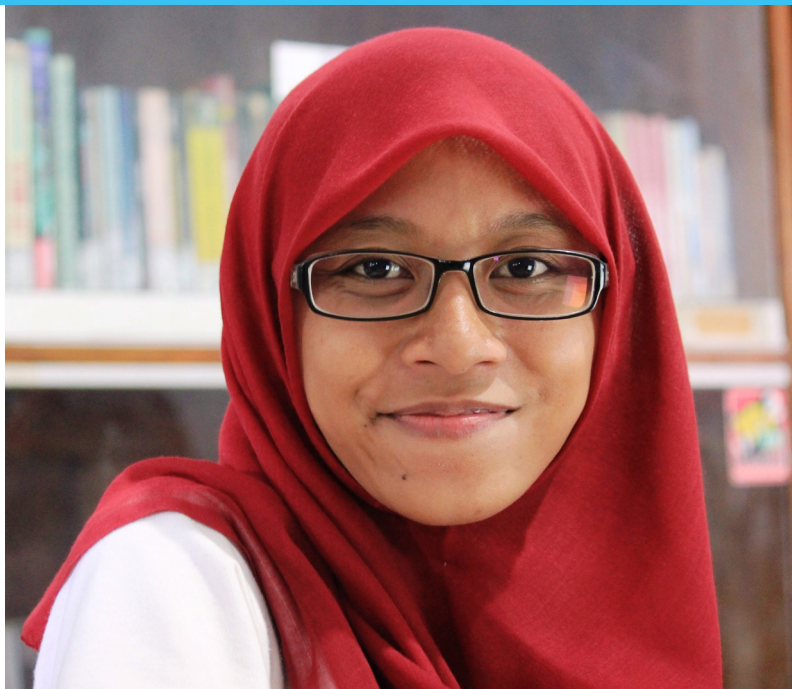# MAPPING THE TERRAIN STUDY 2018-2019 IMPLICATIONS

Mapping the Terrain

AEMS

ADVANCING EDUCATION
IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES

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September 2020 Brief

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

INTRODUCTION

Recent findings of the Mapping the Terrain empirical study, prepared by the research team of the Advancing Education in Muslim Societies (AEMS) initiative[1], on views regarding values and related skills and competencies such as empathy, forgiveness, moral reasoning, and community mindedness, contribute to the discussion on education in Muslim majority societies by providing new and evidence-based information from participants who are directly impacted by reform efforts. Previous studies confirm that values investigated in the Mapping the Terrain study are critical for socioemotional wellbeing and in turn may improve academic achievement. [2] Policy makers entrusted in creating thriving communities need to invest more in these skills to implement a holistic approach to education. This brief provides recommendations on utilizing the findings of this large scale and multisite study (in 2018-2019) in education policy, curriculum, and pedagogy in the fourteen Muslim-majority societies and beyond. We use societies here in this initiative to address Muslim-majority communities within the various countries.

BACKGROUND

Education plays an essential role in human development, and the AEMS initiative, "views education as a platform for addressing…the larger geopolitical environments in which it can play a role in infusing values and empowering individuals and groups to pursue those as part of their intra and inter-personal development."[3] As part of AEMS, the Mapping the Terrain study surveyed in 2018-2019, participants in 14 countries/locations to examine attitudes towards empathy, forgiveness, moral reasoning, and community mindedness and other related constructs. These were selected because in addition to being essential for individual and community wellbeing, they are, "both universal and foundational to Islamic values."[4] Surveys were administered to secondary education students, their parents, teachers, administrators and university students.

