

Gender Mainstreaming in the Policy of Islamic Boarding School Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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article information	Abstract
Submitted: 2024-11-03 Revised: 2025-06-09 Published: 2025-06-23	Pesantren education plays a vital role in shaping religious understanding and thought patterns, including on the issue of gender mainstreaming. This study aims to explore how gender influences pesantren education policy, particularly in relation to gender mainstreaming efforts. Using a qualitative approach with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, the study draws on literature sourced from Publish or Perish, ERIC, and Google Scholar. A total of 64 relevant articles, published between 2013 and 2023, were identified and analyzed. The review investigates key issues related to gender mainstreaming within the political landscape of pesantren education policy. The literature reviewed reveals diverse perspectives, especially from Islamic feminist scholars, who attempt to unpack the complexities surrounding gender roles in Islamic educational institutions. Findings indicate that gender mainstreaming in pesantren is a multifaceted challenge shaped by cultural, religious, and political influences. These factors significantly affect both policy formulation and practical implementation in pesantren settings. By synthesizing different viewpoints, the study offers a deeper understanding of the intersection between gender and pesantren education. It also highlights strategies for more effective integration of gender perspectives into educational policy. This research is particularly relevant for the development of inclusive pesantren education systems that promote gender equality. It provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, academics, and other stakeholders committed to advancing gender mainstreaming within Islamic education in Indonesia.
Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming, Islamic Boarding School Education, Policy	

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren is the oldest and most influential Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, playing a key role not only in transmitting religious knowledge but also in shaping the social and cultural values of Muslim society (Sadali, 2020). One major educational strategy today is gender mainstreaming, which integrates gender justice into all educational policies and programs (Ramadhina & Retnowulandari, 2025). The Indonesian government has supported this through policies such as Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 on Gender Mainstreaming. However, implementation often remains administrative and fails to transform institutional culture or power dynamics (Muhia & Abuya, 2024). Effective strategies include conducting internal gender audits, adopting gender-based budgeting and planning, enhancing staff capacity through training, and establishing grievance mechanisms for violence or discrimination. At the pesantren level, these

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principles remain under-implemented. Data from the Ministry of Religion (2023) show that although 43% of pesantren students are women, female leadership is minimal, and gender-integrated curricula are rare (Mesaroh, 2024). Additionally, the dominance of classical texts like the yellow book, which often reflect patriarchal interpretations of Islamic law, perpetuates gender-biased views (Halik, 2016), contributing to institutionalized gender inequality within Islamic boarding schools.

Gender mainstreaming in pesantren (Islamic boarding school) education remains a complex issue shaped by deeply rooted cultural, religious, and institutional barriers. Although pesantren have the potential to be transformative institutions, they are often governed by traditional views that restrict women's roles. Teachers, for example, may still believe that higher education is unnecessary for women (Jahidi, 2004). As a subculture within Indonesian Islam, pesantren strongly influence religious and social norms (Van Bruinessen, 1999; Krisdiyanto et al., 2019), yet this influence has not consistently resulted in gender-inclusive practices. Legal recognition through Law No. 20 of 2003 has sparked debate due to unclear implementation and limited government support (Wathoni, 2020; Badrudin et al., 2018). Gender disparities persist—from low female student participation and underrepresentation among teachers to classroom biases favoring male students (Amasari, 2005; Hermina, 2015). Despite frameworks like Permendiknas No. 84/2008 and the MDGs 2025 vision (Nurjanah et al., 2022; Azmy & Pertiwi, 2021), implementation within pesantren is inconsistent. Therefore, a systematic literature review is essential to map existing research, reveal policy gaps, and assess gender mainstreaming in pesantren education.

The importance of gender mainstreaming to be applied in various sectors of life, one of which is in the education sector, which is the spearhead in providing awareness and learning for human beings. The implementation of gender mainstreaming is regulated in Permendiknas Number 84 of 2008 concerning guidelines for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in education especially the relationship between men and women (Nurjanah et al., 2022). (Ana Sabhana Azmy And Fini Pertiwi, ", 2021). Gender inequality and the traditional roles of each gender have taken root in the thinking of Indonesian society, and culture and religion are the biggest obstacles (Hermina, 2015). In nation building, gender equality and justice are also one of the eight important points in the 2025 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) development plan, namely achieving basic education for all with the aim that by 2025 all children, both boys and girls, can receive basic education, promote gender equality and women's empowerment with the aim of eliminating all forms of gender disparity in primary and secondary education in Year 2025.

Studies on gender mainstreaming have been conducted by previous researchers but with different focuses than this study. Rashdi (2024) and Mohd Nor et al., (2024) explored strategies to address gender gaps in educational access. Satria Buana et al. (2021) examined women's participation in Islamic education in Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, especially in leadership roles. Muluk (2014) found gender disparities in educational participation between male and female students at the national level, including in PTKI and ma'had aly institutions. Srimulyani (2007) noted that women still face difficulties accessing equal opportunities in schools and society, including Islamic boarding schools. Efforts to mainstream gender in education are supported by regulations such as Permen PPPA No. 11 (2010) and guidelines from Pokja PUG (2004), aiming to expand educational access. However, this study focuses on how pesantren education still limits female participation due to cultural norms and interpretations of classical Islamic texts (yellow books). While existing studies are mostly descriptive and cultural in approach, systematic reviews on policy formulation, actors, political dynamics, and challenges in implementing gender mainstreaming in pesantren remain scarce and underexplored.

