interaction between males and females on-campus (Hanafiah et al., 2019), besides, niqab according to the informants also does not represent a form of marginalization for woman within campus environment as sometimes reported by niqabis elsewhere (Velayati, 2018). This study also declared that neither social nor individual motive significantly contributed to the comfort or discomfort experienced by niqabis.

4. Niqab and Religious Identity

4.1. Nqab is not My Religious Identity: Student's Voice

Religious identity is broadly defined as how individuals or groups comprehend and experience their religious belonging or affiliation (Werbner, 2010). More specifically, it is often understood as an individual's expression of religiosity, which can manifest through symbols or attire (Coşgel & Minkler, 2004; van der Noll et al., 2018). This identity is frequently correlated to religiosity in several academic literatures (Dollinger, 2001). Simply put, religion is believed to influence the formation of an individual's self-concept. Therefore, if identity is defined as an individual self-concept, then religious identity can be understood as an individual's self-concept derived from their perspective or understanding of religious teaching (Peek, 2005). Based on these several definitions of religious identity, this study endeavors to define religious identity as the self-concept of UNKAFA students, specifically based on their expression through the niqab wearing correlated to their understanding of religious teaching.

Based on the motives for the niqab wearing among UNKAFA students discussed in the previous chapter, it can be seen that niqab is not a manifestation of the students' religious affiliation as commonly defined in religious identity literature. Its use also does not stem a self-concept born out of a deep religious understanding of the niqab. Instead, it appears to be primarily a submissive attitude toward the university's policy. Furthermore, all informants concurred that wearing niqab is not a guarantee of a high level of religiosity of niqabis. According to them, niqab and religiosity are two distinct entities. Consequently, religiosity cannot be correlated to the niqab wearing in this context (Falikah et al., 2022; Pasa & Yaqin, 2024; Rohmaniyah et al., 2022; Safitri, 2022). In fact, religiosity can be correlated to the Muslim fashion covering aurat only (Rohmawati, 2020). Regarding minority of female students interpreting niqab as Muslim identity, this stems from the self-concept she has formed in understanding the religious law of niqab.

When individuals perceive the niqab as an act of obedience to her religion or faith, she can genuinely identify it as part of her religious identity. As previously mentioned, identity is a self-concept constructed by each individual, so the variation in this concept from one to another is entirely permissible in discussion of identity. Referring to George Mead's theory of self, individuals considering the niqab the part of their religious identity demonstrate a strong

interconnection between their subjective personal orientation (the "I") and the objective expectations of institutions as manifested within them (the "Me"). On the other hand, a majority of individuals claiming that niqab is not their religious identity imply that their personal orientation was broader than merely wearing niqab, as well as the broad expectations of institutions. One informant stated, "although I do not consider niqab the part of my religious identity, I do believe that I developed an institutional identity. This identity manifested several behaviors like maintaining good character off-campus, doing teaching, etc. That is what I refer to as my institutional identity" (Interview, NSD, 2024)

A sense of pride among students is assumed as a distinctive identity for the campus community. The willingness to wear niqab, even accompanied by a lack of personal preference, suggests that institutional pride takes precedence over subjective orientation. Therefore, while the niqab may not be a direct manifestation of religious identity, it is believed to successfully enhance institutional pride through its symbolic representation.

4.2. Construction of Religious Identity with Niqab Wearing

As the broader concept of identity, it is believed as not static, rather, it is dynamic and continuously evolving (Hall & Gay, 1996; Rosi, 2017, 2023; Rosi & Yousif, 2024). Similarly, religious identity undergoes an ongoing process of construction, shaped by individual experiences, influenced by social context, and constantly refined through interactions with social environment (Werbner, 2010). In fact, the use of niqab is believed to construct religious identity in a broader sense. For instance, from the perspective of UNKAFA students, the niqab wearing serves as a motivation for continuous self-improvement. Although the niqab may not always correlate directly with religiosity, it can act as a means of motivating individuals toward exemplary moral conduct. One informant illustrated this by comparing niqab with hijab, explaining that wearing a hijab serves as a form of self-control to consistently behave better. Becoming a good person is believed to be an integral part of religious teachings; thus the continuous process of striving for self-improvement is an ongoing journey for every individual.

In fact, the university regulations essentially function as moral guidance capable of constructing student's behavior and internalizing a persistent habitus. Conversely, the legal

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discourse surrounding the niqab primarily remains the focus of policymakers. Consequently, the efforts of these policymakers constitute a measure to integrate the values of the Qur'an into student's daily lives. This initiative ultimately allows the Qur'an to become a living reality within student, rather than remaining merely a theoretical discourse. The absence of debate concerning the Islamic legal status of niqab among students while constructing their religious identity off-campus indicated a smooth negotiation of differing scholarly opinions in their everyday practices.

The construction of religious identity is intertwined with the university's mission to produce graduates who are pious and morally upright. The niqab is believed to foster individuals constantly maintaining proper conduct when interacting with the opposite sex and avoiding the excessive interaction with them while studying on-campus. This data further indicates that textual practices mediated by an appropriate authority are capable of vitalizing Qur'anic values, enabling them to serve as the best guidance for any individual action. This finding reinforces the efforts towards the living Qur'an in daily lives of students at this pesantren-based university. Thus, the construction of religious identity is an ongoing process in the daily experiences of students who utilize the niqab. A significant factor in the success of this religious identity construction is the interaction among niqabi's peers, also striving to uphold good daily attitude. This process of religious identity construction for niqabi students also requires support from all campus elements, including policy makers, lecturers, staffs, and all fellow students.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that that understanding the perspectives and motives behind niqab wearing among female students is crucial. This is essential for preventing the possible emergence of negative stereotypes and stigma against niqabi. Such stereotypes and stigma can be dispelled if individuals comprehend the meanings, perspectives, and motives behind the use of niqab. The study also concludes that among UNKAFA female students, there are two primary religious perspectives regarding niqab: permissible and Sunnah. None of the informants in this study stated that the niqab is mandatory. Regarding the meaning of the niqab among these students, at least five primary interpretations emerged: submissive attitude

toward the university, religious expression, manifestation of self-identity, tool for enhancing confidence, and fashion expression. Concerning the motives, there are at least two main types: social and individual motives. Social motives refer to campus policies, kyai's teaching, and lecturers and parents's guidance. Individual motives, on the other hand, refer to religious expression and the desire to become a better person. This research also concludes that the majority of informants stated that the niqab is not a manifestation of their religious identity, but the construction of religious identity continuously constructed in their daily activity in campus. Additionally, this study contributed significantly to the effort of practicing the qur'anic values into daily activities through regulation. The finding stated that textual practices mediated by an appropriate authority are capable of vitalizing Qur'anic values and reinforces the effort toward the living qur'an within student's daily lives at pesantren-based university. Theoretically, this study strengthens the symbolic interactionism theory stating that identity can be constructed through external and internal motives and it is continuously constructed within individuals. This study also finds its limitation with just focusing on a single locus without any comparative study. It is also limited in just viewing the perspective of students without trying to draft solutions while facing any challenges off-campus. For future researchers, it is suggested that further studies could delve deeper by exploring the challenges faced by niqabi students as well as the solutions formulated to address various stigmas that may arise in their lives both inside and outside campus. Comparative study is also needed to delve the other motives within niqabi students in different universities.

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