This annual study provides relevant insights for those seeking to create nurturing learning environments for wellbeing and attention to human development in addition to academic achievement.[5] Literature on the values selected suggests for example that, "forgiveness is associated with improved psychological well-being, physiological functioning, and mental health."[6] Furthermore, existing literature reveals that forgiveness plays an important role in combatting various forms of bullying and shows that, "adolescents with higher forgiveness levels bully less."[7] Beyond forgiveness, previous empirical studies suggest that empathy education can also be used as a tool to reduce bullying[8]

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1 The AEMS initiative is part of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), a non-profit organization based in the United States carrying out evidence-based research on education in Muslim societies.
2 This brief is based on the *Mapping the Terrain: 2018-2019 Report* prepared by Ilham Nasser, Jehanzeb Cheema, Maryam Saroughi, and Ahmed Alwani, *Mapping the Terrain: 2018-2019 Report* (Herndon: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2019), https://iiit.org/wp-content/uploads/Mapping-Terrain-Report-Cropped-Final.pdf.
3 Nasser et al., *Mapping the Terrain*, 4.
4 Ilham Nasser, Cynthia Miller-Idriss, and Ahmed Alwani, "Reconceptualizing Education Transformation in Muslim Societies: The Human Development Approach," *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Fall 2019): 3-25, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/jems.1.1.02?seq=1.
5 Nasser, Miller-Idriss, and Alwani.
6 Rachel C. Garthe and Samantha Guz, "The Development of Forgiving in Children, Adolescents, and Emerging Adults," in *Handbook of Forgiveness*, ed. Nathaniel G. Wade and Everett L. Worthington, Jr. (New York: Routledge, 2019), chap. 9, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781351123341.
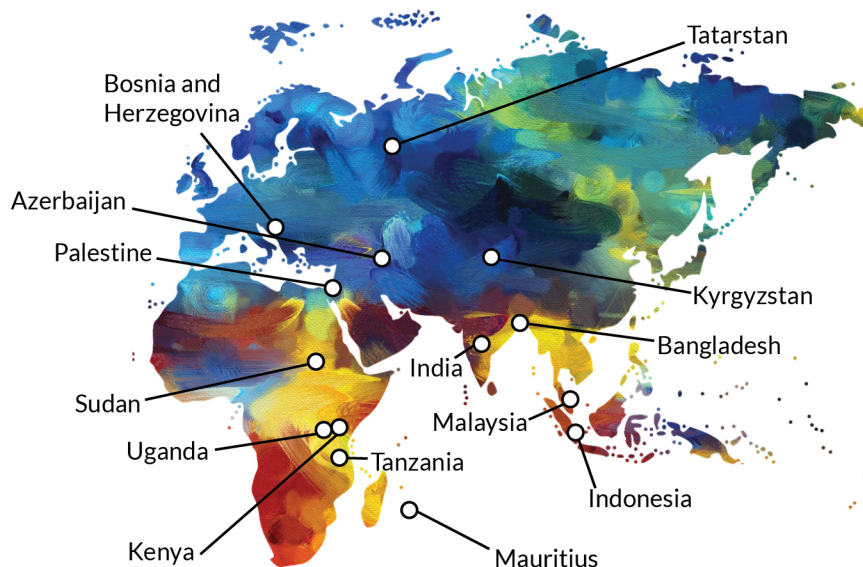7 Quintana-Orts, Rey, and Worthington, "Cyberbullying in Adolescence."
8 Rosalba Morese, Matteo Defedele, and Juri Nervo, "I Teach You to Quarrel - Empathy and Mediation: Tools for Preventing Bullying," in

and those who are empathetic have lower levels of hostility and aggression. Further, empathy was, "found to be instrumental in developing morality," and thus, moral reasoning was also chosen to be examined. Furthermore, encouraging youth to serve their communities and be more community minded, "can advance youths' sense of belonging to a greater community." In addition, increasing students' sense of belonging with their peers, instructors, and administrators promotes their academic achievement and wellbeing.[9]

Populations & Locations

- **25,000+** participants, **61%** younger than 24, evenly split between males and females.

Tatarstan
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Azerbaijan
Palestine
Kyrgyzstan
Bangladesh
India
Sudan
Malaysia
Uganda
Tanzania
Kenya
Indonesia
Mauritius

RESULTS

The major conclusions from the 2018-2019 Mapping the Terrain annual study were:

1. Empathy and forgiveness were highly correlated.

2. Empathy was confirmed to strongly predict forgiveness and community mindedness which means that the more empathetic one is, the higher one's levels of community mindedness and forgiveness.

