

The Importance of Islamic Education and Gender Equality in Contemporary Schools

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Abstract

This article discusses the importance of education, particularly Islamic Religious Education, in addressing gender issues and inequalities faced by women in various aspects of life. Gender, as a social construction, is different from biological sex and plays an important role in social and cultural dynamics. This research, which is descriptive-critical in nature, uses a literature approach to analyze data sources and related literature. The main focus is on how education, especially Islamic religious education, can be used as a tool to combat ingrained gender prejudices and stereotypes in society. Islamic Education is seen as a means to spread the values of equality, freedom, democracy and justice, and to overcome gender-biased interpretations of religious texts. The article emphasizes the importance of an inclusive and gender justice based curriculum in shaping young people's attitudes and understanding of gender issues. This includes addressing gender stereotypes in educational materials and promoting critical thinking among students. In addition, this article highlights the need to recognize that the challenges in realizing gender equality lie not only in education, but also in social and cultural practices. Therefore, it is proposed that gender justice-based Islamic Education Can be a catalyst in promoting a more balanced and inclusive understanding of gender roles, which is essential for the development of a more tolerant, just and egalitarian society.

Keywords: *Education Islamic; Gender equality; Critical thinking*

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas pentingnya pendidikan, khususnya Pendidikan Agama Islam, dalam mengatasi isu gender dan ketidaksetaraan yang dihadapi perempuan di berbagai aspek kehidupan. Gender, sebagai konstruksi sosial, berbeda dari jenis kelamin biologis dan memainkan peran penting dalam dinamika sosial dan budaya. Penelitian ini, yang bersifat deskriptif-kritis, menggunakan pendekatan kepustakaan untuk menganalisis sumber data dan literatur terkait. Fokus utama adalah pada bagaimana pendidikan, terutama pendidikan agama Islam, dapat digunakan sebagai alat untuk memerangi prasangka dan stereotip gender yang telah mendarah daging dalam masyarakat. Pendidikan Agama Islam dilihat sebagai sarana untuk menyebarkan nilai-nilai kesetaraan, kebebasan, demokrasi, dan keadilan, serta untuk mengatasi interpretasi teks-teks keagamaan yang bias gender. Artikel ini menekankan pentingnya kurikulum yang inklusif dan berbasis keadilan gender dalam membentuk sikap dan pemahaman generasi muda tentang isu gender. Ini mencakup mengatasi stereotip gender dalam materi pendidikan dan mempromosikan pemikiran kritis di kalangan siswa. Selain itu, artikel ini menyoroti kebutuhan untuk mengakui bahwa tantangan dalam mewujudkan kesetaraan gender tidak hanya terletak pada pendidikan, tetapi juga dalam praktik sosial dan budaya. Oleh karena itu, diusulkan bahwa pendidikan agama Islam yang berbasis keadilan gender dapat menjadi katalisator dalam mempromosikan pemahaman yang lebih seimbang dan inklusif tentang peran gender, yang penting untuk pembangunan masyarakat yang lebih toleran, adil, dan egaliter.

Kata kunci: *Pendidikan Islam; Kesetaraan Gender; Pemikiran Kritis*

A. Introduction

Gender is a topic that is often discussed in various environments, and this includes academic and non-academic environments. This is due to the fact that discrimination against women is often linked to gender issues. Gender inequality is a serious problem that still plagues societies around the world. One of the most striking forms of inequality is the gap in access and opportunities between men and women. In many countries, women still face barriers to proper education, equal employment and the opportunity to participate in political decisions. These inequalities not only harm individuals, but also hinder a country's economic and social progress. In the Indonesian education context, gender issues have become a major focus in recent years, especially in terms of gender discrimination and equal rights. Larasati and Ayu highlighted that gender differences in Indonesian education can lead to gender discrimination and neglect of human rights, emphasizing the need for education on human rights and gender equality.¹ This underlines the importance of gender-inclusive and sensitive

¹ Ayu Maulidina Larasati and Novia Puspa Ayu, "The Education for Gender Equality and Human Rights in Indonesia: Contemporary Issues and Controversial Problems," *The Indonesian Journal*

educational interventions. Fithriani (2022) observed that gender stereotypes still exist in primary education textbooks, both in Indonesia and internationally, indicating the need for increased awareness and responsiveness in educational documents.² This research emphasizes the need for changes in the way educational materials are structured and presented to reduce gender bias.

