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Empowering Women through Mosque-Based Gender Education: A Study of Women Ulama Cadre Education Program of Istiqlal Mosque

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Abstract

Gender equality and justice are critical areas of inquiry, not only within academic discourse but also in shaping practical responses to contemporary issues affecting women. To effectively address these challenges, this study essentially adopt an integrated perspective that draws from Islamic teachings, gender theories, and women's studies. It employed a qualitative methodology using a grounded theory approach to examine an initiative of Women Education Program conducted by Great Mosque of Istiqlal in Jakarta, Indonesia, including gender curriculum, method and collaboration. The program reflects a global outlook and is supported by multi-stakeholder partnerships involving ministries, universities, and organizations at local, national, and international levels. Participants in the study responded to a combination of close and open-ended questions designed to explore their knowledge, perceptions, and experiences with the program. The study aimed to explore the contributions of Mosque-based Women Ulama Education Cadre Program conducted by Grand Mosque of Istiqlal in improving gender-responsive curricula and teaching methodologies, particularly in enhancing women's knowledge, skills, and active participation in social transformation. The analysis was guided by three interconnected theoretical frameworks: Islamic perspective, gender and social welfare theories. It applied an approach of gender education in alignment with the *Tri Dharma* of Islamic Higher Education under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

Keywords: Women *Ulama*, Gender Curriculum, Islamic Higher Education, Global Understanding and Partnership

Abstrak

Kesetaraan dan keadilan gender merupakan bidang kajian yang sangat penting, tidak hanya dalam diskursus akademik, tetapi juga dalam membentuk respons praktis terhadap berbagai persoalan kontemporer yang dihadapi perempuan. Untuk menjawab tantangan tersebut secara efektif, penelitian ini pada dasarnya mengadopsi perspektif integratif yang memadukan ajaran Islam, teori gender, dan studi perempuan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dengan pendekatan grounded theory untuk mengkaji inisiatif Program Pendidikan Perempuan yang diselenggarakan oleh Masjid Istiqlal di Jakarta, Indonesia, meliputi kurikulum gender, metode pembelajaran, dan kerja sama yang dibangun. Program ini mencerminkan wawasan global dan didukung oleh kemitraan multipemangku kepentingan yang melibatkan kementerian, universitas, dan berbagai organisasi di tingkat lokal, nasional, maupun internasional. Para partisipan dalam penelitian ini memberikan respons terhadap kombinasi pertanyaan tertutup dan terbuka yang dirancang untuk mengeksplorasi pengetahuan, persepsi, dan pengalaman mereka terhadap program tersebut. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi kontribusi Program Kaderisasi Pendidikan Ulama Perempuan berbasis masjid yang diselenggarakan oleh Masjid Istiqlal dalam meningkatkan kurikulum dan metodologi pembelajaran yang responsif gender, khususnya dalam meningkatkan pengetahuan, keterampilan, dan partisipasi aktif perempuan dalam transformasi sosial. Analisis penelitian ini dipandu oleh tiga kerangka teori yang saling berkaitan, yaitu perspektif Islam, teori gender, dan teori kesejahteraan sosial. Penelitian ini menerapkan pendekatan pendidikan gender yang selaras dengan Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam di bawah naungan Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Ulama Perempuan, Kurikulum Gender, Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, Pemahaman Global, dan Kemitraan*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) has significantly intensified existing socio-economic challenges, resulting in profound impacts on vulnerable populations.¹ According to data from the Agency for National Development Planning (Bappenas) and the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), Indonesia's national poverty rate increased by approximately 0.48% to 0.98% in 2020,

¹ Mujiburrahman Mujiburrahman et al., "Reformulation of Competency Development of Lecturers of State Islamic Religious Universities in Indonesia After Covid-19," *Asian Journal of University Education* 18, no. 1 (2022), p. 15; Rafiqi Rafiqi et al., "Consumer Behavior Model: Brand Equity Mediated by Halal Awareness and Religiosity of Herbal Products Islamic Law Perspective," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 24, no. 1 (2024), p. 1–15.

