Internalization of Gender Equality Values through Character Education in Elementary Schools

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Keywords	*Abstract*
Gender equality; Character education; Elementary school; Habit formation; Inclusivity	*This study aims to describe the process of internalizing gender equality values through character education at SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan. The research method employed is a descriptive qualitative approach, involving informants such as teachers, the principal, students, and parents. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The results indicate that the internalization of gender equality values is achieved through school habituation, teacher role modeling, and integration into learning, as reflected in fair task distribution, inclusive language, and equal learning opportunities. This study concludes that character education based on Islamic values is effective in raising awareness of gender equality, but it requires family synergy and improvements in teaching materials. The study has important implications for educational practices, particularly in the context of developing character education based on gender equality values in elementary schools.*
Kata Kunci	**Abstrak**
Kesetaraan gender; Pendidikan karakter Sekolah dasar, Pembiasaan, Inklusivitas.	Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan proses internalisasi nilai kesetaraan gender melalui pendidikan karakter di SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif, dengan informan yang meliputi guru, kepala sekolah, peserta didik, dan orang tua. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, lalu dianalisis dengan model Miles dan Huberman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa internalisasi nilai kesetaraan gender dilakukan melalui pembiasaan sekolah, keteladanan guru, dan integrasi dalam pembelajaran, yang tercermin dalam pembagian tugas adil, bahasa inklusif, dan kesempatan belajar setara. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pendidikan karakter berbasis nilai keislaman efektif untuk menumbuhkan kesadaran kesetaraan gender, namun membutuhkan sinergi keluarga dan perbaikan materi ajar. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi penting bagi praktik pendidikan, khususnya dalam konteks pengembangan pendidikan karakter berbasis nilai kesetaraan gender di sekolah dasar.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is an important issue in education because school is the first environment where children understand social roles, responsibilities, and human values, thereby preventing sexual abuse from an early age (Setiawati, 2025). At the elementary school level, children begin to form their identity and social interaction patterns; therefore, the internalization of gender equality values needs to be initiated early on to help them avoid bias, stereotypes, and discriminatory treatment (Rahmat, Akip, & Iqbal, 2021).

However, the reality on the ground shows that gender stereotypes still exist in the division of roles between men and women, the style of interaction between teachers and students, and even gender representation in textbooks. Research by Aliim Hidayat & Wijayanto (2021) confirms that elementary school textbooks under the Merdeka Curriculum are still rife with stereotypical gender roles, while finding that the integration of gender equality values in basic education has not been optimal and still requires concrete support from character education practices.

The findings indicate a gap between the ideal demands of the school we studied, namely SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan, in its efforts to instill gender equality values systematically, and the actual practice, which is still limited to general habituation activities without a focus on gender issues as well as several studies because most previous studies only highlight gender representation in the implementation of textbooks and teaching materials without examining in depth how the process of internalizing gender equality values takes place through character education in fundamental interactions in the classroom (Fios, Ying, Yang, & Info, 2025; Nurmala, 2025).

Therefore, this study offers a problem-solving approach through empirical analysis of teacher role models, learning strategies, school culture, and student interactions to provide a comprehensive picture of the practice of internalizing gender equality values (Qistina, Panggabean, Ramanan & Mohammad, 2025; Siregar, Sit, & Kunci, 2024; Prayatni et al., 2025; Rosmana et al., 2024; Yonata, 2021). In addition, this study updates knowledge on gender education in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum, which demands more contextual learning. In contrast, recent studies show that teachers' understanding of gender issues is still uneven.

"Gender Equality In The Perspective Of Islam And Education In Indonesia" shows that Islam explicitly respects equality between men and women in terms of rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for development, including in the context of formal education (Aini, 2024). From an Islamic perspective, gender equality is part of the principles of justice and respect for human dignity, as emphasized in the Quran. Al-Hujurat:13 that men and women are created equal before Allah, and reinforced by the hadith about the obligation to seek knowledge for every Muslim regardless of gender (Aini, 2024). Contemporary Islamic education research also confirms that the integration of gender equality values is likely to shape the morals and character of students (Hakim, 2018)

This study departs from the central question of how the process of internalizing gender equality values is carried out through character education in elementary schools and the supporting and inhibiting factors, to describe actual practices, identifying integrated gender equality values, analyzing supporting conditions and obstacles, and providing recommendations for teachers and schools in developing inclusive and gender-sensitive character education.

