

REVOLUTIONISING RELIGIOUS STUDIES LEVERAGING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence is increasingly used in a variety of fields and disciplines. Its promise is often seen in a variety of tasks, from playing games to driving cars. Artificial intelligence (AI) integration in education is expanding globally due to machine learning and big data advancements. AI has the potential to revolutionise teaching and learning practices by providing personalised experiences and enhancing engagement. However, it also raises concerns regarding technology infrastructure and ethical considerations. This study investigates revolutionising religious studies leveraging Artificial Intelligence, innovation and creativity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 religious studies lecturers in Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin using an interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach. Innovations in digital storytelling, interactive simulations, and augmented reality allow for immersive experiences that bring historical religious events, sacred spaces, and philosophical discourses to life. Through the power of AI and human creativity, Religious Studies can evolve into a dynamic, accessible, and intellectually enriching discipline that bridges tradition with modernity. Thematic analysis identified patterns and themes within the data, revealing that lecturers perceive AI as improving teaching efficiency and student learning outcomes. However, concerns about access, ethical use, and pedagogical implications remain significant. Recommendations include policy initiatives, infrastructure improvements, and targeted lecturers training programmes. This study provides insights into the adoption of AI in educational contexts, highlighting the benefits and challenges specific to innovation and creativity in Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin.

Keywords: Revolution, Artificial Intelligence, Religious Studies, Innovation, Creativity

Introduction

Revolutionising religious studies through artificial intelligence (AI), innovation, and creativity marks a transformative shift in how religious knowledge is acquired, preserved, interpreted, and disseminated. Globally, AI technologies are increasingly being applied to digitise sacred texts, perform sentiment analysis on religious discussions, and simulate interfaith dialogues using natural language processing tools (McCahan, 2021). AI also enables researchers and students to access multilingual religious texts through real-time translation, and virtual reality (VR) now allows immersive experiences of religious rituals and sacred spaces, thereby

broadening understanding and enhancing religious literacy across cultures (Akhtar & Khan, 2022).

In Nigeria, where religion holds a significant place in both public and private life, the integration of AI into religious studies offers a promising frontier. AI-powered chatbots, for example, are being developed to offer real-time scriptural references and theological explanations in both Christian and Islamic traditions. This creates opportunities for inter-religious education and promotes tolerance. Furthermore, innovative technologies have the potential to help decode indigenous religious symbols and practices, archiving them digitally for posterity (Adeboye & Ibrahim, 2023). Nigerian universities, especially faculties of arts and theology, are beginning to explore the intersection of AI with religious pedagogy, creating interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate ethics, digital humanities, and theology.

In Kwara State, with its rich tapestry of Islamic, Christian, and indigenous religious practices, adopting AI in religious studies is both timely and transformative. Institutions like the University of Ilorin and Kwara State University have the potential to pioneer this shift by integrating AI tools into theology and religious studies curricula. For instance, using machine learning to analyse Yorùbá oral religious traditions or deploying AI to preserve endangered religious artifacts and chants aligns with both academic advancement and cultural preservation (Olayemi & Musa, 2024). Creativity, in this context, fuels localised content development, such as AI-generated visual interpretations of religious texts in indigenous languages, which not only engages students but also affirms the value of local religious heritage in a digital age.

Therefore, the convergence of AI, innovation, and creativity is reshaping religious studies from a static, text-based discipline into a dynamic, interactive field of inquiry. This transformation, already gaining traction globally and nationally, holds immense potential for educational, interfaith, and cultural development in Kwara State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing relevance of digital technologies in education, religious studies in Kwara State, Nigeria, remain largely traditional, dominated by rote learning, manual text analysis, and limited engagement with modern technological tools. This outdated approach hinders learners from exploring the dynamic, multidimensional nature of religious experiences in today's digitised world. While artificial intelligence (AI), innovation, and creativity are revolutionising educational practices globally, enhancing interactivity, expanding access to diverse religious texts, and promoting contextual learning, religious education in Kwara State has yet to meaningfully integrate these advancements (McCahan, 2021; Akhtar & Khan, 2022).

