



Development of Gender Responsive Islamic Education Curriculum in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the development of a gender responsive Islamic Religious Education curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Al-Khoirot. The study is motivated by the importance of strengthening the pesantren educational system to ensure equal educational rights for male and female students while maintaining the traditional values of Islamic boarding schools. Pondok Pesantren Al-Khoirot develops an integrated curriculum combining the national curriculum, madrasah diniyah, and classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) while emphasizing student protection, safety, and comfort. This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the development of a gender responsive curriculum is implemented through the separation of classes and teachers based on gender, the provision of equal educational access for male and female students, the strengthening of child-friendly and anti-violence policies, and the implementation of a hybrid curriculum integrating formal education with pesantren traditions. The study further finds that gender responsiveness in pesantren education is not interpreted as gender mixing, but rather as an effort to promote justice, protection, and equal educational opportunities. These findings contribute to the development of an Islamic Religious Education curriculum model that is adaptive to the social needs of contemporary pesantren communities.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of gender responsive Islamic education has become increasingly important because educational institutions are expected to ensure equal access, protection, and learning opportunities for all students regardless of gender (Zaironi, 2025a; Zaironi et al., 2026). Islamic boarding schools (pesantren)

play a significant role in shaping religious understanding, moral values, and social attitudes among young Muslims (Muqoffi et al., 2026; Muzedi & Zaironi, 2026). Consequently, the curriculum implemented in pesantren influences students' perspectives on justice, equality, and social interaction. This issue is particularly relevant as educational institutions are required to address contemporary challenges related to gender equality and child protection while maintaining Islamic values. Failure to do so may perpetuate discriminatory practices and hinder student development. Therefore, research on gender responsive Islamic education contributes to developing educational models that promote inclusivity, fairness, and human dignity within contemporary Muslim societies.

Although awareness of educational equality has increased, many Islamic educational institutions still encounter difficulties in implementing gender responsive curricula effectively (Azaim et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2026). In numerous pesantren, gender issues are often limited to the physical separation of male and female students, with less attention given to equal participation, leadership opportunities, and academic advancement (Zaironi, 2025a; Zaironi et al., 2026). Traditional educational practices may continue to place female students in secondary positions and restrict access to advanced religious learning (Horwitz, 2021). Moreover, inadequate policies concerning student protection, anti bullying measures, and gender-sensitive learning environments can affect students' psychological well being (Afandy et al., 2026; Firghol et al., 2026). These conditions indicate that gender responsiveness extends beyond segregation and requires broader institutional commitment. In contemporary Indonesian society, pesantren are expected to preserve religious traditions while responding to educational demands for equality, protection, and inclusive development (Rofiah et al., 2025).

Field observations reveal that Pondok Pesantren Al-Khoirot has developed a distinctive educational model combining traditional pesantren values with gender responsive practices (Zaironi, 2025a). The institution maintains strict separation between male and female students in classrooms, dormitories, and learning activities while ensuring equal educational opportunities for both groups. Students receive comparable access to Madrasah Diniyah, formal secondary education, Qur'anic memorization programs, and higher Islamic studies through Ma'had Aly. The pesantren also enforces anti-violence and anti harassment regulations to protect students' safety and psychological well-being. Furthermore, it implements a hybrid curriculum integrating national educational standards with

classical Islamic scholarship through kitab kuning traditions. These practices demonstrate that gender responsiveness can be realized through equal rights and protection rather than unrestricted interaction between genders.

Previous studies on gender and Islamic education have largely focused on women's access to education, gender bias in religious interpretation, and feminist perspectives within Islamic educational discourse (Forkan, 2018; Shah, 2020). Many researchers argue that traditional Islamic institutions may reproduce patriarchal values through male-dominated leadership and unequal opportunities for female students (Shah, 2020). Other research discusses curriculum reform by emphasizing inclusivity, multiculturalism, and human rights (Anugrah et al., 2024). Studies on pesantren have also explored modernization (Zaironi, 2025b), curriculum integration (Afandy et al., 2026; Maqfiroh & Sumarni, Yustina, 2025), and adaptation to social change (Luluk Ananta, Fajriah, 2025; Ni & Zaironi, 2026). However, most research approaches gender issues from normative or ideological perspectives and pays limited attention to practical curriculum development within pesantren settings. Moreover, gender equality is often associated with mixed-gender education (Özdere, 2023), leaving insufficient understanding of institutions that combine gender separation with equal educational access and student protection.

