Role of Muslim Women in Interreligious Education: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Interreligious learning is becoming more relevant in plural societies, as the case of Bangladesh will illustrate, where religious diversity finds its place alongside resilient cultural and Islamic traditions. Muslim women, as teachers, mothers and members of the community are a meaningful force for promoting dialogue, tolerance and social harmony. Yet, their contribution has been less researched empirically, particularly in an Islamic context. This research is designed to explore the role of Muslim women in interfaith education in Bangladesh. In particular, it aims to examine their background knowledge and understanding; perceived roles and Islamic rationale for participation; the perceived barriers of Muslim women's involvement; and socio-cultural implications. Quantitative research design was employed with the aid of a structured questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale. Muslim women were drawn from educational institutions, community and organizations. Relationships between awareness, religiosity/religious perspective, participation and perceived impact were evaluated using descriptive statistics and inferential analyses. The results have demonstrated significant consensus in which Islamic knowledge is conducive to tolerance and Muslim women contribute toward fostering respect for religious pluralism. But there were also cultural barriers, institutional constraints and training gaps that hindered active participation. The involvement of women in interreligious education is positively associated with perceived social harmony, youth tolerance, and community cohesion. The research concludes that policy support, education and training for Muslim women could contribute to the enhancement of the understanding among religious communities in Bangladesh consistent with Islamic teachings.

Keywords: *Interreligious Education; Muslim Women; Islamic Perspective; Social Cohesion; Gender and Religious*

1. Introduction

The combination of religions has become an urgent necessity in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies to develop verbs like understanding, tolerance and peaceful coexistence Inter-religious education is seen as an essential strategy (Husna & Albina, 2025). In a country such as Bangladesh where social life revolves a lot around one's religious identity, projects which aim to uphold interfaith dialogue are more and more relevant for the overall social stability and stability of the nations (Khambali et al., 2023).

Although the conversation around interfaith work is often framed in terms of institutional policies, the role of women especially Muslim women is relatively understudied despite their roles as powerful actors in the family, educational and community norms (Susari et al., 2024). Within a global framework characterized by heightened levels of religious plurality and misunderstanding between people of faith, the context of inter-religious education within Islam does not begin as a relatively recent accommodation but as a religious and moral imperative that finds expression within the very fabric of revelation (Badar et al., 2024). The Islamic view of humanity, as represented within the Qur'anic text, presents a view of human diversity as purposeful, not coincidental, stating, "O humankind, We created you… and made you peoples and tribes so that you may know one another" (Qur'an 49:13). From the conceptual perspective, interreligious education in Islam could be defined as an organized and intentional pedagogical practice that promotes the pursuit of interreligious understanding through the use of rational discussions (ḥiwār) and ethics. In this regard, the objective of interreligious education in Islam should not be syncretism but rather the pursuit of understanding through rational discussions and ethics. In fact, the Qur'an clearly advocates for dialogical engagement through the use of wisdom and ethics (Qur'an 16:125), thus validating the legitimacy of interreligious education in Islamic epistemology.

Traditionally, the basis of inter-religious education has been formalized in the Islamic formative period through prophetic example and early Islamic politics. This included the Charter of Medina, founded by the Islamic prophet Muhammad, which created an educational political model of religious tolerance through notions of mutual rights and recognitions (Ibn Hisham, circa 833). Early Islamic theologians also developed notions of engaging the other through knowledge rather than power, through accountability to God (Quran 2:256). An important feature of interreligious education in Islam is ethical dialogue, as exemplified in the Quranic mandate to engage in disputation with the People of the Book in a manner that is "the best" (Quran 29/46). Classical scholars like al-Ghazālī (1095/2004) also emphasize the importance of intention and moral purification in intellectual disputation, so that intellectual disputation remains an educative process rather than a polemical one. The other characteristic feature of this identity is the notion of mutual recognition. This can be seen in the Qur'anic acknowledgment of the existence of righteousness in other communities of faith (Qur'an 3:113-115), creating an epistemic openness that cannot be absolutely othered. This is not to deny Islamic theological assertions, however, as it situates the entire idea of interfaith knowledge within a notion of divine justice and human dignity, further emphasizing the role of education in peaceful coexistence.