Gender gaps and inequalities about the relationships between men and women are at the root of perceptions of discrimination against women, as explained by Nur Rohmah and Labib Ulinnuha. The male authority structure, known as patriarchy, is usually perceived as 'oppressing' women.³ The disparities experienced by women seem to be ingrained in society and permeate all aspects of human life, including childcare, politics, economics, religion and culture, and education. This practice consistently places women behind men in a submissive and inferior position and leads to the creation of social classes, including early marriage, sexual harassment, employment restrictions, shame associated with divorce and others.⁴

As a result, education is currently one of the most suggested strategies to combat gender-biased behavior in society. Since education is a tool for learning and spreading new ideas as well as a means to transfer societal norms, it is considered an appropriate solution to this problem.⁵ In addition, religion plays an important role in resolving issues related to the social relations of men and women. A set of belief systems that regulate human interaction with the Creator, other humans and the environment is also referred to as religion. This is especially true of Islam, whose teachings are harmonious, comprehensive and integrated. Religious teachings will be incorporated into education without being isolated in its development.⁶

of *International Clinical Legal Education* 2, no. 1 (2020): 73–84, <https://doi.org/10.15294/ijicle.v2i1.37321>.

² Rahmah Fithriani, "Gender Stereotypes in Educational Texts: A Comparative Study of Indonesian and International Primary English Textbooks," *Discourse and Interaction* 15, no. 2 (2022): 53–76, <https://doi.org/10.5817/Di2022-2-53>.

³ Nur Rohmah and Labib Ulinnuha, "Relasi Gender Dan Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 2 (2014): 345, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2014.32.345-364>.

⁴ Ade Irma and Dessy Hasanah, "Menyoroti Budaya Patriarki Di Indonesia," *Social Work* 7, no. 1 (2014): 71–80.

⁵ Azyumardi Azra, *Realita Dan Cita Kesetaraan Gender Di UIN Jakarta* (Jakarta: McGill IAIN, 2004).

⁶ Achmadi Achmadi, *Islam Sebagai Paradigma Ilmu Pendidikan* (Yogyakarta: Aditya Media, 1992).

Islam is an educational system that many people find themselves at odds with religious texts, customs, and different groups of people found in different regions and countries. This is the reason why Islamic education often does not recognize gender norms. In reality, the basic ideas of the Qur'anic teachings never make a binary distinction between the roles of men and women; in fact, the Qur'an is the only sacred text that seeks to value women equally with men, in line with the universal human condition.⁷ In order not to cause continued misunderstandings, these verses must be further explained to the public, who have of course completed certain studies on them.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyze and understand gender in order to critically assess Islamic Religious Education. To define gender justice-based Islamic Education and to understand and analyze the concept of gender from the perspective of Islamic religious education, this article is necessary.

B. Research Method

This is a literature research or library research, which is a research that collects data and information as well as materials contained in various sources such as books, newspapers, magazines and so on. The steps of this research include: topic selection, information exploration, determining the focus of research, collecting data sources, preparing data presentation, and preparing reports. In this research, the author uses descriptive-critical research by emphasizing the strength of the analysis of existing sources and data by relying on theories and concepts that are interpreted. Data collection techniques through documentation and identifying readings from several books, newspapers, magazines and so on, or other information related to the title of this research. The data that has been obtained is compiled, analyzed, and concluded so as to obtain conclusions regarding the issues discussed.