Several researchers have examined Islamic education and gender equality through the reinterpretation of religious texts and the empowerment of female students in Muslim educational institutions (Karimullah, 2023; Shah, 2020). Studies in Indonesian pesantren commonly highlight women's participation in religious learning (McClendon et al., 2018; Zaironi, 2025b; Zaironi et al., 2023), leadership development (Firghol et al., 2026; Rohanita et al., 2026), and social transformation (Acetylena & Zaironi, 2026; Subairi & Zaironi, 2025). Other scholars have investigated child friendly education and anti violence policies as efforts to improve student welfare. Nevertheless, these studies generally address gender responsiveness separately from curriculum development and educational management frameworks. Research on hybrid curricula often focuses on integrating religious and modern sciences without specifically examining gender responsive structures (Shaleh, 2024). Limited attention has been given to how pesantren implement equality through curriculum design, teaching allocation, infrastructure management, and student protection systems simultaneously. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive investigation of gender responsive curriculum development in pesantren contexts.

The novelty of this research lies in proposing a gender responsive Islamic education curriculum model based on the principle of “educational equality through protective separation.” Unlike studies that equate gender equality with mixed-gender learning environments, this research argues that gender responsiveness can also be achieved through equal access, balanced curricula, fair policies, and effective student protection within separated educational settings. The study emphasizes that protective gender separation does not necessarily constitute discrimination when accompanied by institutional fairness and equal opportunities. It also highlights a hybrid curriculum integrating national standards, classical Islamic scholarship, character education, and child protection values. This perspective contributes to contemporary Islamic educational discourse by offering an alternative framework for pesantren modernization while preserving religious traditions and institutional identity.

Based on these considerations, this research investigates the development and implementation of gender responsive Islamic education curricula at Pondok Pesantren Al-Khoirot. The study argues that gender responsiveness should be understood not merely through physical interaction between genders but through equal educational rights, institutional protection, and balanced opportunities for academic and personal development. It assumes that pesantren can integrate Islamic traditions with contemporary educational values through innovative curriculum strategies. Accordingly, the research analyzes curriculum forms, implementation processes, supporting factors, and challenges associated with gender responsive education. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to curriculum development in Islamic education and practically to educational policies promoting fairness, inclusivity, and student welfare while preserving religious identity and cultural traditions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study (Gammelgaard, 2017; Viera, 2023) approach to explore the development of a gender responsive Islamic Education curriculum within a pesantren context. The design enabled an in depth understanding of educational processes, institutional culture, curriculum practices, and social interactions. It also provided a contextual and holistic perspective on implementing gender responsiveness in contemporary Islamic boarding schools. The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Al-Khoirot due to its distinctive implementation of gender responsive Islamic education. The

institution maintains separate systems for male and female students while ensuring equal educational opportunities. It also integrates national curricula, traditional kitab kuning studies, and student protection policies, making it a relevant setting for this study.

Data were collected through in depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies (Khan et al., 2025). Interviews involved pesantren leaders, curriculum managers, teachers, and students. Observations focused on learning activities and institutional interactions, while documentation included curriculum records, regulations, schedules, and educational guidelines. These techniques provided comprehensive and credible data on curriculum development practices. Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification (Mbanaso et al., 2023; Ravindran, 2019). Findings were selected, organized, and presented thematically to identify patterns and meanings. Data trustworthiness was ensured through source and technique triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking to strengthen the credibility and validity of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Development of a Gender responsive Islamic Education Curriculum in Pesantren

The development of a gender responsive Islamic Education curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Al-Khoirot was understood as an effort to ensure equal educational rights, balanced learning opportunities, and student protection for both male and female students within a separated educational system. Gender responsiveness was interpreted as fairness in curriculum access, academic services, religious learning, and educational facilities rather than unrestricted gender interaction. The pesantren implemented this approach through separate classrooms, gender-based teacher assignments, equal academic programs, anti-violence policies, and a hybrid curriculum integrating national education and classical Islamic scholarship. Curriculum development therefore reflected a balance between Islamic values, pesantren traditions, child protection principles, and contemporary educational needs.