This study aims to describe the actual practices of internalizing gender equality values through character education in elementary schools, identify the integrated gender equality values within character education, analyze the supporting conditions and obstacles, and provide recommendations for teachers and schools in developing inclusive and gender-sensitive character education.

METHOD

This study involved subjects consisting of classroom teachers, principals, students, and parents as supporting informants at SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, which is the selection of informants based on the consideration that they are

considered to have the best understanding of the process of internalizing gender equality values through character education in schools. The research instruments used included observation guidelines, structured interview guidelines, and a documentation checklist compiled based on character education and gender equality indicators at the elementary school level.

Table 1. Character Education Indicators in Elementary Schools

Aspect	Indicators
Character Education: Religious	Respecting religious activities - Being polite, honest, disciplined
Character Education: Integrity	Behaving honestly - Being responsible for tasks
Character Education: Independence	Completing tasks without relying on others - Able to make simple decisions
Character Education: Cooperation	Willing to work together in mixed-gender groups - Helping friends without discrimination
Character Education: Discipline	Obeying class and school rules—Being punctual and orderly

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture (2017). *Strengthening Character Education.*

Table 2. Gender Equality Indicators in Elementary Schools

Gender Equality Aspects	Indicators
Student Attitudes & Behavior	Equal opportunities to ask questions/express opinions - No teasing or discrimination based on gender
Classroom Learning	Fair treatment of all students by teachers - Teaching materials free of gender bias - Group assignments not based on stereotypes
School Environment	Facilities used equally by all students - Anti-discrimination policies enforced
Teacher Role Models	Teachers use gender-neutral language - Provide equal motivation to all students - Correct and address gender bias

Source: UNESCO (2019). *Gender in Education.*

The data collection procedure was carried out in three stages, namely observation of the learning process and school culture, interviews with teachers, students, and the principal to explore their understanding and practices, and collection of documents such as lesson plans, textbooks, and school activity records; the entire process was carried out within a month according to the active learning schedule.

The data obtained were analyzed using **Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis**, which includes the processes of data reduction, data presentation, and repeated drawing of conclusions until valid and consistent patterns of findings are identified. Thus, the analysis was conducted simultaneously during the data collection process to ensure the depth of interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Result

The results of the study conducted at SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan indicate that character education has been consistently implemented through various school habit-forming programs. Routine activities, such as flag ceremonies, morning literacy, and greeting each other between teachers and students, as well as the 5S culture (smile, greet, say hello, be polite, and be well-mannered), became the primary vehicles for internalizing the values of honesty, discipline, responsibility, and cooperation. Teachers also serve as role models in showing respect for every student, regardless of gender, including in the division of roles when working in groups and when communicating in class.

The internalization of gender equality values is evident in the fair distribution of classroom cleaning duties, equal opportunities for male and female students to lead groups, and a culture of cooperation that does not separate the two. Students also demonstrate an understanding of the importance of respecting individual potential and avoiding discriminatory attitudes, for example, when they help each other with school assignments without questioning their friends' gender.

The findings of this study also indicate that several supporting factors strengthen the process of internalizing these values. Teachers have a strong commitment to implementing character education, which is reflected in the use of inclusive language, providing balanced motivation to both male and female students, and the willingness of teachers to reprimand when gender-biased behavior arises. Child-friendly school policies and the positive culture fostered by the school also contribute to the creation of an inclusive climate. In addition, some learning materials, especially in Civics and Indonesian Language subjects, have begun to feature illustrations and narratives that are more sensitive to gender issues.

This is evident at SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan, which emphasizes the importance of gender equality in the illustrations and practices presented in textbooks and learning activities. For example, a) images of male and female students working together in study groups show that collaboration is not limited by gender. In addition, female students are depicted as having the same opportunities to aspire to become doctors, architects, scientists, organizational leaders, or other professions, ensuring they are not confined to traditional job stereotypes. On the other hand, male students are also shown performing domestic activities, such as tidying up the classroom, helping teachers, or taking care of younger siblings, which emphasizes that household skills are not exclusive to women.

Equality is also evident when boys and girls play together without role restrictions, both in sports and traditional games. The use of gender-neutral language, such as the terms "students" or "children," replaces gender-biased phrases, illustrating the school's commitment to presenting an inclusive narrative. In addition, in the learning process at school, female students who actively ask questions, lead discussions, or present their work also reflect equal opportunities to perform and develop.