This study aims to systematically examine how gender influences policy development within Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), with a particular focus on the integration of gender

mainstreaming principles. The objectives of this research are threefold: (1) to analyze how gender issues are represented and addressed within pesantren education policies; (2) to identify the key stakeholders, institutional actors, and political dynamics that shape policy formulation and implementation; and (3) to map existing gaps in research and provide recommendations for future gender-equitable policy development in pesantren education. By conducting a systematic literature review, this research seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to the advancement of inclusive Islamic education. It is hypothesized that despite the presence of formal gender mainstreaming frameworks, their implementation in pesantren education remains limited due to entrenched patriarchal values, lack of policy awareness, and insufficient institutional support. Consequently, the integration of gender equality into pesantren policies is often inconsistent and superficial.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative research with a type of systematic literature review of research. Method *Literature Review* (SLR) is a systematic way to collect, critically evaluate, integrate and present findings from various research studies based on research questions of interest (Anam et al., 2019). The purpose of this research requires comprehensive and systematic data, be it data in the form of journal articles, theses, or dissertations, which discuss gender mainstreaming through policy politics in pesantren education. The use of the systematic literature review method in this study is an ideal thing (Purssell & McCrae, 2020). The data of this research was obtained from various literature, both in the form of research articles and books that are relevant to two source references. This article is compiled based on a critical and comprehensive literature review, published with a high credibility index through publication and perish, ERIC, and Google Scholar for the period 2013-2023, and secondary reference sources in the form of textbooks. Keywords gender mainstreaming, gender equality policy politics, pesantren education, implementation of gender mainstreaming in pesantren education policy.

The data analysis process in this study follows several key steps: (1) Formulating the research problem, specifically focusing on how gender influences Islamic boarding school (pesantren) education and the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming within educational policy; (2) Conducting a comprehensive search for relevant scholarly articles; (3) Screening the literature based on alignment with the research topic; (4) Developing categorization and coding instruments; (5) Analyzing and interpreting the collected data; and (6) Drawing conclusions based on the findings (Xiao & Watson, 2019). The identification and selection of journal articles were guided by the PRISMA framework to ensure methodological rigor in the systematic review process (Page et al., 2021).

In this study, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure relevance and minimize selection bias in the systematic review. The inclusion criteria consist of articles that specifically examine gender mainstreaming policies within the context of pesantren education, are published in scholarly journals or indexed conference proceedings, written in either Indonesian or English, and published between 2013 and 2023. Conversely, exclusion criteria include studies that do not address gender mainstreaming or pesantren education, are only available as abstracts or not fully accessible, are irrelevant to the Indonesian context, or fail to meet methodological quality standards. Following article selection, the process continues with data extraction, where essential information such as methodology, findings, and key variables is collected. This is followed by coding, where data is categorized into relevant themes such as women's roles in pesantren, policy implementation, and encountered challenges. Finally, a thematic or narrative qualitative analysis is conducted, often using tools like NVivo or ATLAS.ti to identify patterns and insights related to the research focus.

To ensure the validity and reliability of literature data in a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), several steps are undertaken. First, the quality of each study is assessed using standardized tools such as the CASP or EPHPP checklist. The selection process is transparently documented using the PRISMA flowchart. To reduce bias, more than one assessor is involved in both selection and quality assessment. Additionally, reasons for including or excluding studies are carefully documented. In presenting results, findings and discussion are separated for clarity. The findings highlight data analysis results, such as trends in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in pesantren and its educational impact. The discussion section interprets these findings, linking them to the research questions, identifying challenges in policy implementation, and offering recommendations for practice and future research.

