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Gender, Marginalization, and Digital Technology in Islamic Learning: A Nigerian Perspective

By AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm¹

Abstract

The integration of digital technologies has significantly transformed the landscape of Islamic education in Nigeria, enhancing accessibility to religious knowledge while simultaneously reinforcing pre-existing socio-cultural disparities. Utilizing an intersectional analytical framework, this study critically explores how gender, socio-economic diversity, and Islamophobia collectively influence experiences within digital Islamic learning environments. Employing qualitative feminist methodologies, I conducted semi-structured interviews from November to December of 2024 with Islamic scholars, educators, students, and general digital platform users from Lagos, Ilorin, and Maiduguri. The findings indicate that intersecting factors such as gender roles, socio-economic conditions, geographical location, and Islamophobic attitudes distinctly shape patterns of digital engagement, creating both inclusion and exclusion. Although digital platforms offer transformative opportunities, particularly for women who have historically faced barriers to structured religious education, these benefits are limited by persistent infrastructural inadequacies, financial constraints, and widespread concerns over misinformation. Consequently, the study highlights the critical need for comprehensive regulatory measures and capacity-building strategies to promote equitable digital participation. In conclusion, this research advocates for policies informed by intersectionality, culturally responsive pedagogies, and inclusive technological innovations aligned with Islamic ethical principles, aiming to cultivate equitable digital Islamic learning environments throughout Nigeria.

Keywords: Digital Islamic learning, Intersectionality, Gender and education, Islamophobia, Digital inclusion, Nigeria, Feminist methodology, Equity, Religion

Introduction

The rise of digital technologies has reshaped Islamic education across the globe, profoundly impacting teaching methodologies, knowledge dissemination, and scholarly engagement through diverse online platforms and multimedia tools (Bunt, 2018). In Nigeria, a country renowned for its diverse and deeply rooted Islamic heritage, the integration of digital technology within religious education has significantly enhanced access, allowing learners from various regions and socio-economic backgrounds to engage actively in religious scholarship and interpretative discourse (Sahin, 2018). Nonetheless, the promise of digital technology in democratizing access to Islamic knowledge is tempered by pronounced disparities driven by complex socio-cultural dynamics.

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Central to understanding these disparities is the concept of intersectionality, which highlights how various identities interconnect; in the context of this study, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and physical ability compound to create unique challenges for digital inclusion within Islamic learning spaces. Gender remains a pivotal determinant, significantly influencing women's access to digital Islamic educational resources due to entrenched cultural norms, economic marginalization, and limited opportunities for digital literacy training (Helsper, 2021). Moreover, marginalized groups, including those from rural areas, ethnic minorities, and individuals with disabilities, experience systemic barriers that further hinder their full participation in digital Islamic education (Jamil, 2021). These persistent inequalities do not merely limit inclusive engagement but also perpetuate existing disparities in religious and educational opportunities (Ghosh & Galczyński, 2014).

Historically, Islamic educational structures in Nigeria have been markedly gendered, predominantly prioritizing men and marginalizing women's contributions and scholarly potential. Recently, however, Nigeria has observed an encouraging trend with an increasing emergence of women as *ulamā* (Muslim scholars). This trend is driven by progressive reforms and community-led initiatives aimed explicitly at closing gender gaps in both religious scholarship and digital engagement (Fahm, 2025; Umar 2004). Despite these positive developments, ongoing gender disparities underline the need for a critical examination of how these digital educational initiatives can sustainably address the unique educational needs of women and other marginalized groups.

In addition, the role of Islamophobia within the Nigerian context adds another layer of complexity to this analysis. Unlike predominantly Western manifestations, Islamophobia in Nigeria often emerges through institutional neglect, biased portrayals in media, and structural discrimination targeting Muslim communities, disproportionately affecting women and economically vulnerable groups (Mahmud & Islam, 2023; Danfulani, 2013). This form of discrimination intersects with gender and socio-economic inequities, exacerbating barriers to equitable participation in digital Islamic educational environments.