3. Demographic variables such as gender, age, and education did not have a large impact on these results.[10]

The results above confirm similar findings on the importance of empathy as a predictor of forgiveness. As this study is annual, it allows for measure and methods development. Nevertheless, the results here are significant and have important research and policy implications that this brief highlights.

Socialization: A Multidimensional Perspective, ed. Rosalba Morese, Juri Nervo, and Sara Palermo (London: IntechOpen, 2018), 105, https://www.intechopen.com/books/socialization-a-multidimensional-perspective.
9 Nasser et al., 12-18.
10 Nasser et al., 64-68.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

1. The empirical focus of this study provides an information bank on participants in countries that are not usually accessible for researchers. Academics, policy makers, administrators, or others interested in education reform will find the results meaningful for a critical examination of the needs of youth and ways to achieve them. When youth, teachers, and parents agree on the importance of these values, educators have some insights and guidance and the responsibility to include those in policy, curriculum, and in pedagogy.

2. This study shifts the discourse on research in Muslim societies so that it is asset-based, focusing on strengths within communities, rather than emphasizing deficits. For years, funding for education reform has been motivated by neoliberal policies dictated by market demands.[11] We take a different approach that is grounded in positive youth development and the importance of creating supportive learning environments in schools and the larger community.

3. This study also establishes a research agenda on values in Muslim societies and provides authentic and sensitive measures especially because it invests in culturally responsive measures. It also brings the voices of researchers and educators from the Global South to the mainstream avenues.

4. The study contributes to research capacity building. At every stage of the study, consultations with local partners and community leaders were conducted to ensure quality research. All coordinators were trained on the use of ethical research methods especially the protection of human subjects.

5. The results from this first of its kind study helps improve data collection and measure development for the next one which took place in 2019-2020.

What are the contributions of this study?