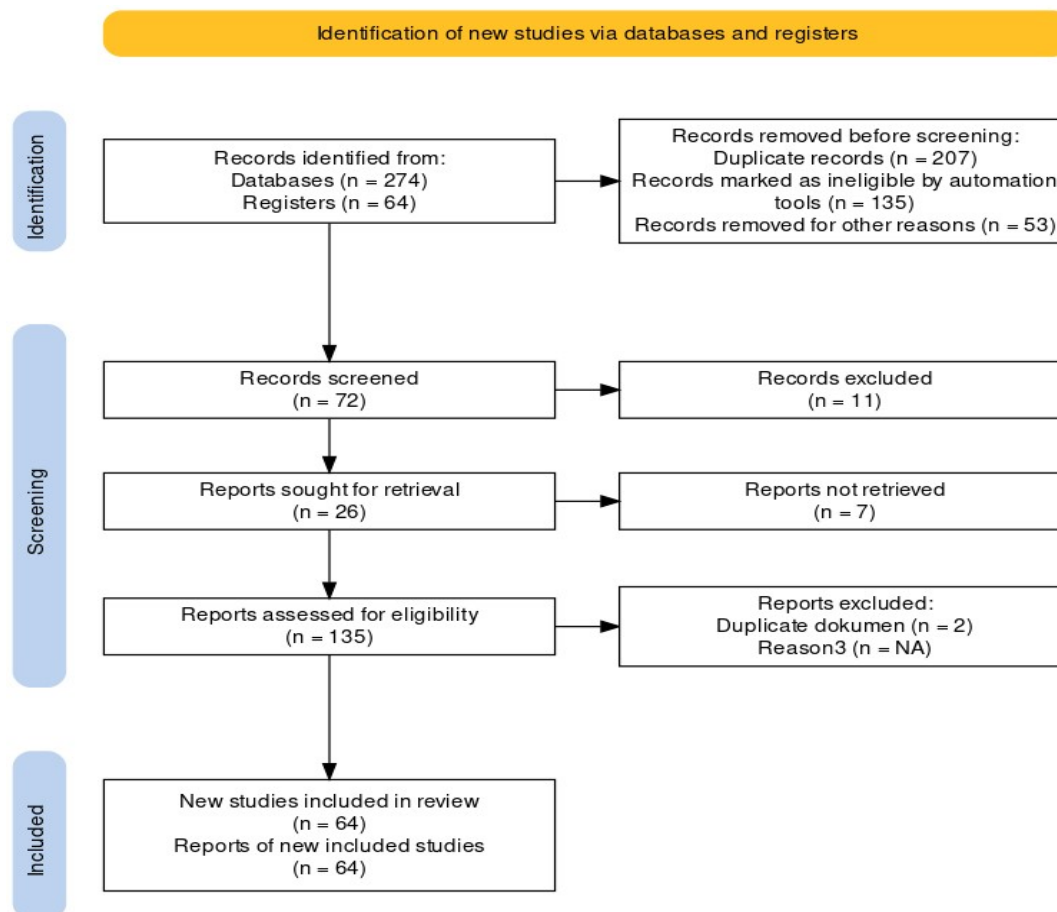


Figure 1. Flow diagram PRISMA Results of Gender Mainstreaming Publication 2013-2023

Figure 1 illustrates the PRISMA-guided selection process for this systematic review. The identification phase involved retrieving 274 documents from databases such as Publish or Perish, ERIC, and Google Scholar, focusing on gender mainstreaming in pesantren education. After removing 207 irrelevant or duplicate articles, 64 remained for further screening. In the filtering stage, these articles were reviewed based on titles and abstracts to assess relevance. Duplicate entries across databases were also eliminated. The eligibility stage followed, where the remaining articles were evaluated against predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that failed to meet these criteria were excluded. Ultimately, a final selection of eligible articles was included in the systematic review. These selected studies were then subjected to content analysis, and the results were interpreted in relation to the research questions, ensuring a thorough and methodical approach to data synthesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Gender Mainstreaming in Islamic Boarding School Education Policy

The policy structure and leadership of Islamic boarding schools are still dominated by men, there is no equality in the strategic distribution of women's roles (Thubatussalamah et al., 2024). Gender-related policies are generally still normative, containing only inclusive terms without clear operational indicators or monitoring mechanisms. The level of gender literacy among caregivers and students is still low (Jauhari & Thowaf, 2019). The understanding of gender issues is still tied to conservative interpretations of texts, which have the potential to perpetuate stereotypes of gender roles (Iwandri, W., 2023). Although there are several positive initiatives from Islamic boarding schools led by progressive figures (Billahi, S., & Thaha, I., 2018), these successes tend to be sporadic and not nationally standardized. The lack of specific regulations regarding gender in the pesantren education system is also a significant obstacle (Muafiah, 2013). Without a firm legal umbrella, the application of the principle of gender equality is only voluntary and non-binding. Overall, the results show that gender mainstreaming in Islamic boarding schools is still at the surface level and requires a systemic, regulative, and literacy-based approach to be applied comprehensively and sustainably. Women have considered that education can empower a good life in a career in choosing a profession that comes from a middle-income country, including Islamic boarding school educational institutions (Samarakoon & Parinduri, 2015). Some of the findings that need to be formulated are as follows:

Table 1. Findings on Gender Mainstreaming Issues in Islamic Boarding Schools

No	Findings	Description	References
1	Gender Inequality in Leadership Structures	Pesantren leadership remains male-dominated, with women largely occupying administrative roles. Gender mainstreaming has not significantly impacted formal structural levels.	Erviana (2021); Ardhanariswari & Haryanto (2021)
2	Gender Policies Remain Normative and Symbolic	Many pesantren policies mention inclusivity but lack technical steps, indicators, or evaluation tools. Without these elements, the policies remain merely symbolic.	Alfirdaus (2019)
3	Low Gender Literacy Among Caregivers and Students	Many pesantren leaders misunderstand gender equality, equating it with going against nature. They fail to distinguish between gender as a social construct and biological roles.	Erviana (2021); Azmy & Pertiwi (2021)
4	Gender-Responsive Practices Depend on Individual Leaders	Some pesantren show good gender-responsive practices, but these rely heavily on progressive leaders. Sustainable transformation should be institutional, not personality-driven.	Arrizal et al. (2025); Nurhayati (2012)
5	Absence of Specific Regulations on Gender in Pesantren Education	The Islamic Boarding School Law No. 18 of 2019 does not explicitly address gender equality or protection for female students. Technical guidelines on gender mainstreaming are needed in religious education policies.	Kamila & Wahjono (2024)