This paper, therefore, seeks to interrogate the intersections of gender, other kinds of marginalization, and Islamophobia in shaping digital Islamic education in Nigeria. This analysis critically examines structural and institutional impediments to digital participation, while highlighting the transformative capacities of digital technologies to foster inclusivity and reduce long-standing educational inequalities. By illuminating how intersecting forms of marginalization influence digital access and engagement, the study aims to bridge a critical knowledge gap in the existing literature on Islamic education in the digital age. Consequently, its findings offer vital insights for educators, policymakers, and digital content developers, guiding them in designing more equitable and culturally responsive digital educational initiatives that align effectively with the principles of equity, justice, and inclusivity (Majeed et al., 2024; Yusuf et al., 2022).

The Role of Gender in Islamic Learning

Islamic education is deeply embedded within religious and cultural traditions of Muslim societies that have historically been shaped by patriarchy, significantly influencing the educational access and participation of women. Despite explicit Islamic teachings advocating for universal education for all Muslims, articulated clearly in prophetic traditions such as, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" (Sunan Ibn Mājah 224), cultural interpretations and institutional practices have frequently skewed educational priorities towards men (O'Brien, 2000). The historical structuring of gender roles within Nigerian Islamic education has conventionally positioned men as the primary recipients and transmitters of religious knowledge, typically through

formal educational settings such as *madrassas* or integrated educational institutions blending Islamic and Western curricula (Bashir, 2022). This framework has long supported the perpetuation of men's leadership within religious communities, reinforcing patriarchal norms concerning authority and religious expertise.

Conversely, women's access to Islamic education in Nigeria has traditionally been constrained, largely confined to informal learning settings such as household instruction or community-based study groups. This limitation stems from cultural practices and religious interpretations emphasizing a strict separation of public and private spheres, with women's roles typically restricted to domestic environments. In rural and more conservative regions of Nigeria, these gender divisions are especially pronounced, reinforced by socio-economic factors such as poverty, limited educational infrastructure, and traditional expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities and early marriage for girls (Uthman, 2009). Consequently, families facing economic hardships often prioritize boys' education, perpetuating significant gender disparities in formal Islamic education enrollment. Furthermore, the cultural practice of *pardah*, which emphasizes women's seclusion, further exacerbates gender inequalities within Islamic educational contexts. *Purdah* significantly restricts women's physical mobility and opportunities to engage in structured public religious education, frequently relegating their educational activities to private, domestic spheres. However, this cultural practice has also created alternative—though less visible—pathways to Islamic knowledge, often through familial networks or informal tutoring, frequently led by men or older women within the household (Danfulani, 2013; Lawson, 1995).

Nevertheless, recent developments in Nigeria indicate a notable shift challenging these traditional gender structures. The emergence of women as *ulamā* and the proliferation of digital technologies are significantly redefining access to Islamic education. Digital platforms provide women unprecedented opportunities to circumvent physical and cultural constraints, allowing remote access to religious scholarship and participation in scholarly networks previously inaccessible to many (Fahm, 2025). In addition, ongoing reforms aimed at mass Islamic education and inclusive curricula have increasingly incorporated women into formal educational frameworks, subtly transforming traditional conceptions of gendered religious authority and participation in Nigeria's northern regions (Umar, 2004). Moreover, historical examples from West Africa, including certain Nigerian contexts, highlight instances where women have historically attained respected positions as religious educators and community scholars, challenging the dominant narrative of Islamic education as the preserve of men. While such instances provide valuable counter-narratives, they remain overshadowed by persistent gender disparities that continue to characterize much of Nigeria's Islamic educational landscape.

Thus, while digital technologies and socio-cultural reforms offer significant potential for greater inclusivity and gender equity in Islamic education, enduring socio-cultural and economic challenges necessitate sustained critical engagement and targeted policy interventions. These efforts must be explicitly directed towards dismantling structural barriers, fostering equitable educational environments, and amplifying the contributions and scholarly voices of women within Islamic learning spaces.

Literature Review

The interplay of gender, other forms of marginalization, and digital technology within the realm of Islamic education presents an intricate nexus of historical traditions, contemporary social dynamics, and technological advancements. Within Nigeria, understanding this intersection requires examining various theoretical, cultural, and infrastructural elements that significantly

influence educational accessibility and inclusivity. Ahmed (2021) provides foundational insights into the historical construction of gender roles within Islamic societies, demonstrating how patriarchal interpretations have historically shaped women's access to education. Recognizing this historical backdrop is critical for unpacking ongoing gender-based disparities prevalent in Nigeria's predominantly Muslim regions.

