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FROM MASJID TO MOBILE:

MUSLIM WOMEN'S JOURNEYS IN QUR'AN LEARNING ONLINE

BY

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The thesis examination committee certifies that the thesis
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Dedication

First, I give thanks to Almighty GOD, Allaah, who has been my Source, my Refuge, and my Solace throughout this journey. I send peace and blessings upon Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, his family, and his companions.

I dedicate this work to my dear parents, Abdillahi Hussein Omar-Hachi (Allaah's mercy be upon his soul) and Fadumo Abdi-Rahman Kahin. Daddy, I know you would have been so proud. Mommy, thank you for encouraging me. Your love, sacrifice, commitment, and unwavering investment are the foundation upon which I stand. May Allaah have mercy on you both the way you raised me when I was small.

I wish to acknowledge my number one fan—my husband, Jim Brandon. You are my mountain to lean on, offering unwavering love, strength, and steady support. I adore you. May our journey together always be guided, blessed, protected, and beautiful. From standing beside me through my defence practice to your constant "stay focused" reminders, you have been my anchor and my encourager. I am deeply grateful for you, my love. I pray for you, as I know you pray for me. May God bless you in every way.

To my beloved children—Asiyah, Asma, Meekal, and Alaa. May you always remember that failure is not the opposite of success, but often the path toward it. May you grow into the many hopes and prayers I carry in my heart for each of you. I hope to remain, for you, a source of love, pride, and inspiration. I am, and will always be, your biggest fan. I look forward to sharing many more meaningful moments like this one for the rest of our lives. Dream big. Dream strong. Dream passionately. Playing small is not your legacy. Always remember: our true Source of every success is our Creator. Be humble. Be ambitious. Be grateful.

Acknowledgement

Creative Commons Statement

AI Disclosure Statement

Artificial Intelligence Disclosure:

This final thesis is the original work of the author, Hodan Hussein. The author acknowledges the use of artificial intelligence tools in the development of this thesis and reports them according to the Artificial Intelligence Disclosure (AID) Framework (Weaver, 2024).

Artificial Intelligence Tools: ChatGPT, Zoom transcript captions, and Microsoft Editor.

Information Collection:

Google Scholar and Athabasca University's library to identify articles and resources related to the proposed research. All articles and resources were read and verified by the author for relevance and accuracy.

Methodology:

Creswell and Creswell (2022) informed the selection and justification of the qualitative methodological approach used in this study and guided its initial design prior to proposal approval. Only after formal approval of the thesis proposal was ChatGPT used as a supplementary reflective tool to support consideration of the study's philosophical assumptions. While coding remained fully researcher-led, ChatGPT was used to support coding refinement by assisting with the organization, comparison, and clarification of codes derived exclusively from participants' verbatim quotations, in a manner comparable to the organizational functions of qualitative data analysis software. All analytic decisions, including coding, theme development, and interpretive judgments, were made solely by the author. AI tools were used to enhance reflexive analysis and organizational clarity and did not determine research findings.

Writing – Review & Editing:

Microsoft Editor were used to assist with grammar, punctuation, clarity, and spelling after the content was composed. The author reviewed and edited all suggested outputs to ensure accuracy and integrity.

The author confirms that all critical thinking, decision-making, interpretation of literature, and scholarly judgment remain the author's own, and that generative AI tools supported the writing process without determining the intellectual content of the thesis.

Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of Muslim women transitioning from face-to-face to online Qur'an study during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a qualitative narrative-ethnographic approach, five participants shared their journeys of adaptation, challenge, and resilience. Analysis revealed six interconnected themes: Learning Environment, Social Connection, Role of Technology, Language and Literacy, Identity and Spirituality, and Female Representation. Findings highlight that Qur'an education is shaped not only by instructional design and technology but also by social bonds, maternal motivation, and spiritual force. While online learning offered flexibility, it disrupted community and teacher–student bonds, introduced linguistic and technological barriers, and exposed the lack of female representation in digital platforms. Participants strongly favored hybrid models that balance accessibility with embodied presence. This research contributes to digital religion and women's education literature, offering practical implications for teachers, program leaders, and app developers to design inclusive, relational, and spiritually affirming Qur'an learning.

Keywords: Qur'an learning, Muslim women, online education, digital religion, hybrid learning, female representation, spiritual identity

Preface

This thesis is the culmination of both an academic journey and a commitment to understanding the experiences of Muslim women in Qur'an education. While framed through the scholarly lenses of open, digital, and distance education, the heart of this work lies in the voices of women whose devotion, resilience, and persistence bring the subject to life.

My decision to explore this topic was shaped by the extraordinary global shift brought on by COVID-19, which forced learning communities around the world to move online overnight. As a Muslim woman and learner myself, I witnessed firsthand the challenges and opportunities that emerged when sacred learning moved from the masjid to the mobile device. This research reflects my desire to honor those experiences and contribute to a body of knowledge that recognizes both the spiritual and pedagogical dimensions of education.

The scope of this study is intentionally focused: five women from one Qur'an program at a Canadian Islamic Centre were invited to share their experiences of transitioning from face-to-face to online learning. Their stories, while situated in a specific context, carry broader meaning. They illuminate the ways in which faith, family, culture, and technology intersect in the lives of Muslim female learners.

Although the analysis that follows is presented in academic language, the preface offers space to acknowledge the personal motivations that guided this research. I hope this work not only contributes to scholarly conversations but also inspires educators, program leaders, and app developers to imagine Qur'an learning environments that are inclusive, relational, and spiritually affirming.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This study explores the experiences of a group of Muslim women in Canada who studied the Qur'an, the sacred text of Islam. Like many educational institutions worldwide, Muslim communities faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced them to shift from in-person to online modes of teaching and learning (Jones-Ahmed, 2022; Yahya et al., 2021). The participants in this study transitioned their Qur'an classes at a local Islamic Centre to online platforms, adapting their study routines, tools, and forms of interaction.

The research investigates which digital applications were used, whether on computers, tablets, or smartphones, and how useful the women found them for pursuing Qur'an learning. It also examines the usability and accessibility of these applications. The aim of this research is to contribute to advancing knowledge on the role of mobile applications in Qur'anic education and informs pedagogical practices in digital learning environments (Hakimi et al., 2024) and to also respond to a notable gap in the literature on Muslim women's experiences with online Qur'an learning environments.

Beyond its local and disciplinary focus, this study also carries broader relevance in relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). The SDGs are described as "a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity" (United Nations, 2015, p. 3). For the women in this study, Qur'an learning functioned as a source of emotional grounding and

spiritual resilience, aligning with definitions of well-being that encompass "quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose" (World Health Organization, 2023).

This study further resonates with SDG 4's call to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015, p. 17), as well as SDG 5's aim to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations, 2015, p. 20), by centering Muslim women's access, participation, and representation in Qur'an education. While technology is not the object of inquiry, the research also engages SDG 9 by examining digital platforms as educational infrastructure, consistent with the goal to "build resilient infrastructure… and foster innovation" (United Nations, 2015, p. 24). These priorities closely align with Islamic teachings, which emphasize that "the pursuit of knowledge in Islam is not merely a right but a duty, incumbent upon all Muslims, male and female alike" (Halstead, 2004, p. 519), and that tools hold value only insofar as they serve ethical and spiritual ends.

Background of the Study

The Qur'an, along with the Sunnah (teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him), forms the foundation of Islamic guidance. Muslims study the Qur'an for spiritual growth, wellness, and divine understanding. Worship in Islam encompasses all actions pleasing to Allah (Luthfiah & Ahmad, 2022), and the Prophet Muhammad said, "The best act of worship for my nation is reciting the Qur'an" (Elias, 2021).

The Qur'an is believed to provide both spiritual and psychological healing, as reflected in the verse: "Say, ˹O Prophet, ˺ 'It is a guide and a healing to the believers'"

(Qur'an, n.d., 41:44.) Learning and reciting the Qur'an has historically combined oral and textual traditions. Because the Prophet himself was unlettered, Qur'anic transmission originally occurred through memorization and oral recitation. Contemporary research has begun to examine Qur'anic listening and recitation in relation to neural and psychological processes, suggesting potential associations with relaxation and psycho-spiritual well-being, while emphasizing the need for further empirical study (Kannan et al., 2022).

Today, this oral tradition continues among Muslims worldwide. Many non-Arabic-speaking Muslims rely on recitation and translation to engage with the Qur'an. Although fewer than 20 percent of the world's Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa (DeSilver & Masci, 2017), the aspiration to study and internalize the Qur'an remains universal (Cummins, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

Despite women's devotion to Qur'an learning, they remain underrepresented in religious scholarship and public recitation. Historical, social, and political factors have constrained women's participation in formal Islamic education (Aydar & Atalay, 2015; Erwani & Siregar, 2025). Yet Islam emphasizes equality in the pursuit of knowledge; according to Sunnah (n.d.), *Sunan Abi Dawud* 236 states that the Prophet declared: "Women are the counterparts of men" (Elias, 2012).

Mastering Qur'an recitation (*tajweed*) demands years of disciplined study. However, in some communities women's public recitation remains contested, shaped by ongoing cultural and theological debates surrounding the female voice. Contemporary media discourse reflects both resistance to and advocacy for women's Qur'an recitation,

particularly in public and digital spaces (Amid debate, women lift their voices with Qur'an recitation, 2022). While certain interpretations frame women's recitation as ʿawrah (something to be concealed), respected scholars such as Sheikh Ibn Bāz have clarified that listening to women recite the Qur'an is permissible for learning or reflection (Listening to Women Recite the Holy Qur'an, 2022).

Contemporary media narratives further highlight the persistent absence of women's voices in public Qur'an recitation. As Javed (2023) observes, women's recitation remains largely unheard in mainstream religious and digital spaces, despite growing advocacy for greater representation. This lack of visible female Qur'an reciters may have implications for young Muslim girls' access to inspiration, as prior research indicates that same-gender role models can positively influence learners' motivation and sense of possibility (Lockwood, 2006). In 2015, Professor Jerusha Tanner Rhodes launched the #AddAFemaleReciter campaign, advocating for the inclusion of women's voices on Qur'an apps (Gadzo & Canela, 2021). Yet even today, most platforms continue to feature male reciters almost exclusively. A few exceptions, such as QAT and *Qariah: The Women Qur'an Reciters App* (Amirebrahimi, 2022), represent emerging steps toward inclusivity. However, there remains limited empirical research examining how Muslim women themselves experience Qur'an learning in digital environments (Amatullah, 2024; Kurmanaliyev, 2024).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of Muslim women navigating the transition from face-to-face to online Qur'an study, with a particular focus on the role of mobile and web-based applications in supporting their learning. Guided by

an ethnographic approach, the study aimed to understand how participants negotiated

technological, linguistic, religious identities and spiritual dimensions of their learning

journeys in a digital context (El Sayed & Hotait, 2025; Alshech et al., 2025).

Limitations

Limitations refer to factors beyond the researcher's control (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Before beginning the study, several limitations were anticipated. One limitation

was the reliance on voluntary participation, which could influence the diversity of

perspectives included in the study.

A second anticipated limitation concerned the mode of interviewing. Because in-

person interviews were not part of the study design, the researcher initially hoped that

video interviews might provide a richer alternative by allowing observation of facial

expressions, gestures, and other nonverbal cues, elements that are often essential for

interpreting meaning in qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tracy, 2020).

However, it was unknown whether participants would be comfortable using video

technology.

If participants declined video interviews, the study would rely entirely on audio-

only interviews, which would limit the ability to capture nonverbal communication. This

was recognized as an anticipated constraint, as remote audio-only interviewing reduces

access to nonverbal cues that can enhance interpretive depth (Hanna, 2012).

These anticipated limitations reflected uncertainties in participant preferences

and technological comfort, as well as inherent constraints in remote qualitative

interviewing.

Delimitations

Delimitations represent the intentional boundaries set by the researcher to define the scope and focus of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013). Several delimitations were established prior to data collection to ensure methodological coherence and alignment with the central research question.

First, participation was limited to Muslim women over the age of 18. This ensured that all participants could provide informed consent and offer mature reflections on their learning experiences. Men and non-Muslim participants were excluded to centre the experiences of Muslim women in a diasporic Canadian context.

Second, participants were required to have experience in both face-to-face Qur'an learning and online Qur'an learning. This criterion ensured that participants could speak directly to the transition between modalities. Such criterion-based sampling aligns with qualitative approaches emphasizing purposeful and theoretically relevant selection (Patton, 2015).

Third, participants had to be current or former students of the same Islamic centre in Canada. This boundary created a shared institutional and pedagogical context, supporting a clearly bounded study site (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020).

Fourth, participation was limited to English-speaking women. Conducting interviews in multiple languages would have required additional ethics approval, translation, and expanded transcription resources. Limiting the study to English allowed for feasibility and analytic consistency (Temple & Young, 2004).

Finally, the study anticipated that all interviews would be conducted remotely, using audio or audio-video technology. While video was preferred for its potential to capture nonverbal cues, participant comfort and technological access were recognized as potential limiting factors. If video was not feasible, interviews would be conducted via audio-only, reducing access to visual communication (Hanna, 2012).

These delimitations clarified the scope of the study, strengthened methodological focus, and ensured alignment with the research objectives.

Main Research Question

What are the lived experiences of Muslim women navigating the transition from face-to-face to online Qur'an learning, and how have digital tools shaped their engagement, accessibility, and spiritual connection to the Qur'an?

Sub-Questions

1. Which digital platforms or applications did participants use to study the Qur'an before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. How did participants perceive the accessibility, usability, and effectiveness of these digital tools?

3. In what ways did online Qur'an learning affect their sense of spiritual connection, community, and motivation compared to in-person study?

4. What challenges and opportunities did participants encounter in sustaining Qur'an learning through digital means?

Definition of Terms

Allah: The Arabic word for God, "the one and only God in Islam" the all-powerful Creator in Islam (Afsaruddin & da Vinci, 2024; Esposito, 2011).

Hafith/Hafitha: A person who has memorized the entire Qur'an (Brown, 2009).

Islam: A monotheistic faith centered on the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Esposito, 2011).

Masjid: A place of worship and community gathering for Muslims (Hillenbrand, 1999).

Muslim: An adherent of Islam who submits to Allah and follows the Five Pillars (Denny, 2011).

Qari/Qariah: A male (Qari) or female (Qariah) trained reciter of the Qur'an (Nelson, 2014; Zaman, 2012).

Qur'an: The holy book of Islam, revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Saeed, 2006).

Surah: A chapter of the Qur'an; there are 114 in total (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

Tafseer: Interpretation or commentary on the Qur'an (Saeed, 2006).

Tajweed: The rules governing pronunciation and recitation of the Qur'an (Nelson, 1985).

Summary

This chapter introduced the context, background, and rationale for exploring Muslim women's Qur'an learning experiences during their transition from in-person to online environments. It outlined the study's purpose, guiding research questions, and scope, while acknowledging key limitations and delimitations. The chapter also defined essential terms for conceptual clarity.

The next chapter reviews existing literature on digital learning, online religious education, and Qur'an study in the context of women's participation. It identifies the scholarly gaps that this research seeks to address, situating the study within the broader fields of open, digital, and distance education.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews existing research on how mobile applications support learning in general, how they have been adopted for religious education, and how they are specifically employed in Qur'ān study. The review situates the study within broader conversations about digital pedagogy, technology-enhanced learning, and the role of mobile devices in facilitating accessible, learner-centered experiences. It also identifies an important gap in the literature: the lack of research examining how Muslim women use Islamic and Qur'ān-learning apps. By tracing developments across general education, religious learning, and Qur'ān pedagogy, this chapter lays the conceptual groundwork for the ethnographic inquiry that follows.

Evaluating Benefits of General Learning Apps

By the early 2010s, educators and students were already adopting mobile devices for study and making pragmatic, criteria-based judgments about app quality and fit (Jonas-Dwyer et al., 2012). Tablets and smartphones soon became affordable and ubiquitous, their portability making them valuable for learning beyond the classroom (France et al., 2016). Practical appraisal frameworks emphasized developer credibility, relevance, content appropriateness, usability, cost, privacy, and customization (Jonas-Dwyer et al., 2012). Calder (2015) further refined these criteria, suggesting that the effectiveness of a learning app depends on whether it is appropriate, applicable, and appealing.

Mobile apps also help students "fit learning into life" by capitalizing on short, informal opportunities for study outside scheduled classes (Steel, 2012). Disciplinary literacy research supports this, showing that close reading and targeted review—typical

of the "micro-interactions" many apps enable—are central to learning in fields such as science (Castek & Beach, 2013).

A well-studied application of mobile technology is the learner-response system. Smartphone-based "clickers" increase interaction, foster collaboration, and improve performance (Aljaloud et al., 2019). Large-scale surveys also find that students themselves are major drivers of mobile adoption in higher education and perceive cross-disciplinary academic benefits (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

Recent systematic reviews confirm that mobile learning continues to enhance both learning outcomes and higher-order cognitive skills. Integrating mobile tools improves academic performance, motivation, and critical thinking (Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2024). Similarly, Kang (2024) synthesized over a decade of studies and found that mobile learning promotes flexibility, autonomy, and persistence in higher education, though digital divides and technological fatigue remain challenges. Asadullah et al. (2023) further observed that sustainable mobile learning depends on continuous innovation and institutional support.