Figure 1. The process of students discussing shows gender equality

The absence of male dominance in the discussion room image shows that all students get a fair share of learning. Male and female teachers are also shown teaching various subjects without stereotypical divisions, such as female teachers teaching sports or mathematics, and male teachers teaching art or religious studies. School learning media also feature Islamic role models from both men and women in a balanced manner, such as Fatimah al-Fihri and Ibn Sina. Finally, all extracurricular activities, from robotics to archery and drum band, are open to all students regardless of gender, thus providing equal opportunities for the development of interests and talents.
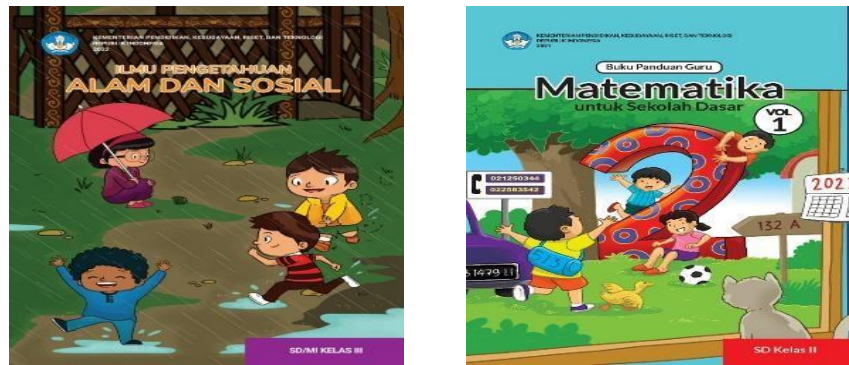
Figure 2. Textbooks are dominated by men

However, this study also identified several obstacles. The textbooks used in schools still contain gender stereotypes, such as portraying men as leaders and women as housekeepers, so teachers need to make an effort to clarify these issues during lessons. The traditional perceptions of some parents also pose a challenge because gender values influence children from their home environment, which are not always in line with the values of equality taught at school. In addition, habits formed by students since childhood, such as the assumption that specific jobs are "only for boys" or "only for girls," still appear in some interactions. However, they are beginning to diminish through the process of school accustomization.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the internalization of gender equality values at SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan occurs through three main approaches: daily habituation, teacher role modeling, and the integration of values into the learning process. This internalization process aligns with the concept of character education, which emphasizes *knowing the good, feeling the good, and doing the good,* as stated by Lickona (2013). According to this perspective, schools not only transmit knowledge but also instill values through practical application. In the context of SD IT, teachers consistently set examples of non-discriminatory behavior, such as not distinguishing between students based on gender, providing equal opportunities for students to take on leadership roles in the classroom, and treating all students fairly (Nurhuda et al., 2024). This exemplary behavior has proven to be the most dominant factor influencing student interaction patterns, as confirmed by the study Se (2022), which states that teacher behavior is the main model in shaping gender awareness in elementary school children.

More deeply, the research findings reveal that character education in this school has fostered a positive culture and a child-friendly learning environment. Programs such as greeting each other, morning literacy, joint class duty, and religious activities have successfully created an equal space for interaction (Nurmala, 2025).

In daily activities, the division of class tasks between male and female students is carried out fairly without reference to gender stereotypes. For example, tasks such as sweeping, tidying the classroom, or leading prayers are rotated among all students. These findings are consistent with the study's results. Putri (2020) and Rensaa & Fredriksen (2022) reveal that when schools implement gender-neutral practices, children tend to develop a more open view of the social roles of men and women. The integration of gender equality values is also evident in the learning process, especially in Civics, Indonesian Language, and Islamic Religious Education subjects. Teachers strive to use story texts, dialogues, and illustrations that do not show gender bias (Kurdi, 2024). Most of the material has begun to feature balanced representations of men and women, such as women as scientists, female religious teachers, or school organization leaders, and men depicted as helping with household chores or caring for younger siblings (Hidayatullah & Yusuf, 2025).

This narrative supports a more progressive paradigm shift, as discussed in studies that emphasize the significant influence of gender-responsive teaching materials on children's perceptions and character (Khasanah & Lestari, 2024). In addition, the integrative approach taken by Islamic-based schools also reinforces the values of equality through the exemplary stories of Islamic figures, both male and female, such as Aisha r.a., who was known for her intelligence and expertise in hadith, and Ali bin Abi Talib, who taught the principle of justice in treating others (Wajdi & Jakarta,2010).