Table 1. Interview Excerpt

Interview Excerpt	Indicator	Informant
"Male and female students receive the same educational opportunities, although the classrooms and teachers are separated."	Equal educational access	Pesantren Leader
"Female students are allowed to continue their studies to higher Islamic education levels such as Ma'had Aly."	Academic equality	Curriculum Coordinator
"The separation system is intended to protect students psychologically and socially."	Student protection	Female Teacher
"The curriculum combines national education and kitab kuning studies for both male and female students."	Hybrid curriculum integration	Senior Teacher
"Anti bullying and anti-harassment policies are applied equally in all dormitories."	Safe educational environment	Dormitory Supervisor

The interview findings demonstrate that the pesantren conceptualized gender responsive education through institutional fairness rather than gender integration. Educational equality was reflected in equal curriculum content, similar academic opportunities, and balanced institutional support for both male and female students. The separation system functioned not as a discriminatory mechanism but as a preventive strategy for maintaining student safety, psychological comfort, and moral discipline within the pesantren environment. Informants repeatedly associated gender responsiveness with proportional educational treatment grounded in Islamic ethics and pesantren traditions. This perspective indicates that the institution attempted to harmonize contemporary educational expectations concerning equality with conservative religious values. Consequently, curriculum development was not directed toward eliminating traditional pesantren structures but toward ensuring that such structures did not generate unequal educational experiences. These findings reveal that gender responsiveness in pesantren contexts may emerge through institutional justice embedded within culturally and religiously accepted educational systems comprehensively.

The data further indicate that the hybrid curriculum became an important instrument for implementing gender responsive educational practices within the pesantren. By integrating national educational standards with traditional kitab kuning instruction, the institution provided equal intellectual development opportunities for male and female students without reducing the authority of classical Islamic scholarship. Female students were not restricted to domestic-oriented educational programs but were encouraged to pursue advanced religious studies and leadership capacities within appropriate institutional frameworks. This finding challenges assumptions suggesting that gender

segregation necessarily limits women's educational advancement in Islamic institutions. Instead, the pesantren demonstrated that separated educational systems could coexist with educational equality when institutional policies support balanced access, protection, and academic participation. Furthermore, the existence of anti-violence and anti-harassment regulations strengthened the pesantren's commitment toward creating a child friendly and secure educational environment responsive to students' social and psychological wellbeing comprehensively and sustainably.

Observational findings strengthened the interview data by showing that male and female students participated in similar academic activities, followed equivalent curricular structures, and obtained relatively balanced educational facilities within separate learning environments. The researcher observed that classroom arrangements, teacher assignments, dormitory regulations, and extracurricular activities were organized systematically according to gender while maintaining equal educational standards. In addition, institutional discipline regarding anti bullying and student protection policies was implemented consistently across both male and female dormitories. The pesantren atmosphere reflected strong institutional commitment toward maintaining moral values, educational discipline, and social harmony simultaneously. From the researcher's interpretation, these practices demonstrate that gender responsive curriculum development at the pesantren emphasized educational justice through structural balance rather than physical integration. Therefore, the institution succeeded in constructing an educational model combining religious conservatism, student protection, and equal learning opportunities within an integrated pesantren educational framework appropriate for contemporary Indonesian Islamic society.

The research findings indicate that gender responsive curriculum development within the pesantren was implemented through four principal dimensions: equal educational access, protective gender separation, hybrid curriculum integration, and institutional student protection mechanisms. Equal educational access was reflected through similar learning opportunities and academic pathways for male and female students. Protective separation functioned as a strategy for maintaining moral discipline and psychological comfort without reducing educational quality. Hybrid curriculum integration enabled students to master both national educational competencies and traditional Islamic scholarship simultaneously. Meanwhile, institutional protection

policies strengthened students' safety and social wellbeing within the pesantren environment. Restating the data more simply, the pesantren developed a curriculum system where male and female students studied separately but received equal educational rights, facilities, and opportunities. Therefore, gender responsiveness was interpreted as fairness, balance, and protection rather than unrestricted gender interaction within Islamic boarding school education comprehensively and institutionally.