Mobile learning also benefits older adults. Studies document increased cognitive engagement, reduced anxiety, and greater confidence and social connection among seniors who learn through mobile apps (Klimova, 2020). More recent research on microlearning demonstrates that short, mobile-based learning sessions are particularly effective for adult learners balancing multiple roles (Moore et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings confirm that mobile learning enhances access and agency across demographics, creating a foundation for understanding its impact in religious and Qur'anic contexts.

Religious Learning With Apps

Religion, too, has been reshaped by mobile technology, what Fewkes (2019) memorably calls "piety in the pocket." A landmark content analysis of 451 religious apps proposed one of the first frameworks for studying digital religious ecosystems (Campbell et al., 2014). Subsequent empirical studies of Christian and Muslim students in the United States revealed routine use of Qur'ān or Bible apps, prayer tools, and navigation aids such as digital qibla compasses, integrating faith practice into daily routines (Rinker, 2016). Surveys of European youth similarly found heavy use of digital media to learn about religion, engage in community activities, and pursue projects of faith (Díez Bosch et al., 2017).

A synthesis of adult informal learning shows that people adopt mobile devices for faith-based learning for the same reasons they do for other domains—ease of access, social interaction, and experiential engagement (Jin et al., 2019). These findings are consistent with the technology-acceptance and activity-theory models applied in educational technology.

In recent years, the line between educational and devotional apps has blurred. Wahid (2024) notes that Islamic pedagogy is increasingly mediated through digital interfaces, where apps facilitate memorization, recitation, and moral education. Yuen (2024) found that mobile learning supported by artificial intelligence allows adult learners to blend formal and informal learning, enhancing reflection and self-regulation—insights equally applicable to religious contexts.

Design practices have also evolved. Developers now employ gamification, adaptive feedback, and visual analytics to sustain engagement (Mokhtar et al., 2023).

Such approaches could benefit Qur'ān-learning apps, where repetitive practice is central to mastery. The transformation of educational apps thus provides a valuable framework for analyzing how religious learning apps might improve usability, authenticity, and inclusivity.

Qur'an Learning With Apps

The Qur'ān—regarded by Muslims as the revealed word of God, preserved since the seventh century—has long been studied through printed mushaf. Smart devices now offer digital access that includes recitation, tajweed guidance, memorization tracking, and multilingual translations, enabling the 80 percent of Muslims who are non-Arabic speakers to engage with meaning while reciting in Arabic (Alqahtani & Fayyoumi, 2015). Accuracy in tajweed remains central to Qur'ānic pedagogy, and apps increasingly target articulation and rule-based pronunciation (Khairuddin et al., 2017).

Empirical work has identified two enduring concerns. First is authenticity: users worry about forgeries or errors in digital texts and seek endorsement by authoritative Islamic bodies (Khan & Alginahi, 2013). Second is discoverability: studies of hundreds of Islamic Android apps have revealed inconsistent store categorization (e.g., Education, Books, Lifestyle) and called for improved metadata and content verification (Hameed et al., 2019).

Despite these challenges, targeted interventions demonstrate potential. A university-developed memorization app with a built-in social component (SAM) led to more than 70 percent improvement in memorization and recitation, along with positive perceptions of usability and peer motivation (AlMudara, 2017). Reinforcement-learning

tutors for non-native Arabic-speaking children have been piloted to provide

individualized feedback and adaptive support (Alsharbi et al., 2021).

More recent studies extend these findings. Alosman and Ismail (2022) found strong

community interest in Android apps designed for vocabulary and surah comprehension,

highlighting learners' desire for accessible tafsīr. Iftikhar et al. (2024) examined the

pedagogical impact of Android Qur'ān apps and concluded that such tools are

"revolutionizing learning and teaching" by providing flexible, on-demand environments.

Still, authenticity, instructor oversight, and user literacy remain concerns (Mat Isa et al.,

2023).

An especially promising development is the emergence of women-focused

Qur'ān-learning apps and online initiatives. The *Qariah* app, launched globally in 2022,

curates female reciters and normalizes the role of the qāriʾah for girls and women

(Amirebrahimi, 2022). Online Qur'an classes for women further emphasize flexibility,

privacy, and female mentorship, demonstrating how digital spaces can promote

inclusion and religious literacy (AlQur'anDesk, 2024; Qur'anic Institute, 2024; Rattil

Qur'an Academy, 2023). However, scholarly attention to how women actually use these

digital tools remains limited, representing a critical gap in current research.

This review, therefore, identifies the need for systematic, gender-focused inquiry

into the design and lived experience of Islamic and Qur'ān-learning apps. Investigating

how Muslim women engage with these technologies—their affordances, constraints,

motivations, and outcomes—will deepen understanding of digital faith learning and

inform the inclusive design of future educational platforms.

Summary

Research on apps for learning, religion, and Qur'ān study is growing but still modest relative to adoption. The clearest gap is intersectional: robust, empirical studies on how girls and women use Qur'ān-learning apps (features, affordances, constraints, outcomes) are scarce. Existing work documents authenticity concerns, usability wins, and promising tutoring designs, but systematic, gender-focused inquiries—especially longitudinal and mixed-methods studies—remain limited. This points to a high-value agenda: design and evaluate Qur'ān-learning apps with/for women and girls, attending to accessibility, voice/reciter availability, tajweed scaffolding, social learning, privacy, and certification markers.

In summary, the literature highlights the growing use of apps in general education, religious learning, and Qur'an study. However, the gap regarding Muslim women's experiences—particularly their use of Qur'an-learning apps in the shift to online environments—remains underexplored. To address this gap, the next chapter outlines the methodological framework for this study. It describes the ethnographic design, explains the rationale for its selection, considers alternative approaches, and details the researcher's role, ethical considerations, data collection, and analysis procedures.

This chapter reviewed the literature on mobile, religious, and Qur'ān-learning apps, tracing how mobile technology has transformed both secular and sacred education. Across contexts, studies confirm that mobile tools enhance accessibility, autonomy, and engagement. Yet within Qur'ān learning, persistent issues of authenticity, usability, and gender inclusion remain. The most significant research gap

concerns the limited understanding of how Muslim women use Islamic and Qur'ān-learning apps—how these tools support or constrain their learning, spirituality, and sense of connection.

Addressing this gap requires an approach that attends to both technological and cultural dimensions. The next chapter outlines the methodological framework for this study. It describes the ethnographic design, explains the rationale for its selection, considers ethical considerations, and details the researcher's role, data collection, and analysis procedures.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter outlines the philosophical assumptions, theoretical framework, and methodological approach that guide this study. In qualitative inquiry, particularly research centered on lived experience, epistemology, how we know what exists, and method are inseparable, shaping how meaning is generated and understood. From a constructivist perspective, realities are understood not as fixed truths but as "multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This understanding aligns with the interpretive stance adopted in this study, in which knowledge emerges through interaction, dialogue, and context. Qualitative scholars emphasize that reality is socially constructed and shaped by the circumstances in which inquiry unfolds (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), a perspective that resonates strongly with research exploring religious learning during a period of disruption and change. Presenting philosophical assumptions, methodology, and positionality together reflects the holistic nature of the study and supports an in-depth exploration of Muslim women's transitions from face-to-face to online Qur'an learning. The following section introduces the foundational assumptions that inform this approach.

Philosophical Assumptions: Constructivist–Interpretivist Paradigm

This study is situated within a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is not fixed or objective but socially and culturally constructed through human interaction. Meaning is understood as contextual, relational, and shaped by individuals' social, historical, and religious locations. From this perspective, there is no single, discoverable truth; rather, multiple realities coexist, each informed by lived experience.

Interpretivism further emphasizes that understanding the social world requires attention to the meanings individuals assign to their experiences. As Schwandt (1994) explains, interpretivists assume that "the social world is interpreted, understood, and constructed by people participating in it." Within this paradigm, knowledge is not extracted from participants but interpreted through engagement with their perspectives. This worldview is particularly appropriate for research examining faith-based learning, where meaning is deeply embedded in culture, identity, and spiritual practice.

By adopting a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, this study prioritizes participants' interpretations of their Qur'an-learning experiences and recognizes that these interpretations are shaped by broader cultural and religious contexts, as well as by the unprecedented conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Epistemological Assumptions: Knowledge as Co-constructed

An interpretivist epistemology underpins this research, informing how knowledge was generated within the study. Knowledge is understood not as an objective representation of reality but as co-constructed through interaction between researcher and participants. In this study, interviews functioned as dialogic spaces in which participants reflected on, articulated, and sometimes reconsidered their experiences through conversation.

As Charmaz (2014) notes, knowledge is constructed through researchers' and participants' "past and present involvements and interactions." Each interview was therefore treated as a meaning-making encounter rather than a neutral data-gathering exercise. The researcher's questions, listening, and prompts shaped the direction and

depth of participants' reflections, while participants' responses shaped the evolving understanding of the study.

The researcher's insider–outsider positionality further influenced knowledge production. Shared religious and cultural understanding facilitated rapport and depth of disclosure, while reflexive awareness supported critical distance in interpretation. Member checking reinforced this epistemological stance by allowing participants to confirm that their intended meanings were accurately represented. Together, these practices reflect an epistemology in which knowledge emerges relationally and contextually through interaction.

Ontological Assumptions: Multiple Realities

This study is grounded in an ontology that recognizes the existence of multiple, subjective realities. Reality is understood as socially constructed and experienced differently by individuals based on their cultural backgrounds, linguistic abilities, family roles, and spiritual orientations. From this perspective, no single, objective reality of online Qur'an learning exists; instead, participants' accounts reflect distinct yet equally valid lived realities.

These realities are shaped by participants' social positions and the contexts in which learning occurs, including the shift from in-person to digital environments during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the study was therefore not to establish a singular account of Qur'an learning but to illuminate the range of meanings participants ascribed to their experiences. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) note, realities are "multiple, constructed, and holistic," a view that underpins the study's interpretive orientation.

Axiological Position: Values and Ethical Commitments

The study is guided by axiological commitments to respect, empathy, trust, and cultural humility. Because participants shared experiences related to faith, identity, and personal struggle, ethical sensitivity was central to all stages of the research process. Participants' narratives were approached as meaningful and valued accounts rather than as data to be extracted or evaluated.

These values informed how interviews were conducted, how participants' words were represented, and how findings were interpreted. Reflexivity was essential in attending to the power dynamics inherent in research relationships and in ensuring that participants' voices remained central. As Madison (2012) emphasizes, ethnographic inquiry begins with an ethical responsibility toward those whose lives are represented, while Pillow (2003) highlights the importance of reflexivity in addressing the politics of representation.

By foregrounding these values, the study sought to honor participants' agency and dignity while producing ethically responsible and culturally grounded knowledge.

Positionality Statement

As a Muslim woman, a mother, a community member, and a researcher, my positionality is inseparable from the design, interpretation, and conduct of this study. Within constructivist and interpretivist paradigms, researchers are understood as active participants in meaning-making rather than neutral observers "Positionality influences how we understand others, how they understand us, and the knowledge we co-create (Holmes, 2020)." My social identity, prior experiences, and interpretive lens inevitably shaped how I engaged with participants' narratives and how they engaged with me.

Acknowledging this positionality is essential to maintaining reflexivity, transparency, and ethical integrity throughout the research process.

Although I did not personally know any of the participants, my identity as a Muslim woman positioned me as an insider in terms of cultural and religious context. At the same time, I had limited familiarity with the program's structure, which created a meaningful element of outsider distance. This combination allowed me to approach participants' descriptions of digital learning, instructional practices, and challenges without prior assumptions. To minimize bias and ensure that participants' interpretations remained central, I intentionally relied on direct quotes, grounding the findings in their exact words rather than in researcher paraphrasing. Reflexivity further shaped how these positional influences were understood and managed "Insider researchers gain access and rapport more easily, while outsider researchers maintain critical distance (Chavez, 2008)."

Reflexivity

Reflexivity informed all stages of this study and supported ongoing awareness of how my positionality influenced data collection and interpretation. "Reflexivity… provides an opportunity for researchers to examine how their own experiences and assumptions might shape the research (Finlay, 2002)." Given the personal and religious nature of the experiences shared, I approached participants' accounts with respect, cultural sensitivity, and methodological care. Before and after each interview, I engaged in intentional mental preparation to acknowledge expectations and remain open to participants' perspectives. During interviews, I monitored my reactions and sought

clarification when needed to ensure that interpretations reflected participants' intended meanings.

In the analysis stage, I relied heavily on direct quotes and coding to minimize researcher influence, revisiting sections of recordings when necessary for accuracy and contextual understanding "Researchers must demonstrate credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to ensure trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017)." My insider connection to the broader Qur'an-learning community guided me to interpret the data attentively without assuming shared experiences. Together, these reflexive practices strengthened the transparency and rigor of the study "Sincerity, including reflexivity… is a hallmark of high-quality qualitative research (Tracy, 2010)." The methodological procedures used in this study are outlined in the following section.

Rationale for Paradigm and Methodological Choices

Several qualitative methodologies were considered for this study. Phenomenology would have focused on the essence of the transition from face-to-face to online learning but would have bracketed the cultural, relational, and religious dimensions central to Qur'an study. Narrative inquiry, while well suited for generating detailed individual life stories, would have limited the study's capacity for thematic synthesis and interpretation of shared cultural meanings. Case study design would have narrowed the inquiry to an institutional context, constraining attention to the broader cultural, diasporic, and pandemic-related influences shaping participants' learning experiences. Grounded theory was also deemed unsuitable, as the purpose of this research was not to generate a new theoretical model but to understand meaning-making within existing cultural frameworks.

Beyond these distinctions, the choice of ethnography is directly tied to the study's constructivist–interpretivist foundations. Because knowledge is understood to be socially constructed and culturally situated (Schwandt, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), the methodology needed to support exploration of meaning within participants' lived religious, linguistic, and communal contexts. Ethnography provides this foundation by attending to cultural practices, shared norms, and embodied traditions that shape how Muslim women learn Qur'an both in person and online (Fetterman, 2020; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Phenomenology's emphasis on reduction and bracketing would have obscured the communal and religious structures embedded in Qur'an learning environments (van Manen, 2016). Narrative inquiry would have privileged individual storytelling over collective cultural interpretation, limiting insight into shared learning expectations. Similarly, case study design prioritizes bounded institutional settings, which would have restricted analysis of the wider social and cultural shifts influencing women's learning during COVID-19. Grounded theory was not appropriate because the aim was interpretive understanding rather than formal theory generation.

Given that participants reflected on faith-based learning shaped by gender, culture, and digital environments, ethnography's emphasis on context, meaning-making, and cultural interpretation offered the most coherent methodological alignment with the study's aims (Madison, 2012; Spradley, 2016). For these reasons, an ethnographic approach, adapted to rely on interviews rather than prolonged field immersion, most effectively supported the interpretive, contextualized, and culturally informed analysis required for this research.

Methodological Approach: Ethnographic Design

Qualitative research emphasizes meaning-making, context, and participants' perspectives rather than statistical generalization (Neuman, 2013). To explore participants' experiences with depth and nuance, this study employed an ethnographic-inspired qualitative methodology. Ethnography is concerned with understanding how meaning is produced within cultural groups and how shared practices shape individual experiences. As Fetterman (2010) describes, ethnography is "the art and science of describing a group or culture," while Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) emphasize that ethnographic work involves engaging with participants' lived realities to highlight social meaning.

Although traditional long-term field immersion was not feasible, ethnographic principles guided the study's design and implementation. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method of data collection, allowing participants to guide the conversation and articulate memories, challenges, motivations, and reflections in their own words. This approach aligns with Spradley's (2016) description of ethnographic interviewing as a conversational process through which participants share cultural knowledge.

Attention to cultural practices, learning traditions, and the embodied nature of Qur'an study helped situate individual narratives within broader communal and religious patterns. By foregrounding context, shared meaning, and lived experience, the ethnographic approach supported a nuanced understanding of how Muslim women navigated the transition to online Qur'an learning during a period of social and educational disruption.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, ethnographic-inspired research design to explore Muslim women's experiences transitioning from face-to-face to online Qur'an learning. While traditional long-term immersion was not feasible, the design retained ethnographic commitments to culture, context, and shared religious practices. While participants shared personal stories, the analytic focus remained on shared cultural meanings and learning practices rather than full narrative reconstruction.

Participants

Participants were five adult Muslim women who studied Qur'an at the same Canadian Islamic centre prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and who continued their studies online during and after pandemic closures. While participants shared a common cultural and religious context, they were interviewed individually to foreground personal meaning-making within a culture-sharing group. The decision to work with five participants was made at the design stage of the study and was appropriate to the scope of a Master's-level thesis and the depth of inquiry required.

This sample size aligns with ethnographic research traditions, which often rely on a small number of key participants to gain deep insight into cultural practices. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) note, ethnographic research frequently draws on "a small number of key participants who provide deep insight into cultural practices." In this study, the limited number of participants enabled extended, in-depth interviews and close attention to individual experiences while supporting interpretation of shared cultural meanings.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide rich and relevant insight into the research question. Inclusion criteria required participants to be adult Muslim women who had participated in face-to-face Qur'an learning prior to COVID-19, transitioned to online learning during the pandemic, and possessed sufficient English proficiency for interview participation. Recruitment concluded with the five participants completed their consent firm, which was appropriate for the scope and purpose of the study.

The sample size is consistent with qualitative research focusing on lived experience and meaning-making. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that such studies commonly include between five and twenty-five participants, with smaller samples being appropriate for in-depth ethnographic or phenomenological inquiry. In this study, five participants allowed for rich, detailed accounts and sufficient repetition of meaning to support interpretive analysis, while remaining proportionate to the study's aims and methodological design.