C. Result and Discussion

1. An overview of gender

The existence of gender is due to the presence of groups that see the inequality in society's view of the two different biological sexes between men and women. The difference of biological views between men and women has implications in socio-

⁷ Zainal Abidin, "Kesetaraan Gender Dan Emansipasi Perempuan Dalam Pendidikan Islam," *Tarbawiyah Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan* 12, no. 01 (2017): 1–17.

cultural life. A perception that has fused in a person's subconscious mind, even reflexively if it is mentioned that someone has biological attributes as possessed by men and women, then that is the benchmark in carrying out social roles in society. Before discussing further about gender, it is better to discuss what gender is and how it differs from sex. It is because the understanding of the two is sometimes confusing. One of the things that causes resistance or difficulty in accepting gender analysis as a solution to the problem of social injustice is the misinterpretation of gender.

Sex is God-given, a biological difference between men and women.⁸ Sex is a label or gender division that is specific to a particular sex and is based on biology. These permanent, natural and immutable biological anatomical differences cannot be reversed. As such, these differences apply everywhere and throughout the ages.⁹ On the other hand, gender is etymologically derived from the word sex, which denotes a type of person. Gender can also be defined as a cultural concept that aims to create differences in attitudes, beliefs, mentalities, and emotional traits between the young and the old in society.¹⁰

Larasati and Ayu define gender as the differentiation of roles, functions and responsibilities between women and men, shaped by men and women through a long social and cultural process. This emphasizes that gender is a social construction shaped by interactions and norms in society, in contrast to sex which is more focused on biological aspects.¹¹ The difference between gender and sex is also reflected in language use and social representations. For example, in Trisna Budiwati's (2011) research, it was found that gender discourse in Indonesian idioms refers to men, women, and men and/or women, with the assumption that men represent various affairs and things, while women play more roles in the domestic domain.¹²

⁸ Nasarudin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender: Perspektif Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2001).

⁹ Mansour Faqih, *Analisis Gender Dan Transformasi Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006).

¹⁰ Nurazizah Nurazizah, "PENGARUH GENDER DAN PENGALAMAN TERHADAP SKEPTISISME PROFESIONAL AUDITOR (Studi Empiris Pada Auditor Di Kantor Akuntan Publik Kota Padang)," *Jurnal Akuntansi* 5, no. 2 (March 2017).

¹¹ Larasati and Ayu, "The Education for Gender Equality and Human Rights in Indonesia: Contemporary Issues and Controversial Problems."

¹² Tri Rina Budiwati, "Representasi Wacana Gender Dalam Ungkapan Berbahasa Indonesia Dan Bahasa Inggris: Analisis Wacana Kritis," *Jurnal Kawistara* 1, no. 3 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.3926>.

A number of factors contribute to the formation of gender, which is then socialized, reinforced, and even constructed through social or cultural contexts and religious interpretations and myths that perpetuate the idea that gender is ingrained in men and women.¹³ In this case, gender is an analytical tool used to establish an equal position between men and women to achieve a more egalitarian social structure. Therefore, gender can be used as an operational tool to measure the problems of men and women, especially those related to the roles that men and women play in the society created by society. Gender is not limited to women, but also applies to men. However, as women are currently seen to be in a marginalized position, they are more prominent in discussions to pursue gender equality, which has been achieved by men in a number of social roles. This is especially the case in the field of education, where changes are expected in terms of thinking, acting and participating in various areas of social life.¹⁴ According to the findings of the analysis, gender equality is the process of achieving equal harmony, balance and harmony without allowing men and women to be treated differently in carrying out social roles in the family, community, nation and state.

Laelatuss'adah (2007) as quoted by M. Kherul Watoni A. et al. revealed that gender equality can be identified by 4 indicators, including: 1) obtaining equal resources for development resources; 2) participating equally in development, including decision making; 3) having equal control over development resources; 4) obtaining equal benefits from development results. Similarly, Efendi (2014) stated that the realization of gender equality and justice is characterized by the absence of discrimination between women and men, and can be seen from 4 indicators of gender equality, namely: 1) they have access; 2) participation opportunities; 3) control over development and; 4) obtain equal and fair benefits from development.¹⁵

2. Islamic Education and gender

Islamic Education is a planned conscious effort in preparing students to recognize, understand, appreciate, and believe in the teachings of Islam, along with

¹³ Mufidah Ch, *Paradigma Gender* (Malang: Bayumedia Publishing, 2003).

