

Gender Responsiveness in the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Islamic Elementary Schools: A Field Study Based on Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract

Keywords:

Gender responsiveness; Islamic Religious Education Curriculum; Critical pedagogy; Paulo Freire; Islamic elementary school.

Gender issues are still not optimally integrated into the Islamic religious education curriculum, especially at the elementary school level, which plays an important role in shaping students' religious and social values. The Islamic religious education curriculum often reflects gender bias, both in content, pedagogical approaches, and classroom learning practices. This study aims to analyze gender responsiveness in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Islamic elementary schools using Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy perspective. This study is in the field of Islamic education and critical pedagogy, which emphasizes the values of justice, dialogue, and liberation in the educational process. The method used is qualitative research based on field studies through learning observations, in-depth interviews with teachers, and curriculum document analysis. The results show that despite initial efforts to accommodate gender perspectives, the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is still normative and teacher-centered, thus failing to fully encourage students' critical awareness of gender justice. Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy approach proved to be relevant as an analytical framework for reconstructing a more dialogical, participatory, and reflective curriculum. This study contributes to the development of a gender-responsive Islamic Religious Education curriculum and affirms the importance of transforming the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in building critical awareness and inclusive religious understanding from primary education onwards.

Abstrak

Kata kunci: Responsivitas gender; Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam; Pedagogi kritis; Paulo Freire; Sekolah dasar Islam.

Isu gender masih belum terintegrasi secara optimal dalam kurikulum Pendidikan agama Islam, khususnya di jenjang sekolah dasar yang berperan penting dalam pembentukan nilai keagamaan dan sosial peserta didik. Kurikulum Pendidikan agama Islam kerap merefleksikan bias gender, baik dalam konten, pendekatan pedagogis, maupun praktik pembelajaran di kelas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis responsivitas gender dalam kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam di sekolah dasar Islam dengan menggunakan perspektif pedagogi kritis Paulo Freire. Penelitian ini berada dalam ranah kajian pendidikan Islam dan pedagogi kritis, yang menekankan nilai keadilan, dialog, dan pembebasan dalam proses pendidikan. Metode yang digunakan adalah penelitian kualitatif berbasis studi lapangan melalui observasi pembelajaran, wawancara mendalam dengan guru, serta analisis dokumen kurikulum. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun terdapat upaya awal dalam mengakomodasi perspektif gender, kurikulum Pendidikan agama Islam masih bersifat normatif dan berpusat pada guru sehingga belum sepenuhnya mendorong kesadaran kritis peserta didik terhadap keadilan gender. Pendekatan pedagogi kritis Paulo Freire terbukti relevan sebagai kerangka analitis untuk merekonstruksi kurikulum yang lebih dialogis, partisipatif, dan reflektif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam yang responsif gender dan menegaskan pentingnya transformasi kurikulum Pendidikan agama Islam dalam membangun kesadaran kritis serta pemahaman keagamaan yang inklusif sejak pendidikan dasar.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education is one of the main pillars in the national education system that functions not only to transmit religious teachings, but also to shape the character, moral attitudes, and social awareness of students (Nuridin et al., 2022). At the elementary education level, Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role as it forms the initial foundation for shaping children's religious perspectives and social relationships (Craig et al., 2023). The values instilled at this stage will influence how students interpret social roles, gender relations, and the principle of justice in social life (Rizka Hidayatul Umami, 2019). However, the practice of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum and learning in elementary schools still shows a tendency toward gender bias, which is evident in the representation of religious figures, the language of learning, and the division of social roles in teaching materials that often place men as the main actors while women are positioned in the domestic sphere (S Abdel Haleem et al., 2017; Apple, 2022; (Saoke et al., 2023). Normatively, Islam affirms the principles of justice, equality, and respect for human dignity without gender discrimination (Amalia et al., 2022; Edi Susanto, 2021).