Data Collection

Recruitment occurred through the Qur'an program leader at the Islamic centre, who helped researcher share an invitation flyer (Appendix A) via WhatsApp groups students used. Interested individuals contacted the researcher via email. Eleven individuals expressed interest and received a Letter of Information (Appendix B) and Consent Form (Appendix C). Some were unable to proceed due to non-submission of consent forms, language limitations, or ineligibility. Recruitment concluded once five participants had returned completed consent forms.

Data was collected through audio-only semi-structured Zoom interviews lasting approximately one hour. Audio-only interviews were selected to prioritize participant comfort and accessibility. A semi-structured interview guide was developed using open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' reflections on learning environments, community, technology use, and spiritual experience. Questions were intentionally flexible, allowing participants to guide the depth and direction of discussion in keeping with interpretivist inquiry.

Interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim using Zoom's Live Transcription / Automated Captions. All transcripts were manually reviewed alongside audio-recording and corrected for accuracy and returned to participants for member checking prior to analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following established qualitative analytic procedures that emphasize immersion, systematic coding, and iterative refinement (Gibbs, 2007). Transcripts were read multiple times to identify recurring patterns. Initial exploratory codes were generated using participants' own words and clustered into categories, which were progressively refined into themes and sub-themes. As part of this immersion process, all direct quotations used during coding were handwritten by the researcher rather than copied and pasted, allowing for slower, more intentional engagement with participants' language and meaning. Research in cognitive psychology suggests that handwriting supports deeper cognitive processing and conceptual engagement by slowing transcription and encouraging active meaning-making (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014).

Initial coding produced nine provisional themes. Through iterative analysis and peer feedback that highlighted conceptual overlap and redundancy, the thematic structure was refined into six final themes presented in Chapter Four.

Several provisional themes captured closely related aspects of participants' experiences and were therefore consolidated to strengthen analytic clarity and coherence. Themes related to learning conditions, accessibility, and challenges were merged to reflect participants' understanding of the learning environment as a holistic constellation of spatial, temporal, and attentional factors. Similarly, themes addressing motivation, identity, and persistence were integrated to foreground the interconnected nature of spiritual growth and maternal responsibility.

Challenges initially identified as a standalone theme were redistributed across more conceptually aligned categories, including learning environment, social connection, technology use, and spiritual identity. This refinement process resulted in six final themes that more clearly represent shared meanings while preserving individual voice. A detailed account of the thematic consolidation process is provided in Appendix E.

Ensuring rigor in qualitative research involves transparency, reflexivity, and systematic analytic procedures (Neuman, 2013). In this study, trustworthiness was established using the criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the data, careful attention to participants' meanings, and the use of rich, descriptive quotations to preserve voice. Dependability and confirmability were addressed through systematic coding procedures, analytic and

ongoing reflexive engagement throughout the research process (Miles et al., 2020; Nowell et al., 2017). Transferability was strengthened by providing detailed contextual descriptions, enabling readers to assess the relevance of findings to similar settings.

As previously mentioned, reflexivity was maintained throughout the study to acknowledge how the researcher's positionality, experiences, and assumptions shaped interpretation. As sincerity and reflexivity are hallmarks of high-quality qualitative research (Tracy, 2010), reflexive practices were treated not as a limitation but as a methodological strength that enhanced transparency and analytic rigor.

Methodological Limitations

Methodological limitations include reliance on self-reported data and the absence of prolonged observational fieldwork. These limitations were mitigated through in-depth interviews, reflexive practice, and participant validation via member checking, supporting the credibility and integrity of the findings.

Ethical Considerations and Data Storage

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and participation was voluntary with the option to withdraw prior to data analysis.

All research data were securely stored on the researcher's password-protected personal computer. Interview transcripts and audio files were anonymized, with identifying information removed and replaced by pseudonyms. Signed consent forms were stored separately from interview data. Transcripts were labeled using pseudonyms

only. Access to all research materials was restricted to the researcher, in accordance with Athabasca University Research Ethics Board requirements.

Summary

This chapter presented the philosophical foundations, methodological design, and ethical commitments guiding the study. Grounded in a constructivist–interpretivist paradigm, the research employed an ethnographic-inspired qualitative approach to examine Muslim women's transitions from face-to-face to online Qur'an learning. Participant recruitment, data collection, analytic procedures, and strategies for trustworthiness were detailed to demonstrate methodological rigor and transparency.

In doing so, the alignment between the study's research questions, theoretical orientation, and analytic process was made explicit. Themes emerged inductively through iterative engagement with the data, with initial coding remaining close to participants' language to capture recurring concerns, metaphors, and emphases across interviews. Through successive rounds of analysis, provisional themes were refined, consolidated, and reorganized to reflect shared meanings rather than isolated responses. The refinement from nine initial themes to six final themes represents not a loss of complexity, but a deepening of analytic coherence, as overlapping concepts were integrated to more accurately represent participants' holistic understandings of their learning experiences.

Together, these methodological choices ensured that the final thematic structure reflects a dynamic alignment between research questions, interpretive theory, participant voice, and analytic decision-making. The following chapter presents the findings of the study.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the study, exploring the lived experiences of Muslim women as they transitioned from face-to-face to online Qur'an learning during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings are organized into the six final themes that together provide a comprehensive understanding of how participants navigated educational, spiritual, social, and technological transformations in their learning journeys. These themes are: Learning Environment, Social Connection, Role of Technology, Language and Literacy, Identity and Spirituality, and Female Representation.

Each theme is presented with rich narratives drawn directly from participants' interviews, ensuring that their voices and lived realities remain at the centre of the analysis. The interpretation is grounded entirely in the interview data and built from participants' verbatim words. Only in rare cases does the researcher add brief contextual clarification, and even then, only when absolutely necessary. For example, if it was unclear whether a participant was referring to the home or the masjid, the researcher inserted a minimal note (e.g., *"at home"*) based solely on the context of the interview question being answered. These limited clarifications were used strictly to preserve accuracy while maintaining fidelity to the participants' intended meanings. The chapter aims to show not only *what* participants experienced, but *how* they made meaning of those experiences — revealing the deeper emotional, cultural, and spiritual layers of their engagement with Qur'an learning.

Relationship Between the Themes and the Research Question

The six themes presented in this chapter collectively address the research question by illuminating how Muslim women experienced the transition from face-to-face to online Qur'an learning and how digital tools shaped engagement, access, community, and spiritual connection. Each theme captures a distinct yet interconnected dimension of this transition, demonstrating how structural, relational, linguistic, technological, and spiritual factors influenced participants' learning journeys.

The Learning Environment theme addresses the research question by showing how the shift from the masjid to home-based online learning reshaped engagement, access, focus, and discipline. Participants' reflections reveal how changes in physical space, time, and structure directly influenced their ability to sustain meaningful Qur'an study.

The Social Connection theme responds to the research question by illustrating how the online transition altered engagement and spiritual connection through disrupted peer relationships and weakened teacher–student bonds. Participants' experiences highlight the centrality of embodied community, recognition, and relational presence in sustaining motivation and belonging.

The Role of Technology theme engages most explicitly with the research question's focus on digital tools. It demonstrates how technology enabled continuity of learning, expanded access, and fostered global connection, while simultaneously introducing barriers related to digital literacy, over-reliance, disengagement, and uneven participation.

The Language and Literacy theme addresses the research question by showing how engagement with the Qur'an was shaped by language proficiency, pronunciation challenges intensified by audio-only learning, and reliance on English-mediated instruction. These linguistic factors influenced learners' confidence, persistence, and depth of engagement in online contexts.

The Identity and Spirituality theme speaks directly to the spiritual dimension of the research question by revealing how faith, motherhood, and personal identity motivated persistence and meaning-making throughout the transition to online learning. Qur'an study emerged as a source of moral guidance, spiritual healing, and identity formation rather than solely an academic endeavor.

Finally, the Female Representation theme addresses the research question by demonstrating how the absence of women's voices in digital Qur'an spaces shaped learners' experiences of accessibility, inclusion, inspiration, and belonging. Participants' reflections reveal how representation influences aspiration, visibility, and perceived legitimacy within online Qur'an learning environments.

Together, these themes provide a comprehensive account of how Muslim women navigated the transition to online Qur'an learning, revealing the complex ways digital modalities reshaped not only access and instruction but also community, identity, and spiritual connection.

Theme 1: Learning Environment

The research question is addressed in this theme by examining how the transition from face-to-face to online Qur'an learning reshaped participants' engagement, access, focus, and discipline. It explores how changes in physical and

digital learning spaces influenced women's ability to sustain meaningful Qur'an study, as the shift from the structured, embodied environment of the masjid to the home introduced both opportunities and challenges. Participants described how this transition affected motivation, discipline, accessibility, and the quality of interaction with teachers and peers, frequently comparing the spiritual focus of the masjid with the convenience and flexibility of online platforms. Many participants ultimately concluded that hybrid models offered the most effective balance between structure, accessibility, and sustained engagement.

Focus and Discipline

For many participants, the masjid was more than a place of instruction — it was a structured learning environment that fostered discipline, intentionality, and sustained focus. The physical act of leaving home and entering a sacred, communal space gave Qur'an study a sense of purpose. As one participant reflected, "At the masjid, I know I have to study. I came for a reason. I can be more focused" (P3). This physical separation from the demands of daily life enabled learners to engage more fully with their studies.

By contrast, the home environment, while offering greater flexibility, often lacked this protective structure. Participants frequently described how household responsibilities, family needs, and the general comfort of home created frequent distractions. As P3 noted, "Home is more flexible but distracting," while P2 similarly explained, "At home you got distracted from the kids. Mommy I want this; mommy I want that." In these accounts, convenience and accessibility came at the cost of consistency and concentration.

A rare counterpoint came from P1, who acknowledged that online learning could still cultivate discipline when supported by clear expectations: "Once we went on Zoom, we had rules. We focused on the class." This perspective illustrates that while the home environment often introduced distractions, structure could still be re-created through intentional online classroom norms.

Time, Travel, and Cost

The shift online also had a significant impact on how participants managed time, travel, and financial costs associated with Qur'an study. Attending classes in person often required long commutes and substantial time commitments. *"Saturday and Sunday, half of the day I spent there… I became tired and wasted my money on transportation"* (P4), one participant shared, highlighting the physical and financial toll of regular attendance.

Online learning transformed this dynamic by removing one of the most significant barriers women faced: the logistical and financial burden of travel. With no commute required, participants gained back valuable time and reduced transportation costs, making continued Qur'an study more sustainable. As P1 explained, "Online saved me a lot of traveling back and forth… (and) cost of driving, that was a life-saver." For many women, this shift was not simply a matter of convenience — it directly affected their ability to remain committed to learning while juggling multiple responsibilities.

This advantage was especially meaningful for participants balancing study with work, childcare, and household duties. P5 openly acknowledged that in-person attendance had become unrealistic given her family responsibilities: "No, I don't want to go (in person) now because of the kids… you know with 5 kids you'll be juggling with

everything, so you don't want to do that." In this case, children became a clear deterrent to in-person participation, illustrating how online learning removed barriers that disproportionately affected mothers with demanding caregiving roles.

Teacher Preparedness and Technology Adjustment

Research indicates that students' perceptions of readiness and confidence play a critical role in shaping their experiences of online learning (Martin et al., 2020). Despite these advantages, the transition to online learning was not without its challenges. Both students and teachers had to adjust to unfamiliar digital tools and teaching methods. *"It was technically difficult to adjust, even the teachers didn't know how to use it. So I think we were all learning it together"* (P1), one participant explained. This period of mutual adaptation sometimes disrupted the learning process but also fostered a sense of shared growth and resilience.

Distractions and Competing Responsibilities

Distractions were a recurring theme in participants' accounts of both in-person and online learning. In the masjid, social interactions could sometimes derail study sessions. *"We would talk and waste a lot of time. Sometimes we would fall behind"* (P1). However, at home, distractions were often more intense and harder to control. *"You go cook and clean… you miss like 20 minutes from class"* (P2). These competing responsibilities made it difficult for some participants to maintain focus during online sessions, highlighting the obscure boundaries between domestic life and study.

Access to Global Learning

While online learning introduced new distractions, it also expanded opportunities. Participants described how digital platforms allowed them to connect with teachers and

peers far beyond their local communities. *"We had 4–5 groups in different corners of the*

masjid" (P1), one participant recalled about the face-to-face setting. "Online gave me

access to the whole world right away within a second. So I am at home, I'm eating,

drinking, relaxing, and learning." (P4), another explained. This access to global learning

networks enriched their educational experience and provided exposure to diverse

learning opportunities.

Video and Visual Limitations

Despite the benefits of flexibility and accessibility, participants also identified

limitations unique to online Qur'an learning environments—particularly the loss of visual

and nonverbal cues essential for effective instruction. This challenge was especially

significant for tajweed, where learners must closely observe the teacher's mouth and

articulation points. As P1 noted, "When you're doing tajweed with the makhraj, you have

to look at people's mouth to see where it is coming from." Similarly, P5 reflected,

"Before that, you see each other's face and your teacher's face… On the online

platform, you can't see anyone's face… Sometimes it's difficult." Although the platform

offered video capabilities, the teachers in this program did not use them, leaving

students without a critical layer of visual guidance.

The absence of video also removed access to the broader range of nonverbal

cues that support comprehension and responsive teaching. While some popular claims

suggest that up to 80% of communication may be nonverbal (Cuncic, 2023), academic

research offers a more nuanced understanding. Mehrabian's well-known "7-38-55" rule,

for example, indicates that in contexts involving attitudes or emotions, only about 7% of

meaning is conveyed through words, while 38% comes from tone and 55% from facial

expressions and body language (Mehrabian & Wiener,1967). Although this model is often oversimplified, it underscores the central role of nonverbal communication in interpersonal understanding.

In face-to-face Qur'an classes, teachers naturally detect subtle indicators of confusion such as puzzled expressions, hesitation, or body posture and adjust their explanations accordingly. Even on video, instructors could still access some of these cues, albeit to a reduced degree. However, when cameras remained off entirely, these pedagogical signals disappeared. Without visual feedback, teachers were forced to rely solely on verbal responses, making it more difficult to identify misunderstandings or provide timely correction. Participants' reflections suggest that this loss of visual and nonverbal communication not only affected tajweed accuracy but also weakened the relational and responsive dimensions of teaching. In this sense, visual limitations in online environments significantly shaped the quality and depth of Qur'anic learning.

Hybrid Preferences

Given the strengths and weaknesses of both modes, many participants concluded that a hybrid approach would offer the best of both worlds. *"One week I can go and another week I can have online"* (P3), one suggested. Another echoed this sentiment: *"Hybrid would have been the perfect method. I will have both worlds"* (P2). This preference reflects a desire to combine the structure, focus, and social connection of in-person learning with the flexibility, accessibility, and global reach of online study.

Interpretation

The findings real that the learning environment played a critical role in shaping participants' engagement with Qur'an study. The masjid provided structure,

accountability, and embodied presence, but required significant time and financial investment. Online learning offered flexibility, affordability, and global access but often challenged their discipline, focus, and nonverbal feedback. Hybrid models emerged as a preferred solution, balancing the advantages of both environments while reducing their respective limitations.

The influence of the learning environment extended beyond focus and logistics. It also shaped how participants built relationships, felt connected, and experienced community. As the next theme illustrates, the shift online was not just a change in space but a profound transformation in the social fabric of their Qur'an study.

Theme 2: Social Connection

The research question is addressed in this theme by exploring how the transition to online learning affected engagement and spiritual connection through changes in social relationships. It examines how the loss of embodied interaction with teachers and peers reshaped participants' sense of belonging, motivation, and community, particularly as the masjid shifted from a vibrant social and spiritual hub to a digitally mediated learning space. Participants emphasized the central role of social bonds, sisterhood, peer friendship, and teacher–student relationships in Qur'an learning, describing the masjid as far more than a classroom, but a place where relationships, identity, and belonging were cultivated. The transition online disrupted these dynamics, producing feelings of disconnection, anonymity, and isolation, and despite efforts to rebuild community digitally, most participants expressed a persistent longing for the warmth, familiarity, and relational depth of face-to-face interaction.

Masjid as a Social Hub

Participants had deep affection for the masjid. P2 shared "I love to learn face to face. I love to be in the masjid." They consistently described the masjid as a vital space for building relationships and fostering a sense of learning community. *"I really liked the connection with my fellow classmates and being able to pray with all the sisters"* (P2), one explained. The mutual experience of learning, praying, and discussing lessons deepened bonds between students and created a supportive environment. "I really liked the social life (at the masjid)" (P1). Teachers, too, were described as integral to this social fabric. *"My teacher was very good. My friends were very good. We listened to each other's lessons face to face"* (P3).

The physical proximity of the masjid also facilitated informal interactions such as conversations before and after class, spontaneous discussions about lessons, and the shared rituals of prayer. These moments strengthened the social fabric of Qur'an study and made learning a collective experience rather than purely individual.

Loss of Teacher–Student Bond

The transition online significantly altered the teacher–student relationship. Without the nonverbal cues and embodied presence of in-person instruction, many participants felt a loss of intimacy and connection. *"When the person is face to face you can see the movement of the lips… online you don't see that"* (P2). The absence of physical presence also made it harder to build rapport: *"Sometimes you don't know your teacher… I wish we had somewhere to meet our teachers so we can connect"* (P5). Teachers, once seen as mentors and guides, sometimes felt distant or impersonal in the digital space.