The transformative potential of digital technologies in Islamic education is considerable, promising expanded access and inclusivity; however, these technologies also risk reinforcing existing disparities. Central to this discussion is the concept of the digital divide, articulated by Hargittai (2003), which highlights systemic barriers disproportionately affecting women's digital participation. Alozie and Akpan-Obong (2017) elaborate specifically on the barriers faced by African women, including Nigerians, emphasizing socio-economic constraints, entrenched cultural norms, and restricted access to digital resources. These insights are complemented by Umukoro et al. (2021), who document persistent gender disparities in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) access within Nigeria, underscoring the marginalization of women within digital educational spheres.

Traditionally, Islamic education has been deeply rooted in oral transmission and communal physical gatherings. However, digitalization has dramatically reshaped this landscape. Bunt (2003) explores the emergence of cyber-Islamic environments as new spaces for religious dialogue and learning, while Shah (2020) emphasizes how digital platforms provide Muslim women new avenues to assert their educational agency and challenge conventional gender roles. These developments underscore digital platforms as contested spaces, where traditional hierarchies and gender dynamics are actively renegotiated.

To fully grasp the complexity inherent in digital Islamic education, intersectionality theory provides valuable analytical tools. Crenshaw (1994) argues that an intersectional lens is critical to understanding compounded systemic oppression experienced by marginalized groups. Within Nigeria specifically, Mahmud and Islam (2023) highlight how intersectional identities, particularly those of Muslim women academics, shape experiences of educational exclusion and Islamophobia, thus emphasizing intersectionality's utility in contextualizing educational inequalities.

Digital literacy emerges as a crucial mechanism for overcoming entrenched gender inequalities in educational contexts. Mallawaarachchi (2019) underscores digital literacy's role in empowering women to participate more fully in socio-economic and educational activities. Similarly, Muhdi et al. (2024) document the efficacy of online platforms in bridging access gaps within Islamic education contexts. However, achieving these benefits requires that underlying structural inequalities are addressed, as highlighted by Brown and Czerniewicz (2017), who advocate context-specific strategies for integrating ICTs into educational frameworks.

Further, cultural and theological dimensions remain influential factors shaping gender dynamics within Islamic education. Nasr (2002) emphasizes core Islamic values of justice and equality as foundational principles challenging patriarchal restrictions on women's educational opportunities. Mahmood (2012) further complicates traditional portrayals of Muslim women as passive participants, documenting active roles women play in Islamic revival movements, thereby reclaiming educational agency.

The pedagogical transformation accompanying digital integration into Islamic education involves aligning technological possibilities with educational goals. Beetham and Sharpe (2019) argue for pedagogical models that can effectively leverage digital possibilities. Akbar (2024) illustrates how virtual environments transcend geographical and temporal barriers, reshaping educational engagement. Nonetheless, Walson and Okanu-Igwela (2019) caution against

infrastructural deficiencies and resistance hindering technological adoption in Nigerian educational institutions, reflecting broader systemic challenges.

In addition, digital spaces have begun challenging structures of traditional religious authority, democratizing theological discourse, and enabling wider participation. Kabba (2024) discusses how digital platforms redefine knowledge legitimacy, empowering previously marginalized voices, especially women. Nisa (2019) further illustrates how Muslim women strategically use digital tools to construct supportive knowledge-sharing networks, actively contesting patriarchal educational structures.

Within Nigeria, leveraging digital technologies presents distinct opportunities and challenges. Fahm et al. (2022) highlight the potential of ICT initiatives, such as the Almajiri education system, for addressing educational disparities among marginalized groups. Yet, significant challenges persist, including inadequate funding, inconsistent policy implementation, and socio-cultural resistance. Adeaga (2024) emphasizes aligning digital educational initiatives with global frameworks, notably the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, to enhance gender equity and inclusivity within Nigerian Islamic education. Furthermore, Islamophobia significantly intersects with these educational dynamics in Nigeria, often exacerbating educational inequalities. Studies by Uthman (2009), Danfulani (2013), and Bashir (2022) reveal Islamophobia's manifestation through negative stereotypes linking Islam to violence, notably influenced by extremist narratives associated with Boko Haram, an insurgent group. Ejiofor (2023) highlights how these portrayals amplify marginalization, especially among Muslim minorities in southern Nigeria. Furthermore, Uthman (2009) and Danfulani (2013) examine how Islamophobic stereotypes further marginalize Muslim women, impacting their educational participation and reinforcing harmful narratives that undermine their agency.