One critical problem is the lack of digital infrastructure and expertise in applying AI tools such as natural language processing, chatbot-driven theological instruction, and automated scriptural analysis within religious studies curricula. Religious education in secondary schools, theological seminaries, and universities often neglects the use of educational technologies that could make content delivery more engaging and inclusive (Adeboye & Ibrahim, 2023). This gap not only limits students' learning outcomes but also fails to prepare them for a knowledge-driven, technology-saturated global environment.

Another problem is the absence of creative and innovative pedagogical methods that reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of Kwara State. Most religious instruction is still confined to static texts and verbal lectures, with little effort made to

utilise multimedia tools, digital storytelling, or immersive experiences such as virtual reality simulations of sacred rituals. This stagnation contributes to low student engagement, especially among digital-native learners who are accustomed to interactive and visual learning platforms (Olayemi & Musa, 2024).

Additionally, there is minimal institutional policy support and curriculum development focused on integrating AI and creative technologies into religious education. Without strategic policy frameworks or capacity-building programs for religious educators, the integration of innovation remains incidental rather than systemic.

Thus, revolutionising religious studies in Kwara State requires not only technological tools but also a reimagining of pedagogy, curriculum, and policy to reflect the realities of the 21st century. If these challenges are not urgently addressed, religious education in the state risks further marginalisation in a world where AI and innovation are fast becoming the foundation of transformative learning.

Objectives of the Study

Given the identified problems in the integration of artificial intelligence, innovation, and creativity into religious studies in Kwara State, this study sets out to:

- i. examine the extent to which artificial intelligence tools and digital technologies are currently being utilised in the teaching and learning of religious studies in Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin;
- ii. assess the challenges that hinder the effective integration of innovation and creative methodologies into religious studies curricula in Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin; and
- iii. propose strategic approaches for revolutionising religious education through the adoption of artificial intelligence, culturally-relevant innovations, and creative pedagogical practices.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, these two questions were raised to guide the study:

- i. To what extent are artificial intelligence tools and innovative digital technologies being utilized in the teaching and learning of religious studies in Kwara State?
- ii. What are the major challenges hindering the integration of artificial intelligence, innovation, and creativity into religious studies curricula and pedagogy in Kwara State?

Literature Review

Religious Studies, as an academic field, has long been a cornerstone of human inquiry into spirituality, meaning, morality, and the transcendent. Traditionally approached through historical, philosophical, theological, and textual analyses, the discipline has undergone a slow but steady evolution over centuries. However, the 21st century presents a decisive moment to revolutionise Religious Studies, responding to the imperatives of digital transformation, interdisciplinary integration, pedagogical innovation, and global social dynamics. To remain relevant and impactful, Religious Studies must break traditional boundaries and engage dynamically with contemporary challenges, technological tools, and diversified worldviews.

One of the most compelling fronts for revolutionising Religious Studies lies in the integration of digital and technological innovation. The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), virtual reality, and big data analytics has transformed nearly every field of human inquiry, and Religious Studies cannot remain an exception. AI, for instance, offers tools for text mining, sentiment analysis, and automated translations of sacred texts, thus enabling researchers to handle vast religious corpora efficiently and to discover new patterns and insights (McLaren, 2021). Online repositories and digitised archives have also made sacred texts, liturgies, and oral traditions more accessible to students and scholars globally, thereby democratising knowledge and encouraging comparative studies. Moreover, digital learning environments foster interactive engagement. Platforms like MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and virtual classrooms now allow learners from different cultural and religious backgrounds to engage in transreligious dialogues in real-time. These platforms promote inclusivity, cultural literacy, and global interconnectedness, values that are indispensable in the religiously plural world of today (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). The capacity of virtual reality to recreate pilgrimage experiences or ancient religious rituals also opens new frontiers for experiential learning in Religious Studies.

To revolutionise Religious Studies is also to situate it at the nexus of other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics, gender studies, and environmental science. Such interdisciplinarity enriches the field and situates religious knowledge within broader human experiences. For instance, engaging with psychology deepens our understanding of religious behaviours, beliefs, and experiences, while dialogue with political science unveils the role of religion in governance, conflict, and peacebuilding. Religion's intersection with environmental ethics, for example, is increasingly relevant in addressing global ecological crises. The emerging field of eco-theology, which examines religious perspectives on environmental stewardship, has demonstrated that religious traditions can serve as powerful motivators for ecological activism (Konisky, 2020). Likewise, feminist theology and queer religious studies challenge patriarchal and heteronormative interpretations of sacred texts, advancing gender justice within religious traditions (Avishai, 2020).