This diminished bond affected motivation and engagement. "Face to face was good because we were looking at each other's faces, it was easy to understand. I really liked the social life and everything." (P1) The shift highlighted how essential embodied presence is for effective religious instruction, not just for transmitting knowledge but for nurturing spiritual and emotional connection.

Erosion of Peer Support

Peer relationships also suffered in the online environment. Many participants described feeling less connected to their classmates and less supported in their learning. *"I was more connected when I was in person. Now, not that much"* (P3). The flexible scheduling of online classes, while convenient, sometimes fragmented group cohesion: *"Every person has a different time of schedule, so it's difficult to connect"* (P3).

This erosion of peer support had practical consequences, such as reduced collaboration, as well as emotional ones, including feelings of isolation and disconnection. The absence of shared physical space meant fewer opportunities for support, encouragement, and mutual learning.

Anonymity and Lack of Recognition

One of the most significant social consequences of the shift online was the emergence of anonymity within the learning community. Participants often spoke of the disorienting experience of studying with people for years without ever seeing their faces. *"I know their names but I've never seen their faces. It's been years now. Maybe I can walk in the mall but I wouldn't be able to know them"* (P2). This loss of visual familiarity

was more than just a logistical issue; it represented a deep rupture in how participants related to one another as fellow learners and sisters in faith.

In face-to-face settings, students shared not only lessons but also life moments such as casual conversations, greetings, and prayers. These small acts of recognition built trust and a sense of belonging. Online, however, these opportunities were minimal or entirely absent. One participant noted, *"Sometimes you don't know your teacher… you can't recognize them"* (P5). This disconnection extended to teachers, with some women reporting that they would not recognize their instructors if they met them outside the class environment.

The result was a kind of "nameless, faceless" classroom dynamic that contrasted sharply with the intimacy and familiarity of in-person learning. The absence of embodied recognition left many participants feeling like strangers to one another, even after years of studying online together. This sense of anonymity, in turn, diminished the motivation and shared sense of purpose that had once defined their Qur'an learning communities.

Loneliness in Online Learning

The loss of community and recognition also manifested as loneliness. Several participants described a feeling of isolation that accompanied online learning — an emotional state that undermined both motivation and enjoyment. *"Without the Zoom link, this attachment, I feel lonely"* (P4), one participant reflected. The digital classroom, while functional, often felt transactional: students logged in, studied, and logged out, without the social rituals that had previously given meaning to the experience.

The emotional contrast with the masjid was particularly pronounced. *"Home… it's more convenient, but I just missed the atmosphere of the masjid. It's a big thing"* (P3).

The masjid, as many described, was not just a physical location but a spiritual and social sanctuary; it was a place where learning was intertwined with community, where knowledge was nurtured in an environment of shared faith. "It was difficult to lose the connection with the masjid" (P2). The absence of this atmosphere online left some women feeling disconnected not just from others, but from the learning process itself.

This loneliness was more than a personal sentiment — it revealed how deeply social Qur'an learning at the masjid was. The text itself is studied communally, recited collectively, and practiced within a shared framework of faith. When that social dimension was stripped away, participants struggled to sustain the same level of engagement, highlighting the inseparability of knowledge and community in their experiences.

Attempts at Digital Community

Despite these challenges, participants made concerted efforts to rebuild a sense of community online. "WhatsApp groups — that's how we communicate" (P1), and these group chats and occasional calls served as partial substitutes for face-to-face connection. P2 echoed this, noting, "We have a study group and it's online… without it I would have been behind." These digital spaces offered opportunities for sharing notes, discussing lessons, and providing encouragement, creating small but meaningful threads of connection within a dispersed learning environment. P3 further agreed, explaining, "WhatsApp — I use [it] for workshops, some programs, and groups."

However, such efforts rarely replicate the depth of in-person relationships. As one participant observed, *"Sometimes I speak with sisters in my class… I know their names, but I've never seen their faces"* (P2). The online environment allowed for

communication but not the same kind of closeness or trust that physical presence enabled. Relationships often remained surface-level and functional, rather than deeply personal or emotionally supportive.

Still, these attempts at having a digital community highlight participants' resilience and adaptability. They were not passive recipients of technological change but active agents seeking to preserve the communal essence of Qur'an learning within new constraints. Yet, their reflections also underscored the inherent limitations of virtual connection, especially for a learning tradition so deeply rooted in embodied presence and interpersonal relationships.

Hybrid and Communal Solutions

Hybrid wasn't a choice in 2000-2002 COVID19 period. However, since the interviews were conducted post-covid and in response to these challenges, many participants now advocated for hybrid learning models that combined the convenience of online platforms with the relational depth of in-person interaction. *"Hybrid would have been the perfect method. I will have both worlds"* (P2), one participant suggested. Others envisioned regular community gatherings or periodic in-person sessions to complement online study. *"At least you can know each other, even your peers, and share your thoughts in person"* (P5).

These suggestions reflect a broader recognition that Qur'an learning is not only about content delivery but also about context — the environment, relationships, and rituals that surround the learning process. Hybrid models were seen to restore these missing dimensions while retaining the flexibility and accessibility that online platforms provided.

Interpretation

The findings from this theme reveal that social connection is not a minor aspect of Qur'an study; it is central to its practice, meaning, and impact. The masjid had offered embodied recognition, relational warmth, and opportunities for spontaneous interaction that were deeply valued by participants. The transition online disrupted these dynamics, leading to feelings of isolation, anonymity, and disconnection.

While digital tools offered partial remedies, they could not fully replace the depth of in-person relationships. Participants' consistent calls for hybrid or communal solutions underscore the importance of reintroducing embodied presence into digital learning models. This points to a broader understanding of Qur'an study as a relational practice, one that thrives not only on textual engagement but also on shared human experience. The breakdown of social connections did not occur in isolation — it was deeply intertwined with the technological shift itself. As participants navigated new tools and platforms, they encountered both opportunities for innovation and barriers to inclusion. The next theme explores how technology acted as both a bridge and a barrier in their Qur'an learning journeys, shaping everything from access and engagement to motivation and dropout rates.

Theme 3: Role of Technology

This theme responds most directly to the research question's focus on digital tools by examining how technology shaped access, continuity, and engagement in Qur'an learning during and after the pandemic. It highlights both the enabling and constraining roles of digital platforms, revealing technology as a central force that simultaneously expanded access, supported continuity, and introduced new learning

resources, while also creating barriers, exacerbating inequalities, and, for some participants, contributing to disengagement. Participants described technology as both empowering and alienating, a mediating force that could either deepen their connection to the Qur'an or distance them from it, depending on their levels of digital literacy, comfort, and access.

Zoom and WhatsApp as Core Tools

For most participants, digital platforms became the backbone of their Qur'an learning experience. Classes were typically held on Zoom, and communication and coordination were handled through WhatsApp groups. *"We only use Zoom… Each class has a WhatsApp group"* (P1). These tools structured the rhythm of study, allowing teachers to deliver lessons and students to stay informed about schedules, homework, and announcements.

In many cases, even though "the adjustment was hard because of technology," (P1) these platforms became indispensable. They enabled real-time interaction, preserved some level of teacher–student engagement, and provided spaces for collaboration and support. WhatsApp, in particular, was praised for facilitating communication outside of class time, a resource that extended beyond the formal lesson where teachers communicated with them.

Apps for Qur'an Study

While no single database provides an exact global count of Qur'an mobile applications, existing studies indicate a rapidly expanding ecosystem. One study on Qur'an memorization via mobile applications notes the existence of "more than 100 mobile applications for Qur'an learning and memorization" (Buzdar & Farooq, 2020). In

a national context, a market analysis of Islamic apps in Pakistan identified around 250

applications returned under the keyword *Qur'an* for a single publisher segment (Data

Darbar, 2021). Similarly, a review of Islamic mobile applications in Turkey reported 724

Islamic apps in the Google Play store alone, with Qur'an apps forming a major sub-

category (Aygul et al, 2019). Longitudinal analyses also show a sharp increase in

Qur'an-category apps between 2012 and 2017 (Hassan et al., 2020). Taken together,

these findings suggest that, across platforms and regions, the total number of Qur'an-

related apps likely reaches into the thousands, even though an exact global figure is not

currently available.

Beyond the core communication tools, participants also embraced a variety of

Qur'an apps to support their learning. These apps offered features such as tajweed

Qur'ans that were color coded, translations, and audio recitations. *"I use Qur'an*

Majeed… They put color with the Tajweed… I love it" (P2). Such tools were particularly

valuable for independent study, helping learners reinforce lessons and practice

recitation at their own pace. P4 also reported that she used "Facebook, Messenger,

Telegram and YouTube."

Apps also introduced a degree of personalization, allowing users to tailor their

study according to their needs and preferences. This self-directed dimension was

empowering for many participants, giving them greater control over their learning

journeys. P5 added that she used "Kindle, Ayat App, Adhkar App, the Qur'an App and

AlQur'an App." However, reliance on these tools also highlighted disparities in digital

literacy and access, which shaped how effectively participants could engage with them.

Digital Resources Beyond Class

Many participants reported that their engagement with Qur'an learning extended beyond scheduled class time, thanks to the abundance of digital resources available online. YouTube lectures, Islamic websites, and online recordings allowed them to supplement their formal instruction with additional learning opportunities. *"I listen to YouTube. I go to websites and listen to recordings"* (P3).

This increased exposure deepened their understanding and allowed them to approach their learning from multiple angles. For some, it meant exploring different teaching styles and interpretations; for others, it provided additional practice and reinforcement. The ability to access diverse resources also empowered participants to become more self-directed learners, seeking out knowledge proactively rather than relying solely on structured classes.

Tech-Supported Assessment

Technology also transformed the way assessments were conducted. Online quizzes, oral recitations via video call, and automated grading systems became common features of participants' learning experiences. *"Starting the second year, we used Google Sheets… it automatically grades it"* (P1). These innovations streamlined the evaluation process, providing instant feedback and supporting teachers. They also allowed for a comparable means of assessments to face-to-face handwritten exams. Automated tools could assess memorization and basic comprehension but often failed to capture subtle aspects of pronunciation, or tajweed; as such teachers had to also use an audio exam online which again mimicked the in-person experience.

Global Connectivity

One of the most transformative aspects of digital learning was the ability to connect with Qur'an teachers, scholars, and students from around the world. *"Online I can connect with England, Dubai, Singapore… many groups, not only this Islamic Centre"* (P4). This global reach broadened participants' perspectives and exposed them to diverse educational contexts.

Global connectivity also fostered a sense of belonging to a wider ummah — a global Muslim community united by the shared pursuit of Qur'anic knowledge. This was particularly meaningful for participants who felt isolated in their local contexts. However, time zone differences and varying teaching standards sometimes created logistical challenges and inconsistencies in learning experiences.

Technology as a Gateway to Self-Learning

For many participants, technology served as a catalyst for greater independence and self-directed learning. Exposure to digital tools encouraged them to explore new formats and methods of study, including podcasts, language-learning apps, and online lectures. *"I think it improved my listening because the exposure to the internet, the apps, and all those things helped. I didn't know before, but I use podcasts a lot now"* (P1). This shift toward self-learning was empowering. Participants reported increased confidence in their ability to navigate the vast landscape of Islamic knowledge and take ownership of their educational journeys.

Over-Reliance on Technology as a Deterrent

Despite its many benefits, technology also created barriers that led some learners to disengage. Digital literacy varied widely among participants, and those who

struggled with new platforms often felt excluded. *"Some people don't know how to use technology and they're scared. That's probably why they dropped it"* (P1).

This digital divide was particularly pronounced among older learners or those with limited exposure to technology. For these participants, the learning curve associated with new tools was intimidating, and the lack of in-person support heightened their frustration. Over-reliance on technology since face to face was no longer an option highlighted the fragility of purely digital learning models.

Interpretation

Technology functioned as a double-edged tool in participants' Qur'an learning journeys. For many, it acted as a *bridge*, expanding access to classes beyond geographic limits, creating opportunities for global connection, and allowing greater learner autonomy. Yet, it also introduced *barriers*, such as decreased engagement, reduced instructional depth, and a risk of disconnecting from the embodied aspects of traditional Qur'an pedagogy.

The participants' insights make it clear that technology, on its own, cannot guarantee a meaningful or sustained learning experience. Its effectiveness depends on how thoughtfully it is integrated, including considerations of accessibility, ongoing technical and pedagogical support, and the preservation of crucial elements like personalized teacher feedback and embodied guidance. A commonly expressed preference was for hybrid learning models, where digital tools are complemented by in-person sessions to balance flexibility with depth and authenticity.

Moreover, the technological shift influenced not only how participants accessed Qur'anic knowledge but also how they processed and engaged with it. The online

transition often magnified issues of language comprehension, pronunciation, and literacy—challenges that deeply shaped learners' confidence, motivation, and their spiritual connection to the Qur'an. These complexities pave the way for the next theme, which explores the pivotal role of language and literacy barriers in shaping the participants' experiences of Qur'an study in digital spaces.

Theme 4: Language and Literacy

This theme addresses the research question by showing how engagement with the Qur'an in online learning contexts was shaped by language proficiency, pronunciation challenges, accent differences, reliance on English-mediated instruction, and the use of digital tools to support comprehension and tajweed. It explores how linguistic factors influenced confidence, persistence, and depth of engagement, particularly as participants navigated language barriers and pronunciation struggles within digitally mediated learning environments**,** negotiating the tension between accessibility and authenticity while balancing the need for understanding with the desire to engage directly with the Qur'an's original language**.**

Participants' accounts revealed that Qur'an learning was as much a linguistic journey as a spiritual or intellectual one. The Qur'an is inherently tied to Arabic, a language many participants did not grow up speaking or reading fluently. This posed both practical and emotional challenges: pronunciation errors, comprehension gaps, and difficulties with articulation were common themes. While technology provided access to translations, color-coded tajweed guides, and audio recordings, these supports were often seen as supplementary rather than sufficient.

For many participants, the language barrier shaped their learning trajectory from the very beginning. Some felt empowered by English explanations that made the material more accessible, while others, particularly native Arabic speakers, found this reliance alienating and frustrating. The interplay between language, comprehension, and identity emerged repeatedly in participants' narratives, illustrating how deeply language mediates the experience of Qur'an study.

Instruction in English vs. Arabic

One of the most frequently discussed aspects of language in Qur'an study was the medium of instruction. Because the Qur'an program operated in Canada, it naturally sought to accommodate learners by using the most common shared language. As a result, instructors delivered lessons in English, even though students came from diverse linguistic backgrounds. For non-Arabic speakers, this approach made tajweed rules, explanations, and meanings more accessible. As one participant noted, "Everything was explained in English… not in Arabic" (P1). This facilitated comprehension during the early stages of learning and reduced anxiety for those who might otherwise struggle with unfamiliar terminology or complex grammatical structures. In this sense, English functioned as a bridge into Qur'anic study, enabling learners to participate more confidently and consistently.

At the same time, this linguistic accommodation created a paradox for students who expected or preferred instruction directly in Arabic, the language of the Qur'an itself. Arabic-speaking participants felt that English-based explanations felt alienating for them. As one participant explained, "Even though the book was Arabic, they explained in English… Arabic speakers struggled" (P1). Their reflections highlight an important

tension: translation-based teaching can broaden accessibility for some while inadvertently diminishing the linguistic and spiritual richness experienced by others. Together, these perspectives reveal how language choice in Qur'an classes can be both inclusive and exclusive, shaping learners' sense of connection to the text and the tradition.

Language Barriers Leading to Dropout

Language was not just a pedagogical issue — it was also a key factor influencing retention. Some participants observed that classmates struggled so much with Arabic comprehension or recitation that they eventually withdrew from their studies altogether. *"Maybe they had language barriers… that's probably why they dropped it"* (P1).

For these learners, the complexity of Arabic grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation compounded the challenges of online learning. Without consistent in-person feedback or individualized support, frustration mounted. The digital environment often lacked the scaffolding necessary to help struggling learners bridge these linguistic gaps, making continued participation feel unattainable.

This reality reflects a broader pattern participants described: language proficiency often determined not only how deeply one could engage with the Qur'an but whether one remained engaged at all. Those with stronger language foundations felt empowered to continue, while those without them frequently felt left behind.

Pronunciation and Accent Challenges

Pronunciation emerged as one of the most persistent linguistic hurdles in Qur'an learning. Several participants described struggling with the articulation of specific Arabic letters or sounds that did not exist in their native languages. *"Being French, I have a*

French accent… some letters don't exist in my language" (P2). These pronunciation difficulties were not merely technical issues — they carried emotional weight, affecting confidence and self-perception as learners.

Accents — both their own and those of their teachers — also played a significant role in shaping participants' experiences. P4 shared that "the teacher's pronunciation is from Meccah… very difficult to understand with her pronunciation - Arabic style English accent." Some found it challenging to understand teachers whose English carried heavy Arabic accents, while others felt self-conscious about their own pronunciation in front of classmates.

These above dynamics sometimes reinforced feelings of inadequacy and difference, particularly in online settings where opportunities for individualized correction were limited. The result was a layered linguistic landscape: learners were not only grappling with a new language but also navigating how identities, other languages, and accents intersected with the study of sacred text.

Perceived Difficulty of Arabic

Participants frequently described Arabic as both beautiful and daunting. Its complexity was a source of awe but also discouragement. *"Arabic language is beautiful and very sweet but hard, very hard for me"* (P4). For many, the challenge lay not only in learning a new script and phonetic system but also in internalizing grammatical structures and vocabulary far removed from their native languages.