Educational institutions themselves have become critical sites for reproducing or resisting Islamophobic narratives. Mahmud and Islam (2023) argue that institutional structures often embody Islamophobic attitudes, restricting professional advancement for Muslim academics, particularly women. Nasir (2007) similarly notes exclusionary curricular practices that perpetuate negative stereotypes and educational inequalities, reinforcing systemic educational disparities. However, acts of resisting these narratives are emerging from within the system. For example, some Muslim educators are actively reshaping course content to reflect authentic Islamic perspectives, challenging orientalist portrayals commonly embedded in standard curricula. There have been reports of integration of digital stories of Muslim innovators, scholars, and reformers into classroom discussions as a way to counteract the dominant depiction of Islam as incompatible with modernity or critical inquiry. By curating content that showcases the intellectual and ethical richness of Islamic traditions, such educators are not only deconstructing stereotypes but also empowering Muslim learners to reclaim their identities. This form of pedagogical agency exemplifies how educational spaces can become arenas of resistance, fostering inclusive narratives that affirm religious and cultural pluralism (Fahm, 2020; Shah, 2020).

Therefore, understanding how gender and other forms of marginalization operate within digital Islamic education in Nigeria requires a nuanced, contextually sensitive approach, informed by global theoretical insights yet firmly grounded in local socio-cultural realities. Azad (2017) argues that digital technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for global Islamic engagement; however, Mohanty (1988) cautions against uncritically adopting Western paradigms, advocating instead for decolonial approaches respectful of local histories and cultural specificities. Such a balanced perspective is essential for effectively addressing the complexities of digital Islamic education within the Nigerian context.

Method

This qualitative study utilized a feminist methodological approach to explore the intersectionality of gender, other forms of marginalization, and digital technology within Islamic learning contexts in Nigeria. Feminist methodology, as articulated by scholars such as Hesse-Biber (2014) and Harding (1988), informed the research design comprehensively, shaping participant selection, ethical considerations, and the overall research dynamics, thus ensuring methodological rigor and alignment with principles of inclusivity and social justice.

Participants were purposively selected to represent a diverse cross-section of Nigerian Muslim communities, with recruitment specifically targeting regions such as Lagos, Ilorin, and Maiduguri. The selection criteria prioritized representation across multiple dimensions, including gender, socio-economic status, educational background, and professional roles, encompassing Islamic scholars, educators, university students, and everyday users of digital Islamic resources. This deliberate diversity was crucial in capturing varied experiences and perspectives related to digital access and usage in Islamic education. Snowball sampling further enriched this sampling strategy, as initial participants recommended additional contacts within their networks, thus broadening the scope and diversity of the participant pool.

Ethical considerations were rigorously integrated into the research process, reflecting feminist commitments to participant safety, privacy, and informed consent. Each participant received a clear explanation of the study's objectives, the processes involved, their rights to confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Participants provided informed consent through signed consent forms, which emphasized their right to withdraw from the research at any stage without any repercussions. Given the potentially sensitive nature of the research exploring religious, gendered, and socio-cultural dynamics, all participants' identities were anonymized. Real names were initially collected solely to enhance transparency during data analysis; however, explicit consent for public identification was intentionally not sought due to concerns around participant safety and social repercussions. Consequently, pseudonyms replaced the participants' actual names throughout the analysis and in the presentation of the findings. Fieldwork took place from November to December of 2024, with interviews conducted in locations selected by participants, typically their workplaces, educational institutions, or other private spaces chosen for their comfort and security. Particular efforts were made to mitigate power dynamics intrinsic to qualitative research, especially when it involves discussions of personal and culturally sensitive issues. Where feasible, interviewers and participants were gender-matched,² an approach used to ensure the comfort of all participants. In addition, to ensure inclusivity and promote more authentic and comfortable dialogue, interviews were conducted in English and local Nigerian languages, including Yoruba and Hausa.