reflecting the severe economic consequences of the pandemic.² This economic strain has coincided with a surge in domestic violence, disproportionately affecting women and children.³ The Ministry for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection's Online Information System (SIMFONI PPA) reported that between February 29 and December 4, 2020, nearly 60% of recorded violence cases were perpetrated against women, while 5,973 instances of child abuse were documented, with 20.88% involving domestic violence.⁴ These figures illustrate the intersection between economic hardship and gender-based violence, a trend supported by global research indicating that crises such as pandemics exacerbate risks of domestic violence due to heightened household stress, social isolation, and reduced access to support services.⁵ Indonesia's experience is consistent with international patterns, emphasizing the urgent need for integrated social protection policies and gender-responsive interventions during health emergencies.⁶

² Central Bureau of Statistics, "Poverty Statistics Report 2020," BPS, 2021; Bappenas, "Indonesia's National Development Planning Report 2020-2021," Ministry of National Development Planning, 2021.

³ Mursyid Djawas et al., "The Legal Position of Children of Incest (A Study of Madhhab Scholars and Compilation of Islamic Law)," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 6, no. 1 (2022), p. 139.

⁴ Dorothy Francis-Jefferson, "Effects of Domestic Violence on Women and Children: A Systematic Review of the Literature" (California Southern University, 2024).

⁵ Kim Usher et al., "COVID-19 and Family Violence: Is This a Perfect Storm?," *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 30, no. 4 (2021), p. 1022–32; Andrew M Campbell, "Improving Prevention of Family Violence during (and after) Disaster: Lessons Learned from the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Forensic Science International: Reports* 3 (2021), p. 100179; Ana Cunha, Mariana Gonçalves, and Marlene Matos, "Understanding the Dynamics of Domestic Violence during the First Year of the Pandemic: An Integrative Review," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 26, no. 1 (2025), p. 118–37.

⁶ Yara M Asi et al., "Assessing Gender Responsiveness of COVID-19 Response Plans for Populations in Conflict-Affected Humanitarian Emergencies," *Conflict and Health* 16, no. 1 (2022), p. 4; Valeria Esquivel, Jayati Ghosh, and Fatimah Kelleher, "A Gender-Responsive Recovery: Ensuring Women's Decent Work and Transforming Care Provision," *Gender & Development* (Taylor & Francis, 2022); Aprillia Findayani, Rina Suryani Oktari, and Juhadi, "Climate Change Riskscapes and Strategies for Women and Girls of Indonesia," in *Climate Crisis in South and East Asia: Analyzing Cross Cutting Issues and Sustainable Solutions from Gender Perspective* (Springer, 2025), p. 223–42; Bonjun Koo, "Enhancing Disaster Management Through Gender-Sensitive Approaches: Insights from South Korea's Climate Crisis," in *Climate Crisis in South and East Asia: Analyzing Cross Cutting Issues and Sustainable Solutions from Gender Perspective* (Springer, 2025), p. 259–76; Amir Fazlim Jusoh Yusoff and Mursyid Djawas, "Problems of Muslim Society in Southeast Asia A Study of the Impact of Online Games from an Islamic Law Perspective," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 9, no. 2 (2025), p. 737–57; Eric Hariyanto, "Public Trust in the Religious Court to Handle Dispute of Sharia Economy," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 1 (2022).

Another alarming development is the rise in child marriage.⁷ Data indicates a spike in requests for marriage dispensation between January and June 2020. Early marriage is a clear violation of human rights and has long-term negative consequences-ranging from maternal health risks and psychological trauma to domestic abuse and poor parenting practices.⁸ Moreover, it perpetuates intergenerational cycles of poverty. Another growing concern is the recruitment of women into radical movements. Women have increasingly been involved in violent extremism, as seen in the 2018 terrorist attacks in Surabaya, which tragically included the use of children. Statistical data continues to reflect troubling trends, including high divorce rates, widespread gender-based violence, and the persistence of masculine-centric policies and government programs.⁹

Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population, with approximately 88% of its citizens identifying as Muslim. This demographic accounts for 12.7% of the global Muslim population, solidifying Indonesia's position as the most populous Muslim-majority nation.¹⁰ While Indonesia is often praised as a model for gender relations in the Muslim world, there remains a significant need to enhance public awareness and institutional commitment to gender equality and justice, especially in safeguarding the rights of women and children.¹¹

One strategy to tackle gender inequality and injustice (referred to as "*Ketidaksetaraan dan Ketidakadilan Gender*" or KKG) is by enhancing the quality of educational institutions, especially at the university level. These institutions

⁷ Mursyid Djawas et al., "The Alimony Obligation of a Civil Servant and Non-Civil Servant Father towards Children Post-Divorce (The Study on Aceh Syar'iyah Court Decision Study of 2019)," *El-USrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 6, no. 1 (2023), p. 91.