This perception of difficulty often intersected with participants' emotional experiences of learning. "I remember when I started learning the Qur'an it was very difficult. I wanted to give up the class because I was so behind" (P2). Some described feelings of

inadequacy or frustration, while others viewed the struggle as a deeply meaningful act of devotion. Regardless of their attitudes, all participants recognized the centrality of language mastery to Qur'an study — not only as a tool for comprehension but as a pathway to deeper spiritual connection.

Learning Supports and Apps

In navigating the challenges of Arabic literacy, many participants turned to digital tools and language-learning apps to support their study. These technologies provided structured lessons, visual aids, and incremental exercises that complemented formal instruction. *"I tried to learn Arabic on Duolingo"* (P3). While apps like Duolingo offered a gamified introduction to vocabulary and grammar, Qur'an-specific apps such as Qur'an Majeed provided features like tajweed color coding, audio recitation, and multilingual translations. *"I use Qur'an Majeed… They put color with the Tajweed… I love it"* (P2).

These tools helped many participants bridge linguistic gaps and practice independently outside class. For example, listening to audio recitations improved pronunciation and rhythm, while visual aids clarified complex grammatical rules. Some participants used these tools to reinforce classroom learning, especially when direct teacher feedback was unavailable.

Despite their usefulness, participants consistently described these digital supports as supplemental rather than sufficient. Apps could not replicate the depth of teacher-led instruction, nor could they offer the personalized correction necessary for mastering tajweed. They were valuable tools but remained secondary to the embodied presence of a knowledgeable teacher.

Personal Literacy as Spiritual Resilience

For many participants, engagement with the Qur'an went beyond intellectual comprehension — it was a deeply spiritual act that provided strength, comfort, and meaning. Even when full understanding was elusive, the act of reading the Qur'an was described as profoundly sustaining. *"Whenever I go down… I can read the Qur'an"* (P5).

This relationship with the text reframed literacy as more than a cognitive skill. For some, simply being able to read Arabic script — even without perfect pronunciation or comprehension — was an achievement that fostered a sense of closeness to Allah. The Qur'an became a source of solace during difficult times and a reminder of divine guidance.

This perspective illustrates the multifaceted nature of Qur'an literacy. It is not only about linguistic mastery but also about emotional connection, spiritual growth, and perseverance. Even partial literacy — the ability to sound out words, follow along with recitations, or recognize familiar verses — carried deep personal significance.

Paradox of English-Mediated Qur'an Instruction

The reliance on English as the primary medium of instruction created a profound paradox for many learners. On one hand, it enabled non-Arabic speakers to comprehend complex concepts, engage meaningfully with the Qur'anic text, and participate confidently in class discussions. As one participant explained, "If they [the teacher] want to say the letter is from the throat, they will say [the word] throat [in English, not in its Arabic equivalency *hulqoom*]" (P1). This approach significantly lowered linguistic barriers, making tajweed principles and articulation points more accessible to those without a background in Arabic.

However, the same strategy risked alienating Arabic-speaking students and distancing all learners from the original linguistic form of the Qur'an. "Even though the book was Arabic, they explained in English… Arabic speakers struggled" (P1). The problem became particularly apparent in tajweed practice, where precise pronunciation and articulation are integral to the sacred act of recitation.

English-based instruction sometimes created unequal learning experiences within the same class. Non-Arabic speakers often advanced more confidently, buoyed by the accessibility of explanations. Participants reflected that such challenges could have been mitigated in face-to-face settings — or even in online video sessions — where teachers might visually indicate articulation points (e.g., pointing to the throat), thereby reinforcing the embodied nature of Qur'anic phonetics.

Interpretation

The findings from this theme demonstrate that language and literacy are not peripheral concerns but central to the experience of Qur'an learning. They shape how learners engage with the sacred text, how they perceive their own progress, and how they sustain their connection to the Qur'an over time.

Participants' testimonies revealed that language functioned simultaneously as a bridge and a barrier. English explanations, translation-based instruction, and bilingual teaching approaches made the Qur'an accessible to a wider audience, particularly for those with limited Arabic proficiency. Yet, these same strategies sometimes created a subtle distance from the Qur'an's original form and meaning. Pronunciation difficulties, accent differences, and the perceived complexity of Arabic further compounded these

dynamics, often shaping learners' confidence, motivation, and sense of belonging within the learning environment.

Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated remarkable resilience and creativity in navigating linguistic obstacles. Many supplemented formal instruction with self-directed learning, using apps, audio recitations, and repetition to reinforce their understanding. For some, the very act of reading — even without full comprehension — was described as spiritually transformative. This underscores a crucial insight: literacy in Qur'an study is not merely a technical skill but a deeply embodied and emotional practice, one that nurtures identity, sustains spirituality, and fosters perseverance.

The impact of language barriers extended beyond individual learning experiences, influencing broader patterns of participation and retention. Learners who struggled with comprehension were more likely to disengage or discontinue their studies, illustrating how linguistic accessibility directly shapes educational outcomes. Addressing these barriers, therefore, requires intentional pedagogical design including differentiated instruction, targeted language support, and opportunities for immersive Arabic learning to ensure that learners remain connected and supported throughout their Qur'an journey.

Moreover, language and literacy challenges were not only academic hurdles; they were deeply intertwined with participants' identities and spiritual journeys. Mastering the Qur'an's language was often described as part of becoming a better Muslim, strengthening one's connection with Allah, and preparing to pass sacred knowledge on to future generations. In this way, language was not simply a tool for

comprehension, it shaped how women understood themselves, their faith, and their roles within their families and communities.

For many participants, learning to read, pronounce, and understand the Qur'an became a deeply personal process of self-discovery. It raised profound questions about identity: Who am I as a Muslim woman? How do I embody the Qur'an's teachings in my daily life? How does this sacred text guide my journey as a mother, daughter, or believer? These reflections reveal that language learning was not just about decoding text; it was about constructing a spiritual and social self.

This connection between language and identity became especially visible as participants described how Qur'an study reshaped their priorities, influenced their decisions, and transformed their understanding of faith and purpose. Ultimately, language served as a lens through which they reimagined their spiritual commitments and redefined what it means to live as Muslim women in the modern world. The next theme explores this evolving relationship between learning and identity in greater depth.

Theme 5: Identity and Spirituality

This theme addresses the spiritual dimension of the research question by examining how Qur'an learning shaped participants' faith, identity, and motivation during the transition to online study. It highlights how spirituality and motherhood sustained persistence and meaning-making across changing learning environments, shaping participants' self-concept, religious priorities, and spiritual journeys as mothers, learners, and Muslims**.** It further examines how engagement with the Qur'an served as both a mirror and a map, reflecting participants' deeply held values while guiding them toward a more intentional, faith-centered, and purposeful way of living**.**

For participants, Qur'an study was far more than an educational pursuit. It was a process of identity formation and spiritual evolution, one that informed how they saw themselves, how they navigated their responsibilities, and how they approached life's challenges. Many described the Qur'an as a moral compass that shaped their daily actions, relationships, and decisions. It helped them to prioritize faith over cultural expectations and to ground their identities firmly in Islam.

Spiritual healing emerged as a recurring theme. Participants spoke of the Qur'an as a source of peace, comfort, and renewal, especially during times of hardship. Even when their understanding of the text was incomplete, reading, reciting, and reflecting on the Qur'an brought emotional relief and a sense of closeness to Allah.

Motherhood added another profound dimension to this theme. Many women framed their learning not only as a personal act of devotion but also as a responsibility to their children. They wanted to model Qur'an learning, teach tajweed, and instill a love of the Qur'an in the next generation. This intergenerational motivation sustained their commitment even when learning was difficult.

Ultimately, Qur'an learning became deeply intertwined with participants' sense of who they were, as Muslims, as mothers, and as women navigating complex cultural and social landscapes.

Religion Over Culture

A central way that Qur'an study shaped participants' identities was by helping them distinguish between cultural practices and Islamic principles. Many described a deliberate effort to prioritize religious teachings over inherited customs. *"As a Muslim woman I put my religion first and the culture after"* (P2). This shift was not merely

intellectual but deeply personal, influencing how participants dressed, raised their

children, and interacted with their communities.

The emphasis on religion over culture also reflected a growing confidence and

agency. By grounding their choices in Qur'anic guidance, participants felt empowered to

challenge social expectations that conflicted with their faith. This process of "reordering"

their values illustrates how Qur'an study was not only about acquiring knowledge but

also about aligning their identity with their beliefs.

Qur'an as a Moral Compass

Participants repeatedly described the Qur'an as a guide for navigating life's

decisions and dilemmas. It offered principles that shaped their ethical framework and

daily conduct. *"Qur'an guides us in every matter"* (P3), one participant stated,

highlighting the centrality of the text in shaping her worldview.

This guidance extended beyond religious rituals to encompass all aspects of life,

from family relationships to work ethics and personal aspirations. The Qur'an's

teachings on patience, justice, compassion, and accountability informed how

participants approached challenges and made choices. Over time, these lessons

became internalized, transforming not only their behavior but also their sense of self.

For many, this moral compass was especially valuable in navigating the

complexities of life in non-Muslim-majority societies. It provided a stable reference point

amid competing cultural messages and helped them maintain their faith identity in

diverse social contexts.

Spiritual Healing and Growth

Another powerful dimension of Qur'an learning was its role in emotional and spiritual healing. Participants spoke of the Qur'an as a source of comfort during difficult times, a text that soothed the heart and strengthened their resolve. *"The Qur'an is my heart healer… I changed myself a lot"* (P4).

This healing was not merely emotional but deeply transformative. Engagement with the Qur'an often sparked moments of introspection that led to measurable personal growth. Participants described becoming more patient, more forgiving, and more mindful of their daily actions as a direct result of their studies. As P2 shared, "If I am on the highway and someone's honking their horn at me, I won't be mad. I have to be patient." Even when full comprehension was limited, the act of recitation itself was experienced as therapeutic—anchoring learners in remembrance of Allah, soothing emotional distress, and reinforcing their trust in His plan.

This spiritual transformation often unfolded gradually. As one participant explained, regular reading deepened her faith and reshaped her inner life: *"I need to read every day to renew my faith… it makes me cry"* (P5). Such moments of vulnerability and connection illustrate how Qur'an study functioned as a spiritual practice, one that nurtured resilience, humility, and hope.

Children as Inspiration

For many participants, their motivation to study the Qur'an was deeply tied to their roles as mothers. "We have a big responsibility to teach our kids... we should learn and we should teach them" (P3). The desire to nurture a strong Islamic identity in their children inspired them to pursue their own learning, even when the journey was challenging. *"I can teach my kids now… the kids see you being in class"* (P1). This

visibility was powerful as children observed their mothers' commitment, perseverance, and reverence for the Qur'an, which in turn shaped their own attitudes toward faith and learning.

The influence of children extended beyond motivation to a profound sense of responsibility. Participants viewed their growing knowledge as a gift to pass on — equipping the next generation with the tools to navigate their faith confidently. This intergenerational dimension added depth and urgency to their studies, transforming personal learning into an act of communal and familial stewardship that brought both satisfaction and accomplishment. As P5 expressed, "I went to tajweed class. I fixed my tajweed. Now I can teach my kids at home."

Parental Role Modeling

Participants also reflected on the importance of modeling Qur'an engagement as part of their parenting. Their efforts to embody the values and practices they wanted their children to adopt were central to their identities as Muslim mothers. *"I can't give up… I have to continue that learning path with them (kids)"* (P2).

This commitment often required sacrifices — of time, energy, and comfort — but it was sustained by the awareness that children learn as much from example as from instruction. Seeing their mothers study, recite, and reflect on the Qur'an taught children that learning is a lifelong pursuit and that faith requires continuous growth.

The emphasis on role modeling also speaks to a broader understanding of parenting as a form of teaching faith applied. By embodying the Qur'an's teachings, participants sought not only to teach their children about Islam but to show them how to live it.

Motherhood as a Driver of Persistence

Motherhood did not merely inspire participants to study, it also sustained their persistence through the difficulties of online learning, language barriers, and technological hurdles. For some, the need to support their children's Qur'an education became a catalyst for acquiring new skills and overcoming personal limitations. *"Because I have to learn Qur'an, I have to know this technology"* (P4).

This determination reflects a broader theme in participants' narratives: the intertwining of personal growth with familial responsibility. Learning was rarely an individual endeavor; it was a collective project that connected mothers and children in a shared pursuit of knowledge and faith. This relational dimension of learning underscores the communal nature of Qur'an study, a practice rooted not only in individual devotion but also in the continuity of faith across generations.

Interpretation

The findings from this theme illustrate that Qur'an learning is deeply entwined with identity formation, spiritual growth, and familial responsibility. Participants did not view their studies as isolated educational experiences but as integral to who they were and who they aspired to be. By prioritizing religion over culture, they aligned their daily lives more closely with their faith. By engaging with the Qur'an as a moral compass, they cultivated ethical awareness and purpose.

Spiritual healing emerged as both a motivation and an outcome of their studies, while motherhood infused their learning with intergenerational significance. The desire to model faith for their children sustained their commitment and transformed their struggles into acts of devotion. This intertwining of personal, familial, and spiritual

motivations highlights the holistic nature of Qur'an study, one that shapes not only knowledge but also character, relationships, and legacy.

Participants' experiences also reveal the transformative potential of Qur'an learning in redefining identity. It provided them with a framework for navigating modern challenges, a source of strength in times of adversity, and a pathway for transmitting values across generations. Ultimately, Qur'an study was not simply about knowing the text, it was about becoming the kind of person who lives by it.

The shaping of identity through Qur'an learning also intersected with another important dimension of participants' experiences: representation. While many women found empowerment in their studies, they also encountered systemic barriers to visibility and recognition in the online world. The absence of female role models in Qur'an recitation apps and teaching, coupled with limited representation in digital spaces, shaped how participants saw themselves and their possibilities within the field of Islamic education. These concerns point to broader questions about gender, authority, and aspiration in Qur'an learning, issues that are explored in the next theme.

Theme 6: Female Representation

This theme addresses the research question by examining how the visibility, or absence, of women's voices in digital Qur'an spaces shaped participants' experiences of accessibility, inclusion, inspiration, and belonging. It focuses on the lack of female reciters as public role models and the significance of relatable female teachers, showing how representation influenced women's aspirations, engagement, and sense of legitimacy in Qur'anic study.

Women's Absence

Participants valued their teachers and peers but noted a major gap in Qur'an education: the near-total absence of female reciters in public and digital spaces. "*If you go to MUQRI… all the Sheikhs are men*" (P2). This lack of representation limited how women imagined their potential roles. "*If you want girls to go beyond just reading… they've never seen a female reciter*" (P2). Without visible role models, many found it difficult to see themselves as teachers, reciters, or scholars, reinforcing gendered assumptions about mastery and expertise.

Some participants also shared personal preferences shaped by this imbalance. "*But I prefer, actually, to listen to male reciters… the young girls… they can get influenced by a female [Qur'an] reciter*" (P5). This reveals how familiarity with male voices has shaped listening habits, while also recognizing the value of female representation for younger learners. The participant's reflection suggests that more exposure to women reciters during childhood might have created a deeper sense of connection and empowerment.

Overall, the tension between personal preference and broader representation highlights how gendered norms shape learners' experiences and expectations. Expanding the presence of female reciters could help future generations envision themselves as active transmitters of the Qur'an's sacred message.

Women's Multiplicity of Roles

Participants emphasized that women already juggle numerous responsibilities — as mothers, professionals, caregivers, students, and community members — and therefore deserve greater recognition and visibility in Qur'an education. "*I'm not a feminist but I feel like we deserve more. Being a mother, a wife, a professional… we*

deserve more" (P2). Their contributions to religious learning often occur alongside demanding domestic and professional duties, yet these efforts frequently go unacknowledged in both institutional settings and public discourse.

This multiplicity of roles shaped participants' understanding of representation. They saw visibility not just as a matter of inclusion but as a form of validation and an acknowledgment of the complex realities women navigate and the resilience they bring to their learning journeys. More importantly, they believed that public recognition of women's achievements could inspire broader participation and challenge stereotypes about women's roles in Islamic scholarship.

Presence of Female Teachers and Scholars

Despite acknowledging that *"women's voice is not an awrah"* (P2), the scarcity of female public reciters, participants spoke highly of the female teachers and scholars they encountered in their local and online contexts. These educators were described as approachable, empathetic, and deeply influential. "*Every woman should understand the Qur'an and read it with tajweed"* (P3). The presence of women teachers not only made the classroom environment more relatable but also created a safe space for learners to ask questions, express vulnerabilities, and share experiences that might not be as easily discussed with male instructors.

The importance of female teachers extended beyond pedagogy; it was also about representation and legitimacy. Their presence challenged implicit assumptions that religious authority belongs primarily to men. "*They see examples [in Islamic history such as] Aisha peace be upon her but for Qur'an [reciters] we have no examples"* (P2). Female teachers served as living proof that women could be both knowledgeable and

authoritative in Qur'an education, thereby expanding students' perceptions of what is possible.

Relatability of Female Perspectives

Participants repeatedly emphasized the unique value of female perspectives in Qur'an teaching. Because many female instructors shared similar life experiences such as balancing family, work, and religious study, they were often better equipped to contextualize Qur'anic lessons in ways that resonated with their students. *"The female perspective is different from the male perspective… girls can relate"* (P5).