Overall, this systematic review highlights that gender mainstreaming in pesantren education continues to face significant structural, cultural, and regulatory obstacles. Institutional leadership remains male-dominated, and efforts toward gender equality often lack technical depth and implementation. Therefore, there is an urgent need to develop supportive institutional, regulatory, and cultural frameworks that promote gender equality while aligning with Islamic values. Schech and Mustafa (2010) explain that Indonesia adopted gender mainstreaming policies after the 1997–98 monetary crisis. Simultaneously, Adams (2007) notes the rise of conservative Islamic groups seeking to reinforce dominant Islamic norms, complicating gender advocacy. Furthermore, the global context after the 9/11 attacks and U.S. interventions in Muslim countries intensified anti-

Western sentiment, influencing Islamic political discourse. As a result, governments and women's organizations must approach gender policy sensitively, ensuring it is not perceived as a Western-imposed agenda but rather a contextual, locally rooted initiative aligned with national values and religious principles.

The results of this systematic review indicate that gender mainstreaming in pesantren education policies remains limited and inconsistently applied. Most pesantren lack institutional structures that enable proportional female participation in decision-making. Leadership roles such as caregivers and policy makers are still dominated by men, even in pesantren with a high number of female students. Although policy documents often mention "gender equality" or "inclusive education," they rarely include clear implementation strategies, indicators, or evaluation mechanisms. Consequently, gender mainstreaming tends to be symbolic, with little practical effect. Furthermore, gender literacy among caregivers, teachers, and students remains low, with many still viewing women's roles as limited to the domestic sphere. Progressive practices do exist but are typically dependent on individual leaders and lack systemic support. The absence of specific gender equality provisions in the Islamic Boarding School Law further contributes to the perception that gender mainstreaming is optional, not a formal obligation within the pesantren education system.

Islamic Boarding School Education Policy in Indonesia

The enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 marked a significant step in recognizing pesantren as part of Indonesia's national education system. However, from a gender mainstreaming perspective, this regulation remains general and does not explicitly incorporate gender equality principles into its design or implementation. While the government supports strengthening pesantren institutions, equal roles for men and women in leadership and curriculum development have not been a central concern. A systematic literature review shows that efforts toward gender equality in pesantren remain sporadic and heavily reliant on the commitment of progressive leaders. In the absence of a firm policy framework and measurable gender indicators, pesantren risk preserving patriarchal norms that restrict women's roles. Therefore, pesantren education policy must be restructured to integrate gender perspectives holistically—through national legislation, curriculum reform, and inclusive leadership. Only by institutionalizing gender equality can pesantren contribute meaningfully to the creation of just and inclusive Islamic education in Indonesia.

Since the enactment of Law No. 18 of 2019, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have gained official recognition as part of Indonesia's national education system, with functions in education, da'wah, and community empowerment. This policy legitimizes pesantren and entitles them to state funding, marking a milestone in integrating pesantren into the national education framework while preserving their Islamic and local values. However, challenges remain, particularly regarding equitable access, curriculum relevance, and institutional capacity—especially in remote areas where state support is still limited. The modernization agenda also raises concerns about eroding traditional pesantren values. Therefore, future policies must balance national education standards with pesantren autonomy. Simultaneously, Indonesia's Gender Inequality Index (0.494) and disparities in human development between men (0.706) and women (0.655) underscore the urgency of gender mainstreaming (PUG). This has become a government priority in human development, supported by various regulations that reflect a commitment to addressing persistent gender inequality.

Referring to Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 7 of 1984 concerning the Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (*Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women*) which in its explanation it is stated that the content of the convention is in accordance with the 1945 Constitution which stipulates that "all citizens are equal to their position in law and government". This is in harmony because the

legislation adheres to the principle of equality between men and women (PKWG UI, 2007). Furthermore, in Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 concerning Gender Mainstreaming in National Development, it is explained that "gender mainstreaming is a strategy built to integrate gender into an integral dimension of planning, drafting, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating national development policies and programs(Pokja PUG Central, 2004)

The above legal umbrella is part of the strategic and systematic efforts made by the government to create gender equality and justice in all government sectors up to the hierarchy that is most demographically close to the community, namely the Regent/Mayor. The parameters of development success today are seen from the human development index (HDI) one of the indicators of which is the gender development index (IPG) which includes health, economic, educational and also political aspects, these developments are as shown in the following table:

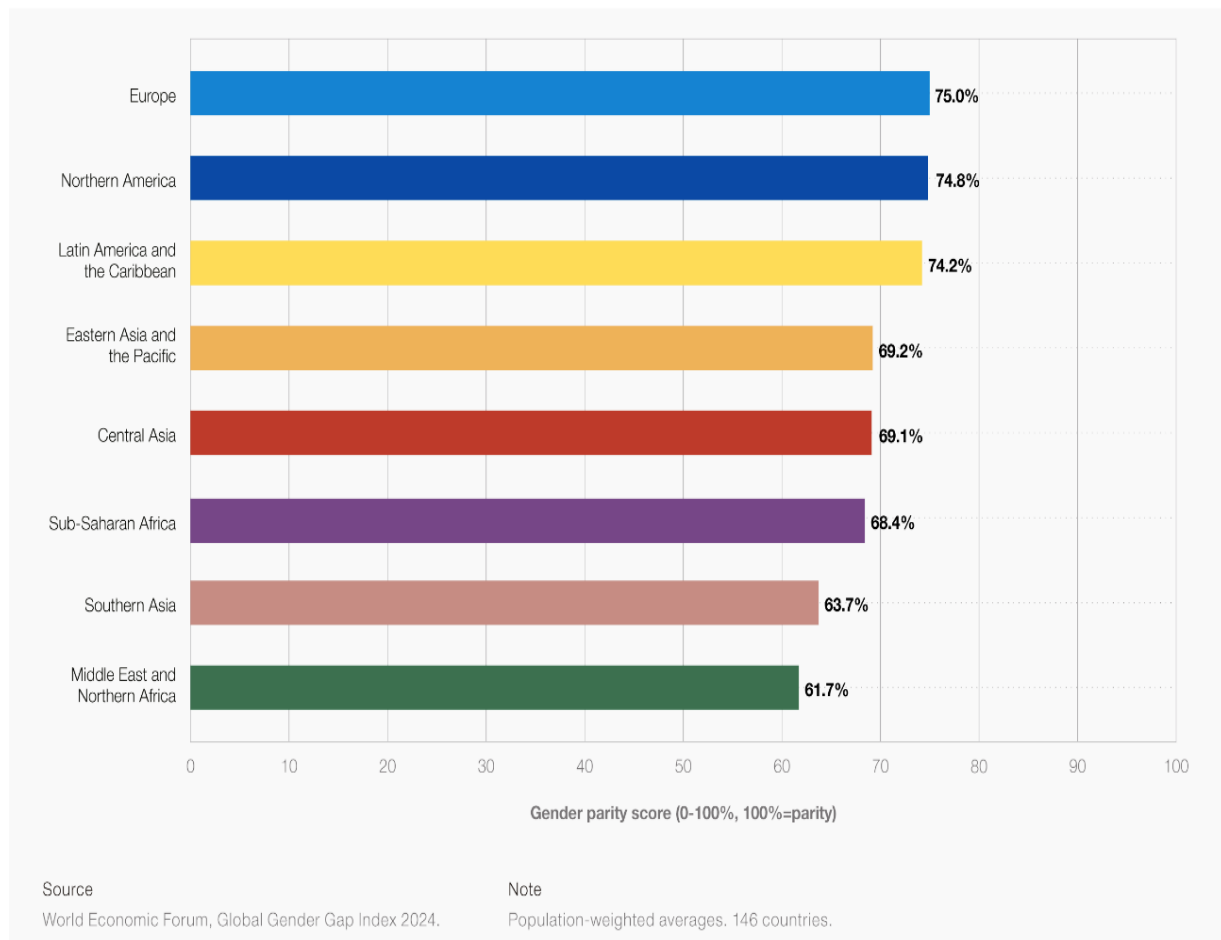


Figure 2. Gender Gap closed to date, by Region

Global Gender Gap Report 2024 published by the World Economic Forum. The report provides an overview of gender gaps in different countries based on four main dimensions: economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.

Table 2 Global Gender Gap Index 2024

Rank	Country	Gender Parity Score (%)
1	Iceland	90.8
2	Finland	86.3
3	Norway	85.9
4	New Zealand	85.6
5	Sweden	81.5
6	Germany	81.5

7	Namibia	80.2
8	Belgium	79.6
9	Lithuania	80.0
10	Ireland	79.5

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2024, World Economic Forum

The data from the Global Gender Gap Index 2024 highlights that countries leading in gender parity—such as Iceland, Finland, and Norway—consistently achieve high scores above 85%, reflecting their strong institutional commitment to gender equality across sectors like education, health, economic participation, and political empowerment. Notably, the dominance of Nordic countries suggests that long-standing policies promoting welfare, inclusive governance, and equal opportunities significantly contribute to narrowing gender gaps. The presence of Namibia in the top 10 also indicates that high gender parity is not exclusive to high-income or Western countries, but is attainable with deliberate national strategies, even in different socio-economic contexts. However, despite these achievements, no country has yet reached full gender parity (100%), underscoring that even the most progressive nations still face challenges in achieving absolute equality. This data serves as a critical benchmark for countries like Indonesia, whose gender gap remains substantial, to learn from global best practices and intensify efforts toward structural and policy reforms that support gender equity.

Table 3: GII and GDI 2025

Yes	Country	GI 2025	GDI 2025	HDI 2025
1	Singapore	0.088	0.985	0.912
2	Malaysia	0.209	0.947	0.795
3	Thailand	0.380	1.000	0.726
4	Indonesia	0.421	0.927	0.706
5	Philippines	0.420	0.977	0.664

The Gender Inequality Index (GI) measures gender disparities across three main dimensions: reproductive health (e.g., maternal mortality and teen births), empowerment (such as women’s representation in parliament and higher education), and labor force participation. A lower GI score indicates less gender inequality. For instance, Singapore scores impressively low at 0.088, reflecting strong female integration across education, employment, and politics. Meanwhile, Indonesia (0.421) and the Philippines (0.420) still grapple with significant challenges, particularly in political representation and reproductive health. Thailand (0.380) and Malaysia (0.209) occupy middle positions, with varying performance in political and strategic female leadership. The Gender Development Index (GDI) compares the Human Development Index (HDI) between men and women. A score close to 1 signifies greater gender parity. Thailand (1.000) shows complete parity, while Indonesia (0.927) and the Philippines (0.977) still exhibit gaps, particularly in income and higher education access. Singapore (0.985) approaches full parity. In terms of HDI, which evaluates health, education, and living standards, Singapore leads the region (0.912), followed by Malaysia (0.795), Thailand (0.726), Indonesia (0.706), and the Philippines (0.664), suggesting that Indonesia and the Philippines still face considerable development challenges.