⁸ Brittany E Hayes and Michelle E Protas, "Child Marriage and Intimate Partner Violence: An Examination of Individual, Community, and National Factors," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37, no. 21–22 (2022), p. NP19664–87.

⁹ Philippa Bennett, "Shifting Gender Norms of Care in the Family Home in Aotearoa" (Open Access Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington, 2024); Kayla Nichol Solsbak, "Don't You Think That We Count?": Gender and Power in the United Farm Workers" (San Diego State University, 2023).

¹⁰ Chris Chaplin, "Radicalized Nationalists? Ideological Contestation, the State, and Populist Muslim Belonging in Indonesia," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 48, no. 1 (2025), p. e70010.

¹¹ Md Jewel Ali, "Breaking Barriers: Gender Policies, Human Rights, and the Legal Quest for Equality and Social Justice," *Issue 5 Int'l JL Mgmt. & Human.* 7 (2024), p. 846; Vanesa Hervias Parejo and Branko Radulović, "Public Policies on Gender Equality," in *Gender-Competent Legal Education* (Springer, 2023), p. 405–28; Prosper Bazaanah and Pride Ngcobo, "Shadow of Justice: Review on Women's Struggle against Gender-Based Violence in Ghana and South Africa," *SN Social Sciences* 4, no. 7 (2024), p. 126; Olaitan O Olusegun and Olatunji S Oyelade, "Access to Justice for Nigerian Women: A Veritable Tool to Achieving Sustainable Development," *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law* 22, no. 1 (2022), p. 4–29; Mursyid Djawas and Riska Fajrina, "Efektifitas Lembaga Perlindungan Anak Terlantar: Studi Pada Panti Asuhan Suci Hati Di Meulaboh, Kabupaten Aceh Barat," *SAMARAH: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 3, no. 2 (2019), p. 295.

carry key responsibilities - teaching, research, and community service - collectively known as the “*Tri Dharma*” (three duties including education, research and community engagement) of Indonesian Higher Education.¹² Gender perspectives can be integrated into curriculum development, academic research, and empowerment initiatives aimed particularly at women and girls. Strengthening educational quality is also viewed as a crucial step toward addressing KKG in broader society. Universities serve as influential arenas for cultivating gender awareness and advancing inclusive pedagogical practices. As such, they are expected to foster academic environments, instructional methods, and institutional cultures that actively resist gender bias and challenge discriminatory stereotypes.¹³

The development of the Women Ulama Cadre Education Program “Pendidikan Kader Ulama Perempuan” at the Grand Mosque of Istiqlal marks a significant and strategic initiative in reimagining religious education and leadership in Indonesia.¹⁴ As the largest mosque in Southeast Asia and a national symbol of Islamic moderation, Istiqlal offers a unique and authoritative platform for promoting inclusive religious discourse. The PKUP is designed to train a new generation of women Islamic scholars (*ulama perempuan*) who are theologically grounded, socially conscious, and capable of engaging critically with contemporary issues - particularly those related to gender equality and justice.¹⁵ The program integrates interdisciplinary knowledge, combining classical Islamic sciences with

¹² Melantik Rompegading Asmah and M Rompegading, “The Role of Higher Education in Fulfilling the Right of Tri Dharma in the Covid-19 Pandemic Era,” in *ICONEBS 2020: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Economics, Business and Social Humanities, ICONEBS, November 4-5, 2020, Madiun, Indonesia*, vol. 99 (European Alliance for Innovation, 2021); Syaik Abdillah et al., “Integration of The Tri Dharma of Higher Education to Realize Resilience and Social Transformation After The Pandemic: Community Service Based On Pesantren Higher Education,” in *The 4th International Conference on University Community Engagement (ICON-UC E 2022)*, vol. 4, 2022, p. 623–26; Mujiburrahman et al., “Structuration in Religious Education: The Ideological Burdens of Islamic Education in Indonesian Schools,” *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, no. 6 (2020), p. 300–316.