This relatability enhanced not only comprehension but also engagement. Learners felt more comfortable discussing sensitive topics, more motivated to persist through challenges, and more confident in their own capabilities. The shared gendered experience created a bond that fostered trust and deepened the learning relationship.

Interpretation

The findings from this theme underscore the profound influence of representation on women's engagement with Qur'an study. Visibility, or the lack of it, shapes aspirations, informs self-perceptions, and determines who feels entitled to claim authority in the field of Islamic learning. The near absence of female reciters in public platforms sends an implicit message about whose voices are valued, which in turn influences the aspirations of future generations.

At the same time, the presence of female teachers demonstrates the transformative power of representation when it is present. These instructors offer more than knowledge; they embody possibilities. Their relatability, empathy, and authority

disrupt traditional gender hierarchies and invite women to see themselves as active contributors to Islamic scholarship rather than passive recipients of it.

Participants' experiences make clear that representation is not a superficial issue. It has tangible consequences for learning, motivation, and identity formation. Ensuring that women's voices are heard — literally and figuratively — is essential for creating inclusive and equitable Qur'an education spaces that reflect the diversity of the global Muslim community.

Summary Of Findings

The six themes explored in this chapter reveal an interconnected picture of women's experiences transitioning from face-to-face to online Qur'an learning. While each theme stands independently, together they weave a complex narrative of adaptation, resilience, and transformation that is shaped by structural forces, personal motivations, and communal bonds.

The learning environment sets the stage for this transformation. The contrast between the disciplined, embodied atmosphere of the masjid and the flexible yet distraction-prone home setting profoundly shaped how participants engaged with their studies. These spatial dynamics were closely tied to social connection: while the physical classroom nurtured sisterhood, belonging, and accountability, the online space often left learners feeling isolated and anonymous.

Technology intersects with these dynamics in powerful ways. It expanded access, convenience, and opportunities for engagement but also created new barriers for those unfamiliar with digital tools. Its influence extended beyond logistics, shaping the nature of interaction, accessibility of materials, and even the depth of connection

with the Qur'an. For many participants, hybrid models offered the most balanced option, combining accessibility with the structure and spiritual intimacy of in-person learning.

Language and literacy further complicated the landscape. The Qur'an's linguistic demands, from pronunciation to comprehension, profoundly influenced learners' confidence, persistence, and sense of belonging. English-based instruction increased accessibility for some yet risked alienating others for whom Arabic was their language of origin. Despite these challenges, many participants described Qur'an learning as a spiritual journey, where even incremental progress carried emotional and devotional significance.

The themes of identity and spirituality were central throughout participants' narratives. For many, studying the Qur'an was not merely an academic pursuit but a moral, emotional, and spiritual undertaking that guided daily life and shaped personal growth. Motherhood emerged as a powerful driver of persistence, as women saw their learning as a means to nurture faith within their families and transmit Islamic values to future generations.

Finally, female representation emerged as a critical dimension of equity and aspiration. The lack of visible female reciters and teachers limited women's role models, while the presence of relatable and knowledgeable female instructors inspired confidence, belonging, and motivation. Representation was not just symbolic; it was transformative, influencing how women envisioned their place in Qur'anic education and religious spaces.

Taken together, these themes illustrate that the shift to online Qur'an learning was far more than a technological transition. It was a transformative process that

reshaped intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of learners' lives. The women in this study were not passive recipients of change; they were active agents who adapted, resisted, innovated, and persisted. They carried forward their faith into new digital landscapes while holding fast to the sacred tradition they sought to preserve.

This chapter has presented the lived experiences of Muslim women as they navigated the movement from the masjid to the mobile, revealing a story of faith-driven resilience and transformation. The following chapter, Discussion and Conclusion, builds upon these findings by interpreting them in light of the existing literature and theoretical frameworks. It connects participants' voices to broader discourses on gender, faith, and digital learning, highlighting the implications of this study for educators, community leaders, future researchers and other stakeholders.

Chapter Five: Discussion, and Conclusion

Building on the findings presented in Chapter Four, this chapter interprets the key insights within broader scholarly and spiritual contexts, drawing connections between the lived experiences of participants and wider conversations in online learning, digital religion, and women's Islamic education. The findings of this study are discussed in relation to existing literature on online learning, digital religion, and women's Islamic education. Whereas Chapter Four presented six themes with the voices of participants, this chapter moves from description to interpretation, situating those findings within pedagogical, technological, and Islamic frameworks.

The transition from face-to-face to online Qur'an study that was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic revealed both the possibilities and the limitations of digital education. The women in this study adapted with resilience, but their experiences expose enduring challenges in instructional design, representation, pedagogy, and community building. These challenges are not purely logistical; they are deeply relational, touching on how learners understand themselves, their teachers, and their roles as Muslim women. Through the lens of this research, several universal truths become evident: learning as necessary growth, the powerful motivation of motherhood, the deep human need for connection, the double-edged nature of technology, language as a force of meaning, and the continuing need for women to be taken seriously in a male-dominated world of scholarship and authority.

This discussion is organized around three broad interpretive areas that synthesize the six themes identified in Chapter Four: Pedagogy and Presence, Structure and Community, and Language and Spirituality. Together, these

sections show how participants' lived realities intersect with the philosophical, pedagogical, and theological dimensions of Qur'an education in a digital age.

Pedagogy and Presence

One of the most consistent findings in this study is the call for more inclusive instructional design in Qur'an-learning environments, both in digital applications and in formal programs. Participants repeatedly noted that the absence of female Qur'an reciters and visible female scholars limited their ability to envision themselves or their daughters as future teachers and reciters. One participant observed that all the reciters on major apps were men and remarked that "we have no female examples to follow." This absence, though subtle, carries profound implications for equity, representation, and learner motivation.

Existing research on digital religion demonstrates that technology is never neutral; its design encodes particular values and assumptions (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). In the context of Qur'an apps, the exclusive use of male reciters implicitly reinforces the notion that mastery and public recitation of the Qur'an are male domains. Female learners, many juggling roles as mothers, professionals, and students, encounter an interface that visually and audibly centers men**.** This design reflects what Cheong (2022) describes as the persistence of hierarchical religious authority within digital systems, where layers of tradition, structure, and ideology remain embedded even in mediated environments. As a result, such interfaces can subtly shape women's internalized expectations of religious authority and belonging.

Participants in this study contrasted that exclusion with their positive experiences under female teachers. As one participant explained, hearing a woman

teach *tajweed* allowed her to "relate differently as a mother and as a woman." This mirrors broader pedagogical literature showing that students thrive when they see themselves reflected in female instructors and curricula (Bailey, 2020). Within Islamic history, women such as Aishah bint Abu Bakr and Ḥafṣah bint ʿUmar, both wives of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) also stand as precedents for female authority in sacred knowledge. Aishah narrated well over 2000 hadiths (Hanim, 2020). Hafsah's copy of the Qur'an (Sunnah, n.d., Sahih Al-Bukhari 4987), was used to create the standard Uthmanic codex which forms the basis of virtually all Qur'ans used globally today. Their contributions demonstrate that women have always been integral to the transmission of divine knowledge (Wadud, 1999).

In this light, instructional design is not a technical question but a theological one: whose voices embody the recitation of God's word, and who is imagined as capable of preserving it? By integrating women as visible transmitters of Qur'anic knowledge, both in classrooms and in code, educators and developers can move from token inclusion toward genuine participation, allowing the prophetic legacy of Aishah and Hafsah to live on in the digital age.

Another key finding reveals that Qur'an learning is not merely a linguistic or technical process but an embodied and relational one requiring learners to see, hear, and imitate their teachers' pronunciation and expression. Participants described how the absence of visual cues in online classes limited their ability to master *tajweed* and *makharij* (points of articulation). As one participant noted, "When you're learning how to pronounce the letters, you have to watch the mouth to see where the sound comes

from." Without this visual dimension, comprehension was often delayed, and confidence decreased.

Scholars of digital pedagogy emphasize that non-verbal communication—gestures, facial expression, tone, and eye contact—significantly supports meaning-making and memory retention in online settings (Guo et al., 2014). In religious education, this effect is magnified; the teacher's physical presence requires embodied moral presence and often carries moral and emotional weight beyond the words themselves (Al-Attas, 1980). Within Islamic pedagogy, learning has traditionally been transmitted through *isnad*—an unbroken chain of teachers who both recite and model the Qur'an. When a teacher hides behind a static icon, that sacred chain risks becoming abstract.

Participants' accounts affirm that this embodied connection has been weakened in digital settings. The hesitation of some instructors to activate their cameras, perhaps out of privacy concerns or institutional policies, further reduced the relational warmth that students previously experienced in the *masjid* classroom. This aligns with findings from Martin and Parker (2014), who observed that when video is absent, learners report lower satisfaction and weaker emotional connection with instructors.

The women in this study articulated this disconnection in affective terms: without seeing their teachers, they felt "anonymous" or "disembodied." Even when audio quality was strong, something vital was missing. Broader research likewise suggests that human presence—not technological sophistication—remains the decisive factor in sustaining engagement in online religious education (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

A key question emerging from these insights concerns whether teachers feel uneasy about appearing on camera or using platforms such as Zoom, and what factors might influence that unease. Concerns about privacy, unauthorized recording, or data handling can understandably affect confidence and trust in the medium. While Zoom's privacy statement clarifies that it does not use customer audio or video content to train artificial intelligence models (Zoom Communications Inc., 2025), perceptions of vulnerability or misunderstanding of these policies may still influence instructors' willingness to engage visually.

Research also indicates that sustained self-view and continuous visibility can increase self-consciousness and fatigue, commonly referred to as "Zoom fatigue," which may heighten the sense of exposure and reduce engagement (Bailenson, 2021; Wiederhold, 2020). Developing teacher self-efficacy is therefore essential. Studies in online pedagogy demonstrate that instructors' confidence and technical competence directly correlate with learner satisfaction and engagement (Martin & Parker, 2014). Structured professional development, covering technical proficiency, privacy settings, online presence, relational communication, and self-care, can help educators feel more secure both technologically and emotionally.

Collectively, these insights suggest that teacher readiness involves more than technical familiarity, it also requires emotional assurance, cultural sensitivity, and spiritual awareness. Understanding the interplay between privacy, trust, and pedagogical presence will continue to be vital as digital Qur'an education evolves. Research consistently highlights the importance of support structures in online education. Lee et al. (2011) found that students' perceptions of both institutional and

instructor support significantly influence course satisfaction, which in turn is associated with stronger self-reported learning outcomes—underscoring the central role of perceived support in sustaining engagement in online learning environments.

From the learner's perspective, visual presence restores trust, focus, and belonging. Programs can institutionalize this by specifying clear expectations in orientation materials, outlining which classes require camera use, how to maintain respectful modesty, and what privacy safeguards are in place. Small-group practice sessions using video feedback can also replicate the intimacy of face-to-face correction. Ultimately, pedagogy in Qur'an education cannot be completely divorced from presence. The Prophet's model of teaching combined auditory, visual, and emotional dimensions; neglecting any of these weakens the transmission of meaning. In a digital environment, visibility becomes the new embodiment. By helping teachers embrace technology as a vessel of connection rather than a barrier, programs can sustain both the accuracy of recitation and the warmth of mentorship.

Structure and Community

Across all participants, a recurring conviction emerged: hybrid learning, combining in-person and online study, offers the most balanced and sustainable model for Qur'an education. Face-to-face classes provided discipline, embodied connection, and communal atmosphere, while online learning offered flexibility, accessibility, and reduced travel costs. All the participants recognized that neither modality alone could fully meet their needs.

One learner explained that alternating between *masjid* and home sessions allowed her to maintain consistency despite family responsibilities. Another described

hybrid learning as "having the best of both worlds." Their reflections correspond with educational research demonstrating that blended learning improves retention and satisfaction compared to purely online or purely traditional instruction (Means et al., 2013). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) likewise argue that hybrid models foster deeper learning because they integrate both cognitive presence (structured study) and social presence (peer interaction).

From a theological standpoint, hybrid learning also harmonizes the Islamic pedagogical value of ease and the accessibility of learning. The Prophet taught, "Make things easy and do not make them difficult" (Sunnah, n.d., Sahih Al-Bukhari 6125) Participants' desire for hybrid models reflects this principle of balance: a structure firm enough to sustain accountability yet flexible enough to accommodate motherhood and work.

One of the most profound findings was the loss of community and peer connection that accompanied the shift to online Qur'an learning. For most participants, the *masjid* had been more than a classroom; it was a living community where prayer, friendship, and sisterhood intertwined. When learning moved online, many described a subtle erosion of belonging: names remained but faces disappeared.

Participant reflections mirror what Wenger (1998) calls the essence of a community of practice, shared repertoire, mutual engagement, and joint enterprise. Qur'an circles traditionally held in *masjids* naturally embody these characteristics. The abrupt migration to digital spaces fragmented these dynamics. One participant noted that even after years of study with the same group online, she "would not recognize any of them if [they] met in the mall." Another observed that while group chats facilitated

communication, they could not replace the warmth of human proximity. Most of the

spontaneous smiles and shared laughter that mark in-person fellowship are not

replicable online.

The loss of physical gathering was also experienced spiritually. The Prophet

(peace be upon him) promised that whenever people gather to recite and study the

Qur'an, "tranquility descends upon them, mercy envelops them, angels surround them,

and Allah mentions them among those with Him" (Sunnah, n.d., Sahih Muslim 2700).

Several women explicitly mentioned missing this blessing of togetherness.

The experience of isolation reported by participants corresponds with wider

psychological literature on online education. Song and Bonk (2016) found that while

online learning promotes autonomy, it often weakens emotional engagement and

persistence if social presence is not deliberately cultivated. For adult women learners,

especially those combining study with domestic responsibilities, the absence of in-

person support can increase cognitive load and decrease motivation.

Moreover, the *masjid* context had previously offered a moral environment that

extended beyond learning. Teachers modeled patience and humility; peers reinforced

discipline and accountability. When this support dissipated, learners had to self-regulate

more intensely. For some, this nurtured independence; for others, it produced fatigue.

As one participant summarized, "When you're alone behind a screen, you have to push

yourself; no one notices if you disappear."

A nuanced dimension of this finding concerns gendered patterns of visibility. In

the physical *masjid*, women had dedicated spaces where they could see one another

and build networks of solidarity. Online platforms, although theoretically egalitarian,

inadvertently erased these micro-rituals. Scholars of digital religion note that such

erasures can undermine gendered belonging even when platforms claim neutrality

(Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

The longing for community thus transcends nostalgia; it reflects a deeper instinct

that faith matures in fellowship. In Islam, companionship is both a social and spiritual

necessity. Prophetic teaching reinforces this principle through a well-known analogy of

good companionship: "The example of a good companion is like the seller of musk —

either you will buy some from him, or at least you will enjoy its fragrance" (Sunnah, n.d.,

Sahih al-Bukhari 2102). In today's fragmented social landscape, finding good company

is often difficult, and the women deeply felt the loss of this companionship in their online

learning experience. When they lamented the facelessness of online classes, they were

expressing this classical insight in contemporary terms.

The abrupt global shift to online Qur'an learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

also left both teachers and students unprepared for a fully digital environment. While the

participants adapted with remarkable resilience, their accounts revealed the emotional

and cognitive toll of navigating new technologies without structured support. For many,

the first months of the transition were marked by frustration, self-doubt, and a sense of

disorientation. One learner summarized the collective sentiment: "We were learning the

Qur'an and Zoom at the same time." With technological confusion, students felt a slip

from devotion toward mere survival. The disorder of emergency online learning

represented not simply a technical failure but a disruption of spiritual etiquette.

These experiences reflect a broader pattern documented in distance-education

research. Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) found that emergency remote teaching, unlike

planned online learning, often produces anxiety and disengagement because orientation, scaffolding, and community are absent. Similarly, Hodges et al. (2020) emphasize that successful digital transitions depend on explicit onboarding that clarifies expectations, cultivates confidence, and humanizes technology.

Language and Spirituality

Language emerged as both a bridge and a barrier in this study. For some participants, instruction in English facilitated comprehension; for others—particularly Arabic speakers—the use of English obscured nuance and impeded emotional connection. Likewise, non-Arabic speakers struggled when teachers' accents or explanations differed from their linguistic background. These tensions reveal that Qur'an learning is as much an act of translation and understanding as of recitation.

Participant reflections show how language operates on multiple levels—technical, cognitive, and emotional. One Arabic-speaking learner noted that English explanations of articulation points (*makhaarij*) often failed to convey the physical precision to Arabic speakers. Conversely, French- or Urdu-speaking students found Arabic-only explanations intimidating. These experiences mirror Cummins's (2000) theory of linguistic interdependence: proficiency in one language affects comprehension in another.

In Qur'anic education, language carries sacred weight. Abdel Haleem (2010) observes that the Qur'an's power resides partly in its Arabic rhythm and semantic density; translation inevitably dilutes meaning. Yet Abd Rahman et al. (2017) reminds that understanding, even through translation, is integral to the Qur'an's purpose of

guidance. Balancing linguistic authenticity and accessibility is therefore an ethical challenge for teachers when going beyond recitation.

