

# *Stylistic Usage Of Hijab As Fashion Among Muslim Women In Southwestern Nigeria*

Adeola Abiodun ADEOTI

Department of Fine and Applied Arts,  
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Ogbomosho, Nigeria,  
Email: [aaadeoti29@lautech.edu.ng](mailto:aaadeoti29@lautech.edu.ng),  
Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2196-4015>



**Abstract** – Islamic standard of modesty requires that Muslim women use *hijab* to cover their heads, face, and body in the presence of any male outside their family members. Though there are many types of head coverings for Muslim women, such as *chador*, *hijab*, *khimar*, *niqab*, *shaylar*, and *burqa*, *hijab* is the only one that is being used as fashion. In contrast, the rest are used as religious garments. As important as this head covering among Muslim women, there is a dearth of literature on hijab usage in southwestern Nigeria because it is not well studied. The study examines the stylistic usage of *hijab* as fashion among Muslim women in southwestern Nigeria. The study aims to describe the head covering as both religious and fashionable garments, eventually adding to knowledge of *hijab* usage. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach to collect the data while the descriptive method is used to gather information and observation without intervening. The findings reveal that *hijab* is not only used for religious purposes but also as fashion for ladies who want to be trendy.

**Keywords** – *Hijab*, Veil, Muslim, Women, Fashion, Usage.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Fashion is the latest and most admired style in cloth, cosmetics, and behaviour. It could also be referred to as clothing such as footwear or accessories currently popular in style [1]. There is usually a thin line of demarcation between clothing and fashion. Clothing is the dress worn, attire, or dress wear. [2] pointed out that the selections in clothing are prejudiced by fashions, societal impacts, and individual priorities. On the other hand, [3] opined that clothing is a covering intended to be worn on the body. But fashion is the latest and most admired style in clothes and behaviour or simply the way of expressing the dress or attire worn. [4] reiterated that the clothing worn has fashion ideas capturing elegances, season, actions and surroundings. In light of this, clothing and fashion have their ways everywhere people practice any form of religion for identification and religious injunctions.

[5] opines that ‘fashion’ comes from the Latin word “*factio*,” meaning to make or do. Therefore, the original meaning of the word “fashion” refers to activities”; fashion is something that someone does and wears be it clothing or accessories. He further reiterated that “fashion” refers to the idea of a fetish or fetish object. This word reveals that “fashion items” and “clothing” are fetish commodities, which are produced and consumed in capitalist society. The term “fashion” is often used as a synonym for makeup, jewelry, style, and clothing in which hijab is inclusive, and when a style is viable, as [6] rightly puts it, then the fashion is wearable.

Modesty in Islam is as important as Islamic virtue which translates into styles of dress or what to put on as Islamic injunction, and fashion could also be referred to as what people wear when they go about their everyday activities. Some Muslims believe that their dress is not connected to religion as Moors and [7] buttress that even as a committed Muslim, their outer dress may not be expressed

through their choice of clothing. Some other Muslims feel Qur'an has mandated it for women to cover themselves completely leaving the hands and feet uncovered.

[8],

“And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty save to their husbands;..... and that they should not stamp their feet to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. . .”

This is a specific code of behavior for believing women in Islam to protect their modesty through eye contact, outfit adornment, and walking style [9]; [10]; [11]. Nonetheless, Islamic dress and fashion in south-western Nigeria has developed considerably, similar to other Muslim women in other world nations. Muslim women who wear hijab actively participate in the public sphere. They engaged in professions like orthodox medical practices, lawyers, lecturing, pilots, and other government jobs and the majority of them express their individuality usage of *hijab* through the latest fashion [12]: [9].

The conception of the *hijab* following the rules of Islam, and the conception of being fashionable when wearing the *hijab*, started around 2010 when Muslim fashion designers attended a forum on appareling in Islam, and Muslim fashion designers were instrumental in bringing together the two concepts [5]. This is reiterated by [13] that some Muslim women upload and post their outfits and fashion styles, changing the notion that Muslim women could still be modest and at the same time be fashionable. He added that there was a Muslim fashion collection at New York Fashion Week whereby an Indonesian fashion designer Anniesa Hasibuan was the first designer to present collections with the use of hijab [13]. Some Muslim women also are using the power of social media, Instagram, fashion influencers, etc, to counter the narratives of expression on the use of hijab through their support and comments on social media [14].