¹³ Bharat Dhiman, “Education’s Role in Empowering Women and Promoting Gender Inequality: A Critical Review,” *Available at SSRN 4556375*, 2023; Ottavia Brussino and Jody McBrien, “Gender Stereotypes in Education: Policies and Practices to Address Gender Stereotyping across OECD Education Systems,” *OECD Education Working Papers*, no. 271 (2022), p. 0_1-44; Larissa M Gaias et al., “From Laissez-Faire to Anti-Discrimination: How Are Race/Ethnicity, Culture, and Bias Integrated into Multiple Domains of Practice in Early Childhood Education?,” *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 36, no. 2 (2022), p. 272–95; Nofialdi et al., “Urf, Gender, and Customary Law: Negotiating Women’s Participation in Boar Hunting in Minangkabau, Indonesia,” *Ijtihad : Jurnal Wacana Hukum Islam Dan Kemanusiaan* 25, no. 2 (2025), p. 279–303.

¹⁴ Rosita Tandos, “Historical Approach and Analysis of Roles and Functions of Indonesian Mosques,” *Asian Social Work Journal* 9, no. 3 (2024), p. e00295–e00295.

¹⁵ Aksin Wijaya, Ibnu Muchlis, and Dawam Multazam Rohmatulloh, “Rethinking Gender Justice in the Quran: A Critical Exploration of Muslim Feminist Perspectives,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur’an Dan Hadis* 26, no. 1 (2025), p. 77–98; Syed Imad Alatas, “Women’s Issues and What It Means To Be a Muslimah: The Religious Orientations of Female Muslim Activists in Malaysia” (National University of Singapore (Singapore), 2021).

gender studies, social sciences, and leadership training, while also emphasizing practical community engagement. This mosque-based educational model represents an important shift in the landscape of Islamic education, challenging the historically male-dominated structure of religious authority and affirming women's right to participate fully in shaping religious and social narratives. By situating this program within the Istiqlal Mosque, the initiative also underscores the role of religious institutions in promoting gender justice, fostering interreligious dialogue, and contributing to national efforts in educational reform and women's empowerment. As such, the development of this program not only addresses the urgent need for gender-sensitive religious leadership but also positions Istiqlal Mosque as a pioneer in transforming the future of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia and beyond.¹⁶

This study examined the contributions of the Women Ulama Education Program (PKUP) conducted at the Istiqlal Grand Mosque to the development of gender-responsive curricula and transformative teaching methodologies. The program is particularly focused on enhancing women's knowledge, skills, and active participation in broader processes of social change. Central to this inquiry is the exploration of a mosque-based model of women's empowerment, implemented through a structured educational initiative tailored to cultivate women ulama. This model integrates formal academic pathways with Islamic scholarship and gender studies, positioning the mosque not only as a place of worship but also as a strategic centre for advancing gender justice and educational reform.¹⁷

Drawing on integrated frameworks (Islamic perspectives alongside gender and social welfare theories), this study adopts the concept of women's empowerment to examine how the PKUP develops participants' knowledge, skills, and lived experiences as alumni. It aims to cultivate influential female religious leaders and social agents who are capable of addressing contemporary gender issues, both as individuals and as members of women's groups, families, and communities. Accordingly, the study traces participants' life trajectories across different stages, analysing their experiences as both students and alumni of the program.

Gender continues to be a contentious issue that faces pushback in both academic and broader societal contexts. One significant area where bias persists is in the interpretation of religious texts. Traditional readings often sideline women's

¹⁶ Muhajir Abd Rahman et al., "Public Space and Women: A Case Study of Mosque Friendliness Towards Women in Ambon City," *Al-Iltizam: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 9, no. 1 (2024), p. 105–20.

¹⁷ Sura Jihad Mustafa Shalabi, "Unveiling the Skills of a Mujadilah: An Exploration of Women's Empowerment at Al-Mujadilah Center and Mosque at Qatar Foundation" (Hamad Bin Khalifa University (Qatar), 2025); AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm, "Breaking Barriers: Muslim Women's Scholarship and Engagement in Higher Education Leadership in Nigeria," *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies* 6, no. 2 (2025), p. 14–26; Bahruddin Umar Yakub et al., "Living Qur'an, Gender, and Sibaliparriq, in Mandar, Indonesia: Cultural Construction in the Perspective of Islamic Law," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 2 (2023), p. 1219.

rights, reinforcing unequal power dynamics. For instance, the term *qawwamun* - frequently translated as "leader" - is commonly cited to legitimize male dominance, while the story of woman being created from man's rib is used to support notions of female inferiority.¹⁸ These interpretations sustain systemic inequality and obstruct progress toward gender justice. As such, it is essential to critically reassess and dismantle these theological narratives, replacing them with interpretations that emphasize fairness, inclusivity, and respect for the inherent dignity of all individuals.

