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## REALIZING GENDER EQUALITY IN BASIC EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: AN ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES, POLICIES, AND RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

**Faris Maulana**

Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia  
faris.maulana@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id

**Aristamia Sukma Ayuningtyas**

Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia  
aristamia.sukma.ayuningtyas@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id

**Sayidah Nabilah**

Universitas Islam Negeri K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, Indonesia  
sayidah.nabilah@mhs.uingusdur.ac.id

### **Abstract**

*This study comprehensively analyzes the implementation of gender equality in Indonesian basic education. Its objectives are to identify challenges, review relevant government policies, explore implemented best practices, and measure their impact on student character development and sustainable development achievements. The research method employs a qualitative approach, based on a comprehensive analysis of academic literature, research reports, and relevant government policy documents. Findings indicate that despite strong legal frameworks guaranteeing gender equality, implementation in basic education faces crucial challenges. These include gender bias in curriculum and teaching materials, discrimination in educational access exacerbated by economic and cultural factors, the pervasive influence of patriarchal culture, and a lack of teacher understanding regarding gender bias. However, programs like Gender-Responsive Schools (SRG) and non-formal education institutions (PKBM) demonstrate promising practices in addressing these challenges. The positive impacts observed include changes in student mindset and behavior (increased empathy and respect), enhanced female participation and confidence, and significant contributions to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In conclusion, while challenges persist, planned and collaborative interventions among government, schools, teachers, and parents are crucial for realizing fair and inclusive education for all children.*

**Keywords:** Basic Education, Challenges, Discrimination, Gender Equality, Impact,

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality is a fundamental issue that continues to be the focus of discussion and is upheld at the executive and legislative levels, indicating that this issue is not merely a social discourse, but has become a crucial political and legislative agenda in Indonesia (Komnas HAM, 2018). This commitment reflects the recognition of the importance of social justice and human rights as the main pillars of national development.

The concept of gender equality is rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

(CEDAW), which fundamentally refers to full equality between men and women to enjoy a full range of political, economic, civil, social, and cultural rights, without denial of access or deprivation of rights solely on the basis of their gender (Se, 2021). This understanding emphasizes the elimination of all forms of barriers that prevent individuals from reaching their full potential solely because of their gender identity.

In the context of education, exposure to gender equality is very important to be given to children from an early age, especially at the primary education level. This period is considered the “golden age” when the formation of positive thoughts and attitudes is highly likely, making it the most appropriate time to instill inclusive and fair values and change any “negative mindset” that may have formed regarding gender (Mu'adalah, 2022). Primary education serves as a crucial foundation in shaping students' cognitive frameworks, including attitudes, knowledge, and basic skills relevant to gender awareness.

Although Indonesia has a strong legal foundation that guarantees gender equality and prohibits discrimination, as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution and various derivative regulations (Arifin, 2020), its implementation at the primary education level still faces a number of challenges and critical issues. The gap between normative commitments at the policy level and the reality of implementation in the field has the potential to hinder the formation of a more just and inclusive society.

One of the main challenges is the internalized gender bias in the curriculum and teaching materials. Many textbooks, both in text and illustrations, still contain gender-biased content, where women are often depicted in domestic roles while men dominate the public sphere (Lestari & Wardani, 2021). This phenomenon can be explained through the Social Construction of Gender Theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which states that gender roles and stereotypes are not biologically innate, but are formed and reinforced through socialization processes, including in educational environments. A gender-insensitive curriculum actively reproduces norms that limit children's potential from an early age.

Additionally, discrimination in access to and participation in education remains an issue exacerbated by economic and cultural factors. For families with weak economic conditions, boys are often prioritized over girls for continuing their education, based on the assumption that boys will eventually become the head of the household (Sari, 2023). This is in line with Social Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), which argues that the education system can indirectly perpetuate existing social inequalities, including gender inequality, through prevailing practices and norms, thereby creating a cycle of injustice.

The influence of patriarchal culture and gender stereotypes is still very strong in Indonesian society and has been indirectly instilled from an early age (Rahma et al., 2023). Women are portrayed as weak, irrational, or timid, often relegated to secondary roles in leadership opportunities or public spheres. These stereotypes form a “negative mindset” that is difficult to change if not addressed early on, hindering women's self-development and full participation in society.

Finally, the role of teachers and the school environment in perpetuating or addressing gender bias is crucial. Teachers, as central figures in the learning process, often lack a comprehensive understanding and deep awareness of various forms of bias or gender responsiveness (Hasanah, 2017). This lack of insight often inadvertently manifests in teacher-student interactions, where discriminatory practices occur without providing equal opportunities for boys and girls to participate.