The results of the analysis based on the above data Singapore consistently excelled in all indicators, making it a regional model in terms of gender equality and human development. Meanwhile, Indonesia and the Philippines still face considerable gender inequality, especially in terms of women's empowerment and access to basic services. Thailand displays high gender equality according to GDI, but HDI and GI reveal that women have not fully gained equal opportunities in non-economic aspects. Malaysia is in a position to transition towards a better balance, especially in terms of women's education and health. This condition affects the development of Indonesia, where women are also part of citizens who must be empowered and

have equal access, especially in the field of education. Current development is directed at the development of policies, programs, and projects specifically designed to promote gender equality, especially for women. There is a need to review the concepts underlying this policy approach (Setiadi and Kolip, 2011).

Indonesia's human development will be better and can compete with other countries. The seriousness of the Indonesian government can be seen from regulations that focus on gender mainstreaming in the education sector. This can be seen in 2010, the Minister of State for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia stipulated the Regulation of the Minister of State for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia Number 11 of 2010 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in Madrasah of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (Permen of the Republic of Indonesia, 2010). This is based on mapping the situation, conditions and learning processes and community participation, there is still a gender gap, so there is a need for gender mainstreaming in the madrasah environment, namely Islamic boarding schools.

This regulation is considered strategic in addressing the gender gap in education, particularly when analyzing the root causes. First, public perception often disadvantages girls. Culturally, boys are viewed as future breadwinners, making their education a priority with the expectation of securing jobs aligned with their qualifications. In contrast, girls are seen primarily as future housewives, making their pursuit of higher education seem unnecessary in the eyes of many. Second, educational policies often adopt a neutral stance, not accounting for gender disparities. While this may seem inclusive, it fails to support women who are already marginalized due to cultural norms and lack of institutional encouragement to pursue education. Third, government-issued educational access often does not reach remote areas. In such regions, where resources are scarce, families tend to prioritize boys' education while directing girls toward income-generating activities instead of school, due to the associated costs (Subiyantoro, 2005).

Steps that must be taken to eliminate the gender gap become open with the support of national and international commitments in realizing gender and child equality and justice in the field of education. The Government of Indonesia has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in Law No. 7 of 1984. Thus, the government is consistent and has a clear policy to realize gender equality and justice. The Beijing Declaration and The Platform for Action 1996 (Gender Education and Development, International Centre of The ILO) expressly states that: "education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education will benefit both women and men, which in turn will facilitate equality in the relationship between women and adult men in the wider society (Dilli et al., 2018).

From the above presentation, Gender Mainstreaming in the education sector at all levels, including training programs carried out, through various programs/policies, needs to be implemented immediately considering that education is a need for both men and women. In some of the implementation of training and education activities, the initial phenomenon of gender problems in general can be seen in the proportion and type of programs, activities, and certain types of subjects in Islamic boarding schools that are still dominated by men or women. Based on a review of the articles submitted, several key findings were found related to gender mainstreaming in Islamic boarding school education policies, *First* The Role of Kiai in Gender Mainstreaming. Kiai has a central role in the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies in Islamic boarding schools. Second, limited access and opportunities for students often have limited access to activities outside the pesantren and lack the opportunity to perform in public spaces. Third, the implementation of the curriculum with a gender perspective. Some Islamic boarding schools have redesigned the curriculum by incorporating a gender perspective. Fourth, challenges in the Implementation of

Gender Mainstreaming, despite efforts to implement gender mainstreaming, challenges such as lack of understanding of the importance of gender in education, as well as resistance to change from some quarters, are still significant obstacles.

Discussion

Structural Challenges in Integrating Gender Mainstreaming into Pesantren Education Policy

The integration of gender mainstreaming into pesantren education policy remains structurally weak. Although Law No. 18 of 2019 legally positions pesantren within the national education framework, it lacks explicit provisions that mandate gender equality in areas such as leadership, curriculum content, and institutional governance. Rosa and Clavero (2021) argue that such legal gaps contribute to the persistence of institutional structures that overlook gender equity. Consequently, pesantren continue to reproduce patriarchal norms, with men occupying most strategic positions, while women—despite often being the majority of students—are underrepresented in decision-making roles (Ridwan & Susanti, 2019). This situation reflects what O'Mullane (2021) describes as institutional embedding of gender inequalities, where both formal regulations and informal practices perpetuate discrimination. Gender perspectives, according to O'Mullane, are frequently treated as symbolic gestures—appearing in official documents but lacking real implementation. Similarly, Gupta et al. (2023) emphasize that without integrating gender considerations across all stages of policymaking—from planning and budgeting to monitoring and evaluation—gender mainstreaming efforts risk reinforcing, rather than challenging, existing inequities. Therefore, without structural reforms that genuinely incorporate gender analysis, pesantren education policy will likely continue to reflect and reinforce gendered hierarchies.