A number of studies show that gender issues in Islamic education are gaining academic attention. Research (Nuridin et al., 2022) reveals that patriarchal culture still strongly influences the madrasah and Islamic school education systems. Studies (Fitriah, 2021) and (Rahman & Adi Armin, 2024) confirm that gender bias in religious education is often rooted in religious interpretations that lack contextual relevance. Research (Syahrul Az-Zahra et al., 2024) also shows that Islamic Religious Education textbooks in elementary schools still lack female figures as role models of Islam. In addition, a study (Damanik et al., 2025) emphasizes the importance of transforming Islamic education through a gender justice approach so that religious education does not become a means of legitimizing social inequality.

In the development of contemporary educational studies, several studies have begun to link gender issues with critical pedagogy as a transformative strategy in education. Studies (Wita et al., 2025) and (Nurul, 2018) show that critical pedagogy can open up space for reflection on power relations and social injustice in the educational process. This perspective is in line with Paulo Freire's idea that views education as a practice of liberation that places students as active subjects in the learning process through dialogue, reflection, and action (praxis) (Nelson & Chen, 2023; Shih, 2018; Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2023; (Giroux, 2021). In the context of Islamic religious education, this approach is relevant for developing a curriculum that not only emphasizes ritual and dogmatic aspects but also the values of justice and universal humanity in line with maqashid syariah (Auliadara et al., 2024; Arsyad et al., 2023).

However, most previous studies are still dominated by conceptual approaches, literature studies, or teaching text analysis, so that empirical studies on the implementation of gender-responsive Islamic Religious Education curricula in Islamic elementary schools are still relatively limited. In addition, the integration of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy approach in the analysis of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum based on field studies has not been explored in depth. This condition shows a research gap between theoretical studies on gender justice in Islamic education and the practice of curriculum and learning that takes place in schools.

Based on this gap, this article aims to analyze the extent to which the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Islamic elementary schools has been gender-e and to examine the relevance of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy approach in promoting the transformation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum and learning practices.

This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of critical Islamic education studies as well as practical contributions to teachers, curriculum developers, and education policy makers in developing Islamic Religious Education learning that is more equitable, reflective, and inclusive.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a field study design to examine gender responsiveness in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Islamic elementary schools through the perspective of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy (Moleong, 2019). This approach was chosen because the study focuses on an in-depth understanding of the practice of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum and learning as it takes place in the real context of schools. The focus of the study was directed at the objectives and structure of the curriculum, learning materials, pedagogical strategies, patterns of teacher-student interaction, and the Islamic Religious Education learning evaluation system related to the integration of gender justice values and the development of critical awareness among students.

The research subjects included Islamic Religious Education teachers, Islamic elementary school students, and supporting informants such as school principals and curriculum managers. The subjects were selected *purposively*, considering their direct involvement in the planning and implementation of Islamic Religious Education (Sugiyono, 2019). The research was conducted in Islamic elementary schools that implemented the national curriculum and formally conducted Islamic Religious Education learning. The research location was selected based on the relevance of the school context to the focus of the study and the institution's openness to the research process.

Data collection was conducted through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis (Miles, 2014). Observations were conducted non-participatory to observe teaching methods, language use, teacher-student interactions, and student responses to Islamic Religious Education learning materials. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers and other key informants to explore their experiences and views regarding the integration of gender perspectives in the curriculum and learning. Document analysis was conducted on the curriculum, syllabus, lesson plans, textbooks, and evaluation tools to identify the forms and levels of gender responsiveness in lesson planning.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through a process of reduction, presentation, and thematic conclusion drawing (Radlinski & Craswell, 2022). Data from observations, interviews, and documentation were coded based on the focus of gender responsiveness and critical pedagogy principles. The findings were interpreted using Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy perspective to link Islamic Religious Education curriculum practices with issues of gender justice and the development of critical awareness among students. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques and double-checking of findings with informants, thus enabling replication and verification of the research in similar Islamic education contexts.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Gender Responsiveness in Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Planning

The results of the analysis of curriculum documents, syllabi, and lesson plans show that gender responsiveness in the planning of Islamic Religious Education curricula is still implicit and has not been formulated systematically. The integration of a gender perspective has not become a basic framework in curriculum development, but appears in a limited and inconsistent manner. This condition is reflected in the weak formulation of learning objectives, teaching materials, and achievement indicators that explicitly lead to the development of gender justice awareness.