Finally, inter-religious education in Islam is purposeful and transformative. The purpose of Islamic education is to produce individuals who are just (ʿadl) and compassionate (raḥma) between different religions (Qur'an 5:8). Recent authors have observed that the Qur'an-based framework locates inter-religious education within Islamic ethics rather than an external ideology (Cornille, 2008; Elius & Zulkifli, 2015), thus securing the characteristics of inter-religious education within the Islamic epistemology. Teachings within Islam stress values of compassion, equity and respect for people of other faith communities, offering a sound theological basis for religious reconciliation. As mothers, teachers, activists and role models-ínā-Muslim women have a unique role in leading the way to translating these values into daily reality (Susiyawati et al., 2025). Their role in moulding children attitudes, engaging in the debate of communities as well as belonging to educational processes can be an important determinant of what is perceived and practised as religious diversity at the popular level. But archaic gendered presumptions, a lack of access to platforms for women's voices and lack of institutional push back often limit their participation in interfaith cooperation (Skuza & Lizak, 2023). In the context of Bangladesh, where inclusive education and social cohesion are being increasingly emphasized, there exist opportunities for revisiting the role of Muslim women in fostering inter-religious learning (Muthoifin et al., 2024). Schools, nongovernmental organizations, and religious groups have come to understand that women's participation can help both bring dialogue closer together and encourage more compassionate relationships in society. However, a literature on how Muslim women perceive their roles, what drives them from an Islamic standpoint to participate and challenges they face is still scarce (Boiliu & Silitonga, 2024).

This gap is addressed in this study by examining the impact of interfaith educational processes on Muslim women quantitatively. It investigates their inter-faith understanding, their concept about teachings of Islam regarding religious tolerance, level of participation and sociological consequences of this engagement. By relocating the analysis in relation to the socio-cultural and religious context of Bangladesh, this study hopes to inform public sector bodies as well as academic debates, concerning how empowering Muslim women can facilitate greater inter-religious dialogue and thus enhance sustainable social harmony.

2. Literature Review

Interfaith education is any form of teaching, practice about or study of religion in which members of different religious groups participate. This education is said to be necessary for the reduction of prejudice, development of empathy, and cultivation of social cohesiveness in diverse societies (Khatun, 2023). Among international visionaries, a number of whom have been associated with UNESCO, intercultural and interfaith learning are increasingly recognized as principal peacebuilding and inclusivist citizenship tools. The possibilities of social polarisation and co-existence are now widely being considered in South Asian nations for interfaith learning (Siregar et al., 2024). According to Islamic ideology, the culture of toleration and peaceful coexistence is inherent in our religion. Qur'an emphasizes respect for "People of the Book", and promote conversation based on wisdom and good will (Bećirović & Polz, 2024). Modern Muslims understand these teachings as a call to positive engagement with other communities. Islamic tradition has it that the advent of social reform not only is compatible with but is in accordance with Islamic ethical values (Mayhew & Rockenbach, 2021). Such theological basis enables a solid foundation for Muslim women's participation in interfaith education. Empirical evidence indicates that women are central to both informal and formal education, notably as disseminators of values within the family and community. As mothers and educators, Muslim women frequently serve as the first sort of socialising agent for children, determining how they will be influenced in relation to diversity or tolerance (Dalimunthe et al., 2025). Attention to gender and religion has shown that the presence of women in dialogical initiatives tends to generate more communicatively inclusive and empathetic contexts. UN Women is one of the organizations stressing that women participating in peacebuilding and education programs have a noteworthy improvement on outcomes at the community level (Annisa et al., 2023).

The historical involvement of Muslim women in inter-religious education offers an important but relatively unexplored feature of Islamic learning history. In this regard, Muslim women served as interlocutors and mediators between different religions by actively participating in inter-religious education through learning and dialogical interaction with members of other religions (Mehrabani & Obaid, 2025). Such involvement was based on the authority of Islamic theology and learning and obtains its legitimacy from the principle of accountability and spiritual equality articulated in the Qur'an: "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women…" (Quran 33:35), where the Quran grants gender equality in matters of learning and morality. The prophetic era is a foundational source of evidence on women's involvement with interreligious contexts. Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, who was the first believer, sought consultation with her Christian cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal regarding Islamic theology on the nature of prophethood with respect to Muhammad. This placed interfaith dialogue at the very beginning of Islamic history (Ibn Saʿd, 845/2001). Another prominent woman, Umm Salamah, was part of the Abyssinian migration. Muslim refugees there defended Islamic monotheism against Christian King Negus. Her involvement with this interfaith encounter shows women's active involvement with Islamic theology. In fact, Muslim women were active rather than passive actors with respect to interreligious contexts. During the Islamic classical period, women made their contributions through the establishment of educational institutions. Fatimah bint Muhammad al-Samarqandi (12th century) delivered lectures in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo. Students from the Christian and Jewish faiths attended her lectures. She taught Hanafi jurisprudence. Intellectual interactions between members of different faiths were made possible