In Islam, divine attributes such as *ar-Rahman* (The Most Compassionate) and *ar-Rahim* (The Most Merciful), as well as references in *Surah Al-Fatihah*, emphasize that love and mercy are central to faith. Some interpretations even suggest maternal imagery in how Allah introduces divine care, underlining the nurturing aspect of the Divine. Islamic feminism offers a path forward, calling for a reinterpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith through a gender-equitable lens,¹⁹ in his book *The Nature of Equality and Gender Justice*, outlines several principles of gender equality as found in the Qur'an. He emphasizes that one of the fundamental purposes of human creation is to worship Allah (Q.S. Az-Dzariyat / 51:56). In this role as creations of God, both men and women are given equal potential to reach their ideal selves, regardless of their backgrounds be it ethnicity, race, or nationality. Moreover, both are equally entrusted with the responsibility of serving as stewards (*caliphs*) on earth (Q.S. Al-An'am / 6:165), characterized by submission, obedience, and devotion to Allah SWT. When it comes to achieving success or making contributions, Islam does not distinguish between men and women (Q.S. Ali Imran / 3:195; Q.S. An-Nisa / 4:124; and Q.S. Mu'min / 40:40). These Qur'anic verses reflect the core principle of gender equality, highlighting equal opportunities for all individuals in both spiritual pursuits and professional achievements.²⁰

From a broader perspective, a gender-sensitive approach recognizes that men and women are not the same, yet both possess three fundamental elements that must be acknowledged equally: rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. These

¹⁸ Katja von Schöneman, "Adam's Rib as a Shared Source of Patriarchy in Abbasid Iraq: The Interconnectedness of Jewish and Muslim Exegeses on the Creation of Woman," *Medieval Encounters* 31, no. 1 (2025), p. 47–71; David Boocker, "'Women Are Indebted to Milton': Milton and Woman's Rights in the Nineteenth Century," in *Milton Reinvented: Cultural Reception in 19th-Century America and 'Our Day'* (Springer, 2024), p. 103–31.

¹⁹ Heidemarie Winkel, "Islamic Feminism. Thinking Gender Justice as a Religious Knowledge Practice," in *Exploring Islam beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism: Sociological Approaches* (Springer, 2021), p. 179–210; Amna Yameen, "Navigating Gender and Religion in Leadership: Identity Construction of Women Leaders in Islamic Contexts," in *The Routledge Critical Companion to Leadership Studies* (Routledge, 2024), p. 212–23; Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender* (Jakarta: Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999).

²⁰ Jumni Nelli et al., "Qiwamah's Reconception of Muhammad Shahrur's Thoughts and Their Implications for the Feminist Movement in the World," *Al-Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 9, no. 1 (2024), p. 309.

shared elements form the basis for mutual support, effective collaboration, and meaningful contributions within families and communities. However, gender roles significantly influence individuals' access to these rights and resources, shaping their opportunities in diverse ways. Importantly, these roles are not fixed; they vary across different cultural, historical, and geographical settings, reflecting the dynamic nature of gender within societal structures. In other words, gender roles are not biologically predetermined, but are socially constructed and continually shaped by broader socio-economic, political, and cultural dynamics, as well as by individual identity markers such as age, race, social class, and ethnicity.²¹ These roles are further entrenched by longstanding cultural narratives and religious interpretations, many of which perpetuate rigid distinctions between men and women.

