

**BETWEEN TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION: THE
INTELLECTUAL LEGACY OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN SHAPING
WOMEN'S ROLES**

Abdul Qayyum Gondal

Ph.D. Researcher, Lincoln University College, Malaysia

Email: Qayyum.gondal@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Zulkarnan Hatta

Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Lincoln University College

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: zulkarnain@lincoln.edu.my

Abstract

This study explores the critical role Islamic education plays in empowering women and advancing a more equitable and inclusive society. This research employs the literature study technique, which takes a systematic and comprehensive approach to literature analysis, to locate, collect, and evaluate literature sources relevant to the research question. The results of the study show that Islamic education supports gender equality and women's empowerment. Women who have equal access to Islamic education can develop the skills, knowledge, and gender awareness needed to engage fully in society. However, there are significant problems that need to be fixed, such as financial challenges, patriarchal social norms, gender discrimination, and limited access. Additionally, it is imperative to continue pushing for reforms in Islamic education, elevating women's status in society, and removing barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Gender Equality, Women Empowerment

Introduction

Islamic education is essential for both religious and wider social and economic advancement. Scholarly attention has increasingly shifted to its potential to further women's empowerment, which is essential to creating inclusive and progressive societies. With their enormous ability to impact development on many levels, women are a fundamental pillar of society's progress. However, in nations like Pakistan, women still face structural obstacles like restricted access to high-quality education, gender-biased interpretations of religious texts, and sociocultural limitations that prevent them from fully participating (UNESCO, 2023; Aurat Foundation, 2022).

According to UN Women (2023), a number of Muslim-majority nations, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and Tunisia, have made significant strides in implementing gender-inclusive Islamic education reforms, encouraging women to hold leadership positions in religious institutions, and developing equitable curricula.

Therefore, it is essential to critically analyse Islamic education's function in Pakistan in order to realise its transformative potential in enabling women to take a more active role in the advancement of society. Islamic education, a fundamental part of the educational system, helps to mould social values and individual character by fostering moral integrity, ethical principles, and community responsibility based on Islamic teachings.

Islamic education has the potential to revolutionise women's empowerment by giving them a more thorough and accurate understanding of their rights as they are embodied in both religious doctrine and public life. This is especially important in countries like Pakistan, where women's access to their proper status and opportunities is frequently impeded by a variety of interpretations that are frequently more influenced by patriarchal traditions than by true religious teachings (Bano, 2017; Hashmi, 2022). Scholars like Amina Wadud and Fatima Mernissi have long maintained that women can be empowered to question discriminatory norms and assert their religious and social rights by reinterpreting Islamic texts through a gender-inclusive lens.

Additionally, Islamic education can be a useful tool for addressing more general socioeconomic problems like systemic social injustice, gender inequality, and poverty. There is evidence from nations such as Tunisia and

Indonesia that incorporating gender equity principles into progressive Islamic curricula has improved women's economic independence, decreased their susceptibility to exploitation, and increased their educational participation (UN Women, 2023; GIZ, 2022). Women with higher levels of education are more likely to break intergenerational cycles of marginalisation, become economically independent, and make informed decisions.

Strong research and trustworthy data are necessary for the transformation of gender-inclusive Islamic education in order to impact resource allocation and policy. In order to mainstream gender-inclusive Islamic education, it is imperative that policymakers, religious scholars, and educational institutions engage in evidence-based discourse. A solid moral and ethical basis is produced when Islamic education is in line with universal humanitarian principles like equality, justice, and compassion. Gender justice is supported by the ethical foundation of Islam, so long as its tenets are applied with human dignity and historical awareness. Incorporating these principles into Islamic education improves women's ability to make significant contributions to contemporary society and fortifies religious understanding. For a future in which women can flourish as equal and empowered members, Islamic education must be expanded to encompass critical thinking, social awareness, and civic responsibility.