through her lectures. Similarly, another woman named Zaynab bint al-Kamal (d. 1339) taught hadith to hundreds of students. Ibn Hajar Asqalani admitted her island as authentic. Thus, the contribution of women as teachers of the Islamic faith is confirmed. The Andalusian period represents the intellectual contributions of women in the framework of pluralism, in which Muslims, Christians, and Jews coexisted. Lubna of Cordoba (10th century) functioned as royal secretary and librarian; she facilitated the dissemination of Greek philosophical works to Latin scholars by means of translations, thus providing Christian Europe access to classical knowledge through the mediation of the Muslims (Menocal, 2002). Lubna's activities represent the feature of mutual recognition in the framework of the education provided by each of the three faiths; knowledge is recognized regardless of the faith to which it is related, in accordance with the Qur'an's instruction that "And say not to those who offer you peace: 'You are not a believer'" (Qur'an 4:94). This instruction has been interpreted by al-Qurtubi (1273/2006) to require respect for non-Muslim people who show goodwill towards Muslims.

In Bangladesh studies of interreligious relations have mainly been concerned with the policy framework, madrassa education and community harmony while there is relatively less research on gendered perspectives (Mahoney, 2019). Studies in existence point out that although Muslim women in general support values of tolerance and co-existence, they are not equally engaged in official interfaith activities owing to societal inhibitions, fewer institutional opportunities, and absence of gender-focused capacity building (Andri Nirwana et al., 2024). But civil society-led, community-based experiments show that the more women are involved, the better dialogues work and the greater ground-level acceptance. Structural And Cultural Barriers The literature consistently points to structural and cultural barriers that inhibit Muslim women's participation in interfaith education (Karimullah, 2023). These factors, such as traditional gender roles, limited mobility in some areas and few opportunities for leadership positions are compounded by a lack of policy support. Furthermore, theological claims notwithstanding, misconceptions that interfaith work may compromise religious identity could also dissuade involvement (Elmali-Karakaya, 2022). According to researchers, capacity building programs and supportive institutional environments are necessary to address these challenges. There is an increasing amount of evidence that demonstrates the beneficial association between women's participation in faith based cross-cultural contexts and positive social dividends such as decreased hostility, improved relations among communities and increased levels of youth tolerance (Bălan, 2023). Research on peace education shows that women-led programs tend to prioritize dialogue, empathy and cooperative problem solving, so they are especially effective in multicultural environments (Manuain et al., 2024). Studies show that educating Muslim through increasing opportunities for leadership and policy recognition can go a long way in promoting better inter-religious relationship, thereby contributing toward future social stability (Lo, 2022).

Notwithstanding the realistic acceptance of women's role in social and educational process, there is however a dearth of empirical quantitative studies exploring Muslim women's specific functions, views and struggles for participation in inter-religious education (IRE) practices within Bangladesh. The majority of published research are conceptual or qualitative and there is a lack of quantifiable evidence that can be used to develop policy and program-sensitive planning. It therefore aims to bridge this lacuna by offering empirically based insights into awareness, Islamic motivations, perceived roles, barriers and societal impact related with the participation of Muslim women in interreligious education. The objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the awareness of inter-religious education in Bangladeshi Muslim women.
2. To investigate Muslim women's perceived contribution in facilitating interfaith amity, at levels of families, institutions and community.
3. To examine Islamic views that inspire or affect involvement of Muslim women in interfaith education programs.

4. To recognize the significant opportunities and challenges affecting Muslim women's participation in interfaith education.
5. To assess the perceived societal effect of Muslim women's engagement in promoting tolerance and social unity.

3. Methods and Methodology

Quantitative cross-sectional research design was used in this study to investigate the role of Muslim women in interreligious educational practices in Bangladesh. Data were gathered by means of structured instrument containing question items on awareness, perceived roles, Islamic perspectives, barriers and societal impact. The target group were Muslim women, who formed the age criteria of 18 years and above from the educational institutions, community based organizations (CBO) in urban as well as semi-urban areas and household. The sample size was determined by using Cochran's formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 . p . (1 - p)}{E^2}$$

Where Z= 1.96 for a 95% confidence level, p= 0.5 assuming maximum variability and E=0.05 margin of error (Cochran, 1942). Using this estimate a minimum sample size of 384 respondents was necessary to be included into study. Then, to ensure a representation in both occupation and education level groups, a stratified convenience sampling method was adopted. The data obtained were subjected to descriptive statistics, reliability and inferential statistical test (correlation and regression) that examines the relationship between variables. Ethical issues such as voluntary participation, anonymity and informed consent were considered while collecting the data.