The importance of early intervention in primary education as a long-term social investment cannot be underestimated. By teaching gender equality values from an early age, not only can an inclusive and fair mindset be formed, but discriminatory behavior and gender-based violence in the future can also be prevented (Oktavian & Hasanah, 2021). Early childhood education is an effective primary prevention mechanism for addressing the root causes of gender inequality.

Children who understand gender equality tend to be more empathetic and respectful of differences, which in turn creates a more harmonious environment, both at school and in society (Cipatujah Village Government, 2024). This indicates that interventions at the primary education level are strategic investments aimed at creating a more just, harmonious, and democratic society in the future, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the implementation of gender equality in primary education in Indonesia. The focus of the analysis includes identifying challenges faced, reviewing relevant government policies, exploring best practices that have been implemented, and measuring their impact on student character development and sustainable development outcomes. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to enriching the academic literature on gender equality in the context of Indonesian primary education. Additionally, it is hoped that this research will provide valuable input for policymakers, education practitioners, and parents in designing more effective interventions to achieve fair and inclusive education for all children.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing literature review and document analysis as the primary methods. This approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of gender

equality in primary education, particularly regarding the challenges faced, the implementation of related policies, and the current practices at the institutional level.

Data were collected through a comprehensive examination of a wide range of documents, including peer-reviewed academic journals, theses, and scholarly books. In addition, research reports from educational institutions, official government policy documents (such as Ministerial Regulations and Presidential Instructions), as well as publications from non-governmental and international organizations (including UNICEF and Komnas HAM) served as essential sources.

The data analyzed include narrative texts, case studies, descriptive statistics, and conceptual frameworks presented within these documents. These data were interpreted to identify emerging patterns, key themes, and interrelationships relevant to promoting gender equality within Indonesia's primary education system.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study identify various aspects of gender equality implementation in Indonesian primary education, ranging from the challenges faced to good practices and their impact.

### **Gender Bias in Curriculum and Teaching Materials**

One of the main challenges is the internalized gender bias in the curriculum and teaching materials. Many textbooks, both in text and illustrations, still contain gender-biased content. Women are often depicted in domestic roles, while men dominate the public sphere (Lestari, 2024; Lestari & Wardani, 2021). Thematic textbooks or textbook packages for elementary school students are also still found to contain material points that do not support gender equality, which contradicts the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) program (Lestari, 2024).

### **Discrimination in Access to and Participation in Education**

Gender inequality has long affected almost all aspects of society, including education, where women often receive unequal treatment in terms of access to proper education (Cakrawikara Indonesia, 2023). In some cultures, girls often do not have the same access to education as boys (Oktavian & Hasanah, 2021). For families with weak economic conditions, parents tend to prioritize their sons over their daughters in continuing their education, based on the assumption that boys will eventually become the head of the household (Sari, 2023).

### **The Influence of Patriarchal Culture and Gender Stereotypes**

Patriarchal culture is still very strong in Indonesian society and has been indirectly instilled from an early age through social stereotypes that are ultimately embedded in the social order and in children (Rahma et al., 2023). Women are portrayed as weak, irrational, and timid, and are

therefore considered unfit or incapable of leadership (Arifin, 2020). Stereotypes are also evident in the division of household tasks, which are traditionally assigned to wives and daughters (Arifin, 2020).

### The Role of Teachers and the School Environment in Maintaining or Overcoming Bias

Teachers, as central figures in the learning process, do not yet have a complete understanding and deep awareness of the various forms of gender bias or responsiveness that have been constructed (Hasanah, 2017). This lack of insight is often inadvertently revealed in the learning process, where interactions between teachers and students still tend to be gender biased (Pratiwi & Susanto, 2023). Discrimination is often practiced unconsciously, for example by not providing equal opportunities for boys and girls to participate in learning roles in and outside the classroom (Maleva, 2014).