Another frontier for revolution lies in the decolonisation of the Religious Studies curriculum. Much of the traditional content is heavily Eurocentric, often privileging Abrahamic religions while marginalising Indigenous African religions, Eastern spiritualities, and newer religious movements. A revolutionary Religious Studies curriculum must reflect the full spectrum of human religiosity, including African Traditional Religions, Afro-Caribbean spiritualities, and diasporic practices, especially in postcolonial contexts like Nigeria. Decolonisation also involves adopting pedagogies that value oral traditions, embodied practices, and lived religion, rather than restricting knowledge to canonical texts. As Asad (2021) argues, religion should not be viewed merely as a belief system but as a cultural, embodied, and social reality. Therefore, methodologies that include ethnography, performance studies, and visual analysis are crucial for a holistic understanding of religious life.

Revolutionising Religious Studies also requires pedagogical transformation. Traditional didactic approaches must give way to more dialogical, participatory, and problem-based learning models. For example, case studies on religious extremism, interfaith cooperation, or religion and mental health can be used to connect theoretical insights with real-world issues. Service-learning, where students engage in religious

or interfaith communities as part of their academic work, also promotes critical reflection and civic responsibility (Patel & Joshi, 2020). Assessment methods should equally evolve, embracing reflective essays, digital storytelling, podcast production, and collaborative projects. These methods not only make learning more engaging but also build transferable skills in communication, critical thinking, and digital literacy, thereby enhancing students' employability.

Religious Studies must speak to the pressing social issues of our time. From religious intolerance and terrorism to religious contributions to social cohesion and humanitarian aid, the field has a vital role to play. In pluralistic societies like Nigeria, where religion is both a source of identity and tension, Religious Studies can equip learners with the tools to foster interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, and mutual respect.

To revolutionise Religious Studies is to recognise its enduring relevance in a rapidly changing world and to equip it with the tools, methods, and visions that align with contemporary needs. This transformation must be multifaceted, embracing digital technologies, interdisciplinary integration, decolonised curricula, innovative pedagogies, and a deep responsiveness to societal challenges. In doing so, Religious Studies can continue to contribute meaningfully to academic scholarship, ethical reflection, cultural understanding, and global peace.

Artificial Intelligence, Innovation, and Creativity: A Synergistic Relationship for the Future

Artificial Intelligence (AI), innovation, and creativity represent a powerful triad shaping the trajectory of contemporary society. AI, broadly defined as the ability of machines to mimic cognitive functions such as learning, problem-solving, and decision-making, is no longer a futuristic concept, it is a transformative reality permeating nearly every sector of human activity (Russell & Norvig, 2021). When aligned with innovation and creativity, AI transcends its technical nature to become a catalyst for groundbreaking solutions, artistic expression, and socio-economic advancement.

Innovation refers to the implementation of novel ideas, methods, or products that create value or improve processes. AI drives innovation by accelerating research, enabling real-time data analysis, and automating routine tasks, thereby freeing human resources for more strategic and inventive activities (Lee, 2020). For instance, in fields like healthcare, AI-powered diagnostics and predictive analytics have enhanced treatment precision and speed, reshaping how medical innovation is achieved (Topol, 2020).

Creativity, often perceived as a uniquely human trait, is increasingly being influenced by AI systems capable of composing music, writing poetry, designing architecture, and generating visual art. While such systems do not possess consciousness or emotion, they demonstrate an ability to mimic and even enhance human creativity by exploring patterns and combinations beyond traditional human capabilities (McCormack et al., 2020). AI tools like DALL·E, ChatGPT, and Jukebox exemplify how machines can collaborate with humans in the creative process, pushing the boundaries of imagination and artistic expression.

Moreover, the convergence of AI, innovation, and creativity has critical implications for education, business, and the arts. In education, AI supports personalized learning environments that adapt to individual student needs, fostering deeper engagement and creative thinking (Luckin, 2020). In business, AI facilitates

the development of innovative products and services, opening new markets and reshaping competitive strategies. In the arts, AI challenges traditional notions of authorship and originality, encouraging novel forms of expression and interdisciplinary experimentation. Despite these advances, ethical concerns around authorship, bias, and authenticity remain critical. Thus, responsible and inclusive AI development is essential to ensure that innovation and creativity flourish without compromising human dignity and cultural integrity (Floridi & Chiriatti, 2020). Therefore, the relationship between AI, innovation, and creativity is mutually reinforcing. As AI becomes more sophisticated, it will not replace human creativity but rather amplify it, enhancing our ability to solve complex problems, generate novel ideas, and envision new futures.