4. Result and Discussion

The empirical results of the investigation will be outlined in this section, which they will be interpreted with reference to the study goals and relevant literature. The study was to explore Muslim women's awareness in respect of Interreligious Education (IRE), their perceived roles, Islamic motives and barriers and social implications for their taking part on the basis of Bangladesh. An initial analysis entailed utilizing descriptive statistics to describe the demographic characteristics and overall responses of participants, followed by inferential analyses examining associations between key variables. The article concludes by placing the findings in Islamic discourses of tolerance as well as current debates about female social and educational engagement. Drawing on statistical evidence and theoretical insights, this section attempts to make sense of how Muslim women engage in the field of interreligious education, and what their involvement means for social integration and inclusive learning spaces.

4.1 Demographic Information

Demographics of the respondents are percentage-wise reported to present a succinct view about sample profile and have been used later on to contextualize subsequent analysis on Muslim women's engagement in interreligious education in Bangladesh.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25	110	28.6
	26–35	142	37.0
	36–45	78	20.3
	46–55	34	8.9
	56+	20	5.2
Marital Status	Single	126	32.8
	Married	238	62.0
	Other	20	5.2
Education Level	Secondary	56	14.6
	Higher Secondary	64	16.7
	Bachelor	146	38.0
	Master	92	24.0
	PhD	10	2.6
	Madrasa Education	16	4.1
Occupation	Student	118	30.7
	Teacher/Educator	86	22.4
	Homemaker	80	20.8
	Professional	56	14.6
	NGO/Community Worker	32	8.3
	Other	12	3.1
Area of Residence	Urban	186	48.4
	Semi-Urban	122	31.8
	Rural	76	19.8
Institution Type	General Education	178	46.4
	Madrasa	48	12.5
	Religious Organization	52	13.5
	NGO	66	17.2
	Not Applicable	40	10.4

The Table 1 shows that 37.0% of the respondents were aged 26–35, which was a majority of younger and socially active sample. Over half of the sample was married (62.0%), underscoring the saliency of family level influence on interreligious education. There was a relatively high level of educational attainment, 62.0% having bachelor's/master's degrees, highlighting their rich exposure to formal knowledge environment. Professionally, the largest groups were students (30.7 %) and educators (22.4 %), which indicated a close relation to learning situations. About half of the respondents lived in urban areas (48.4%), meaning that they were possibly exposed to more diversity and chances for dialogue.

Most participants were in the age group of 26–35 years, and next to this age group in the 18–25 years range demonstrating that majority of participants in this survey belonged to young – middle-aged adult category. This age-distribution implies a socially active and probable family or community-relation oriented population which is consistent with the literature describing that women of these ages are frequently involved in educational and value-shaping processes. Older participants (36 years and older) added to the diversity as well as weight of life, community experience. The majority of respondents were married and few (%) were single. This trend is important for married women, especially mothers play a role as an important agent of informal education in the family. The higher histogram representation of these two supports the importance of value transmission, tolerance and interfaith understanding within

the family context. The sample was relatively well-educated, the major part with bachelor's and master's degrees, and minority with madrasa or secondary education. This variety allowed for comparison between different levels of formal education and indicates that exposure to formal learning might have an impact on knowledge, attitudes and behavior in relation to interreligious education. The presence of a larger proportion of the participants from higher education evokes the participation of educated Muslim women in social and intellectual debates.

Information about respondents; occupation Respondents' occupations were diverse, they included students, teachers, professionals, homemakers and NGO/community workers. max=49) of teachers and students combined, which is noteworthy since these groups have a direct association with educational settings at which interreligious learning actually takes place. Involvement of Homemakers underscored the role of informal educators within the family, and NGO workers as a community-based interest. While the majority of participants were from urban and semi-urban regions, only a minority came from rural settings. It is this distribution that implies a higher level of exposure to diversity, educational resources and social programs for our respondents, which may in turn impact their awareness and attitudes towards interfaith work. Age and occupation were not significant because rural respondents were also included. Those associated with institutions, the majority were from general education systems, followed by NGOs and religious organizations. This means that the interreligious education perspective is formed in other locations besides religious contexts, also in mainstream educational settings and civil society.