Second, structural barriers in implementing gender mainstreaming in pesantren stem from the absence of clear guidelines and monitoring systems. Son Hing et al. (2023) emphasize that organizational frameworks often fail to systematically address gender inequities without formal guidance. Although the Ministry of Religious Affairs holds institutional authority, it has not provided technical directives to translate gender goals into actionable plans. According to the World Health Organization (2003), the lack of standardized tools hinders policy implementation. Most pesantren lack gender-responsive instruments, and educators receive minimal training on gender equality. Tabassum and Nayak (2021) observe that women's leadership roles are often tokenistic and depend on individual efforts rather than institutional will. Schech and Mustafa (2010) further argue that Indonesia's gender mainstreaming agenda has struggled against conservative religious norms. In pesantren, the perception of gender equality as a Western agenda intensifies resistance, rendering reform efforts both politically and culturally sensitive.

Finally, the broader socio-political context significantly shapes structural resistance to gender reform within pesantren education. According to Syeed (2014), while the post-reformasi era introduced gender equality policies, it also witnessed the rise of conservative Islamic movements that sought to reinforce traditional gender roles. These groups often frame gender discourse as contradictory to Islamic values, which contributes to selective and inconsistent implementation at the pesantren level. Öztürk (2023) highlights that this resistance is further exacerbated by the lack of strong leadership from state institutions in promoting gender-sensitive education within Islamic schools, resulting in fragmented practices—where some pesantren adopt progressive interpretations, while others maintain rigid patriarchal norms. Mulia (2005) stresses that meaningful gender reform requires systemic interventions, including the integration of gender-focused curricula, the revision of gender-biased teaching materials, and the empowerment of female religious scholars. Without a clear legal mandate and sustained engagement from key stakeholders, gender mainstreaming efforts risk remaining symbolic—preserving structural inequalities under the justification of tradition and religious orthodoxy.

Strategic Efforts to Eliminate Gender Bias in Islamic Education

Islam provides a robust theological and methodological basis that upholds justice and equality, offering a powerful platform to address gender bias in Islamic education. According to Mulia (2005), it is essential that both national and regional education policies explicitly support women's rights by ensuring equitable access and learning outcomes. Alshdiefat et al. (2014) argue that structural reforms are necessary, particularly in educational governance, by promoting women into strategic leadership roles such as principals, administrators, and school supervisors. In addition, curriculum reform is critical to eliminate content that reinforces patriarchal norms. Nandi et al. (2024) observe that many current textbooks continue to depict women in passive, domestic roles, thereby perpetuating harmful stereotypes. They advocate for educational materials that present men and women as equally active agents in the learning process. Furthermore, strengthening educator quality through gender sensitivity training and reforming the religious scholar cadre system—especially within institutions like the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI)—is vital. This, as emphasized by Mulia (2005), will ensure gender-responsive knowledge production and greater female participation in religious discourse.

Another essential strategy for advancing gender equality in Islamic education is the reconstruction of religious interpretations, particularly those concerning Qur'anic verses and hadiths that have historically been misread in a gender-biased manner. Mulia (2005) asserts that religious texts must be interpreted contextually and through a justice-oriented lens to prevent their misuse as tools of legitimizing inequality. In this regard, pesantren have a pivotal role and, as suggested by Haryanti et al. (2023), should become centers for promoting critical and gender-aware readings of Islamic teachings. Simultaneously, curriculum at both national and local levels must eliminate gender dichotomies and be realigned with principles of justice and equality. Vreuls et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of regionally responsive curriculum development to meet the distinct educational needs of various communities. In addition, Nganga and Kambutu (2024) highlight the value of women's empowerment through informal education—such as literacy centers and lifelong learning initiatives at local levels—which can provide continuous access to knowledge for women in rural areas, thereby enhancing their autonomy and civic participation.

Beyond educational reform, addressing structural gender inequality also necessitates the economic and political empowerment of women. Dahlum et al. (2022) emphasize that financial dependence remains a key factor in women's marginalization, highlighting the need for strategies that strengthen women's economic autonomy. In line with this, Balasubramanian et al. (2024) advocate for initiatives such as support for home-based industries and vocational training, which must be accompanied by improved access to markets and financial resources to ensure sustainable outcomes. On the political front, cultural narratives that associate politics exclusively with men continue to hinder women's participation. Mad Sa'i (2015) argues for the urgent need to redefine politics as a platform for ethical, peaceful engagement in decision-making processes rather than as a domain of dominance or conflict. Enhancing women's political literacy and leadership—both locally and nationally—can empower them to actively shape policy agendas. When integrated holistically across sectors—education, religion, economy, and governance—these efforts can help build a more inclusive and gender-equitable pesantren education system in Indonesia..