However, this study also found that there are obstacles that affect the optimization of internalizing gender equality values. One of them is textbook content that still contains gender stereotypes. Some illustrations still show women as housekeepers and men as leaders or technical workers. This finding aligns with the Ministry of Education and Culture's (2020) report, which states that more than 40% of elementary school textbooks still contain gender bias. Additionally, parents' perceptions, which still adhere to traditional values regarding the roles of men and women, pose another challenge. Some parents consider domestic work to be a woman's job, while physical activities and leadership roles are often viewed as the domain of men. This external factor has been proven to influence student behavior because these values are introduced into the school environment and impact interactions with peers (Sholihah, 2020).

On the other hand, this study shows that a home and school environment that is not in line with each other can result in inconsistent values. Many students exhibit equal behavior at school, such as cooperating with members of the opposite sex or speaking politely without discrimination, but revert to biased behavior when at home due to family influence (Qur, 2021). This is reinforced by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which states that child development is greatly influenced by interactions between the micro (family) and meso (school) environments. Thus, synergy between schools and parents is an important factor in the successful internalization of gender equality values.

The findings of this study align with international research, such as the UNICEF report (2021), which states that child-friendly schools with an inclusive culture can accelerate the development of gender equality values. The commitment of teachers at SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan to providing an open dialogue space, not discriminating between male and female students, and offering fair emotional support demonstrates that gender equality-based character education practices are already in place, although not yet perfect. Additionally, the integrated Islamic school approach provides a strong moral and religious foundation, as Islam teaches that men and women have equal standing before Allah in terms of worship, morals, and social contributions. These values support the strengthening of gender equality in the school environment (Jalil, 2021).

Research *by Anwar* (2019). Gender Equality Education in Childcare demonstrates that gender equality education from an Islamic perspective enables children to explore their potential without being limited by stereotypes, promoting equal participation between men and women from an early age. Meanwhile, Azhari (2024) found that the integration of Islamic values in character education consistently shapes positive attitudes and behaviors in students, strengthens morals, and supports justice and gender balance in the school environment (Fikroh et al., 2025).

However, it is essential to acknowledge that this study has several limitations. The research location, which focused on only one school, limits the generalization of findings to other schools. The descriptive qualitative method is also highly dependent on the subjectivity of the researcher and informants. Additionally, the observations were conducted over a relatively short period, so they could not capture the dynamics of long-term change. Nevertheless, the research findings still contribute to the development of gender equality-based character education theory and practice in elementary schools.

Overall, this discussion illustrates that the internalization of gender equality values at SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan has been successful through a character education approach, despite challenges in teaching materials and parental perceptions. These findings reinforce previous literature and provide an opportunity for further research to develop a more comprehensive, gender-responsive learning model, involving stronger collaboration among schools, teachers, parents, and the community.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the internalization of gender equality values at SD PLUS Islam Terpadu Padangsidimpuan occurs systematically through the implementation of character education that integrates Islamic values, habitual practices, teacher role models, and the use of increasingly gender-sensitive teaching materials. This internalization process is evident in students' daily interactions, fair class task distribution, equal opportunities in learning activities, and the support of a school environment that promotes a positive culture and child-friendly policies.

Teachers play a central role in instilling values of equality through nondiscriminatory behavior, the use of inclusive language, and consistency in providing equal opportunities to male and female students. Islamic moral values and principles of justice also serve as a foundation that strengthens the development of gender-equal character through the exemplary stories of male and female figures who have contributed to Islamic history.

In addition, the study's results reveal that internal supporting factors include teacher commitment, a conducive school culture, and specific teaching materials that feature more representative illustrations and narratives. However, the study also identified several obstacles, including the presence of stereotypes in textbooks, traditional perceptions of gender roles among some parents, and inconsistencies in values between home and school environments. These obstacles highlight the need for stronger collaboration between schools, families, and communities in fostering a shared understanding of gender equality.

Overall, this study confirms that integrating character education and Islamic values can be an effective means of promoting internalization of gender equality among elementary school students. These findings not only reinforce previous literature but also contribute to the development of gender-responsive education models in integrated Islamic schools. The implications of this study indicate that the internalization of values cannot be done partially but requires program continuity, the involvement of all stakeholders, and the refinement of teaching materials that are more inclusive and bias-free.

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