As noted by,²² such constructs are often treated as unquestionable truths, passed down through generations and normalized within both public consciousness and institutional frameworks. Crucially, these constructions frequently serve to legitimize unequal power relations and reinforce discriminatory practices that marginalize women and gender minorities. Religious texts, when interpreted through patriarchal lenses, can become powerful tools for justifying exclusion, hierarchy, and the denial of agency. Challenging these embedded narratives, therefore, requires not only critical theological reflection but also a broader socio-cultural transformation - one that reimagines authority, leadership, and participation through equitable and inclusive paradigms. Given this context, there is an urgent need to cultivate educational, religious, and institutional environments that actively embrace inclusivity and respect for diversity.²³ This includes integrating gender-sensitive approaches into curricular frameworks, institutional policies, and community engagement initiatives. By doing so, such spaces can contribute meaningfully to deconstructing gender stereotypes, fostering critical awareness, and promoting gender justice.²⁴

²¹ Katie Tavenner et al., "Intersectionality in Gender and Agriculture: Toward an Applied Research Design," *Gender, Technology and Development* 26, no. 3 (2022), p. 385–403; Vanessa Juarez-Bernaldez and Christian Staerklé, "The View From Below: Low-Status Youth Representations of the Political in Switzerland," *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 35, no. 4 (2025), p. e70149.

²² Mensah et al., (2025)

²³ Anne Suryani and A Bukhori Muslim, "Religious Tolerance, Intellectual Humility, and Democratic Education," in *Embracing Diversity: Preparing Future Teachers to Foster Religious Tolerance* (Springer, 2024), p. 13–34; Sri Astuti A. Samad et al., "Teacher's Spiritual Competence and Its Implication in Islamic Religious Education Learning in Pidie, Aceh," *Ulumuna* 27, no. 2 (2023), p. 624–48.

²⁴ Lauren Gurrieri and Fiona Finn, "Gender Transformative Advertising Pedagogy: Promoting Gender Justice through Marketing Education," *Journal of Marketing Management* 39, no. 1–2 (2023), p. 108–33; Alyssa Whitford, "Understanding and Addressing Gender Stereotypes with Elementary Children: The Promise of an Integrated Approach," *Theory & Research in Social Education* 51, no. 2 (2023), p. 264–95.

From a broader perspective, a gender-sensitive approach acknowledges that while men and women are inherently different, both share three fundamental elements that demand equal recognition: rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. These shared components underpin mutual support, effective collaboration, and meaningful contributions within families and communities.²⁵ However, gender roles significantly mediate individuals' access to these rights and resources, thereby shaping their life opportunities in complex and varied ways. Importantly, gender roles are not biologically fixed; rather, they are socially constructed and continually reshaped by socio-economic, political, and cultural forces, as well as by intersecting identity markers such as age, race, social class, and ethnicity.²⁶ These roles differ markedly across cultural, historical, and geographical contexts, reflecting the fluid and dynamic nature of gender within societal structures.²⁷

These socially constructed gender roles are further reinforced by entrenched cultural narratives and religious interpretations that often sustain rigid distinctions between men and women.²⁸ As highlights, such constructs tend to be regarded as unquestionable truths, perpetuated through generations and normalized within both public consciousness and institutional frameworks. Critically, these constructions frequently serve to legitimize unequal power relations and reinforce discriminatory practices that marginalize women and gender minorities. When religious texts are interpreted through patriarchal lenses, they risk becoming potent instruments for justifying exclusion, hierarchy, and the denial of agency.²⁹ Challenging these embedded narratives therefore necessitates not only critical theological reflection but also broader socio-cultural transformations that reimagine authority, leadership, and participation along inclusive and equitable lines.³⁰

²⁵ Carmel Devaney et al., "Child, Parent or Family? Applying a Systemic Lens to the Conceptualisations of Family Support in Europe," *European Journal of Social Work* 26, no. 2 (2023), p. 335–47; Ruth E Cooper et al., "The Effectiveness, Implementation, and Experiences of Peer Support Approaches for Mental Health: A Systematic Umbrella Review," *BMC Medicine* 22, no. 1 (2024), p. 72.

²⁶ Hema Appachu and Jitendra Kumar Singh, "Understanding the Social Identity of Adolescents in the Indigenous Kodava Community of India," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 34, no. 2 (2024), p. 327–38; Tavenner et al., "Intersectionality in Gender and Agriculture: Toward an Applied Research Design."

²⁷ Bukola L Oloba and Anne M Blankenship, "Gender Dynamics in Online Religious Leadership in Nigeria: Investigating How Digital Platforms Shape Communication, Authority, and Influence," *Religions* 16, no. 1 (2024), p. 5.