In general, the demographic results suggest that we were able to recruit a diverse if somewhat educated and socially active sample of Muslim women. There is an overwhelming amount of married, educated and urban participants which indicates high capacity for both family and institutional influence (Muthoifin et al., 2024). These qualities fall into place with the theories that have emphasized women as principle agents of socialization and transmission of cultural/religious meanings. This demographic profile therefore serves as a sound basis for the interpretation of the further insights relating to awareness, roles, barriers and social influence, as it represents a cohort that has both capacity and potential access to contribute meaningfully to interreligious education projects.

4.2 Awareness of Interreligious Education

Respondents' awareness about the interreligious education was measured with five Likert-type statements. The percentage of disaggregate responses informs the degree to which Muslim women consider interfaith learning, in a Bangladeshi setting, to be important, relevant and rooted in Islamic teachings.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Awareness of Interreligious Education

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Familiar with the concept of interreligious education	3.75	0.98	High awareness
Islam encourages peaceful coexistence with other religions	4.07	0.86	Very high agreement
Interreligious education is important for social harmony	4.02	0.89	High agreement
Muslim women should be aware of interfaith teachings	4.09	0.84	Very high agreement
Educational institutions should include interfaith topics	3.89	0.93	High agreement

Collectively, all of the mean ratings are above 3.50 reflecting that respondents have an overall positive view and high level of awareness about interreligious education. The mean score at the highest level for educational institutions should include interfaith topics (M = 4.09) indicates that participants definitely agree to the extent that Muslim women should be aware of interfaith education. Islam encourages peaceful coexistence with other religions also indicates high confidence in Islam's role in

peaceful coexistence. SD values are quite low (from 0.84 to 0.98) which means that responses are not much dispersed and there is a robust degree of consensus among the participants. The findings have shown a strong pre-disposition and awareness of respondents in Bangladesh for the practice of interreligious education. On the whole, participants were in strong support of statements that indicated familiarity with interfaith concepts, understanding their role for social harmony, and agreement to integrate them into educational contexts (Table 2). The mean scores of the sum of all items were still far above 3, showing that the respondents tended to have rather positive perceptions than neutral or not sure attitudes in general. Especially newsworthy is the powerful common agreement that Islamic beliefs endorse peaceful living together and, equally so, Muslim women should be well-informed about interfaith lessons (Dalimunthe et al., 2025). These results suggest that consciousness is not some abstract condition but is very much tied to understanding religion and being responsible for one's life. The fact that there is little spread in responses also suggests that these are views held by most or all of the group, not just a small segment. Collectively, these data suggest that Muslim girls have a firm cognitive and attitudinal base for engaging in interfaith learning. This high level of awareness serves as a conducive context for future programs, since efforts to increase the participation may be more successful if they are targeted on practical opportunities and training that will fill gaps created by these barriers rather than just sensitization.

4.3 Perceived Role of Muslim Women

The role that it was thought Muslim women could play in interreligious education was tested using a number of statements on family, among students, and in the community. The percentage distribution of women's contribution in promoting interfaith understanding among respondents in Bangladesh.

Table 3: Statistics for Perceived Role of Muslim Women

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Muslim women can play a significant role in promoting interreligious understanding	4.07	0.86	Very high agreement
Women educators influence students' attitudes toward other religions	4.00	0.91	High agreement
Mothers play a key role in teaching children respect for religious diversity	4.17	0.82	Very high agreement
Participation of Muslim women in community dialogue strengthens social cohesion	3.95	0.94	High agreement
Women's leadership is essential in interfaith educational initiatives	3.86	0.98	High agreement

Descriptive statistics of respondents' perceptions on the role for Muslim women in interreligious education in Bangladesh. Mean scores above mid-point reflect positive perceptions and the SD suggests consistency of participant's responses (Table 3). These mean scores illustrate positive orientations and reactions with regard to all role dimension of Muslim women's roles. The greatest mean value is attributed to the influence of mothers in the development of children's attitudes towards religious diversity, emphasizing value creation at the level of family relationships. Likewise, respondents were strongly of the opinion that Muslim women make a large contribution to facilitating interfaith understanding. The low standard deviation figures mean that these perceptions are almost universally shared among the participants. Overall, the descriptive statistics validate the view of Muslim women as significant agents in promoting tolerance and dialogue and lend support to the argument that greater involvement on their part can contribute to better results for inter-religious education. The study indicates a high level of consensus that Muslim women are key agents for building interfaith relations. A large majority believed that women have a specific role in encouraging interfaith awareness which reflects