1. Future Policy Design and Implementation

Since empathy and related constructs identified as important values to invest resources and time in, we encourage a collaborative approach between researchers and appropriate education agencies at the national and local levels to deliver instruction around those in a way that is feasible.[12] This requires examining the current curriculum and identifying ways to infuse skills related to empathy and the other constructs such as listening skills, and prosocial messages across the curriculum. Other non-formal programs emphasizing empathy and other values may also be implemented outside the formal curriculum for students and parents. [13] Any intervention programs should be accompanied by an evaluation study to ensure effectiveness. Very often governments and their ministries of education implement programs because they come with funding and sometimes without field-based evidence.
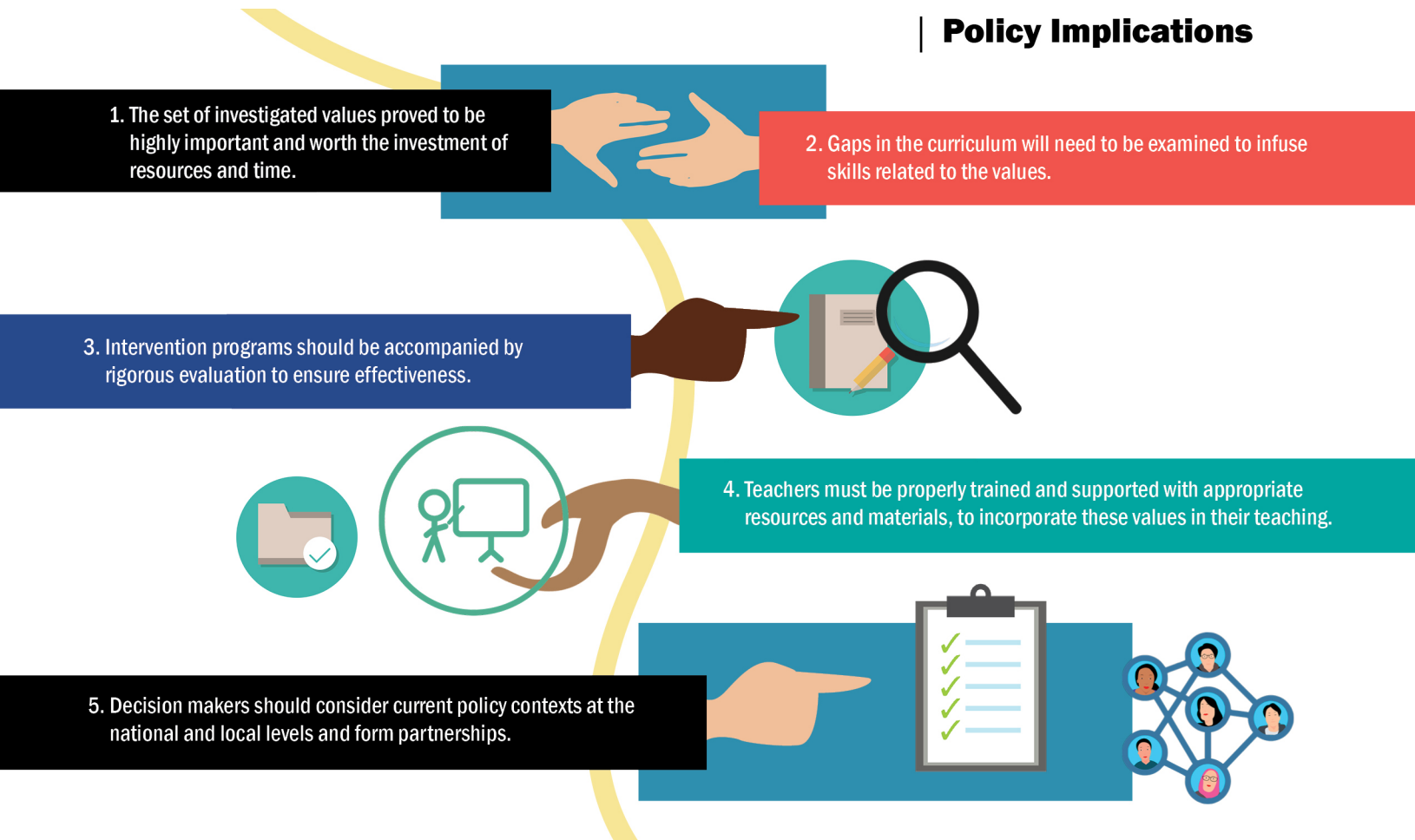
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11 Julia Sass Rubin, Ryan M. Good and Michelle Fine, "Parental Action and Neoliberal Education Reform: Crafting a Research Agenda," *Journal of Urban Affairs*, vol. 42, no. 4 (2020): 492-510, https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2019.1660582.
12 Michael McShane, *What Social and Emotional Learning Advocates Can Learn from Common Core*, (American Enterprise Institute, 2019), 4, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596339.pdf.
13 McShane, *What Social and Emotional Learning Advocates Can Learn,* 5.

Teacher preparation is also essential before any mass roll-out takes place.[14] Policy makers need to support educators and provide them with the skills they need to incorporate these values meaningfully in their classrooms. This is possible by gradually building the capacity of the pre-service and in-service teachers and enhancing their professional development.[15] Furthermore, understanding the current policy contexts at the national and local levels is vitally important to determine whether the proposed changes will ameliorate or undermine current efforts, and examine how they fit in with current priorities and to what extent these need to shift.[16]

| Policy Implications

1. The set of investigated values proved to be highly important and worth the investment of resources and time.

2. Gaps in the curriculum will need to be examined to infuse skills related to the values.

3. Intervention programs should be accompanied by rigorous evaluation to ensure effectiveness.

4. Teachers must be properly trained and supported with appropriate resources and materials, to incorporate these values in their teaching.