¹⁴ Mad Sa'i, "Pendidikan Islam Dan Gender," *Islamuna: Jurnal Studi Islam* 2, no. 1 (2015): 118, <https://doi.org/10.19105/islamuna.v2i1.657>.

¹⁵ Hairil Wadi, Hamidsyukrie ZM Muh. Khaerul Watoni A., "Penerapan Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pendidikan Pada Siswa SMAN 5 Mataram," *Solidarity* 9 1, no. Kesetaraan Gender, Pendidikan (2020): 811–22, <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/solidarity/article/view/38849>.

guidance to respect adherents of other religions in relation to inter-religious harmony so as to realize national unity and integrity.¹⁶ Islamic Education is a conscious effort made by educators in order to prepare students to believe, understand and practice Islamic teachings through guidance, teaching or training activities that have been determined to achieve predetermined goals.¹⁷

In the Indonesian context, religious education has two main purposes: first, to fortify students' religious beliefs; and second, to foster tolerance, mutual respect and acceptance of differences. Through this function, the unity and integrity of the Indonesian nation can be strengthened.¹⁸ Under the banner of plurality, religious education—especially Islamic religious education—should be able to become a mediator or bridge that unites Indonesia's differences and plurality. In general, Islamic Education (PAI) is one of the compulsory subjects that has an important role in the education system in Indonesia. In addition, PAI is present at all levels of education, including primary, secondary, and higher education.¹⁹

The dynamics in which the learning experiences ups and downs and adjustments to the pattern of daily human life cannot be separated from the process of implementing Islamic Education so far.²⁰ The public perception of religious education is often negative due to the failure of the implementation of Islamic Education in the practice of fostering student morals. Rarely do students' daily lives reflect the metamorphosis of religious values, which should be in line with a life full of tolerance, honesty, responsibility, and nobility of character. Instead, what is seen is a biased perspective from students who tend to stigmatize other religions and favor their own religion, show a condescending attitude towards others who do not agree with them or their group,

¹⁶ Dian Majid, Abdul dan Andayani, *Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Kompetensi* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2006).

¹⁷ Muhaimin, *Paradigma Pendidikan Islam: Upaya Mengefektifkan PAI Di Sekolah*, (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2002).

¹⁸ Tarmizi Taher, *Menuju Ummatan Wasathan: Kerukunan Beragama Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: PPIM IAIN Jakarta, 1998).

¹⁹ DPR RI, “Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional” (n.d.).

²⁰ Rizka Hidayatul Umami, “Relevansi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Pengarusutamaan Gender,” *Journal of Islamic Education Policy* 4, no. 1 (2020): 29–39, <https://doi.org/10.30984/jjep.v4i1.1271>.

lack understanding of social issues, are more preoccupied with their own interests, and perpetuate gender roles in particular.²¹

Education is intended to help people reach their full potential so that they can become independent and critical thinkers who can evaluate and form their own opinions about the things they encounter, consider those opinions, and use those opinions as a basis for reality. Education aims to empower people to not only accept and adapt to their environment, but also actively shape history.²²

According to Athiyah, Islamic values can be spread everywhere with just one simple formula. The universal central themes of Islam are equality, freedom, democracy and justice. Therefore, justice, freedom, democracy and equality (humanity) are the four main pillars of Islamic education. The ultimate goal is to advance humanist principles.²³ The idea of gender equality and equality of principles and spirit brought by Islam must be able to become a humanist and tactical support system for the advancement of da'wah teachings and the realization of Islamic ideals. Therefore, the three principles of ontology, epistemology and axiology must be the foundation of the educational framework in order to have a clear and gender-neutral educational structure. Naturally, the theoretical framework of the equality of men and women in Islam is the basis for the formulation of these three principles.