In order to compete in dynamic labour markets and navigate complex social realities, people must have access to knowledge. Islamic education can give women the confidence to take on leadership roles in a variety of fields and tackle social and economic issues. However, incorporating pertinent social, cultural, and gender-sensitive viewpoints into the curriculum is essential to the efficacy of Islamic education. Research from Malaysia and Jordan demonstrates that Islamic education that is inclusive and contextually sensitive encourages women to think critically, participate in civic life, and take on leadership roles. Women in nations like Pakistan, on the other hand, experience institutional barriers, cultural norms that restrict their access to education, and prejudice against them because of their gender.

Families, communities, and legislators must work together to create an educational environment that supports women's agency. This entails promoting curricula that embody Islamic-based egalitarian values, dispelling

myths, and creating secure and encouraging learning environments. To guarantee equitable participation, Islamic education must be inclusive, embracing women from all socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographic backgrounds. The idea that empowering women through inclusive Islamic education is not only a religious obligation but also a strategic necessity for societal advancement is reinforced by such an approach, which aligns with the larger objectives of gender justice and sustainable development.

This study explores the role of Islamic education in promoting women's empowerment, highlighting its multifaceted role in enhancing religious literacy, expanding general knowledge, dismantling socio-cultural barriers, and fostering inclusive learning environments. It emphasizes that Islamic education, when aligned with principles of justice, compassion, and equity, can transform women's confidence, leadership, and economic agency. The study also examines strategic approaches for strengthening the role of Islamic education, particularly in regions where women face institutional and cultural constraints. Comparative perspectives, such as a 2018 study in Bangladesh, affirm that inclusive Islamic education significantly boosts women's knowledge, skills, and self-assurance, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to community life. The research advocates for reform, innovation, and equity in educational systems, paving the way for a future where all individuals, regardless of gender, can thrive equally.

Another significant contribution to this discourse is the study by Lynda A. Tyler-Viola and Sandra K. Cesario, which underscores the role of inclusive, gender-sensitive education in reducing gender inequality and fostering environments that support women's empowerment. Their research demonstrates that education systems informed by gender equity principles can reshape societal attitudes toward women, expanding their access to opportunities across multiple domains, including leadership, healthcare, and education. These findings resonate with global studies that explore the intersection of Islamic education and gender justice.

Recent studies have looked at topics like women's access to Islamic education, how religious knowledge affects gender roles, the role of social norms, and the use of digital tools in religious education in a variety of Muslim-majority and minority contexts. These studies consistently demonstrate how

Islamic education can undermine long-standing gender biases and elevate women's roles in both the public and private domains when it is implemented through inclusive, reform-oriented frameworks.

This review expands on the understanding of how Islamic education can be used as a strategic tool for empowerment by examining these comparative studies. In the end, it advances women's full participation in sustainable development and equitable societal advancement by contributing to a more thorough framework for addressing social, cultural, and economic barriers.

Method

To find, gather, and assess pertinent academic sources, this study employs a methodical literature review approach. Peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, policy reports, and related theses are all part of this process because they offer a strong basis for analysis. Key findings, thematic patterns, and noteworthy contributions from earlier research on the role of Islamic education in women's empowerment are extracted by the researcher. The approach makes it possible to evaluate methodological approaches, compare research findings, and pinpoint knowledge gaps. The study's conceptual foundation is this literature-driven analysis, which guarantees academic rigour and coherence. In addition to adhering to a methodical approach, the study will produce insightful information about the ways in which Islamic education supports women's empowerment across a range of sociocultural contexts.

Results and Discussion

In Muslim societies, Islamic education is essential for advancing inclusive development and gender awareness. It fosters a sophisticated view of gender roles and rights while influencing ethical behaviour and social norms. However, patriarchal and culturally conservative interpretations of traditional Islamic teachings are common. Dismantling gender stereotypes and encouraging critical thinking are more successful outcomes of inclusive Islamic curricula that incorporate Hadith studies, Quranic exegesis, and socio-legal discourses. In Muslim-majority contexts, this strategy promotes active female involvement in civic, political, and economic life, affirms the equal spiritual and social status of men and women, and provides a crucial platform for gender-transformative change.