Adhering to feminist methodological principles, significant attention was dedicated to addressing potential power imbalances between researchers and participants. Open-ended and semi-structured interview questions allowed participants to express their experiences freely and deeply, focusing on their interactions with digital Islamic learning platforms, experiences of inclusivity and exclusion, and strategies employed to overcome access barriers. Throughout the interviewing process, participants were encouraged to articulate any concerns or discomforts, reinforcing the feminist methodological emphasis on participant agency and collaboration.

² The research assistants for the interviews were Usman Adefabi, AbdulFattah Muhammad, Murjanatu Ibrahim, and Sofiat Abubakar.

Findings and Discussion

Drawing on feminist and intersectional theoretical frameworks, the findings demonstrate how gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, and religious affiliation collectively mediate access to and engagement with digital Islamic learning. Rather than operating in isolation, these variables interact in complex and often compounding ways, producing varied outcomes across the participant spectrum.

The Gender Divide in Access to Digital Islamic Knowledge

Gender remains a critical axis of identity that shapes the accessibility and perception of digital Islamic learning. Women participants consistently articulated a sense of newfound autonomy, empowerment, and visibility through the use of digital tools. One woman participant reflected on digital tools empowering her to “participate equitably in Islamic education alongside men,” underscoring technology’s potential in mitigating traditional gendered exclusions (24/11/2024). Barakat Muhammad, a 22-year-old graduate from the University of Ilorin, recounted the transformative potential of platforms such as YouTube in deepening her grasp of traditionally complex subjects. Muhammad noted, “When I had difficulties with Islamic inheritance, I watched an eight-hour YouTube series which clarified everything for me. It widened my knowledge significantly” (24/11/2024). Her experience underscores the democratizing capacity of digital technology to fill instructional gaps for learners, especially for women who may face logistical or socio-cultural barriers to formal religious education.

Similarly, Shenaz Rania Ahmed, a woman student from Lagos, emphasized the economic relief offered by open-access digital resources. She notes that “Digital platforms allow free access to books and articles online. This helps economically because these books are expensive and difficult to obtain offline” (23/11/2024). For women from lower-income backgrounds, the affordability and convenience of digital tools are key to giving them an entry point into sustained Islamic study. However, as feminist scholars remind us, gender must be understood intersectionally. While technology may enable access, the access itself is mediated by other social variables, including geography, infrastructure, and socio-economic background.

Geographic Disparities and the Rural-Urban Divide

A professional based in Lagos highlighted stark contrasts between urban and rural digital experiences: “While I can stream lectures online seamlessly, my colleagues in remote areas struggle to access the same resources” (1/12/2024). Participants from rural areas repeatedly cited infrastructural inadequacies as a major limitation. For example, Alabi Fatimoh, an Islamic educator based in a village outside Ilorin, explained, “My students are more eager when I show them videos related to Islamic history instead of just lecturing. They remember visuals better. But the biggest issue is the unreliable internet in our village. Frequent disruptions severely limit our learning sessions” (24/11/2024). This account points to a paradox: digital technology has the potential to enhance engagement, but its realization remains unevenly distributed due to infrastructural inequities. Murjanatu Ibrahim, an academic in a rural area called Maiduguri, expanded on these challenges by emphasizing the role of economic inequality: “The main challenges are poor network services and the expense of maintaining updated devices and data subscriptions. These financial constraints significantly hinder consistent access to digital Islamic resources” (15/11/2024). The digital divide, therefore, is not only a matter of physical connectivity but also of sustained investments in hardware, digital literacy, and access, reinforcing long-standing disparities within Nigeria’s educational system.

Financial Barriers and the Monetization of Islamic Knowledge

An unexpected theme that surfaced was the conflict between a desire to offer free access and the need for teachers to charge fees to sustain educational services. Several participants raised concerns about the affordability of Islamic programs and the need to generate income from teaching. In particular, they pointed out that while many Islamic educators wish to offer their courses and lectures for free, or at subsidized rates, the realities of sustaining online platforms, covering internet costs, and dedicating time to content creation require financial support. Some noted that existing programs, especially those involving live Zoom sessions or certification courses, could cost between 3,000 and 10,000 Naira (approximately 3 to 12 USD), which can be prohibitive for students from low-income backgrounds. Others mentioned the indirect costs such as data subscription and device maintenance, which further compound the issue. The dilemma lies in balancing the ethical motivation to provide religious knowledge without barriers and the practical need for remuneration to maintain quality and consistency in Islamic teaching. This tension highlights broader questions about commodification of religious education and sustainability in the digital era. Sherifat Musa, an administrator and educator in Ondo State, suggested that “Sometimes, a small commitment fee makes learners more dedicated and gives teachers a form of empowerment. Islam encourages women to earn from their homes too” (18/12/2024). This observation introduces a critical tension between the ideal of open access and the material realities faced by educators, particularly women who may rely on such platforms for both *da'wah* (sharing Islamic learning with others) and their livelihood.