Table 2. The Implementation of Gender responsive Education in Pesantren

Position of Informant	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Pesantren Leader	"Educational equality is part of Islamic justice and must be implemented fairly for all students."	Islamic educational justice
Curriculum Coordinator	"The curriculum structure for male and female students follows the same academic standards."	Balanced curriculum structure
Female Teacher	"Separated classrooms help students focus and feel psychologically secure during learning."	Psychological protection
Dormitory Supervisor	"Student protection policies are implemented strictly to prevent violence and harassment."	Child-friendly environment
Senior Teacher	"Classical Islamic studies and national curricula are taught equally to all students."	Equal intellectual opportunity

The second table demonstrates that institutional actors shared relatively similar perceptions regarding the meaning and implementation of gender responsive education within the pesantren. Educational equality was consistently associated with Islamic justice, balanced curriculum structures, and equal intellectual opportunities rather than unrestricted social interaction between genders. Informants emphasized that educational separation functioned primarily as a protective mechanism supporting students' concentration, discipline, and psychological wellbeing. This indicates that gender responsiveness within the pesantren emerged from institutional adaptation to contemporary educational concerns while maintaining the pesantren's moral and religious identity. Moreover, the findings reveal that curriculum development was influenced strongly by collective institutional values emphasizing fairness, protection, and educational balance. Consequently, the pesantren's educational model may be interpreted as an alternative approach to gender responsive Islamic education rooted in Islamic ethics and culturally accepted institutional practices within traditional Indonesian pesantren environments today.

A clear pattern emerging from the data is the integration between educational equality, institutional protection, and Islamic moral values within curriculum development practices. All informants emphasized fairness and equal educational opportunity as central principles while simultaneously supporting gender-based educational separation. This pattern suggests that the pesantren rejected the dichotomy between religious conservatism and gender responsiveness by combining both within one educational framework. Another important pattern concerns the institutional consistency in implementing anti-violence policies, equal curriculum standards, and balanced academic access across male and female educational units. These recurring patterns indicate that gender responsive curriculum development at the pesantren was not symbolic or administrative only but operationally embedded in everyday educational practices. Therefore, the pesantren successfully established a sustainable educational structure integrating curriculum innovation, Islamic educational traditions, student protection systems, and contemporary social expectations regarding educational justice and gender equality within Indonesian Islamic boarding school education comprehensively.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research demonstrate that gender responsive Islamic Education curriculum development within Pondok Pesantren Al-Khoirot emphasizes equal educational access, institutional protection, and balanced academic opportunities within a separated educational environment. This finding corresponds with previous studies arguing that Islamic education can promote social justice and educational equality while preserving religious values and institutional traditions (Riaz et al., 2023; Sahin, 2018). Scholars of Islamic education have explained that pesantren modernization does not necessarily require abandoning traditional structures but rather adapting them to contemporary educational needs (Siregar, 2026; Sofi et al., 2025). However, this study differs from several earlier studies that equated gender responsiveness with mixed-gender educational systems. The present research indicates that separated educational arrangements may still support gender equality when implemented alongside equal curriculum standards and fair institutional policies. Therefore, the study expands existing educational discourse by introducing an alternative interpretation of gender responsive Islamic education rooted in pesantren

traditions and Islamic ethical principles within contemporary Indonesian society comprehensively.

The implementation of a hybrid curriculum integrating national educational standards with classical Islamic scholarship also strengthens previous theories concerning curriculum integration within Islamic educational institutions (Afandy et al., 2026; Maqfiroh & Sumarni, Yustina, 2025; Nia Hasanah, Muchammad Syamsul Ma'arif, Nurul Ma'rifah, 2025). Earlier research generally emphasized the importance of combining religious and modern sciences to improve students' competitiveness and social adaptability (Astawa & Wimba, 2025). The present findings support this perspective by showing that the pesantren successfully integrated formal education, kitab kuning studies, and character education for both male and female students equally. Nevertheless, this research contributes a new perspective because previous studies rarely discussed how hybrid curriculum models can simultaneously function as mechanisms for gender equality and student protection. The equal provision of advanced Islamic learning opportunities for female students challenges assumptions that traditional pesantren education inherently limits women's intellectual participation. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the argument that curriculum integration within Islamic institutions may support educational transformation while maintaining religious legitimacy and institutional continuity in rapidly changing social contexts today (Sahin, 2018).