Table 1: Issues and Manifestations of Gender Bias in Indonesian Primary Education

Issue Categories	Concrete Examples	Impact	Sources
Curriculum and Teaching Material Bias	Women are depicted in domestic roles, while men dominate the public sphere (textbook text and illustrations). The content of thematic textbooks does not support gender equality.	Limiting children's potential and instilling stereotypes from an early age is not in line with the SDGs.	(Lestari, 2024; Lestari & Wardani, 2021)
Discrimination in Access and Participation	Girls do not have equal access to education as boys in some cultures. Education for boys is prioritized in economically disadvantaged families. There is a perception that "no matter how high a woman's education is, she will end up in the kitchen anyway."	Women have fewer job opportunities, are vulnerable to harassment/violence, and reinforce the cycle of poverty.	(Cakrawikara Indonesia, 2023; Sari, 2023; Gultom, 2021)
The Role of Teachers and the School Environment	Teachers lack understanding of gender bias, teacher-student interactions tend to be biased. Does not provide equal opportunities for participation in learning. Selection of class leaders/ceremonies is gender biased.	The reproduction of inequality in the school environment hinders the formation of positive attitudes.	(Hasanah, 2017; Pratiwi & Susanto, 2023; Maleva, 2014)

### Indonesian Government Policy and Regulatory Framework

The Indonesian government has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender equality through various legal frameworks and policy initiatives

## **Legal Basis for Gender Equality in Education**

The state guarantees gender equality for everyone in law and government as well as in social life, as stipulated in Regulation of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Permen PPPA) Number 6 of 2023 (KemenPPPA, 2023). A strong constitutional foundation is also found in the 1945 Constitution, which clearly stipulates that all people are equal before the law and government without discrimination between men and women (Arifin, 2020).

## **Gender Mainstreaming Initiative (PUG) in the Education Sector**

The Indonesian government has sought to integrate a gender perspective into all government policies, community organizations, and educational institutions (PKBM Ronaa, 2023). Some examples of the implementation of PUG in the legal field through legislation and other legal instruments with a gender perspective are the provision of equal access to educational scholarships for both women and men (KemenPPPA, 2023).

## **Gender Responsive School Model (SRG)**

The SRG model is a partnership program designed to strengthen understanding of gender equality in education (INOVASI, 2022). This approach is a structured effort to address existing gender bias in schools, implemented through training and mentoring (INOVASI, 2022).

## **Case Study of Sidoarjo (SDN Tenggulunan)**

SDN Tenggulunan in Sidoarjo has demonstrated gender responsiveness practices, such as in the equal distribution of tasks for male and female students. The school's facilities and infrastructure are also considered adequate, including a sufficient number of toilets (INOVASI, 2022).

## **Case Study in Yogyakarta (State Junior High School 15 Yogyakarta and State Senior High School 2 Bantul)**

The SRG program in Yogyakarta refers to various national regulations and is driven by local contexts, such as vulnerability to bullying and patriarchal culture (UNY Journal Collections, 2022). The implementation of SRG in these schools is carried out by developing a school culture that supports equality, such as installing anti-bullying artifacts. School policies are designed with a gender perspective, the curriculum is developed based on gender responsiveness, and participatory activities are organized (UNY Journal Collections, 2022).

## **The Role of Non-Formal Education Institutions (PKBM)**

In addition to formal education, non-formal educational institutions such as Community Learning Centers (PKBM) also play an important role in achieving gender equality. PKBM organizes equivalency education and provides broad opportunities for women's participation in the field of education, aligning them with men (PKBM Ronaa, 2023). Research shows that

educational programs at PKBM have been implemented inclusively, ensuring there is no gender bias in terms of curriculum, teaching and learning processes, and evaluation (PKBM Ronaa, 2023).

### Examples of Good Practices in Elementary School Environments

The freedom to choose extracurricular activities without gender discrimination (Kompasiana, 2024). Fair selection of class president or student council president, providing equal opportunities for both male and female students in leadership (Kompasiana, 2024). Pemerataan fasilitas dan aksesibilitas agar semua peserta didik dapat menggunakan fasilitas sekolah tanpa batasan atau diskriminasi gender (Kompasiana, 2024). Prevention of harassment and gender violence through policies and programs designed by schools (Kompasiana, 2024). The creation of gender awareness through special education programs (Kompasiana, 2024).

Table 2: Key Components and Examples of Gender Responsive Schools (GRS) Implementation in Indonesia.