Navigating Religious Authority and Content Authenticity

One of the most nuanced findings of this study centers on how participants navigate issues of authenticity and authority in the digital Islamic space. Women participants, in particular, expressed concern about whether online materials were legitimate and aligned with doctrine. Barakat Muhammad noted, “I always filter websites carefully because some present sectarian views conflicting with Sunni teachings. Ensuring accuracy and authenticity is a constant challenge” (24/11/2024). This act of critical curation reflects both a gendered precaution and a broader anxiety over the decentralization of religious authority in the digital age. By contrast, the participants who were men appeared less apprehensive about their online engagements; for example, Baidou-Suleiman, a 27-year-old Islamic teacher, remarked, “I follow several international scholars on Facebook, they help me gain multiple perspectives” (12/11/2024). This gender divergence in attitudes may reflect different expectations around religious propriety, with women being held to stricter communal standards and thus exercising greater self-censorship.

Nonetheless, concerns about misinformation were shared across the gender spectrum. Baidou-Suleiman offered a succinct summary: “Digital platforms make teaching easier, save time, and allow global reach. Yet, the main drawback is the authenticity of information online. Without proper regulation, false teachings can easily spread” (12/11/2024). This underscores a growing tension between accessibility and epistemological integrity in the digitized Islamic learning environment.

Islamophobia and the Reframing of Islamic Learning

Although not always named explicitly, Islamophobia emerged as a subtle yet important theme in the interviews. Several participants discussed using digital tools as a means of combating societal stereotypes and asserting the intellectual validity of Islamic studies. Najibat, for example,

stated: “I use digital resources to correct misconceptions that Islamic studies limit career opportunities. These platforms help combat negative stereotypes and broaden understanding” (15/11/2024). This re-narrativization of Islamic learning through digital platforms can be seen as a strategic response to marginalization, allowing Muslim learners to reposition themselves in public discourse. Participants reported being affected by persistent stereotypes such as Muslims being anti-modern, Islamic studies being intellectually inferior, or veiled Muslim women being oppressed. These narratives, perpetuated in both local and global media, contribute to social exclusion and undermine the legitimacy of Islamic scholarship. In response, learners and educators have adopted digital storytelling, visual content, and public webinars as tools for advocacy. For instance, some participants described producing short videos debunking myths about women’s roles in Islam, while others hosted digital forums on the compatibility of Islam with science and modernity. Through such resisting efforts, participants are actively reconfiguring the meaning and relevance of Islamic education within the contemporary digital public sphere.

Digital Empowerment and Equitable Instruction

From an educator’s perspective, digital technology also facilitates new pedagogical relationships. Educator and administrator Sherifat Musa spoke extensively on this: “Digital platforms allow me to reach diverse audiences globally, promoting gender equity and cultural inclusivity. I deliberately design accessible online courses to empower women and marginalized groups” (18/12/2024). She explained that these courses are structured with features such as self-paced modules, multilingual audio and subtitle options, and compatibility with low-bandwidth mobile devices, making them usable for learners in both urban and rural areas. Beyond simple access, the courses integrate inclusive content such as case studies featuring female scholars, modules on women’s contributions to Islamic knowledge, and examples that reflect the lived experiences of ethnic and socio-economic minorities. Sherifat noted that her pedagogy emphasizes collaborative learning through moderated discussion boards, anonymous feedback channels, and live Q&A sessions, which are often more approachable than hierarchical classroom settings. She also employs visual storytelling, scenario-based learning, and reflective journaling to cater to different learning styles, reduce barriers to participation, and build learner confidence. In contrast to conventional in-person instruction, which may be limited by logistical and cultural constraints, these online designs foster agency, voice, and critical engagement for women and other historically excluded groups. Her work highlights the intentionality required in ensuring that technological affordances are not merely available but meaningfully structured to achieve inclusion. Sherifat also raised important ethical concerns regarding online learning environments. She cautions that “Educators should discourage private chats among participants on learning platforms because we don’t know who is behind the screen. People could misuse these spaces” (18/12/2024). Her remarks point to the need for clear ethical guidelines and community standards, especially when engaging mixed-gender, transregional audiences in virtual settings.