The effort being made to minimize the conflict between these two concepts (hijab and the rule of Islam) was by integration. Integration refers to the adjustment or the melting of two or more different things to be merged. Stages of the integration process began with the stage of accommodation which is the efforts made based on the desire of both parties to work together [15]. Appearing well-groomed and neat, presenting a pleasant, harmonious look is recommended in Islam, and it may also be considered a form of visual (*da'wa*) and part of the Islamic faith [16]. The role of Muslim fashion designers in fashion *hijabs* as visual displays of *da'wa* has been increasing noticeably since the revolution started three decades ago [17]. Muslim fashion designers and users of *hijabs* took part as agents of change in the development of *hijab* fashion and styles. Through their hijab design collection, they showed the values of what they believe. It was inseparable from the existence of various activities of Islam in society that affected the viewpoints on wearing the *hijab*. Social media based on videos, pictures, and writing became the intermediary tools to spread various Islamic knowledge on trends of *hijab* styles.

Islamic scholars through the Islamic groups and movements explained the various scientific Islamic knowledge such as (*Tawheed* and *fiqh*), including discussing how to clothe and dress in Islam [18]. After receiving the explanation from Islamic scholars about Islamic knowledge of *hijab* and usage of it, the quick response of the Muslim women in the community was different. One of the most visible was the visual appearance, especially on *hijab* for Muslim women. *Hijab* clothing became one of the communication tools representing the ideology, affiliation to a particular community or viewpoints, and social class [18]; [19].

In Christian and Islamic religions, head covering is regarded as part of modesty for women. [20] made a distinction between a veil and a hijab. He points out that a veil means head covering, while a hijab is a thing that stops or guards. [21] mentioned that hijab means barrier and it has Islamic implications, but the veil does not expose details of the practice.

[22] buttressed this that “before Qur'anic edicts in the seventh century, female believers do not display their beauty, therefore Jews, Christians, and Hindus wore veils to indicate religious commitment and privileged social status”. [23] also opined that the reason for the covering of heads by Muslim women is that the relationship between man and woman reflects the relationship between Christ and his church. In the conventional practice, Christian women in many denominations cover their heads especially during

the church services or while praying privately. It is a biblical injunction in [24] for women to cover their heads in the churches especially while communicating with God. This practice in the recent years is a matter of choice in some denominations. But those who often wear veils as part of their religious habit are nuns of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. *Hijab* consciousness among the (*hijabites*) was motivated largely by fashion designers who designed smart *hijab* types for the consumers.

*Hijab* is an Arabic word that connotes “wrap” or “hide”. The *hijab* is a religious headscarf, or covering worn by Muslim women as a custom in Islamic society for women’s modest dress outside their homes. In Islam, Muslim women who want to dress fashionably without being forced to cover their heads thereby use *hijab* as fashion on either Ankara or lace fabrics to any occasion, either religious occasion or secular outings, and even to places of work. They believe it is their religious individuality and a way of self-expression. Many women choose small *hijab* and wrap their heads in different styles to look fascinating and trendy. [25] stated that *hijab* especially fashion-oriented ones is for contemporary Muslim women. [26] and [5] corroborate that *hijab* fashion and style trends amongst contemporary Muslim women have four major functions, namely: encouragement, attraction, modesty, and social image.

The *hijab*, according to [27]; [28]; [29] is a religious dress for Muslim women. It is in the form of a veil or head scarf worn by the women to conceal the hair and neck and possibly the upper chest usually in the presence of any male outside their immediate family [30]; [31]; [32]. But [28] posited that *hijab* means ‘hiding’, ‘obstructing’, and ‘isolating’ someone or something. [28] argues that it is never used in the Qur’ān to mean headscarf. This is a matter of compulsion for Muslim women that has generated a lot of crisis and controversies in southwestern Nigeria, especially in both secondary and higher institutions of learning as highlighted by [33] and [34]. An example of such a crisis was that of a student – Basira Saliu and two others at the College of Education, Ilorin, who was denied access to attending lectures and writing exams because of her using *hijab*. The case was taken to court and the judgment went in favour of the students [35]. Furthermore, Ibadan International School (ISI) of the University of Ibadan, *hijab* watershed between the ISI School management and Muslim Students Society of the school, watershed ended in court and the judgment favoured the Muslim Students of the school [36].

Another example of such a crisis in Osun State was the case of Sheik Olayiwola versus the State government leading to the forceful use of *hijab* in schools. Other religions started wearing their particular garments in action which nearly caused chaos in the society. The judgment also was in favour of Muslims that it is an Islamic injunction [37].

In Western society, wearing *hijab* is considered a sign of oppression but most women wearing *hijab* believe it commands respect while using it [38]. They further discuss that the Islamic religion preaches that all Muslim women should cover both their heads and bodies while in public. Nevertheless, Muslim women in this twenty-first century have turned the custom into fashion to make it trendy and stylish.