For many participants, studying Qur'an online became both sanctuary and therapy. They described the Qur'an as "a healing for what is in the hearts." One said that reciting even one page after a stressful day "calmed everything." Another linked her perseverance to motherhood: learning so she could teach her children. Their motivation was not external accreditation but inner transformation—healing, closeness to God, and the desire to transmit faith to their children. Such intention shapes not only their learning but also the spiritual reward it carries, echoing the Prophet's teaching that "the reward of deeds depends upon the intention, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended" (Sunnah, n.d., Sahih al-Bukhari 1).

This intertwining of maternal devotion and spiritual aspiration resonates with Mahmood's (2005) analysis of women's piety movements, where submission and agency are not opposites but co-constitutive forms of moral striving. Motherhood emerged as a recurrent spiritual force, with participants viewing learning as a form of intergenerational worship: "When I learn, they learn."

Together, these linguistic and spiritual dimensions show that comprehension and devotion are mutually reinforcing. Language is not neutral in Qur'an learning; it is the very fabric through which meaning flows. When teachers or apps privilege a single linguistic norm, they risk reproducing exclusion. When they embrace multilingualism, they enact global inclusion.

This study was guided by the following research question: "What are the lived experiences of Muslim women navigating the transition from face-to-face to online

Qur'an learning, and how have digital tools shaped their engagement, accessibility, and spiritual connection to the Qur'an?"

Building on the findings presented in Chapter Four, this section explicitly connects the study's key insights to this research question by interpreting how participants experienced digital Qur'an learning and how technology shaped their educational, social, and spiritual engagement.

Emerging Universal Truths

Collectively, the themes explored in this study illuminate a deeply interconnected portrait of Muslim women's experiences navigating digital Qur'an learning. The findings reveal that educational, emotional, and spiritual growth cannot be separated from social connection, representation, and language. Each theme stands on its own but together they weave an intricate narrative of adaptation, resilience, and transformation. From these insights, several universal truths emerge:

1. Learning is necessary growth, shaped by both hardship and faith.

2. Motherhood serves as a powerful engine for intention, motivation and spiritual perseverance.

3. Connection with teachers, peers, and community is a condition for sustained engagement.

4. Technology is both a blessing and a test, offering accessibility while challenging authenticity.

5. Language shapes understanding and emotional connection to the Qur'an.

6. Representation and visibility empower women's participation and self-recognition in sacred learning.

7. Spiritual intention transforms digital study into a moral and transformative act. Together, these findings affirm that effective Qur'an education is not merely the transmission of text but the cultivation of souls and intellect. As Abdel Haleem (2010) writes, "The Qur'an educates the whole person, intellect, conscience, and heart."

Key Insights in Relation to the Research Question

The following four key insights directly address the research question by revealing how Muslim women experienced the transition to online Qur'an learning and how digital tools shaped their engagement, accessibility, and spiritual connection to the Qur'an.

Insight 1: Inclusive Instructional Design Shapes Engagement and Belonging

Participants' lived experiences revealed that instructional design choices within digital Qur'an platforms significantly shaped their sense of engagement and belonging. The absence of female Qur'an reciters and visible female scholars in digital tools limited participants' ability to envision themselves, or their daughters, as legitimate transmitters of sacred knowledge. This insight directly addresses the research question by demonstrating how digital tools shape women's engagement and religious self-concept in online Qur'an learning. This finding aligns with broader pedagogical research showing that learners thrive when they see themselves reflected in instructors and curricular representation (Bailey, 2020).

Insight 2: Visual Presence Influences Accessibility, Confidence, and Connection

A second key insight emerging from participants' lived experiences was the centrality of visual presence in online Qur'an learning. Participants described how the absence of visual cues in digital environments delayed comprehension, weakened confidence, and disrupted their connection to teachers. This finding responds to the

research question by illustrating how digital tools affect accessibility and the embodied dimensions of Qur'an learning. Scholars of digital pedagogy emphasize that non-verbal communication, gestures, facial expression, tone, and eye contact, significantly supports meaning-making and memory retention in online settings (Guo et al., 2014).

Insight 3: Digital Learning Reshaped Community and Spiritual Belonging

Participants' lived experiences consistently revealed that the transition to online Qur'an learning altered their sense of community and spiritual belonging. While digital tools maintained access to instruction, they often diminished peer connection and collective spirituality. Participants described a subtle erosion of belonging: names remained, but faces disappeared. This insight addresses the research question by showing how digital tools reshape social and spiritual dimensions of Qur'an learning. Song and Bonk (2016) found that while online learning promotes autonomy, it often weakens emotional engagement and persistence if social presence is not deliberately cultivated.

Insight 4: Hybrid Best Supports Engagement, Accessibility, and Continuity

The final key insight indicates that hybrid learning, combining face-to-face and online Qur'an study, most effectively supports Muslim women's lived realities. Participants valued the structure, embodiment, and spiritual atmosphere of in-person learning alongside the flexibility and accessibility of digital tools. This insight responds directly to the research question by demonstrating how learning models mediate women's engagement, access, and spiritual continuity. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) argue that hybrid models foster deeper learning because they integrate both cognitive presence (structured study) and social presence (peer interaction).

Taken together, these insights demonstrate that Muslim women's lived experiences of online Qur'an learning are shaped not merely by access to technology but by how digital tools are embedded within pedagogical, relational, and spiritual frameworks. The findings show that digital Qur'an learning can enhance engagement, accessibility, and spiritual connection when it is intentionally designed to preserve presence, representation, community, and meaning.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study carry significant implications for teachers, program leaders, app developers, and learners engaged in Qur'an education in a digital age. These implications translate lived experiences into actionable strategies that can improve inclusivity, representation, pedagogy, and community engagement.

For Teachers

Teachers play a vital role in bridging the gap between digital tools and embodied pedagogy. The study highlights the importance of:

- Developing confidence and competence with visual presence tools such as video demonstrations and screen sharing to enhance *tajweed* instruction while maintaining modesty and professionalism.

- Utilising video in teaching to better student learning experience

- Engaging in professional development that integrates technical training with emotional and spiritual readiness for online instruction.

- Viewing visibility not as exposure but as continuity in the sacred chain of nurturing connection and presence even through digital mediums.

- Adopting relational pedagogy of teaching as nurture that emphasizes empathy, feedback, and mentorship.

- Understanding the real significance of social bonds and connection for students

- Engaging with students to confirm their understanding and being mindful of body language cues that show they may be confused or did not understand.

- Accommodating languages where possible to enable student understanding

- Committing to hybrid lessons for students where possible

- Attending teacher-student functions and gatherings to foster sisterhood

For Program Leaders and Institutions

Administrators and program coordinators have the capacity to institutionalize balance and inclusivity through design and policy. Recommendations include:

- Implementing hybrid-first models that integrate in-person and online components, preserving both the discipline of traditional learning and the flexibility of digital access.

- Establishing structured onboarding programs for teachers and students to familiarize them with platforms, etiquette, and expectations before classes begin.

- Ensuring female representation in teaching and leadership roles to reflect historical precedents of women as scholars and transmitters of sacred knowledge.

- Providing linguistic inclusivity by assessing language preferences at enrollment and offering parallel or multilingual options where possible.

- Incorporating and organize community-building initiatives, such student teacher events, iftars, Eid get togethers, female only Qur'an competitions, and to maintain belonging and accountability.

- Doing periodical confidential surveys and seeking student and teacher feedback.

For App Developers and Technologists

Developers of Qur'an-learning applications can transform user experience by designing for inclusivity, accessibility, and community rather than isolated use. They can capitalize on the knowledge of the female gap that exists in the Qur'an and Islamic App world. Recommendations include:

- Integrating female reciters and scholars in app content to normalize women's voices in Qur'anic learning.

- Providing multilingual interfaces, explanations, and subtitles to support diverse linguistic backgrounds.

- Embedding hybrid-ready features such as live-stream modules, peer recitation spaces, and short video submissions for teacher feedback.

- Including motivational prompts derived from Qur'anic verses on patience and perseverance, aligning design with spiritual values rather than commercial appeal.

- Recognizing that so-called gender-neutral design often defaults to male-centered assumptions and intentionally incorporating features that reflect the lived realities and needs of female learners, such as flexible navigation, family-friendly progress tracking, and inclusive imagery.

- Designing with gender-awareness strengthens usability and representation for all learners.

For Learners

Learners also bear agency in shaping their educational journey. Key takeaways for students include:

- Viewing persistence in Qur'an study as a form of worship and self-development.

- Forming or joining online Qur'an circles that sustain motivation and accountability.

- Balancing digital convenience with embodied worship by attending in-person sessions when possible.

- Embracing technology as a tool of remembrance rather than a replacement for sacred community.

- Giving continuous honest feedback to teachers, program leaders, app developers so your voices and needs are addressed to better your success in learning

By acting on these recommendations, educators, institutions, and developers can collectively reimagine digital Qur'an education as a field that upholds inclusion, spiritual integrity, and educational excellence.

Unanticipated Limitations

During the research process, several unanticipated limitations emerged that influenced data collection and interpretation.

First, obtaining signed consent forms proved more challenging than expected. Some participants were unfamiliar with digital form-filling and electronic

submission, which caused delays and required repeated communication. A few potential participants ultimately had to be excluded because completing the consent form was an ethically necessary requirement.

Second, the inability to use video during interviews became a more significant limitation than anticipated. Once recruitment began, four of the five participants (80%) requested audio-only interviews in their consent forms, reflecting their comfort levels and the norms of their online Qur'an classes, where video was never used. Although interviews proceeded smoothly, the absence of visual cues restricted the researcher's ability to observe facial expressions, gestures, and other nonverbal communication, limiting the depth of ethnographic insight.

Finally, the coding and thematic analysis process introduced methodological limitations. Initial coding produced numerous overlapping codes, reflecting the complexity of participants' experiences. Themes such as spirituality, identity, maternal motivation, and community connection often intertwined. Collapsing these overlapping codes required researcher precision and interpretive judgment, introducing an element of subjectivity inherent in qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

Unanticipated Delimitations

Several delimitations also emerged during the research process that were not anticipated at the outset but ultimately shaped the study's scope and organization.

First, challenges in obtaining signed consent forms took more time than expected. Although eligibility criteria were predetermined, many potential participants experienced difficulty completing and returning the digital consent form. Some may

have been unfamiliar with electronic signing tools, while others found the extra

technological step burdensome, despite the support provided. In a face-to-face context,

consent could have been completed more easily using printed forms. As a result, data

collection was delayed, and finally the first five who successfully navigated the digital

consent process were able to participate.

Second, the study became delimited by the uniform use of audio-only

interviews. Although remote interviewing was anticipated, it was unexpected that most

participants would explicitly request audio-only interviews. Since four out of five

participants refused video, honouring participant comfort required the researcher to

apply audio-only format for all interviews to maintain consistency. This created an

unanticipated boundary around the mode of data collection.

Finally, analytic delimitations emerged during coding. Nine preliminary themes

were identified during the initial coding cycle. Peer coding review suggested that several

themes overlapped or reflected interconnected dimensions of participants' experiences.

To ensure conceptual clarity, the nine themes were intentionally condensed into six

integrated themes. This refinement narrowed the analytic structure in ways not originally

planned but necessary for producing a coherent and meaningful interpretation of the

data (Miles et al., 2020).

Contributions of the Study

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of Muslim women navigating

the transition from face-to-face to online Qur'an learning during the COVID-19

pandemic. Using a qualitative, narrative-ethnographic approach, it drew on in-depth

interviews with five participants who reflected on their learning journeys, struggles, and

aspirations. Six central themes emerged, Learning Environment, Social Connection, Role of Technology, Language and Literacy, Identity and Spirituality, and Female Representation, each revealing how structural, social, and spiritual forces intersected in shaping women's engagement with the Qur'an. This research contributes to multiple domains:

Scholarship

It expands the literature on digital religion and women's Islamic education by centering Muslim women's perspectives, often under-represented in academic discourse. The findings illustrate how gender, language, and technology converge to shape distinctive pedagogical and spiritual conditions in online learning (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

Practice

This research provides evidence-based guidance for Qur'an teachers, program leaders, and masjids seeking to design hybrid, inclusive, and relational curricula. Prior research demonstrates that online and blended learning can be effective when pedagogical design emphasizes meaningful interaction and learner engagement (Adam & Nel, 2009), a pattern echoed in participants' accounts of Qur'an study across modalities. Together, these insights suggest that technology, when aligned with intention and ethical design, can sustain sacred learning without eroding its embodied ethos (Hrastinski, 2019).

Learner Voices

While prior research has explored the digitization of women's Islamic education (Lyngsoe, 2022), this study foregrounds Muslim women's own narratives of transitioning Qur'an learning from masjid-based to mobile contexts.

Community Context

This research affirms the resilience, agency, and leadership of Muslim women who, even amid disruption, remained committed to Qur'an learning for their own growth and for transmission to their children, a living continuation of the legacies of Aishah and Hafsah as preservers and teachers of revelation.

Transferability of the Study

As with all qualitative research, statistical generalizability is limited; however, this study offers strong potential for transferability across several interrelated research domains, including women's studies, faith-based education, online and adult education, and pandemic-era learning research. Although the study involved a small sample of five participants from a single Qur'an program within a specific cultural and linguistic context, the depth of participants' narratives provides thick, contextualized accounts that support analytical transferability beyond the immediate setting.

Women's education research

The findings are transferable to broader scholarship on women's learning experiences, particularly studies examining how women negotiate access, voice, and legitimacy within gendered educational spaces. Participants' reflections on discipline, confidence, representation, and relational learning resonate with research on women's adult education and informal learning environments, where learning is often shaped by

caregiving responsibilities, emotional labour, and community belonging. These gendered dynamics are not unique to Qur'an study and may apply to women navigating online or hybrid learning in other cultural, religious, or community-based contexts.

Faith-based and religious education research

While situated within Islamic Qur'an learning, the study's insights are transferable to other forms of faith-based education that emphasize spiritual formation, relational pedagogy, and embodied presence. Themes such as spiritual connection, teacher– student relationships, communal learning, and the tension between sacred practice and digital mediation reflect concerns shared across religious traditions engaging with online platforms. Educators in diverse faith contexts may therefore find relevance in how participants described sustaining meaning, reverence, and spiritual intimacy in virtual spaces.

Online, adult, and digital education research

The study also contributes transferable insights to online and adult learning literature, particularly regarding learner autonomy, motivation, accessibility, and the role of social presence in sustaining engagement. Participants' experiences with flexibility, discipline, language accessibility, and hybrid preferences mirror challenges faced by adult learners across secular and non-secular online programs. These findings may inform instructional design, facilitation practices, and learner support strategies in broader digital education contexts.

Pandemic and crisis-era education research

Although shaped by the exceptional circumstances of COVID-19 confinement, the study offers transferable insights into how learners respond to educational disruption,

uncertainty, and emotional strain. Participants' reliance on learning for stability, calm, and continuity aligns with pandemic-era research highlighting education's role in emotional regulation, resilience, and well-being. These insights may extend to future research on learning during crises, displacement, or periods of social disruption beyond the pandemic context.

Post-pandemic and hybrid learning futures.

Finally, as digital and hybrid learning models continue beyond the pandemic, the study's findings remain transferable to emerging educational landscapes in which learners navigate blended forms of presence, community, and identity. The emphasis on relational design, representation, and spiritual or emotional well-being offers relevance for educators and program designers working across disciplines where learning is deeply connected to identity and meaning.

By offering detailed contextual descriptions and centering participants' lived experiences, this study enables researchers, educators, and practitioners across multiple fields to evaluate the applicability of its findings within their own settings, supporting thoughtful transferability rather than universal claims.

Recommendations for Future Research

Building on these findings, future inquiry could:

- Conduct longitudinal studies tracing women's Qur'an-learning trajectories over several years to examine how hybrid engagement evolves.

- Compare experiences across different countries or cultural settings to understand the role of local norms and institutional structures.

- Investigate gender representation in digital Qur'an platforms globally, assessing the impact of female reciters and educators on learner engagement.

- Explore long-term effects of hybrid pedagogy on memorization retention, *tajweed* mastery, and community belonging.

- Examine how emerging technologies such as AI-assisted recitation feedback can be ethically integrated without compromising reverence or human connection.

Conclusion

Mobile learning (m-learning) has emerged as a transformative force in education, with recent scholarship highlighting its expanding role and potential within Islamic studies (Ahmad et al., 2024). At its heart, this study is about women's devotion and agency in the pursuit of divine knowledge in person or online. The participants' stories affirm that Qur'an learning is not a static ritual but a dynamic relationship—with God, with teachers, and with self. Their journeys highlight universal truths: that learning entails growth even through difficulty; that motherhood inspires sacred striving; that human connection anchors faith; that technology both empowers and tests sincerity; that language carries spiritual meaning; and that women's voices must be taken seriously in every sphere of religious life.

This chapter has situated these lived experiences within broader conversations on digital learning, pedagogy, and Islamic education. The six themes examined demonstrate that effective Qur'an education in the digital age must be inclusive in representation, relational in pedagogy, hybrid in structure, and linguistically responsive, while remaining grounded in the spiritual aims that give Qur'anic learning its meaning.

Importantly, raising the visibility of women in Qur'an education does not mean bringing men down. Rather, it invites an expansion of inclusion, one that honors the contributions of both men and women while ensuring that design and pedagogy reflect the diversity of the ummah. Developers of Qur'an-learning applications should move beyond the assumption of a "gender-neutral" learner, who in practice often reflects a male norm, and intentionally consider how female users engage, navigate, and experience sacred knowledge in digital spaces. Recognizing and responding to the needs of women in design and content not only benefits them but enriches the spiritual and educational experiences of all learners.