Key Components of the SRG	Component Description	Example Implementation/Good Practice	Observed Impact	source
School Policy	Integration of gender perspectives in school management and governance.	Gender-responsive budget allocation; Gender-based anti-bullying policies; Job assignments/positions based on ability, not gender.	A safer and fairer school environment.	(INOVASI, 2022; UNY Journal Collections, 2022)
Curriculum and Teaching Materials	Development of a curriculum and teaching materials that are free from gender bias and inclusive.	Revision of teaching materials to eliminate stereotypes; Integration of gender equality values in lesson plans, media, and learning evaluation.	The formation of an inclusive mindset, increasing gender understanding.	(Lestari, 2024; Lestari & Wardani, 2021; UNY Journal Collections, 2022)
Physical Environment	Provision of facilities that support equality and comfort for all genders.	Separate toilets for men and women; Lactation room for female teachers/staff; Comfortable study desks and privacy.	Improvement of comfort and privacy for students/staff.	(INOVASI, 2022; UNY Journal Collections, 2022)
Student Participation	Encouraging the active participation of all students without gender discrimination.	Freedom to choose extracurricular activities; Election of class president/student council without gender discrimination; Mixing male and female students in study groups; Assignment of non-stereotypical roles.	Increased self-confidence, empathy, and leadership skills of students; Decreased bullying.	(Kompasiana, 2024; UNY Journal Collections, 2022)

## **The Impact and Success of Gender Equality Implementation**

The implementation of gender equality in primary education has shown significant positive impacts, both at the individual student level and in contributing to broader community development.

### **Changes in Students' Mindset and Behavior**

The most significant impact is the cognitive and affective changes in students (Oktavian & Hasanah, 2021). Children who understand gender equality tend to be more empathetic and respectful of differences, which in turn creates a more harmonious environment in schools and in the community (Cipatujah Village Government, 2024). The early introduction of gender equality has also proven to prevent discriminatory behaviors and gender-based violence in the future (Wahyuni & Fitri, 2024). The SRG program in Yogyakarta, for example, has resulted in attitudes and behaviors of mutual respect among school members, with a significant decrease in cases of bullying and fighting (UNY Journal Collections, 2022).

### **Increasing Participation and Empowerment of Women**

Understanding gender equality helps children, both boys and girls, to feel more confident in pursuing their aspirations (Oktavian & Hasanah, 2021). Girls, in particular, will feel empowered to take on roles that were previously considered exclusive to boys, and vice versa (Shihab, 2019). Quality education for girls also includes ensuring that they acquire relevant skills and competencies to explore the future effectively (UNY Journal Collections, 2022). Increased participation of women in school leadership, such as female students leading student organizations, also demonstrates success in empowering them (UNY Journal Collections, 2022).

### **Contribution to Sustainable Development (SDGs)**

Gender equality is one of the pillars of social justice. When children understand this concept, they also learn about the importance of respecting the rights of others and actively participating in creating an inclusive and democratic society (Oktavian & Hasanah, 2021). Children who grow up with an understanding of gender equality will become individuals capable of creating positive change in the future (Cipatujah Village Government, 2024). Gender inequality is one of the crucial issues that significantly affects the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Indonesia (Susilawati et al., 2022).

### **Analysis**

The analysis of the findings of this study shows that the gap between policy commitments and the reality of gender equality implementation in Indonesian primary education is greatly influenced by several sociological and educational theories. The Social Construction of Gender Theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) explains how gender bias in the curriculum and teaching

materials (Lestari & Wardani, 2021) as well as deeply rooted stereotypes in society (Rahma et al., 2023) are not biologically innate but rather the result of an ongoing socialization process. Textbooks that depict women in domestic roles and men in public spheres (Lestari, 2024) actively reproduce gender norms that limit children's potential from an early age. This aligns with the view that education not only transfers knowledge but also values and norms (Lestari & Wardani, 2021).

Social Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) can be used to understand how gender inequality in education is perpetuated. Discrimination in access to and participation in education, especially for girls from economically disadvantaged families (Sari, 2023), shows that existing social structures, including patriarchal culture (Rahma et al., 2023), tend to reproduce intergenerational injustice. The notion that “no matter how high a woman's education, she will end up in the kitchen” (Gultom, 2021) is a manifestation of patriarchal habitus that limits women's aspirations and opportunities. Teachers' lack of understanding of gender bias (Hasanah, 2017) also contributes to the reproduction of inequality in the school environment, where discriminatory practices often occur unconsciously (Pratiwi & Susanto, 2023).

However, efforts to implement Gender-Responsive Schools (GRS) and the role of Community Learning Centers (CLCs) demonstrate the potential of Social Change Theory (Parsons, 1951) in the context of education. The SRG program, which focuses on changing school policies, curricula, physical environments, and teacher roles (INOVASI, 2022; UNY Journal Collections, 2022), is an example of a structured intervention aimed at changing social norms and practices at the micro level. The success of SRG in reducing bullying and increasing mutual respect (UNY Journal Collections, 2022) demonstrates that institutional-level changes can have positive impacts on individual behavior. Similarly, the role of PKBM in providing inclusive education (PKBM Ronaa, 2023) shows that non-formal institutions can be effective agents of change in addressing participation gaps.