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

As important as the Islamic use of *hijab* is for women, there is a dearth of literature on the subject, especially for Muslim women in southwestern Nigeria. The study seeks to rectify this situation. The study aims to systematically describe the head covering of Muslim women especially in southwestern Nigeria as first, Islamic injunction laid down by Prophet Mohammed for them in [8] and [39], and second, as fashion, in which they could dress and still be trendy and modest as women, because *hijab* usage transcends religious garment in recent years but as fashion.

This paper focuses on the stylistic usage of *hijab* as fashion among Muslim women in southwestern Nigeria. Though Prophet Mohammed placed much importance on the acceptable dressing of male and female Muslims, while some see the usage as a burden, some see the usage as an identity belonging to a particular religion. In light of this, any dressing that is different from the set standard is considered as unacceptable as it is against the teaching of Islam.

## III. METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study adopts a descriptive design for gathering information and observation without intervening using both primary and secondary sources, while a qualitative approach is used to analyze the data. The women with head coverings were randomly selected

and photographs of their covering were taken, followed by structured interviews with the respondents. The women were between the ages of 20-30 years and most were students of higher institutions in south-western Nigeria. The answers were recorded by note-taking with consent. The approach was suitable as most of the respondents willingly granted interviews, and allowed their photographs to be taken. Though, very few declined, but insignificant to the study as those willing outnumbered those who declined, thereby having enough data to use for the study.

### **Muslim Women and Head Coverings**

A headscarf is a scarf used to cover most or all upper chests of a person's, usually women's hair and head leaving the face exposed. A headscarf is created of a rectangular cloth or a square cloth folded into a rectangle with which the head is covered. Women have a set standard of dressing that could be referred to as dress code. Muslim women mustn't wear revealing dresses that could show what is underneath. Therefore, it is expected of Muslim women to cover their heads, neck, and chest as a way to conceal their bodies [40] and also to avoid unwanted attention from overly familiar men [28]. In light of this, Muslim women cover their heads, necks, and chests, which is very popular and has entered the fashion world. Muslim women usually wear head coverings as a signifier of spiritual, and cultural belief, or a demonstration of personal humility. The type of coverings, styles, and practices vary based on cultural and religious differences.

[41] and [16] assert that an ideal covering for Muslim women is to cover the body and her back. He further posits that the skin should be hidden and the dress worn should not be tight to reveal the body's curves, the breast part, waist, and hips. The hijab must be clean, neat, and devoid of decorations that will bring too much attraction. It must not be flashy.

The head coverings for Muslim women all over the world are of different types and names, which include; *niqab*, *jilbab*, chador, *Shayla*, *shalwar*, *kameez*, *dupata*, *tudung* and *burqa* as reiterated by [38] and [32]. Muslim women wear scarves and veils of different colours to match the dress worn at a particular time. Many of these coverings cover the hair, ears, and throat, but do not cover the face. The observant Muslim women cover themselves so that they will not expose their beauty but only be seen by their family members as the Islamic religion recommends modest behaviour or dress in general and in particular the headscarf for Muslim women.

Higher institutions in south-west Nigeria were used for the study, and a random sampling of selected Muslim students was asked some questions to gather the information for the study. The questions were:

- (i) Do you believe in the use of hijab?
- (ii) Do you use it?
- (iii) Do you wear jewelry while wearing hijab?
- (iv) Do you feel comfortable using hijab?
- (v) Were you forced to wear a hijab?
- (vi) If you have an option, will you still use it?
- (vii) Can you convince other ladies to wear it or drop it?
- (viii) Do you use it for fashion or while performing prayers?
- (ix) Which of the coverings do you like using?
- (x) Which one of the coverings can you do away with (dislike)?

#### IV. FINDINGS

##### *Hijab Trendy and Fashion*

The use of *hijab* in southwestern Nigeria has transformed tremendously in response to modern events thereby making it an object of Muslim devoutness and expression of fascinating fashion [42]. Though there are many types of veils used, the specific one used for fashion is the *hijab* which is the most popular among Muslim women who want to be trendy. This *hijab* consists of one or two layers of scarves covering the head and the neck leaving the face completely uncovered. Some women who are conscious of their dressing are suggesting non-traditional forms of *hijab* such as turban, some consider turbans as a proper head cover, while others disagree that it cannot be considered as an appropriate Islamic veil if it leaves the neck uncovered.

The study reveals that some Muslim women were caged in the use of the *hijab* because they were not all the user of *hijab* are interested in wearing the veil, but considerable number that use it are happy in its use. Few numbers of the respondents confessed that they were forced to use it and not that they willingly use it. But in all, majority of the Muslim female students interviewed were willingly using *hijab* without any coercion from any quarter. But majority confessed that they cannot use *niqab* or *burqa*.