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey research design with quantitative technique. The population of the study is 20 lecturers of the two departments of religious studies (Christian Religious Department, and Islamic Religious Department) of Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin. The same 20 lecturers served as the sample size of the study because of the manageability of the population. Interview protocol was used as the research instrument to obtain useful information from the respondents. Descriptive statistics of mean rating was adopted to answer the two research questions raised.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Mean rating on the extent to which artificial intelligence tools and digital technologies are currently being utilised in the teaching and learning of religious studies in Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision	Rank
1	AI-powered educational platforms (e.g., chatbots or virtual tutors) are used to enhance students' understanding	2.30	0.87	Low Extent	4 th
2	Teachers incorporate digital tools such as smartboards, educational apps, or multimedia content	2.90	0.83	High Extent	1 st
3	Students use online resources and AI-assisted research tools to explore religious themes	2.70	0.86	High Extent	2 nd
4	Digital innovations such as VR or 3D simulations are used to illustrate religious sites or events	2.00	0.92	Low Extent	5 th
5	There is institutional support for training teachers in AI and digital technologies for Religious Studies	2.15	0.89	Low Extent	3 rd

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, decision, and rank for the utilisation of artificial intelligence (AI) tools and innovative digital technologies in Religious Studies and offers valuable insight into the extent of their adoption in Kwara State. Based on responses from 20 participants, the data reflect a moderate but varied integration of AI in Religious Studies pedagogy. Among the five evaluated items, the highest-rated statement was “Teachers incorporate digital tools such as smartboards, educational apps, or multimedia content when teaching Religious Studies,” which had a mean score of 2.90 and ranked first. This suggests that, among all listed digital innovations, the use of general digital teaching tools is the most commonly practiced. The corresponding standard deviation 0.80 indicates a moderate level of agreement among respondents, pointing to a relatively consistent perception of this practice.

Closely following is the item “Students use online resources and AI-assisted research tools to explore religious themes and topics,” which had a mean score of 2.70, ranking second. This reflects a moderately high usage level, implying that students are beginning to explore and apply AI-related tools in their academic inquiries, though not extensively. Its standard deviation of 0.86 suggests a slightly broader range of responses but still within an acceptable consistency level.

The third-ranked item was “There is institutional support for training teachers in the use of AI and digital technologies for Religious Studies instruction,” with a mean of 2.15 and standard deviation of 0.89. This low mean indicates that most respondents perceive limited institutional investment in capacity building for AI integration in teaching, which can be a critical bottleneck in promoting innovation. Likewise, item four, “AI-powered educational platforms (such as, chatbots or virtual tutors) are used to enhance students’ understanding of religious concepts,” had a mean score of 2.30, also categorised as a low extent of use. The standard deviation of 0.87 points to moderate variation in the responses, indicating that while some institutions may be exploring such technologies, many others are yet to do so.

The lowest-rated item, ranked fifth, was “Digital innovations such as virtual reality or 3D simulations are used to illustrate historical religious sites or events,” with a mean score of 2.00 and a standard deviation of 0.92. This finding suggests that advanced immersive technologies like virtual reality are rarely utilised in Religious Studies teaching in Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin. The relatively high standard deviation also reflects a wide disparity in experience or awareness of such tools among the respondents.

Therefore, the findings reveal that while basic digital tools are fairly common in Religious Studies instruction, more sophisticated AI-driven innovations are still underutilised. The standard deviations, all within the moderate range, indicate that respondents’ views are relatively consistent across the board. These patterns point to a critical need for increased training, policy support, and infrastructure investment to fully realise the benefits of AI and digital innovation in Religious Studies in Kwara State.