The ethical, moral, and social norms of Muslim societies are greatly influenced by Islamic education, especially when it comes to promoting gender awareness. It entails being aware of men's and women's rights, obligations, and social roles. However, patriarchal cultural filters and regional norms can cause differences in how traditional Islamic sources, like the Qur'an and Hadith, are interpreted. Research from North Africa and Southeast Asia demonstrates that inclusive, gender-conscious curricula in Islamic education greatly raise awareness of women's rights and challenge constrictive gender norms.

Islamic education, when approached through a rights-based and inclusive lens, can play a crucial role in promoting gender equality and social progress. It encourages critical engagement with texts, affirming Islam's advocacy for the dignity and equal agency of both sexes. This education also helps deconstruct harmful gender stereotypes in various settings, equipping women to engage more confidently in economic, political, and civic spheres. When schools, families, and communities align in supporting gender equality through religious education, the potential for broader societal transformation is amplified.

Developing gender awareness through Islamic education requires explicit inclusion of gender equality principles in the curriculum, active engagement of religious leaders and scholars, review of educational materials to eliminate gender bias, and inclusive curricula supporting intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Islamic education can also address harmful practices like child marriage, female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence by raising awareness of their negative impact and incompatibility with Islamic ethics.

To achieve this goal, coordinated efforts among educational institutions, families, communities, and religious authorities are needed to build supportive environments for gender equality. However, challenges such as deep-rooted patriarchal norms, limited access to Islamic education for women, and economic and cultural barriers persist. A gender-aware Islamic education should equip students with critical thinking skills and a deep understanding of gender justice rooted in Islamic values.

In order to incorporate gender issues into curricula, teacher preparation programs, and instructional materials, cooperation between Islamic and formal educational institutions is essential. Because early gender role socialisation

starts at home, families also play a fundamental role. Classroom lessons are reinforced by encouraging shared responsibilities and respect for both genders within the family.

Public dialogue on gender equality is strengthened by community involvement, which includes neighbourhood programs and religious endeavours. In order to provide resources, advocacy, and training, support from NGOs and educational institutions is essential. By eradicating discrimination and guaranteeing equal access to education, national and regional policies should support these initiatives.

In Muslim societies, Islamic education is an essential instrument for raising gender awareness and improving women's political, social, and economic engagement. It encourages equal access to both religious and secular knowledge, giving women the abilities and self-assurance they need to make significant contributions to society. Islamic education aims to empower women by dismantling gender stereotypes and sociocultural barriers that restrict their participation in public life. Education can question established conventions and advance inclusive values by incorporating the gender justice principles found in Islamic teachings. To effectively promote women's rights and end discriminatory practices, it is imperative to involve the larger Muslim community, which includes academics, religious leaders, families, and educators.

Empowered through Islamic education, women are more likely to become community leaders, contribute to decision-making, and promote peace and stability. Studies show that societies with educated women experience reduced poverty, lower violence rates, improved family health, and higher economic growth. Moreover, educated mothers often inspire future generations to pursue learning, creating a multiplier effect for social progress. Thus, Islamic education, when inclusive and gender-aware, serves not only individual women but also as a catalyst for broader societal transformation and sustainable development.

Islamic education is crucial in reducing economic inequality by providing women with knowledge of their rights, promoting social justice, and fostering equal opportunities. Empowered women are better equipped to resist exploitation and participate meaningfully in economic life. Islamic education

also promotes environmental sustainability, as educated women lead eco-conscious practices within families and communities. It can challenge patriarchal norms by reinforcing religious principles that support gender equality and reshape cultural values that hinder women's progress. Empowered women preserve and transmit religious and traditional values, safeguarding heritage for future generations. They also bring diverse perspectives to religious discourse, enhancing pluralism and understanding. Empowered women can address global challenges like conflict, climate change, and poverty with critical thinking and moral leadership. Investing in women's Islamic education is essential for achieving gender equality, sustaining cultural identity, and fostering global peace and resilience. Comparatively, countries investing in inclusive Islamic education have shown progress in advancing women's roles in religious scholarship, leadership, and civic life.