²⁸ Hiba, (2025)

²⁹ Rabea M Khan, "Speaking 'Religion' through a Gender Code: The Discursive Power and Gendered-Racial Implications of the Religious Label," *Critical Research on Religion* 10, no. 2 (2022): 153–69; Brenda Bartelink, Chia Longman, and Tamsin Bradley, "Gender, Religion, and Harm: Conceptual and Methodological Reflections," in *Religion and Gender-Based Violence* (Routledge, 2022), p. 1–25.

³⁰ Carolina Montero Orphanopoulos, "Reframing Vulnerability through an Embodied Theological Lens: Towards Ethical Engagement in a Globalized Context," *Religions* 15, no. 7 (2024), p. 766; Mlamli Diko, "Exploring Women's Challenges and Victories in the New Testament through Liberation Theology," *Theologia Viatorum* 48, no. 1 (2024), p. 230.

Given this context, there is an urgent imperative to cultivate educational, religious, and institutional environments that actively embrace inclusivity and respect for diversity. This involves integrating gender-sensitive frameworks into curricular design, institutional policies, and community engagement initiatives. Such integration can play a crucial role in deconstructing gender stereotypes, fostering critical awareness, and advancing gender justice within diverse social settings.³¹ By fostering these transformative spaces, institutions can contribute to dismantling systemic inequalities and nurturing a culture of equity and respect that aligns with contemporary values of human rights and social justice.

Academics play a pivotal role as agents of change in advancing gender equality and justice. Their contributions must be grounded in critical, interdisciplinary analysis that fosters a balanced and accurate understanding of gender as a social construct that affects all individuals - not only women, but also men and other gender identities. It is essential to move beyond the misconception that gender issues pertain solely to women, and instead approach gender as a relational and systemic concept embedded in cultural, political, and institutional structures.³² To strengthen gender awareness within academic environments, the integration of gender perspectives into teaching and learning strategies is crucial. Embedding these perspectives into curricula can enhance the sensitivity of the academic community, encouraging critical engagement with gender concepts and enabling students and educators alike to apply, promote, and advocate for gender equity within their broader social contexts.³³ states that gender discourse is a contemporary issue that is necessary to be applied as an alternative perspective and analysis for a scientific field of studies.³⁴

In the broader Islamic context, movements such as ‘Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality’ (WISE) illustrate how gender equality advocacy within Muslim communities fosters theological reinterpretation and institutional reform. Meanwhile, multidimensional models of empowerment in

³¹ Matthew Damilola Omojemite, Elphina Nomabandla Cishe, and Mpongwana Zibongiwe, “Gender Stereotyping and Social Norms: Exploring Theoretical Perspectives and Educational Implications,” *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 9, no. 3 (2024), p. 77–92; Whitford, “Understanding and Addressing Gender Stereotypes with Elementary Children: The Promise of an Integrated Approach.”

³² Amanda Keddie, “Gender Equality Reform and Police Organizations: A Social Justice Approach,” *Gender, Work & Organization* 30, no. 3 (2023), p. 810–25; Jess MacArthur et al., “Gender-Transformative Approaches in International Development: A Brief History and Five Uniting Principles,” in *Women’s Studies International Forum*, vol. 95 (Elsevier, 2022), p. 102635; Debashish Sarker Dev and Jaime A Manalo IV, “Gender and Adaptive Capacity in Climate Change Scholarship of Developing Countries: A Systematic Review of Literature,” *Climate and Development* 15, no. 10 (2023), p. 829–40; Kathryn Haynes, “The Role of Accounting in Creating, Perpetuating, and Overcoming Inequalities: Going beyond Discipline, Borders, and Stasis towards Accounting as Activism,” *Gender, Work & Organization* 32, no. 2 (2025), p. 912–28.

³³ Kohtamäki et al., (2022)

³⁴ Ismail Anshari et al., “Learning Innovation In Dayah: The Effectiveness Of Experiential Learning Methods In Developing Students’ Skills,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 3 (2025).

social welfare theory stress the need to operate at micro (individual), mezzo (relational in family, group and community), and macro (institutional in state) levels for sustainable changes.³⁵

Despite Indonesia's prominent position in the global Islamic community, there remains a significant shortage of qualified female *ulama* to address this pressing need. Future women scholars must be equipped not only with a solid grounding in classical Islamic scholarship but also with a comprehensive understanding of contemporary socio-economic, political, and global issues. In response, several non-governmental organizations and private universities have initiated specialized educational programs aimed at developing women *ulama* who can apply their knowledge both locally and internationally.³⁶ These scholars are expected to respond to the diverse needs of women, families, and communities in a rapidly changing world.