acceptance of their social influence outside the home. This view is also consistent with feminist theory, which focuses on women as primary transmitters of values and social solidarity (Andri Nirwana et al., 2024). One of the strongest agreements found among mothers was in the teaching of respect for religious diversity, emphasizing the significance of family-based non-formal education. This means that early socialization by families is considered a key channel for the promotion of tolerant attitudes, which leads to consideration of religion education across religious divides as part of home-based education. Respondents also recognized the role of women educators, noting that female teachers play a key part in crafting students' understanding religious diversity. This mirrors the increasing presence of women in schools and their potential to develop classrooms that are inclusive.

While responses were high in favor for involvement of women in community dialogue and leadership, slightly higher neutral responses at these levels underscore the fact that structural or cultural barriers may restrict women's voice in formal decision-making contexts. However, on balance the evidence simply suggests widespread recognition that it is both desirable and advantageous for women to play a part.

4.4 Islamic Perspective

This part of the analysis examines respondents' constructions of Islam's basis in interfaith education, specifically how religious teachings contribute to tolerance and dialogue, as well as women's role in promoting peaceful coexistence in Bangladesh.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Islamic Perspective of the Respondents

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Islamic teachings support respect for followers of other religions	4.10	0.84	Very high agreement
The Qur'an promotes tolerance and mutual understanding	4.16	0.81	Very high agreement
Muslim women have a religious responsibility to promote peace	4.01	0.90	High agreement
Interreligious engagement aligns with Islamic ethical values	4.06	0.87	Very high agreement
Religious scholars encourage women's participation in social education	3.83	0.98	High agreement

Average scores also indicate high positive attitudes in all of sentences, from which the one about Islamic teachings and Qur'an (respectively) fostering tolerance is found to have a great agreement (Table 4). Somewhat less positive but still mildly positive experiences with being called to prayer by religious scholars might indicate heterogeneity in community experiences. Taken together, the descriptive statistics support the hypothesis on high Islamic religious belief as a supportive factor for Muslim women's participation in interfaith education. Results suggest high agreement that the Islamic teachings offer a strong framework for interreligious education. An overwhelming majority respondents believe that Islam fosters respect toward non-Muslims, and tolerance and mutual understanding. This implies that the religious principle of interfaith is regarded as being compatible with religious tradition and not a contradiction thereof. There was also strong support for the idea that Muslim women have a religious duty to work towards peaceful coexistence. This indicates a process of internalization of the moral message embedded in Islamic teachings and a construction of women's institution in interfaith ventures from a perceived normative perspective. Respondents also identified the interreligious dialogue as reflecting the more general ethical principles of Islam, including mercy, justice and living side by side. Such an understanding reinforces the assertion that religious motivations can be a successful incentive for participating in dialogue and learning.

However, responses to items concerning encouragement from religious leaders were somewhat more neutral and disagreed when compared to those of other statements (Susari et al., 2024). This may suggest differing exposure to religious leadership support or interpretations across communities. Nevertheless, general perceptions were positive overall which implies the religious legitimacy of women's participation is generally recognized.

4.5 Opportunities and Barriers

The following section discusses the perceived opportunities and challenges for Muslim women in interreligious education. Knowledge of these factors would be valuable in identifying pragmatic options for increasing engagement and effect in a Bangladesh context.

Table 5: Opportunities and Barriers of the Muslim Women in Interreligious Education

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Social norms limit Muslim women's participation in interfaith programs	3.64	1.12	Moderate agreement (notable barrier)
Lack of awareness is a major barrier to involvement	3.60	1.10	Moderate agreement
Institutional support for women is adequate	2.69	1.14	Low agreement (indicates support gap)
Training programs would increase participation	4.08	0.89	High agreement (strong opportunity)
Family support influences engagement	3.97	0.95	High agreement

The results offer a complex image in which, on the one hand, limiting factors and opportunities to participation configure Muslim women's access to Interreligious Education. The vast majority of the participants responded that social norms were a barrier, suggesting that cultural dynamics and constructs of gender continue to shape the visibility and exercise of women's voice in public discourse. This appears to indicate that attitudes toward women's roles are changing but traditional barriers are still acting on participation rates. Not being informed was similarly reported as a barrier by many respondents; however the fact that this appears to be balanced by a large number of neutral responders suggests that there is also heterogeneity in experience across communities. This suggests that existing public awareness campaigns may exist in some settings but are not universally available. More modestly positive were attitudes about support from the institution. More than half of respondents disagreed that the necessary support is well established, suggesting a formidable divide between policy mandates, institutional support and strong formal opportunities. This indicates that widespread changes are required to transform favorable attitudes into active engagement (Table 5). In contrast, the greatest consensus revolved around training and capacity building. Large majorities felt that having organized training programs would help improve women's participation – pointing to the need for training, leadership development and educational materials. This finding represents a concrete actionable direction for policy makers and practitioners (Husna & Albina, 2025).