Based on an analysis of learning objectives, most objectives are still oriented towards mastery of cognitive and normative aspects, such as understanding faith, worship, and morals, without accompanying objectives that encourage critical reflection by students on social and gender relations. Analysis of the curriculum documents shows that the learning objectives do not explicitly include perspectives on justice or gender equality. This indicates that gender issues have not been positioned as an integral part of the learning outcomes of Islamic Religious Education.

From the perspective of teaching materials, there is a tendency for male figures to dominate narratives of Islamic history and examples of role models. Women are more often portrayed in domestic roles or as supporting figures, while women's contributions to Islamic scholarship and society remain relatively minimal.

Meanwhile, analysis of learning indicators and outcomes shows that the indicators formulated still focus on cognitive achievement and memorization of material. Affective and reflective indicators that measure attitudes of justice, critical awareness, and gender sensitivity have not been adequately formulated.

These findings are also reinforced by interviews with Islamic Education teachers who stated that gender perspectives are not yet an explicit part of lesson planning.

One teacher said: "*In setting learning objectives, we usually follow existing textbooks and curricula. Gender equality issues are not specifically written in the learning objectives, but are considered more as general values in Islamic teachings.*"

Table 1. *Gender Responsiveness in Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Planning*

No	Curriculum Planning Aspect	Description of Findings from Document Analysis
	Learning objectives	Learning objectives still focus on cognitive and normative achievements, with implicit references to gender equality values that have not been systematically formulated.
2	Representation of teaching materials	Teaching materials begin to address issues of social justice, but the representation of gender experiences and roles is still limited and has not become the main focus of content development.
3	Gender-responsive learning indicators	Learning indicators do not specifically measure students' attitudes, critical awareness, and understanding of equitable gender relations.

Based on the findings in Table 1, gender responsiveness in the planning of the Islamic Education curriculum has not been fully and systematically integrated. In terms of learning objectives, gender equality values have not been explicitly formulated as learning outcomes, so that the curriculum orientation is still dominated by normative

and cognitive objectives alone. This condition shows that a gender perspective has not become a conceptual basis in formulating learning directions.

In terms of teaching material representation, the curriculum has begun to accommodate issues of social justice in general, but has not yet consistently presented balanced experiences, roles, and contributions of gender. The learning material still tends to be textually neutral, but is not yet fully critical in challenging gender-biased social constructs.

Meanwhile, gender-responsive learning indicators show the most fundamental weakness in curriculum planning. The indicators used have not been designed to assess the development of critical awareness, reflective attitudes, and the ability of students to understand and respond to gender inequality. This indicates that the gender dimension has not been positioned as a measurable and meaningful learning competency.

This was also confirmed by teachers who stated that learning indicators generally focus on students' knowledge acquisition.

The teacher stated: "*The assessments we conduct are usually related to understanding the material, such as creed or fiqh. We have not yet specifically created indicators for assessing critical attitudes towards social or gender issues.*"

Islamic Religious Education Learning Practices and the Dynamics of Gender Responsiveness in the Classroom

The results of observations of Islamic Religious Education learning show that gender responsiveness in classroom practices appears in several pedagogical aspects with varying degrees of occurrence. These field findings are summarized in Table 1 to provide a systematic overview of the learning patterns that take place.

Table 2. Gender Responsiveness in Islamic Religious Education Teaching Practices

No	Aspect of Learning Practice	Description of Field Findings
	Use of inclusive language	Teachers use gender-neutral language and avoid stereotypes when delivering material.
2	Opportunities for student participation	Teachers give male and female students the opportunity to ask and answer questions
3	Management of teacher-student interactions	Teacher interactions do not consciously encourage active participation from students who tend to be passive
4	Critical discussion of social issues and gender relations	Discussions on social justice and gender issues are still rarely raised explicitly.
5	Dialogic and reflective learning strategies	Learning is still dominated by lectures; reflective dialogue has not yet become the main pattern.