The positive impacts observed, such as changes in students' more empathetic mindset and increased female participation (Oktavian & Hasanah, 2021), indicate that gender-sensitive educational interventions can empower individuals and contribute to Human Development Theory (Sen, 1999). By providing equal opportunities and instilling values of equality from an early age, basic education not only enhances individual capacity but also encourages them to become agents of change who advocate for social justice and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Cipatujah Village Government, 2024; Susilawati et al., 2022). This underscores that investing in gender equality in basic education is a long-term investment in a more just, harmonious, and sustainable society.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis shows that gender equality in basic education in Indonesia is a crucial foundation for shaping inclusive mindsets and preventing discrimination from an early age. Although Indonesia has a strong policy framework that guarantees gender equality, significant challenges remain, particularly in the form of bias in the curriculum and teaching materials, discrimination in access exacerbated by economic factors, and the influence of deep-rooted patriarchal culture.

However, the Gender Responsive School (GRS) program and the role of non-formal educational institutions such as PKBM have demonstrated promising best practices in addressing these challenges. The implementation of GRS, as seen in Sidoarjo and Yogyakarta, has been able to catalyze cultural change in schools, although consistency in implementation by all parties remains a concern. The positive impact of these efforts is evident in changes in students' mindsets and behavior, increased confidence and participation of women, and tangible contributions to the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

### Policy Recommendations for the Government

To accelerate the realization of gender equality in basic education, several policy recommendations can be considered:

- a. **Strengthening the Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming (PUG):** The government needs to ensure that the Minister of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Regulation Number 6 of 2023 on Gender Equality Parameters is not only a regulation but is implemented consistently at all levels of basic education, with a strict monitoring and evaluation mechanism (KemenPPPA, 2023).
- b. **Curriculum and Teaching Material Revisions:** Conduct a comprehensive review and revision of the curriculum and teaching materials to eliminate gender bias and stereotypes, as well as to explicitly and contextually integrate gender equality values (Lestari & Wardani, 2021).
- c. **Teacher Capacity Building:** Developing a continuous and in-depth teacher training program on the concept of gender equality, gender-responsive teaching methods, and ways to identify and address biases in the classroom (Hasanah, 2017). This training must include cognitive and affective aspects to build a strong commitment.
- d. **Gender Responsive Budget Allocation:** Encouraging gender-responsive budget allocation at the school level to support equality initiatives, including the provision of gender-friendly facilities and programs for the prevention of gender-based violence (INOVASI, 2022).

### **Recommendations for Schools, Teachers, and Parents:**

The responsibility to achieve gender equality does not only lie in the hands of the government, but also requires the active role of schools, teachers, and parents:

a. School

Creating an inclusive school environment free from gender discrimination, including in school policies, the provision of adequate facilities (e.g., separate toilets, lactation rooms), and extracurricular activities that are open to all (Kompasiana, 2024). Encouraging the active participation of all students in leadership and various activities, regardless of gender (UNY Journal Collections, 2022). Establishing a gender-responsive anti-bullying team that proactively addresses gender-based violence in the school environment (INOVASI, 2022).

b. Teacher

Applying gender-sensitive teaching methods, such as mixing male and female students in study groups and assigning non-stereotypical roles (Pratiwi & Susanto, 2023). Being a role model in gender just behavior and actively instilling the values of empathy, honesty, and mutual respect in students (Mulyani, 2023).

c. Parents

Providing an understanding of gender equality from an early age at home, such as sharing household chores equally and supporting children's interests without gender bias. Engaging in open discussions about gender equality and encouraging respect and empathy in children (Cipatujah Village Government, 2024).

### **Further Research Directions**

To deepen the understanding and effectiveness of gender equality interventions in primary education, several directions for further research can be explored:

Longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of gender equality interventions in primary education on career choices, social participation, and individuals' quality of life. Comparative research on the effectiveness of various SRG models in different cultural and socio-economic contexts in Indonesia.

In-depth analysis of the role of parents and the community in supporting or hindering gender equality efforts in primary schools. Development and evaluation of comprehensive and standardized measurement instruments for gender bias in the curriculum and teaching materials.

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