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For this reason, the strategy of mainstreaming gender equality through Islamic Education Teaching materials is very necessary considering that the lives of the majority of Muslims show the factual reality of inequality as follows: First, the pattern of male and female relations in Muslim communities in Java, for example, is a

²¹ Nanik Setyowati, "PENDIDIKAN GENDER DALAM ISLAM: Studi Analisis Nilai-Nilai Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pelajaran PAI Di SD Ma'arif Ponorogo," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 1, no. 1 (February 2019): 35–47, <https://doi.org/10.37680/SCAFFOLDING.V1I101.41>.

²² Rohmah and Ulinuha, "Relasi Gender Dan Pendidikan Islam."

²³ Muhaimin, *Paradigma Pendidikan Islam: Upaya Mengefektifkan PAI Di Sekolah*.

reflection of the knowledge system about male and female relations absorbed from Javanese culture and the interpretation of religious teachings socialized through educational centers, namely pesantren, madrasah, and schools. Second, a number of studies show that the paternalistic leadership style continues to influence educational institutions in the pesantren environment, which reveals unequal rights and obligations between husbands and wives.²⁴

These data clearly show that gender mainstreaming is needed in the knowledge system of Islamic societies, and that education is the only way to achieve it. Whether we like it or not, education plays a major role in realizing gender justice in society because education not only helps people learn and spread new ideas and values, but also changes people's norms, knowledge and skills. Therefore, gender justice should be realized in educational institutions from the very beginning as a means to disseminate knowledge to society.

This description shows that the curriculum functions as the main tool for implementing gender mainstreaming in the classroom. The curriculum functions as a forum or means for educational institutions to develop their vision and mission so that they can carry out that mission well. After that, the curriculum will cover open materials with all the necessary tools, allowing educational institutions that support gender equality to incorporate gender equality initiatives into their vision and mission, which will then be carried out through the curriculum and all its components.

Therefore, gender mainstreaming through teaching materials is so important to implement based on several considerations. First, educational experience has a significant influence on the values and thought patterns developed by educators, where the entire experience influences the mindset, attitude patterns and rational behavior of men and women. Second, gender inequality has become an undeniable reality in almost every sector of life, the proof is that stereotyping, subordination, marginalization, double burdens and violence against women often occur and therefore, systematic efforts are needed to eradicate it, namely by making women aware of their rights. -their rights and obligations are proportional, and on the other hand, providing argumentative information to men that in fact what they have received so far is gender biased. Third, the internalization of values that are not gender biased will be more effective if it is

²⁴ Mohammad Muchlis Solichin, "Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Kesetaraan Gender," *Tadris* 1, no. 1 (2006): 51–60.

based on religious materials, so that by showing that there has been manipulation of religious texts that are gender biased and there has been a misinterpretation of religious doctrines, emotions and awareness will increase. The religion of the younger generation will surge, and then they will be critical of these interpretations, so that ultimately a dynamic of interpretation occurs which leads to the creation of dynamics of religious thought which greatly influences the dynamics of social life.

D. Conclusion

Education, as a medium for spreading values and knowledge, plays a vital role in shaping understanding and attitudes towards gender issues. Gender mainstreaming of the Islamic Education Curriculum is key to changing gender-biased mindsets that have long been rooted in society. This initiative is not only about promoting equality between men and women but also about building a more just and inclusive society.

A holistic and inclusive approach in Islamic Education Demands a deeper understanding of the concept of gender from an Islamic perspective. This requires proper interpretation of religious texts, avoiding misinterpretations that can reinforce gender stereotypes and biases. The process of internalizing values that are not gender biased through Islamic Education can encourage young people to be critical and think dynamically about religious and social issues.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the challenges in realizing gender equality lie not only in educational aspects but also in social and cultural practices. Therefore, striving for gender equality requires collaboration across sectors, including education, public policy and active community participation. Gender justice-based Islamic Education can be a catalyst in promoting a more balanced and inclusive understanding of gender roles for the realization of a tolerant, just and egalitarian society.

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