Based on the findings in Table 2, the practice of using inclusive language has been relatively internalized in Islamic Religious Education learning. Teachers tend to use gender-neutral diction and try to avoid delivering material that contains stereotypes, which shows an initial normative awareness of gender equality issues in the linguistic aspects of learning. This practice reflects the initial stage of gender responsiveness, which is symbolic and normative in nature.

In terms of participation opportunities, teachers have tried to provide equal space for male and female students to ask and answer questions. However, this openness

has not been fully accompanied by pedagogical strategies that actively encourage student involvement.

The results of classroom observations were also reinforced by interviews with students who stated that opportunities to ask questions were indeed open, but not all students felt encouraged to participate actively.

One student said: "*Teachers usually give all students the opportunity to ask questions, but only a few are usually active.*"

In addition, discussions on social justice and gender relations are still rarely raised explicitly in the learning process. The dominance of lecture methods shows that dialogic and reflective learning strategies have not become the main pedagogical pattern.

Teachers also acknowledge limitations in developing critical discussions in class. One teacher stated: "*Islamic Education material can actually be linked to social issues, but due to time constraints, we focus more on delivering the main material.*"

Teachers' Perceptions and the Islamic Religious Education Learning Evaluation System

Data collection in this study was conducted through a combination of reflective dialogue with school officials, academic interaction with Islamic Education teachers, and analysis of learning evaluation documents. The dialogues referred to were not limited to structured interviews, but also included professional conversations, curriculum discussions, and reflective communication that took place in the context of school activities. This approach enabled researchers to obtain a contextual understanding of teachers' perceptions and school policies regarding gender issues in Islamic religious education.

The data collection results show that teachers' awareness of gender justice values has begun to develop, but has not been fully internalized in pedagogical practices and learning evaluation systems. Teachers' understanding of gender justice is generally positioned as a normative value of Islamic teachings, without the support of a clear pedagogical and evaluative framework.

Table 3. Teachers' Perceptions and Learning Evaluation Systems in Islamic Religious Education

No	Aspects Analyzed	Description of Field Findings
	Teachers' awareness of gender issues	Teachers understand justice as a normative Islamic value, but it has not been formulated into an operational pedagogical approach.
2	Integration of gender perspectives in learning	Gender perspectives arise situationally in the learning process and are not yet integrated into learning planning
3	Understanding of critical pedagogy	Teachers and school officials do not yet have an adequate conceptual understanding of critical pedagogy as a learning approach.
4	School support for strengthening teacher capacity	Schools have not made gender equality and critical pedagogy a primary focus in teacher professional development.
5	Learning evaluation system	Learning evaluation is still oriented towards mastery of material, with limited assessment of students' critical reflection and social awareness.

Based on the findings in Table 3, reflective dialogues with teachers and school officials indicate that gender equality is understood as part of Islamic moral values, but has not yet been positioned as a pedagogical competency that needs to be systematically designed, implemented, and evaluated.

One teacher explained that the value of equality is actually understood as part of Islamic teachings, but has not been translated into learning design.

The teacher stated: *"In Islam, justice is certainly taught, including to men and women. But in our teaching practice, we have not specifically created methods or assessments related to gender issues."*

School management acknowledges that the main focus of Islamic Religious Education is still on completing the material and achieving cognitive competencies.

A deputy principal stated: *"Our main focus is still on curriculum achievement and student learning outcomes. Gender equality is indeed an important issue, but it has not yet become a specific program in learning development."*

This situation has a direct impact on the learning evaluation system. Analysis of evaluation documents shows that assessment still focuses on mastery of material and memorization, while aspects of critical awareness, social reflection, and students' understanding of fair gender relations are not yet part of structured evaluation. Dialogue with schools reveals a gap between normative awareness and pedagogical implementation in Islamic Religious Education.