Family support was also an important facilitator, as they responded that encouragement from family members is a major contributing factor to engagement. This underscores that household level acceptance is a key factor model for women's access to and engagement in community-based initiatives.

4.6 Impact on Society

The third section about the broader responses on society effects of Muslim women participation in interreligious education. The impact is discussed in regard to conflict reduction, youth attitudes, community relations, inclusiveness and national stability in the context of Bangladesh.

Table 6: Impact of Interreligious Education on Society

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Women's involvement helps reduce religious conflict	4.00	0.92	High agreement
Interreligious education promotes tolerance among youth	4.07	0.88	Very high agreement
Community peace improves when women participate in dialogue	4.01	0.91	High agreement
Women-led initiatives effectively promote inclusivity	3.94	0.95	High agreement
Interfaith education contributes to national social stability	3.93	0.97	High agreement

The high means (near or above 4.00) on all measures reflect positive perceptions of societal impact. The measure on youth tolerance receives the highest average score, seeming to indicate that respondents dub educational influence as a major avenue toward long-term social transformation. Small variation in responses implies a consensus in the sample. Taken together the descriptive statistics would support the argument that Muslim women's involvement interreligious education is considered to be beneficial in fostering tolerance, building community relationships and strengthening social cohesion. Overall, the findings reveal strong consensus that the involvement of Muslim women in interreligious education can lead to significant and positive social development. The highest proportion of respondents express agreement to address the course outcome that it enables tolerance among the youth. Apparent is the belief that the activities and outcomes of educational programs can have a generational impact, instilling attitudes of acceptance and deterring conflict in the future. Additionally, women hold many educational and care roles at the personal level, making their involvement and relationship-building even more impactful. Thereafter, the community experiences peace when women are involved in the dialogue process was supported by the majority. This reiterates the reliance on the apparent women's abilities in discussing inclusivity during engagements. Lastly, positive perceptions for women-led activities are explicit, where the community felt thriving and inclusive found a good proportion (Bećirović & Polz, 2024). This consensus can be viewed based on the trust and experience expected to have been developed over time by these communities. The positive consensus that these initiatives foster national stability can be interpreted from the local to the national interest of the activities (Table 6).

In sum, the results indicate a general perception that involvement of Muslim women in interreligious education fosters important social goods. The universally high levels of agreement across every item indicate that women are seen as taking part in - and even instigating - social change. These findings illustrate the potential of women-focused interfaith programs to increase tolerance, promote community solidarity and help support long-term peace and stability.

4.7 Women Contributing to Interreligious Education

The women listed in this table are presented chronologically and thematically below for their contribution to scholarship, spirituality, and social activism fostering cross-religious understanding and inclusive education. As it juxtaposes characters from early Islamic history, classical spiritual traditions and modern academic, social contexts (in and beyond Bangladesh), the table celebrates how women have been keeping alive the tradition of dialogue, tolerance and coexistence. This Review offers a framework to explore how women's knowledge production and community engagement have influenced interreligious education across historical periods and sociocultural contexts, in turn establishing the study's emphasis on the importance of the participation of Muslim women in furthering social reconciliation.

Table 7: Women Contributing to Interreligious Education

Name	Period / Country	Key Contributions	Relevance to Interreligious Education
Aisha bint Abu Bakr	7th century, Arabia	Renowned hadith scholar; taught companions and jurists; provided legal and ethical guidance	Her teachings shaped Islamic perspectives on social relations, justice, and respectful engagement with other communities
Fatima al-Zahra	7th century, Arabia	Moral and spiritual authority; emphasis on social justice and compassion	Her legacy promotes ethical coexistence and human dignity, foundational for interfaith understanding
Rabi'a al-Adawiyya	8th century, Iraq	Early Sufi thinker emphasizing divine love and universal spirituality	Her teachings inspired inclusive spiritual perspectives that transcend religious boundaries
Amina Wadud	Contemporary, USA	Scholar of Qur'anic interpretation, gender justice, and inclusive theology	Advocates dialogue, equality, and mutual understanding across faith traditions
Asma Lamrabet	Contemporary, Morocco	Writer on Islam, women's rights, and pluralism	Promotes reinterpretation of Islamic texts supporting coexistence and interfaith respect
Hamida Banu Shabnam	Contemporary, Bangladesh	Researcher and educator promoting peace education and social cohesion	Contributes to academic discourse on interreligious harmony in Bangladesh