5. Decision makers should consider current policy contexts at the national and local levels and form partnerships.

2. The Value of Asset-based Approaches

While we cannot generalize based on this study, the findings suggest that most participants surveyed had high scores of empathy, community mindedness, moral reasoning, and forgiveness.[17] Although someone may argue that this result is due to social desirability (where people answer the way they think we want them to), differences between the five target groups and the various countries existed. Since youth (in secondary education) had slightly lower scores on several of the constructs, a recognition of an assets-based approach and a more intentional focus on youth's positive

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14 McShane, 6.
15 Amina Derbi, "Value-based Approaches," *AEMS Research Notes*, October 2019, https://iiit.org/en/value-based-approaches-to-education/.
16 McShane, 6.
17 Nasser et al*., Mapping the Terrain*, 44.

development is in place instead of viewing them as a risk factor. We highlight the idea to, "recognize and build on a combination of the human, social and physical capital that exists within local communities," and focus on "empowering rather than delivering" which has the potential to benefit youth and their larger societies.[18] Asset-based activities include, "mapping the capacities and assets of individuals, groups, and local institutions," which helps increase wellbeing in communities by, "ensur[ing] engagement with individuals is meaningful and empowering rather than tokenistic and consultative," where these individuals are, "seen as part of the solution, not the problem."[19] The benefits of asset-based approaches are that they change, "the focus from 'what's wrong with us' to 'what's right with us,'" which is more successful in motivating people than emphasizing deficits.[20]

3. Promoting an Authentic Research Agenda in Muslim Societies

It is essential when planning and executing policies to keep in mind that the key messages in the programs are aligned with values and skills that are rooted in the local context. Experts in the area of program assessment note that it is, "critical for service delivery organizations to develop strong, trusting relationships with community members as early as possible when conducting community needs assessments and developing new service delivery options."[21] Furthermore,

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18 Jennifer Mclean, *Putting Asset Based Approaches Into Practice: Identification, Mobilization, and Measurement of Assets*, Concepts Series (Glasgow: Glasgow Centre for Population and Health, 2012), 2-4, https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/3433/GCPHCS10forweb_1_.pdf.
19 Mclean, *Asset Based Approaches*, 5.
20 "Comparison Between Asset and Deficit Based Approaches," Asset Based Community Engagement Module 4, University of Memphis, last modified August 7, 2019, https://www.memphis.edu/ess/module4/page3.php.
21 Bumgarner et al., *Developing Culturally Responsive Approaches to Serving Diverse Populations: A Resource Guide for Community-Based*

key players involved in global initiatives to improve the lives of children and adolescents through education, such as UNICEF, The World Bank, and others, note in their implementation considerations that interventions, "usually need to be adapted to the local context."[22]

The culturally responsive research framework applied to the Mapping the Terrain study adheres to local values and addresses topics that youth and adults are not used to giving their opinions on, as expressed by participants in several countries. In order to be culturally responsive, when defining the constructs of empathy, community mindedness, forgiveness, and moral reasoning; AEMS' research team consulted and communicated with local religious scholars to make sure that our definitions, "aligned with their understandings of Quranic values and teaching."[23]

FINAL THOUGHTS

Ultimately, education policy makers impacting curriculum design may find the selected constructs and the empirical results of the Mapping the Terrain study useful when working on implementing programs in various Muslim societies. We invite stakeholders in education to examine the results of the study not only for information on the four values of empathy, forgiveness, community mindedness, and moral reasoning, but also others such as religiosity and sense of belonging and ways they may inform policy, curriculum design, and pedagogy.

For further information go to www.iiit.org to access the full Mapping the Terrain Report for 2018-2019 along with updates on current and future research.

Organizations (National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families, 2017), 15, https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2017-06/cultural-competence-guide.pdf.

22 Alexander Butchart et al., *INSPIRE, Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2016), 86, https://www.who.int/publications-detail/inspire-seven-strategies-for-ending-violence-against-children.

23 Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Ilham Nasser, "Culturally Responsive Research," International Institute of Islamic Thought, accessed March 19, 2020, https://iiit.org/en/culturally-responsive-research/.