These head coverings are not really for fashion but are highly used as religious garments, these include *niqab*, *chador*, and *burqa* [43] and [44]. As for the *niqab*, it covers the whole body and face but leaves the eyes visible. This *niqab* is of two types, there are ones called half *niqab* and the other type is called full *niqab*. The half *niqab* has a headscarf with a veil that allows the eyes and part of the forehead visible while the full *niqab* is the full covering that allows only a slim slit for the eyes.

The *chador* is also known as *jilbab*. It is a covering for the whole body but it is closed at the neck region either by a knot or by pin. It usually comes with a smaller headscarf below. This type mostly covers the whole body but the face is left uncovered. *The burqa* is a veil that covers both the face and the body of the wearer. It only has a net screen for the wearer to see. Therefore, all these are not meant for fashion but are religious, but *hijab* types are mostly used for fashion, especially in southwestern Nigeria.

Other head coverings commonly used in southwestern Nigeria include; *shaylar*, *hijab*, *Al-amira*, and *khimar*. *Shaylar* is a long rectangular scarf used to wrap around the head and the neck and inserted into the dress or pinned at the shoulder (Figure 1). *Khimar* is a long cape-like covering that goes downwards to just above the waist. It is also popular in southwestern Nigeria. It covers the hair, neck, and shoulders completely, but leaves the face uncovered (Figure 2).



Figure 1: Two ladies wearing *Shaylar hijab*



Figure 2: A lady wearing *Khimar hijab*

Muslim women in southwestern Nigeria made *hijab* usage fashionable and attractive in different types of garments. [43] posited that *hijab* is of various types with various techniques of wrapping it. It comes in various styles thereby having different names such as *Al-amira* and *Kuwaiti* types of *hijab*. They wear colourful *hijabs* on their Ankara or lace outfits as a form of Islamic fashion. The dressings thereby express their personality, outlook, and concern as observed by [45]; [46]; [47].

*Al-amira hijab* is easy to wear. It comes in two types of design; these are, one-piece and two-piece. The one-piece is also called a single piece which covers the head, neck, upper chest, and upper back area (Figure 3), while the two-piece has a scarf underneath and a piece that covers the head, neck, upper chest, and upper back area. This type of *hijab* needs no pin and it is usually good for sport (Figure 4). But the *Kuwaiti hijab* is a ready-made type of *hijab*. It has a rectangular shape with a bonnet. This bonnet helps the head to be secured and also helps the *hijab* from falling off. The rectangular *hijab* helps the wearer to stylishly wrap their *hijabs*. When the bonnet is in place, the *hijab* can trail to the chin, thereby allowing the wearer to tie and wrap her head in different styles (Figure 5).



Figure 3: A lady wearing *Al-Amira hijab*



Figure 4: A lady wearing *Al-Amira hijab* (Single-piece)  
(two-piece)



Figure 5: A lady wearing a *Kuwaiti hijab* with a bonnet

The square *hijab* is always in simple prints or has different ornamentations and embellishments such as stones, beads, and sequins attached to it on one side, but it is always square, unlike the rectangular type. Wearing this frees the neck from the burden provided by the rectangular type. The only thing is that it gives less coverage of the head, neck, and chest area (Figure 6). The square *hijab* is usually used together with the *Abaya*. The *abaya* is a loose garment that goes down to cover the entire body leaving the head, hands, and feet uncovered (Figure 7). This type is used on many occasions. It is usually designed in stylish ways in different colours with variety of styles worn as fashion by Muslim women in southwestern Nigeria.



Figure 6: A lady wearing a Square *hijab*



Figure 7: A lady wearing an Abaya with Shayla *hijab*

Any of these *hijabs* is used on special occasions like wedding ceremonies or religious gatherings worn over Ankara or lace dresses. Some coverings come in white and in different colours with fewer graphics and designs, but the ones usually used match the dresses worn. In light of this, Muslim women who are trendy are interested in wrapping their heads stylishly on any occasion they find themselves with a stylish *hijab*.

## V. CONCLUSION

Muslim women wear *Hijab* to maintain modesty and privacy from unrelated males. In the holy Qur'ān, the *hijab* is referred to as a curtain preventing visitors to Muhammad's main house from his wives' residential lodgings. Therefore, some claim that wearing a *hijab* is meant for the wives of Mohammad and not for all Muslim women as observed by Ahmed (1992). Veiling are religious garments initially, but those ladies that want to be trendy use *hijab* as fashion, especially on Ankara and lace fabrics on secular occasions, ceremonies, or festival occasions. *Hijab-wearing* became very popular in southwestern Nigeria less than two decades ago according to Anydike and Abubakar (2022) and since then, it has been consistently used by Muslim women in schools, offices, and marketplaces.

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