These findings confirm that gender-responsive transformation of Islamic Education requires a systemic approach involving school policies, teacher capacity building, and reformulation of the learning evaluation system. Without structural support from schools and adequate pedagogical understanding, gender justice values have the potential to remain at the level of normative discourse and fail to function as instruments of transformative Islamic education.

Discussion

Gender Responsiveness in Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Planning

Research findings indicate that gender responsiveness in Islamic Religious Education curriculum planning is still implicit and has not been systematically formulated. The curriculum tends to place gender issues as general moral values that are assumed to be represented in Islamic teachings, without being explicitly formulated in learning objectives, teaching materials, or achievement indicators. This condition reflects the normative curriculum paradigm that is still dominant in Islamic education, where the curriculum functions primarily as a means of transmitting religious doctrine, rather than as a space for critical reflection on social realities (Ilhan et al., 2025).

In critical curriculum studies, (Bolin, 2017) asserts that the curriculum is not a neutral document, but rather an ideological arena that reflects power relations in society. When gender perspectives are not explicitly formulated in curriculum planning, this actually reinforces established structures of injustice. Field findings that show low aspects of gender-perspective learning objectives indicate that curriculum awareness of gender justice issues is still at a symbolic level, not yet substantive.

The dominance of male figures in Islamic Education teaching materials is also an important finding that needs to be critically examined. As shown by (Iheduru-Anderson & Waite, 2024; Brata et al., 2025), religious education textbooks still portray women as supporting figures, rather than active subjects in Islamic history. In fact, in Islamic tradition, there are many female figures who have played strategic roles in the fields of science, social affairs, and da'wah. The absence of such representations is not only a

matter of content, but also an ideological issue that shapes students' perspectives on gender roles in religious life.

From Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy perspective, a curriculum that does not provide space for reflection on social inequality has the potential to perpetuate what is known as *a culture of silence*, a condition in which certain groups accept injustice as something normal (Cam & Ballantine, 2025; Akhter & Zai, 2023). An Islamic Religious Education curriculum that does not explicitly raise the issue of gender justice risks forming a false consciousness, in which students understand religious teachings ahistorically and detached from their social reality. Therefore, reconstructing curriculum planning is a strategic step to make Islamic Religious Education a means of forming critical awareness and social justice.

The low findings of gender-responsive learning indicators show that the problem lies not only in the objectives and materials, but also in the evaluative orientation of the curriculum. The curriculum still places learning success solely on cognitive achievement, while the affective and reflective dimensions have not been given primary attention. This reinforces the argument that Islamic Religious Education curriculum planning needs to be directed towards a value-based approach of justice and maqashid sharia that emphasizes the protection of human dignity and social justice (M. Nejati, 2023).

Islamic Religious Education Learning Practices and the Dynamics of Gender Responsiveness in the Classroom

At the implementation level, the results of the study show that Islamic Religious Education learning practices have displayed several initial indicators of gender responsiveness, such as the use of relatively inclusive language and providing opportunities for male and female students to participate. However, these practices are still technical in nature and do not yet reflect a profound pedagogical transformation. Learning is still dominated by lecture and memorization methods, so that pedagogical interactions are one-way and there is minimal critical dialogue.

This condition is in line with the findings of (Andi Al Muhammad Ardiansyah, et.al, 2024) and (Anwar, 2017), which state that religious education in elementary schools is still stuck in the traditional pedagogical paradigm. Teachers act as the sole source of truth, while students are positioned as passive recipients. In this context, efforts toward gender responsiveness tend to be limited to superficial aspects, such as language and the distribution of speaking opportunities, without addressing the substance of power relations in the classroom (Permadi, Rabbi, Wajihan, Najah, & Gustian, 2026).

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy offers an alternative perspective by emphasizing education as a dialogical process and praxis of liberation. According to Bolin (2017), liberating education must enable students to read their social reality critically (*reading the world*), not just read texts (*reading the word*). The finding of a low frequency of critical dialogue related to social and gender issues shows that Islamic Religious Education learning has not functioned as a space for such critical praxis.