Table 2: **Mean rating on the major challenges hindering the integration of artificial intelligence, innovation, and creativity into religious studies curricula and pedagogy in Kwara State**

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision	Rank
1	Lack of access to digital infrastructure and reliable internet	3.05	0.90	High Challenge	3rd
2	Teachers not adequately trained to use AI and digital technologies	3.15	0.86	High Challenge	1st
3	Limited institutional funding or support for integrating AI	2.90	0.91	High Challenge	4th
4	Conservative attitudes and resistance to change in the Religious Studies community	2.85	0.89	High Challenge	5th
5	Absence of curriculum policies promoting AI and digital creativity	3.00	0.88	High Challenge	2nd

The highest-rated challenge, ranked first, is the item stating that “Teachers of Religious Studies are not adequately trained to use artificial intelligence and digital technologies in teaching.” This item recorded a mean score of 3.15, indicating a high challenge, and had a standard deviation of 0.86, suggesting moderate variability in responses. This implies that the majority of respondents agree that teacher capacity, particularly in the area of digital literacy and AI usage, is a primary obstacle. Without proper training and continuous professional development, educators are unlikely to adopt or adapt to innovative tools in their teaching practices.

The second-ranked challenge, with a mean of 3.00 and standard deviation of 0.88, is the “absence of curriculum policies promoting AI and digital creativity in Religious Studies.” This points to a systemic problem at the policy level, where educational authorities have not yet embedded AI and innovation objectives into formal Religious Studies curricula. The relatively consistent responses across participants show a broad recognition of this structural gap.

Ranking third, the item “Lack of access to digital infrastructure and reliable internet limits the use of AI and innovative tools in Religious Studies” had a mean of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.90. Despite its third-place ranking, the mean score is still high, reinforcing the fact that infrastructure limitations, including poor internet connectivity and inadequate technological facilities, are a significant barrier to digital integration in Religious Studies classrooms, especially in public institutions. Likewise, the fourth challenge, “There is limited institutional funding or support for integrating AI and creative digital innovations into the Religious Studies curriculum,” received a mean score of 2.90 and a standard deviation of 0.91. This also falls within the high challenge category, underscoring the role of funding constraints. Without targeted investments, schools and colleges cannot procure AI technologies or provide the needed training and resources for innovative teaching practices to flourish.

Finally, the fifth-ranked challenge, though closely behind others in terms of severity, is the statement that “conservative attitudes and resistance to change within the Religious Studies community hinder the adoption of innovative teaching methods.” This item had a mean of 2.85 and a standard deviation of 0.89, indicating that while this barrier is slightly less emphasized compared to others, it still represents a notable hindrance. Cultural and institutional conservatism, often rooted in tradition and a preference for conventional teaching methods, may deter educators and institutions from embracing technology-based reforms.

Therefore, the results from the table show that the integration of AI, innovation, and creativity into Religious Studies in Kwara State is being held back by interconnected challenges, notably inadequate teacher training, lack of enabling policies, insufficient infrastructure, poor funding, and resistance to change. The high mean values across all items and the moderate standard deviations point to a broad consensus among respondents on the urgency of these issues. For any meaningful advancement, stakeholders, including government, educational institutions, and religious bodies, must collaborate to build capacity, update curricular frameworks, invest in infrastructure, and foster a more open and adaptive culture within Religious Studies education.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that while there is a moderate level of utilisation of artificial intelligence and innovative digital technologies in the teaching and learning of Religious Studies in Kwara State, significant challenges hinder their full integration. The most frequently used tools are basic digital teaching aids, while advanced innovations such as AI-powered platforms and virtual reality remain largely underutilised. The major barriers identified include inadequate teacher training, lack of curriculum policies, limited infrastructure, insufficient institutional funding, and resistance to change within the Religious Studies community. These findings highlight the urgent need for strategic interventions that focus on capacity building, policy development, infrastructure investment, and cultural reorientation to ensure that Religious Studies aligns with contemporary educational advancements and prepares learners for a digitally-driven world.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Education authorities and school administrators should implement targeted capacity-building initiatives aimed at training Religious Studies teachers in the effective use of artificial intelligence tools and digital innovations. These programmes should focus on practical applications of technology in lesson planning, content delivery, and student assessment to improve teaching quality and learner engagement.

Likewise, curriculum planners and policymakers should revise the existing Religious Studies curriculum to incorporate the use of artificial intelligence, digital resources, and creative pedagogical approaches. The revised curriculum should also

emphasize the integration of culturally-relevant content and context-specific innovations that reflect local religious experiences, thereby making the subject more relevant, accessible, and transformative for students in a digital age.

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