Institutional Barriers and Patriarchal Structures in Pesantren Education Policy

One of the persistent challenges in educational policy implementation is the assumption that education is a value-neutral field. Mifsud (2024) critiques this notion, arguing that education is, in fact, a social construct deeply influenced by prevailing societal norms and ideologies. In the same vein, Muthali'in (2001) highlights how dominant social constructions frequently position women as inherently subordinate, shaping the ways in which education systems are structured and delivered.

Taber (2024) emphasizes that schools, as formal institutions, are instrumental in either reinforcing or challenging these gendered constructions, as they significantly influence identity formation and social hierarchies. When such institutions unconsciously perpetuate gender bias, they contribute to various injustices, including marginalization, stereotyping, double burdens, and even systemic violence against women—a phenomenon that Fakihi (1996) identifies as deeply rooted in educational practice. Ananga (2021) further stresses that education, rather than serving as a transformative force, often upholds existing patriarchal roles unless actively challenged. Therefore, integrating a gender perspective at all levels of educational policy and practice is essential to dismantle these persistent inequalities..

The findings of this study confirm that pesantren education in Indonesia has yet to fully adopt the principles of gender mainstreaming in a comprehensive and systemic manner. Salim et al. (2025) observe that leadership positions in Islamic boarding schools remain overwhelmingly dominated by men, leaving limited space for women to participate in decision-making processes. This imbalance reflects what they identify as a deeply entrenched patriarchal culture within pesantren institutions. According to Wardana et al. (2023), institutions like pesantren not only reflect but also actively construct and reproduce gender inequalities through both formal governance structures and embedded cultural norms. While certain policy documents reference the importance of gender equality, Conzon (2023) argues that such commitments are often merely symbolic, lacking operational indicators and mechanisms for effective implementation. As a result, gender policies frequently fail to produce substantive change. Morgan et al. (2022) further emphasize that in the absence of structured monitoring and evaluation tools, the impact of gender-related programs remains difficult to assess. These shortcomings contribute to the marginalization of women in educational leadership, reinforcing the perception that their roles are secondary or supportive rather than equal and essential.

From a policy perspective, the lack of systemic integration of gender perspectives in pesantren education reveals a critical gap in governance. Kurdi (2023) and Salim (2024) note that pesantren policies rarely incorporate gender equality in a structured, institutionalized way. UN Women, as cited by Waal (2006), emphasizes that gender mainstreaming must be embedded across all policy stages—planning, implementation, and evaluation. Yet, many pesantren lack clear operational mechanisms to realize this vision. Jahidi (2004) warns that without concrete action and institutional support, gender justice risks remaining a rhetorical ideal. In this context, Mukhibat (2023) calls for stronger leadership from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to create gender-responsive frameworks. Mahfudh and Istiadah (2024) propose developing technical guidelines, providing regular gender training for educators, and implementing consistent monitoring systems. Advancing gender equality beyond moral discourse toward formal benchmarks of quality and accountability is vital to ensure that pesantren education aligns with modern principles of justice, equity, and inclusive development.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that gender mainstreaming in pesantren education policies remains ineffective and lacks comprehensive implementation. The key findings highlight the dominance of men in leadership roles and the minimal integration of gender equality principles within formal regulations and daily educational practices. One of the primary obstacles is the absence of clear mechanisms for implementation and evaluation, which hinders the realization of systemic gender equity in Islamic boarding schools. This structural gap is further compounded by the limited understanding and insufficient gender training among pesantren caregivers and educators. As a result, gender mainstreaming efforts tend to be symbolic—mentioned in documents but not translated into concrete institutional reforms. Without practical strategies and institutional

commitment, these initiatives have yet to bring about meaningful change, leaving patriarchal norms intact and women's roles in pesantren marginalized. To achieve transformative outcomes, gender perspectives must be embedded structurally, supported by training, monitoring, and inclusive leadership development.

The theoretical implications of this research reinforce the relevance of Gendered Organization Theory in the context of pesantren education. Faith-based institutions like pesantren not only reflect but also perpetuate patriarchal structures through their internal policies and daily practices. The findings underscore the urgency of applying gender mainstreaming principles in a more contextual and systematic manner to address the cultural and social barriers embedded in Islamic boarding schools. This suggests that gender mainstreaming cannot adopt a one-size-fits-all model but must consider local religious and cultural dynamics. Consequently, this research contributes to the refinement of gender theories by promoting approaches that are more responsive to specific socio-religious settings. It opens pathways for developing a contextualized framework of gender mainstreaming in faith-based educational institutions, particularly within the pesantren system.

Further research is recommended for policy practitioners, particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs and pesantren administrators, to develop clear and measurable technical guidelines on gender mainstreaming. These should include success indicators and sustainable monitoring mechanisms. Training and leadership empowerment programs for women in pesantren must also be intensified to foster structural change. Researchers are encouraged to conduct empirical studies using qualitative and quantitative methods to explore socio-cultural factors influencing the acceptance of gender mainstreaming in pesantren. This is essential for generating more applicable and contextual policy recommendations. This study has limitations, as it is based solely on a systematic literature review and does not incorporate direct field data. As a result, it may not fully capture the complex social and cultural dynamics surrounding gender issues in pesantren. Additionally, reliance on accessible online literature in Indonesian and English may narrow the scope of analysis. Broader empirical research is needed to obtain deeper and more grounded insights.

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