The Table 7 offers a genealogy that links the historical with the contemporary in terms of Muslim women's involvement in knowledge making, ethical leadership, and social justice work, exposing the fact that women's contribution to interreligious pedagogies is not new or peripheral at all; on the contrary, it has long been a part of world Islamic intellectual history. Primitively, women leaders such as Aisha bint Abu Bakr and Fatima al-Zahra embody the classical Islamic model of women who were knowledge transmitters, moral examples and community educators (Geissinger, 2011). Their mandates set the tone for academically encouraging spaces in which moral counsel, fairness and goodness dictated Muslim engagement with peoples of other cultures. This historical underpinning indicates that interreligious understanding in Islam is not, as some have alleged, a novelty of modernity but very much part and parcel of the broader edifice of social justice and moral accountability erected by its early visionaries. And then when we enter the spiritual-intellectual tradition, Rabi'a al-Adawiyya represents that migration to universal spiritual morality where love and empathy and devotion become the concern of all communities. Her impact demonstrates how spirituality can be a soft glider towards interfaith harmony, and with formal education in parallel to moral transformation. In the field of contemporary scholarship as well, Amina Wadud and Asma Lamrabet show that when Islamic sources are reread from a gender-inclusive and justice-oriented perspective, they open up for dialogue and resist exclusionist narratives (Mohomed, 2023). Their efforts illustrate a move from an implicit coexistence to an explicit inter-religious engagement which corresponds with the results of this study regarding awareness and perceived roles. The leaders of Bangladesh including Hamida Banu Shabnam connect these with the nativist socio-educational contexts . They provide further evidence of how women's empowerment, literacy and social advocacy contribute to creating space for tolerance and pluralism, reinforcing the study's finding that structural support and education are crucial factors in light of women's involvement in interreligious initiatives.

5　Findings

- Muslim women in Bangladesh had very high levels of knowledge about interfaith education and the importance it plays to establishing social solidarity and understanding.
- Respondents regarded Muslim women as being central to interfaith harmony through their roles as mothers, teachers and members of the community.
- It was found that there is mutual recognition of Islamic values as a powerful driving force, there is respect for the teachings which encourage tolerance, peaceful coexistence and the social responsibility of women in education.
- Social norms, insufficient institutional support and absence of a formal training now are identified as potential barriers, while family support and accessibility to empowerment programs were perceived as key opportunities.
- Participation of Muslim women in inter-religious education was thought to have a positive impact on issues such as youth tolerance, community unity and cohesion, inclusiveness & national social stability.
- Above all, the study showed that if Muslim women can be empowered through awareness building, training and supporting policies during interreligious education, it may contribute to establishing religious harmony within Bangladesh.

6　Recommendations

- Include interreligious instruction in the formal curriculum and use women teachers to promote knowledge and understanding of others.
- Arrange courses and seminars in which Muslim women will learn how to make use of interfaith dialogue and women's leadership.
- Foster support from family and community to promote the involvement of women in inter–religious efforts.
- Shape institutional guidelines and resources for women-led interfaith initiatives.
- Encourage the teachings from Islam regarding tolerance and social responsibility among women to encourage their participation.
- Promotes successful stories of women who have contributed to interfaith education by media campaigns.
- Develop systems to monitor and evaluate the impact of programs targeted towards women.

7　Conclusion

This research illuminates the positive role of women in reaching out to learners with diverse religious backgrounds, as well as developing good will and convincing the marginalized audience that Muslims are ready to be tolerant towards others through interreligious education in Bangladesh. Significant barriers, such as social norms, weak institutional support and lack of training limit their active participation; while family encouragement, opportunity for capacity building programs and religious motivation enhance the possibilities. Its results demonstrate that supporting Muslim women through education, policy backing and leadership roles can help in facilitating cross religious dialogues, building community integration and furthering prospects for long-term social stability. In sum, the incorporation of women's viewpoints and participation in interreligious pursuits is not only compatible with Islamic ideals but also a pragmatic way forward for creating a more inclusive and peaceful society in Bangladesh.

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