Empowerment Beyond Education: Skills and Economic Independence

Beyond religious instruction, digital Islamic education was described as a gateway to broader personal and economic empowerment. As Hikmah Adaara, an educator and program facilitator, noted: “We now teach Islamic ethics alongside vocational skills in our WhatsApp learning groups. After learning, many women start tailoring or online marketing. This is Islamic education creating social change” (1/12/2024). Such models exemplify how religious education

can be embedded within a broader project of economic uplift, particularly for marginalized women.

Conclusion: Toward an Ethically Inclusive Digital Future

The findings of this study reveal the intricate interplay of gender, digital technology, and other experiences of marginalization within contemporary Islamic learning in Nigeria. Digital tools hold immense promise for promoting access, participation, and equity in religious education, particularly for women and marginalized communities. Yet, this promise is not automatic but is conditioned by intersecting structural factors such as poverty, geography, and social norms that can either facilitate or obstruct meaningful engagement. To harness the full emancipatory potential of digital Islamic education, efforts must be made to develop inclusive infrastructure, strengthen digital literacy, and establish ethical standards that safeguard learners and educators alike. Moreover, digital spaces should be deliberately designed to reflect and respect the diversity of Muslim experiences, especially the voices of women, rural learners, and economically disadvantaged groups.

This study affirms that a feminist and intersectional lens is essential for understanding and transforming digital Islamic learning. It moves us beyond simplistic narratives of access toward a more nuanced appreciation of how digital technology intersects with social identities to shape educational possibilities and constraints. Far from operating in isolation, these overlapping axes of identity reveal how inclusion and exclusion are differentially experienced by learners and educators navigating online Islamic spaces. Through such a lens, we can begin to reimagine Islamic education not just as a mode of transmission, but as a site of equity, empowerment, and ethical transformation.

The findings also underscore the duality of digital technology in this context. On one hand, it offers liberating pathways, particularly for women and marginalized groups, by expanding access to religious knowledge beyond traditional settings and cultural gatekeeping. As illustrated in participants' narratives, digital platforms have enabled many, especially women, to engage more freely with Islamic scholarship by circumventing barriers imposed by geography, financial limitations, and conservative gender norms. On the other hand, the same technologies often reproduce or exacerbate existing inequalities. Participants from rural areas, for instance, highlighted how infrastructural deficits, high data costs, and limited digital literacy compounded their exclusion, showing that access remains unevenly distributed.

Furthermore, the study foregrounds Islamophobia as a subtle but influential axis of marginalization in the Nigerian context. Though not always explicitly named, participants' experiences point to a broader climate of religious stereotyping that shapes not only public perception but also self-presentation and engagement within digital platforms. In an environment where being visibly Muslim can attract stigma or limit opportunity, especially for women, the digital space becomes both a site of resistance and of heightened vulnerability.

Ethical concerns were equally prominent, with participants expressing anxieties about the authenticity of online Islamic content and the potential for misinformation. These concerns call for a careful balance between democratizing access and safeguarding doctrinal integrity. Furthermore, the research highlights the critical need for intersectionally informed design and policy in digital Islamic education, highlighting the need for strategies that are attuned to learners' varied realities and that actively dismantle compounded barriers.

Therefore, the findings emphasize that technology alone cannot guarantee equity; therefore, intentional context-sensitive interventions rooted in intersectional awareness are

essential. This includes investment in infrastructure, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the cultivation of digital literacy, especially among women and marginalized communities. Equally as important, Islamic education in the digital age must be grounded in principles of equity and justice that are intrinsic to the Islamic tradition itself. In advancing these aims, policymakers, educators, and technologists must work collaboratively to reimagine digital Islamic education as not merely a tool for knowledge dissemination but a transformative space for inclusion, empowerment, and social justice. Only then can the full potential of digital platforms be realized in fostering equitable access to Islamic learning across Nigeria's richly diverse society.

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