The research findings regarding student protection and anti-violence policies align with studies emphasizing the importance of child-friendly educational environments within Islamic schools and boarding institutions (Antika et al., 2026; Mufarrohah & Zaironi, 2026). Previous researchers have argued that educational quality is strongly influenced by students' psychological security, institutional discipline, and social wellbeing (Xiaoxia et al., 2024; Xin et al., 2022). The current study confirms these arguments by demonstrating that strict anti-bullying regulations, separated educational spaces, and gender-based supervision contributed significantly to creating a safer learning atmosphere for students. However, unlike some earlier studies that criticized gender separation as restrictive, this research found that separation was interpreted by institutional actors as a preventive and protective educational strategy. This difference indicates that the meaning of gender responsive education may vary according to sociocultural and religious contexts. Practically, the findings imply that pesantren administrators may develop student protection systems without necessarily

eliminating traditional educational structures or moral values deeply embedded within pesantren institutional culture and educational philosophy.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the discourse of Islamic curriculum development by proposing the concept of “educational equality through protective separation.” Existing theories on gender responsive education often prioritize interactional equality and integrated educational participation between male and female students. In contrast, the findings of this study suggest that equality may also be achieved through proportional educational services, balanced curriculum structures, and institutional fairness within separated educational systems. This concept broadens the theoretical understanding of gender responsiveness by incorporating cultural and religious dimensions into curriculum analysis. Moreover, the research supports Islamic educational theories emphasizing justice, welfare, and protection as fundamental educational objectives. Practically, the findings provide an alternative model for Islamic boarding schools seeking to modernize their curricula while preserving institutional identity. Consequently, pesantren may adopt adaptive educational reforms that respond to contemporary social challenges without undermining traditional Islamic educational values and organizational stability within Indonesian Muslim communities today.

Overall, the discussion indicates that the development of a gender responsive Islamic Education curriculum at the pesantren represents a dynamic negotiation between tradition, modernity, educational equality, and institutional protection. The findings reveal that pesantren are capable of responding to contemporary educational demands creatively without abandoning their religious foundations and cultural identity. This conclusion differs from assumptions suggesting that traditional Islamic institutions are resistant to educational reform and gender-sensitive policies. Instead, the study demonstrates that pesantren possess institutional flexibility allowing curriculum adaptation according to societal needs and educational challenges. The integration of equal educational opportunities, hybrid curriculum structures, and student protection mechanisms reflects a transformative educational approach grounded in Islamic ethical principles. Therefore, this research contributes both theoretically and practically by offering a contextual framework for understanding gender responsive curriculum development within Islamic boarding school education and by providing a reference for future educational reforms in Indonesian pesantren institutions comprehensively.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding is that gender responsive Islamic Education at Pondok Pesantren Al-Khoirot is realized through equal access, balanced opportunities, and student protection within a separated educational system. The study shows that gender responsiveness does not require unrestricted interaction between genders. Educational justice can be achieved through fair curricula, equal learning opportunities, and protection consistent with Islamic values.

The study contributes to Islamic curriculum development and gender responsive education in pesantren settings. It introduces the concept of educational equality through protective separation as an alternative framework for understanding gender responsiveness. This perspective broadens theories linking equality with mixed-gender learning. Practically, it offers a contextual model integrating curriculum modernization, educational justice, and student protection while preserving Islamic values.

This research is limited to one pesantren, restricting broader generalization to institutions with different cultural and organizational contexts. It also focuses mainly on policies and practices without comprehensively examining long-term student outcomes. Future studies should compare multiple pesantren models, explore students' perspectives more deeply, and investigate effects on leadership development, achievement, and social transformation.

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