As introduced in Chapter One, when viewed through a wider lens, the findings of this study also speak to global educational and social priorities articulated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Participants' accounts illustrate how Qur'an learning supported calm, resilience, and spiritual healing during a period of uncertainty, reflecting SDG 3's emphasis on well-being as a multidimensional state encompassing physical, mental, and social health (World Health Organization, 2023). These findings align with the World Health Organization's call to move beyond a narrowly economic understanding of development toward one that prioritizes human well-being as central to health and human flourishing (World Health Organization, 2023).

While digital transformation has the potential to expand educational access and foster communities of practice, the WHO cautions that such processes may also widen equity gaps and erode social cohesion when they are not guided by inclusive and human-centred principles. The women's experiences in this study reflect this dual reality: digital Qur'an learning offered calm, continuity, and spiritual resilience during

disruption, yet its benefits were constrained by issues of access, representation, and relational presence. Together, these findings underscore that technology contributes to well-being not by its presence alone, but by how ethically, equitably, and meaningfully it is embedded within learning practices.

The study's focus on access, pedagogy, and continuity of learning aligns with SDG 4's commitment to lifelong education, while its attention to women's visibility and authority in digital religious spaces reflects SDG 5's call to empower all females, women and girls (United Nations, 2015). From the perspective of SDG 9, the findings underscore that innovation in faith-based education must remain human-centered and ethically grounded. As Islamic educational philosophy reminds us, "tools and techniques are valuable only insofar as they serve moral and spiritual ends" (Halstead, 2004, p. 523). The women's experiences in this study demonstrate how these enduring principles continue to guide learning in contemporary digital contexts, showing that sacred education can engage modern infrastructures while remaining faithful to its spiritual purpose.

The research extends existing scholarship by reframing digital challenges as opportunities for renewed pedagogy and by affirming that what sustains faith learning is not bandwidth or platform but the blessing that arises when intention, community, and knowledge align. Future Qur'an programs that embrace this holistic vision can ensure that sacred learning continues to nurture minds and hearts across both physical and virtual worlds.

Ultimately, the findings of this study reaffirm that the aims of Qur'an education cannot be reduced to technological access or instructional efficiency alone. Islamic

scholarship has long emphasized that knowledge is pursued for transformation rather than accumulation, and that well-being is rooted in spiritual alignment as much as intellectual mastery. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ likened divine knowledge to rain that falls on different types of land, explaining that its benefit depends on receptivity: some people internalize guidance and are transformed by it, others retain knowledge without personal change, and some gain no benefit at all (Sunnah.com, n.d., Sahih al-Bukhari 79). The women's experiences in this study illustrate how these enduring principles continue to guide Qur'an learning across both physical and digital spaces, demonstrating that sacred education remains most powerful when intention, community, and knowledge are held together in service of faith.

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Appendix A: Invitation Flyer

Appendix B: LETTER OF INFORMATION

EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM WOMEN STUDYING QUR'AN:

TRANSITION BETWEEN FACE-TO-FACE AND DIGITAL LEARNING

May 21, 2025

Principal Investigator (Researcher):   **Supervisor:**

Hodan Hussein   *Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin Ph.D*

Hodan.Hussein@gmail.com   *cynthiablodgettau@gmail.com*

Participant Information Sheet and Invitation to Participate

Study Title: *Experiences of Muslim Women Studying Qur'an: Transition Between Face-to-Face and Digital Learning*

Invitation to Participate

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled *"Experiences of Muslim Women Studying Qur'an: Transition Between Face-to-Face and Digital Learning."*

This form is part of the informed consent process. It explains what the research is about, what your participation will involve, and your rights as a participant. Please read this carefully. If you have any questions, feel free to contact the principal investigator, Hodan Hussein, before agreeing to participate.

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to participate, or if you decide to withdraw later, there will be no negative consequences for you now or in the future.

Introduction

My name is Hodan Hussein. I am a Master of Education in Open, Digital, and Distance Education (MDDE) student at Athabasca University. This project is part of the requirements for my degree. The study focuses on the experiences of Muslim women

studying the Qur'an at the Abu Hurairah Islamic Centre in Canada, both face-to-face and online during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin.

Why You Are Being Invited

You are being invited to participate because you were part of the women's Qur'an study group at the Abu Hurairah Islamic Centre in Canada during the transition from face-to-face learning to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose of the Research

This study aims to explore the experiences of Muslim women transitioning from traditional face-to-face Qur'an learning to online and distance education methods. It seeks to understand the challenges, adaptations, and opportunities encountered through digital platforms and Qur'an apps.

What Participation Involves

If you agree to participate, you will take part in an audio or video-recorded interview, scheduled at your convenience. The interview will take about one hour and will be conducted in English. You must be able to speak and understand English, though non-native speakers are welcome.

You will be asked questions about your experience using online platforms or apps to study the Qur'an. A follow-up conversation may be scheduled to review and confirm your transcript.

The research findings will be included in a publicly available paper and abstract posted in Athabasca University's digital thesis and project room.

Information Collected

Collected data may include your:

- Full name

- Address

- Email

- Phone number

- Date of birth

Only the researcher will have access to this identifying information.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

Risks

There are no anticipated physical, emotional, social, economic, or spiritual risks associated with this research.

Potential Benefits

- **Personal Reflection:** A chance to reflect on your Qur'an learning journey in a supportive environment.

- **Contribution to Knowledge:** Help expand understanding of Muslim women's educational experiences and challenges.

- **Empowerment:** Share your voice and story in a study that values diversity and inclusion.

- **Improved Educational Practices:** Your input may help shape better, more inclusive digital learning tools and resources.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Participation is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or **withdraw your data from the study up to two weeks following their interview or until you have reviewed and verified your transcript, whichever comes first.** After this point, the data will be integrated into the overall analysis and can no longer be withdrawn.

Privacy, Confidentiality, and Anonymity

- This study is anonymous. Your name or identifying traits will not appear in reports or publications.

- Your email will be used only to coordinate the interview.

- You may create a new email account just for the study and delete it afterward, if you prefer.

- You will be assigned a code or pseudonym.

- All email correspondence will be deleted after the researcher completes their program.

- Your data will be securely stored and never shared with third parties.

- You will not be identified in any publication without your explicit written permission.

How Data Will Be Stored and Used

- Interview recordings will be used for transcription only and will be deleted once you validate the transcript.

- Transcripts will not include your name or identifying information.

- Digital files will be stored on a password-protected computer.

- Any paper files will be kept in a locked cabinet.

- Only the researcher (Hodan Hussein) will have access to identifiable data.

- Email communication will be deleted upon completion of the study.

- Anonymized data may be used for future related research, subject to ethics review.

Note on Confidentiality and Technology Use

This study may use educational software and AI tools such as ChatGPT to support transcript analysis. While some of these tools may use data to improve their services, no identifying information will be shared by the researcher. Even when using direct quotes, only pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy.

Interviews will be conducted using Zoom, a secure, internet-based platform. Zoom's terms state that it does not use any meeting audio, video, or chat content to train AI models without consent. While safeguards will be in place, please note that any online communication carries a small risk of interception.

Handling of Recordings

- Audio and video recordings will be saved only to the researcher's password-protected local device and will not be uploaded to the cloud or iCloud. Zoom interviews will be downloaded directly to the researcher's secure, password-protected computer.

- Participants are asked not to make unauthorized recordings of the interview.

Research Results and Access

The research abstract will be publicly available in the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room. The final report may include direct quotations (with

your identity protected). No audio or video recordings will be shared. If you would like to access the results, please contact the researcher.

Contact Information

If you have questions or wish to participate, please contact:

Hodan Hussein (Principal Investigator)
hodan.hussein@gmail.com

To participate, please sign and return the attached **Consent Form** by email.

Ethics Review Statement

This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board [REB File # _____]. If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant or the research itself, please contact:

Research Ethics Officer
✉ rebsec@athabascau.ca
📞 780.213.2033

Appendix C: SIGNED CONSENT FORM:

EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM WOMEN STUDYING QUR'AN:
TRANSITION BETWEEN FACE-TO-FACE AND DIGITAL LEARNING

Principal Investigator (Researcher):   **Supervisor** *(if applicable)*:

Hodan Hussein   *Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin Ph.D*

Hodan.Hussein@gmail.com

    cynthiablodgettau@gmail.com

Informed Consent - Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the **<u>LETTER OF INFORMATION</u>** about the research project.
- You have been able to ask questions about this project.
- You are satisfied with the answers to any questions you may have had.
- You understand what the research project is about and what you will be asked to do.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw your participation in the research project without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now, or in the future.
- You understand that if you choose to end your participation **during** data collection, any data collected from you up to that point will be destroyed.
- You understand that your data is being collected anonymously, and therefore cannot be removed once the data collection has ended.

	YES	NO
I agree to be audio-recorded	◯	◯
I agree to be video-recorded	◯	◯
I agree to the use of direct quotations	◯	◯
I allow **de-identified data** collected from me to be archived/deposited	◯	◯

| I am willing to be contacted following the interview to verify that my comments are accurately reflected in the transcript. | ○ | ○ |

Your signature confirms:

- You have read what this research project is about and understood the risks and benefits. You have had time to think about participating in the project and had the opportunity to ask questions and have those questions answered to your satisfaction.
- You understand that participating in the project is entirely voluntary and that you may end your participation at any time without any penalty or negative consequences.
- You have been given a copy of this Informed Consent form for your records; and
- You agree to participate in this research project.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

Principal Investigator's Signature:

I have explained this project to the best of my ability. I invited questions and responded to any that were asked. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in participating in the research project, any potential risks and that they have freely chosen to participate.

_____   _____

Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix D: Interview Questions / Guide / Script

EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM WOMEN STUDYING QUR'AN:
TRANSITION BETWEEN FACE-TO-FACE AND DIGITAL LEARNING

Section 1: Background and Pre-COVID Learning

1. Prior to COVID-19, had you ever used any apps or online tools to study the Qur'an?
2. Can you describe your experience learning the Qur'an in a traditional face-to-face setting?
3. What was your learning environment like? (e.g., other students, seating arrangements, background noise, etc.)

Section 2: Transition to Online Learning

4. How did you feel about transitioning from face-to-face Qur'an learning to online platforms during COVID closures?
5. What apps or tools (Qur'anic or non-Qur'anic) did you use, and how did you find them?
6. What were the biggest challenges or surprises you encountered during this transition?

Section 3: Language and Accessibility

7. What is your native language?
8. How did you find learning the Qur'an in Arabic through online tools, especially if Arabic is not your first language?

9. Were there any features in the platforms that helped or hindered your understanding and learning?

Section 4: Qur'an Applications and Female Representation

10. Which Qur'an apps or online platforms have you used, and how often did you use them?
11. Do you have any favourites? What made those apps or platforms especially helpful for your Qur'an study?
12. Do you think Qur'an apps are inclusive and supportive of women's learning needs? What improvements would you suggest, especially for younger female learners?

Section 5: Religious Identity, Culture, and Learning Context

13. How does the Qur'an influence your daily life and spiritual growth as a Muslim woman?
14. In what ways do your cultural background, spiritual commitments, and family responsibilities shape your motivation and ability to study the Qur'an?
15. How did your home environment and community respond to your Qur'an learning during the online learning period?

Section 6: Spiritual Practice and Gendered Space

16. Did your approach to Qur'an study shift in any way during the transition to online learning (e.g., time of day, frequency, emotional or spiritual connection)?
17. Do you feel online platforms offer more freedom or present limitations for women compared to in-person settings?

18. How would you describe your personal growth as a Muslim woman during this time of online Qur'an learning?

Section 7: Return to In-Person & Learning Preferences

19. Have you returned to face-to-face Qur'an learning? If so, how was the transition?
20. What differences have you noticed between online and in-person Qur'an learning?
21. Given the choice, do you prefer online, in-person, or a hybrid style of Qur'an learning? Why?

Section 8: Inspiration and Future Generations

22. What advice or thoughts would you share for school age female students learning the Qur'an today, especially when using apps?
23. Do you think including female Qur'an reciters or role models in apps would inspire female learners to engage more deeply?
24. Are there any reflections you'd like to offer specifically from your perspective as a Muslim woman learning the Qur'an?

Section 9: Broader Reflections

25. Do you have any personal reflections or experiences you'd like to share that we haven't covered?

Appendix E: Development of Themes From Initial Coding to Final Themes

Initial analysis produced nine provisional themes.

1. ***Learning Environment / Atmosphere***

   – Physical space, discipline, focus, in-person structure, exams, travel, cost

2. ***Social Connection & Community***

   – Peer relationships, teacher–student bond, sense of belonging

3. ***Accessibility & Flexibility***

   – Time-saving, convenience, hybrid preferences, online access

4. ***Role of Technology***

   – Use of digital tools, platforms, online delivery, assessments

5. ***Language Barriers & Literacy***

   – English-mediated instruction, tajweed support, comprehension challenges

6. ***Female Representation***

   – Visibility of women as teachers/reciters, gendered presence in learning spaces

7. ***Identity & Spiritual Growth***

   – Spiritual development, self-identity, meaning-making through Qur'an learning

8. ***Challenges***

   – Distractions, divided attention, technology fatigue, assessment issues, loss of interaction

9. ***Motivation***

   – Persistence, motherhood, role-modeling children, internal drive

Further review revealed conceptual overlap among several categories, prompting a process of consolidation and refinement to enhance analytic clarity. The final six themes were:

1. **Learning Environment**

   – Conditions of learning across face-to-face and online settings, including space, focus, discipline, time, travel, cost, hybrid preferences, and visual/video limitations.

2. **Social Connection**

   – Teacher–student relationships, peer support, sense of community, loss of connection online, anonymity, and lack of recognition.

3. **Role of Technology**

   – Use of digital tools for Qur'an learning, opportunities enabled by technology, over-reliance as a deterrent, and technology-supported assessment.

4. **Language & Literacy**

   – Language barriers, literacy development, English-mediated Qur'an instruction, and comprehension challenges.

5. **Identity & Spirituality**

   – Spiritual growth, motivation, persistence, motherhood as a driver, and children as inspiration and role models.

6. **Female Representation**

   – Visibility of women as reciters and teachers, gendered access to religious learning, and the significance of hearing women's Qur'an recitation.

These final six themes reflect how overlapping dimensions of experience were integrated into stronger, more conceptually distinct categories.

Learning Environment emerged as a consolidated theme incorporating aspects of the original Learning Environment/Atmosphere, Accessibility and Flexibility, and portions of Challenges. Overlapping sub-themes related to time, travel, cost, and convenience were unified under conditions of study, while issues of divided attention, focus, and discipline were consolidated to reflect the impact of learning space on engagement. Difficulties related to learning tajweed without visual cues and limited literacy support in online settings were reframed as video and visual limitations within the learning environment. This consolidation strengthened comparison between face-to-face and online contexts.

Social Connection and Community integrated the original Social Connection theme with social-loss elements from Challenges. Experiences of reduced peer interaction and diminished teacher–student relationships were reframed as erosion of social bonds. Participants' reflections on anonymity and lack of recognition within long-standing learning groups were retained as a distinct sub-theme, highlighting the relational consequences of online study.

Role of Technology was refined by integrating technology-related challenges originally coded separately. Issues related to technological adoption, over-reliance on digital tools, and online assessment practices were incorporated to present a balanced view of technology as both enabling and constraining Qur'an learning.

Language and Literacy remained a distinct theme, with refinement focused on eliminating overlap with environmental and visual factors. Literacy challenges specific to

language mediation were retained, including the paradox of English-mediated Qur'an instruction, while visual and instructional limitations were repositioned within the Learning Environment theme.

Identity and Spiritual Growth was formed through the integration of the original Identity and Spiritual Growth and Motivation themes. Motivational factors related to motherhood, role modeling, and persistence were reframed as expressions of spiritual identity, emphasizing the interdependence of faith, responsibility, and inner drive.

Female Representation remained intact as a standalone theme due to its conceptual distinctiveness. This theme addressed women's visibility in Qur'an recitation and teaching and did not overlap meaningfully with other thematic categories.

The original themes of Accessibility and Flexibility and Challenges were therefore not retained as standalone categories. Instead, their components were redistributed across thematically aligned domains, resulting in a more coherent and analytically rigorous final structure.

Appendix F: TCPS 2 CORE-2022 Completion Certificate

PANEL ON
RESEARCH ETHICS
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE 2022

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Hodan Hussein

successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on
the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research
Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)

Certificate # 0000911935   14 March, 2023

Appendix G: Certification of Ethical Approval

Athabasca
University

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: 25938

Principal Investigator:
Ms. Hodan Hussein, Graduate Student
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences\Master of Education in Open, Digital, and Distance Education (MDDE)

Supervisor/Project Team:
Dr. Mohamed Ally (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Cynthia Blodgett-Griffin (Co-Supervisor)

Project Title:
EXPERIENCES OF MUSLIM WOMEN STUDYING QURAN: TRANSITION BETWEEN FACE-TO-FACE AND DIGITAL LEARNING

Effective Date: May 15, 2025   **Expiry Date:** May 14, 2026

Restrictions:

Any modification/amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval prior to proceeding. Any adverse event or incidental findings must be reported to the AUREB as soon as possible, for review.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. A request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

An Ethics Final Report must be submitted when the research is complete (*i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)*) or the research is terminated.

Approved by: **Date: May 16, 2025**

Eloy Rivas-Sanchez, Chair
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
1 University Drive, Athabasca AB Canada T9S 3A3
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