The lack of critical dialogue also shows teachers' concerns in linking religious education with contemporary social issues. Gender issues are often perceived as sensitive topics or outside the realm of religious education. In fact, many values of justice, equality, and respect for human dignity are normatively in line with Islamic teachings. The reluctance to raise this issue creates a gap between religious teachings and the social reality of students.

(Corbett & Guilherme, 2021) assert that without a critical pedagogical approach, education has the potential to become a tool for reproducing dominant ideologies. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this means that non-critical learning can unconsciously reinforce gender biases that are already established in society. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education learning practices need to be directed towards more dialogical, contextual, and reflective pedagogical strategies so that gender justice values are not only taught but also experienced by students in the learning process.

Teachers' Perceptions and the Islamic Religious Education Learning Evaluation System

The findings show that Islamic Education teachers generally have normative awareness of the importance of justice and gender equality. However, this awareness has not been fully internalized in teaching practices and evaluation systems. This indicates a gap between teachers' normative knowledge and pedagogical competence.

Teachers' limited understanding of critical pedagogy is one of the main factors hindering learning transformation. As stated by (Taufiqurrohman et al., 2024), strengthening critical perspectives in religious education is highly dependent on teachers' reflective capacity. Without adequate training, teachers tend to reproduce the learning patterns they have experienced before, even though they conceptually understand the importance of gender justice.

The Islamic Education learning evaluation system, which still focuses on cognitive aspects, also shows inconsistencies between the normative objectives of Islamic education and assessment practices in the field. Evaluations that only measure memorization and conceptual understanding have the potential to neglect the dimensions of attitude, values, and critical awareness of students (Aslihah & Wasehudin, 2023; Hasan, Mujahidin, Azizah, & Solechan, 2024). In critical pedagogy, evaluation should be understood as a reflective process that encourages students to understand their position in the social structure and develop transformative attitudes (Giroux, 2021).

The lack of gender-based evaluation indicators shows that the assessment system has not been designed as part of the emancipation process, even though evaluation actually plays a strategic role in shaping learning orientation (Kabalmay, Rahmadewi, Aziz, & Tantawi, 2025; Shobihah, 2025). When evaluation only assesses cognitive aspects, teachers and students will prioritize memorization over critical reflection. Therefore, reformulating the evaluation system is an important step in the effort to transform Islamic Education to be gender-responsive (Mustikamah, Na'imah, & Qutsiyah, 2025; Sholihah, Sunanto, Afifuddin, & Salik, 2026; Sholihah, Syaputra, Seenaa, & Ismawati, 2026).

Overall, this discussion shows that gender responsiveness in Islamic Religious Education cannot be achieved solely through content changes, but requires comprehensive structural and pedagogical transformation. The integration of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy provides a relevant conceptual and practical framework for making Islamic Religious Education a means of forming critical awareness, gender justice, and human liberation (Brata et al., 2025). The findings of this study reinforce the urgency of developing Islamic Religious Education that is not only normative but also transformative and contextual in responding to contemporary social challenges.

Gender Responsiveness in the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum from the Perspective of Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy

Reading the research findings through the lens of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy shows that the main problem with gender responsiveness in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum lies not only in the content of the teaching materials, but also in the power relations at work in the educational process. The findings that gender issues only appear implicitly in the curriculum, that learning practices are still dominated by lecture methods, and that evaluation focuses on memorization indicate that the educational model that has developed is still close to what Freire calls *the banking model of education*, namely education that positions students as passive recipients of knowledge (İlhan et al., 2025). In this model, learners are not encouraged to engage in critical dialogue, social reflection, and praxis, so that awareness of gender injustice never really grows (Corah, Riawarda, & Hisbullah, 2025).

Within the framework of critical pedagogy, education should be a space for fostering *critical consciousness*, which is the ability of students to reflectively read social realities and act to transform them. If the findings of this study indicate a lack of critical dialogue on social and gender issues in Islamic Religious Education, then this signifies that the process of forming critical consciousness has not yet taken place. Religious education tends to focus more on cognitive and normative aspects, without accompanying processes of problematization regarding the structures of injustice experienced in daily life (Craig et al., 2023). As a result, gender bias is not only failed to be corrected, but can even be reproduced through religious discourse that is conveyed in an ahistorical manner.