Notably, the intersectionality of education, health, legal awareness, and economic participation emerged as a recurring theme in the literature. Women with access to quality Islamic education demonstrated greater resilience, autonomy, and civic responsibility—acting as agents of peace, ethical governance, and social reform. Furthermore, the inclusion of environmental ethics and sustainable development principles in Islamic pedagogy enhances women's roles as custodians of both social and ecological well-being.

Islamic education can offer a values-based basis for confronting injustice and fostering inclusive growth, even though it cannot eliminate systemic inequality on its own. The findings suggest that in order to close the educational gap, specific interventions—like curriculum reform, teacher preparation, gender studies integration, and digital access—are necessary. To assess the long-term effects, these need to be backed by thorough legal frameworks and ongoing monitoring.

In the end, empowering women via Islamic education is not only morally required, but also strategically necessary for creating societies that are just, knowledgeable, and peaceful. Therefore, this study urges a paradigm change—from a reactive model of women's inclusion to a proactive and transformative strategy based on knowledge, justice, and shared responsibility.

Conclusion

Islamic education has the potential to empower women in Muslim societies and achieve gender equality because it is based on the Quran's teachings of justice and the pursuit of knowledge. It can dispel gender stereotypes, promote women's active engagement in public life, and impart scholarly and religious knowledge. But according to the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report, Pakistan comes in at number 145 out of 146, underscoring the need for easily accessible, gender-sensitive Islamic education that gives women economic, social, and intellectual power. It is imperative that Islamic education be reformed to be more inclusive, particularly in nations like Pakistan.

The Islamabad Declaration, which was the result of recent efforts like the 2025 International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities, reaffirmed girls' right to education as a civic and religious obligation. Major Muslim scholars and leaders endorsed the declaration, which demonstrated the growing congruence of Islamic principles with international standards for gender justice. In addition to providing access, the focus was on establishing spaces where women feel safe, valued, and heard, such as madrassas, Islamic universities, and community organisations. Islamic education can foster social responsibility, ethical contemplation, and critical thinking in these contexts.

Women who receive gender-inclusive religious education are more likely to contribute more confidently to the political and economic arenas and to oppose harmful practices such as early marriage, domestic abuse, and gender-based discrimination, according to research. Depending on the curriculum's content, the attitudes of the teachers, and the institutions' readiness to embody the egalitarian spirit of Islamic teachings, Islamic education can either support or contradict conventional norms. It is essential to include female role models from Islamic history, like Aisha and Khadijah. Beyond theology, inclusive Islamic education ought to cover women's legal rights, gender parity, civic involvement, and leadership. The development of Muslim women leaders who can tackle today's social and political issues depends on this interdisciplinary approach.

It is also impossible to overestimate the importance of the media, family, and community. Islamic education that is practiced within the family, such as the fair distribution of household duties and shared decision-making, can have a cascading effect on schools, workplaces, and society at large. Families are the

first social institutions where gender roles are formed. Additionally, there are new ways to reach women who are geographically or culturally isolated thanks to digital Islamic education platforms, which have expanded dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic. Disparities in digital access, however, continue to be a significant obstacle, particularly in rural Pakistan, where 70% of women do not regularly have access to the internet. To guarantee that digital Islamic education is both equitable and accessible, this gap must be closed.

There are still difficulties. The potential of Islamic education as an empowering force is still being weakened by conservative societal resistance, a lack of gender-sensitive pedagogy training for teachers, and inadequate government supervision of madrassas. Furthermore, education that is rote-based and exclusionary rather than critical and inclusive is frequently the consequence of financial limitations, out-of-date curricula, and inadequate monitoring frameworks. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. More and more Islamic education reformers, both men and women, are striving to update curricula, develop the skills of teachers, and promote educational policies that embody the inclusive, compassionate, and just spirit of Islam.

In conclusion, Islamic education can be a powerful tool for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment when it is based on equity, inclusivity, and critical engagement with both scripture and society. Governments, places of worship, educational institutions, and communities must all work together to achieve this. It also calls for a change in perspective from seeing women as passive learners to seeing them as active participants in social, cultural, and spiritual change. Islamic education can contribute to the creation of a more equitable and gender-neutral society in Pakistan and throughout the Muslim world with consistent reform and inclusive implementation.

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