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy approach also emphasizes that education must be dialogical, placing teachers and students as subjects who learn together through a process of reflection and action (*praxis*). Findings about the dominance of lecture methods, the lack of class discussion, and the limited critical participation of students indicate that pedagogical relations in Islamic Education classes are still hierarchical. In this relationship, teachers are positioned as the owners of truth, while students are merely recipients. This type of relationship does not provide space for women or men to articulate their experiences related to gender justice issues. In fact, from Freire's perspective, marginalized voices must be raised as part of the process of liberation through education (Nelson & Chen, 2023).

Through the perspective of critical pedagogy, gender responsiveness in the Islamic Education curriculum is understood not merely as the insertion of material on male and female equality, but rather as a comprehensive reconstruction of the religious education paradigm. The curriculum needs to be designed to encourage students to examine their social experiences, including experiences of gender inequality, as realities that need to be critiqued and changed (Fuad, Basyirah, & Khuluqo, 2024; Isnaeni, Budiman, Nurjaya, & Mukhlisin, 2025). Learning practices need to shift from lectures to dialogue, reflective discussion, case studies, and experience-based learning. Similarly, learning evaluations need to measure critical thinking skills, social sensitivity, and gender-equitable attitudes, not just memorization of religious texts. In this way, Islamic Religious Education can fulfill its emancipatory function of " , " as emphasized by Freire and other critical pedagogical thinkers (Shih, 2018).

Thus, Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy approach not only serves as a lens for analyzing the findings of this study, but also offers a transformative direction for the development of a gender-responsive Islamic Education curriculum. The integration of this perspective enables religious education to shift from an indoctrinative pattern to an

emancipatory dialogical pattern that builds students' critical awareness of justice, equality, and humanity. This also confirms the contribution of this research to the development of Islamic education studies that are not only normative, but also critical and transformative.

CONCLUSION

This study found that gender responsiveness in the curriculum and teaching of Islamic Religious Education in Islamic elementary schools is not entirely absent, but is present implicitly, partially, and unconsciously as part of a planned pedagogical strategy. A rather surprising finding is the gap between teachers' normative awareness of the values of justice and equality in Islam and the actual implementation of the curriculum and teaching practices. Although most teachers understand that Islam upholds the principle of gender justice, this understanding has not been systematically articulated in curriculum planning, teaching material selection, teaching strategies, or evaluation systems. Gender issues are often perceived as additional themes outside the substance of Islamic Religious Education, so that religious learning has the potential to unconsciously reproduce gender bias. These findings can only be revealed through field research that combines document analysis, classroom observation, and in-depth interviews.

Scientifically, this study not only confirms previous findings on the existence of gender bias in Islamic education, but also broadens the analytical perspective by integrating Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy as a theoretical and analytical framework. This study challenges the view that positions gender issues solely as teaching content issues, by showing that the root of the problem lies in the curriculum structure, pedagogical relationships, and learning evaluation orientation. Thus, this study contributes the perspective that the transformation of gender-responsive Islamic Religious Education requires a critical pedagogy approach that places religious education as a praxis of liberation and critical consciousness formation, not merely the transmission of normative teachings. The integration of curriculum analysis, learning practices, and teachers' pedagogical awareness contributes conceptually and methodologically to the development of critical Islamic education studies.

This study has a number of limitations that need to be considered when reading and following up on the findings. The research was only conducted in the context of Islamic elementary schools with limited cases and locations, so the results cannot be generalized broadly. In addition, variations in education levels, student characteristics, and differences in social contexts were not the focus of the study. From a methodological perspective, this study used a qualitative field study approach, a , so it did not accommodate quantitative analysis with a larger sample size. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted by involving more diverse school contexts, different levels of education, and a mixed-method approach in order to obtain a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding. With a broader and stronger basis of findings, the formulation of gender-responsive and effective Islamic Religious Education curriculum policies can be carried out more accurately and sustainably.

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