As heirs to the prophetic mission, *ulama* (scholars and leaders) bear the responsibility of guiding the ummah not only in religious matters but also in addressing contemporary societal challenges. Furthermore, there is a growing need for women *ulama* who can guide individuals, families, women's groups and communities toward harmonious and equitable living. These *ulama* are uniquely positioned to promote moderate, gender - inclusive interpretations of Islamic teachings. Such interpretations emphasize values of justice, equality, compassion, and welfare-counteracting the over-masculinization often present in religious discourse.

Several initiatives from governmental and non-governmental organizations aimed to integrate gender awareness within Islamic higher education (PTAI) continue through policies and stakeholder collaboration. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) has engaged in multi-party dialogues to fortify the gender

³⁵ Zeliha Tören and Bilge Aslan Açı, "Social Workers' Experience with the Concept of Empowerment: Voices from the Disability Field," *Journal of Social Work Practice* 38, no. 3 (2024), p. 287–301; Melanie Zajacová, "Social Work Between Marginalization and Empowerment: Addressing Poverty Through Trust and a Human-Centered Approach," *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems*, 2026, p. 1–23; Maryurena Lorenzo et al., "Green Social Work as a Framework for Socio-Environmental Transformation: A Systematic Review," *Social Sciences* 14, no. 12 (2025), p. 720; M Rezaul Islam, "Introduction to Social Work," in *Fieldwork in Social Work: A Practical Guide* (Springer, 2024), p. 1–26.

³⁶ Faqiat Afolake Adeaga, "The Role of Muslim Women in Nigeria's Socioeconomic Development Through the Implementation of The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals" (University of South Florida, 2024); Sulaiman Haqpana and Maria Tsouroufli, "'Powerless, Poor and Needy?': Reproducing Colonial Discourses of Gender and Muslim Women through Educational Interventions by I-NGOs in Afghanistan," in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 98 (Elsevier, 2023), p. 102714; Emma Rachmawati et al., "The Roles of Islamic Faith-Based Organizations on Countermeasures against the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia," *Heliyon* 8, no. 2 (2022); Mukhtar Umar Bunza, "Gender, Religion and Grassroots Development in Nigeria: Diagraming the Role of the Federation of Muslim Women Associations (FOMWAN) and the Christian Zumuntar Mata," 2025.

curriculum across PTAIs. The ultimate goal is to create a gender-sensitive Islamic academic paradigm - responsive, inclusive, and capable of addressing inequality.

Additionally, there are three prominent institutions (Fahmina Institute, Rahima Institute, and the PKUP of Istiqlal Mosque) that offer graduate and postgraduate programs aimed at strengthening both academic competencies and broader capacities necessary for becoming a *woman ulama* in Indonesia. These programs emerged during Indonesia's Reformation Era, which began on May 21, 1998, following the fall of President Suharto's New Order regime (1966–1998).³⁷ This period was marked by significant social, economic, and political instability, prompting a nationwide push for democratization, justice, and inclusive development including within the realm of Islamic education and leadership.³⁸

The first is Fahmina Institute that is a socio-religious organization founded in November 2000, dedicated to advancing social justice and supporting marginalized communities through education, advocacy, and community engagement.³⁹ A major initiative that Fahmina's actively involved was undertaken to strengthen the roles of Indonesian women *ulama* through the program titled "Strengthening the Perspectives and Roles of Women Ulama in Advancing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, and Pakistan." The program also served as a platform for knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practices, particularly through the Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI), held in Cirebon from 13 to 16 October 2024. This gathering brought together 12 prominent women leaders and *ulama* from Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. The initiative pursued three primary objectives. First, it aimed to strengthen the perspectives and capacities of Muslim women leaders in promoting gender equality and social inclusion. Second, it sought to provide a broader platform for exchanging experiences and best practices in advancing women's leadership toward a just, inclusive, and equitable society grounded in both religious and humanitarian values. Third, it created a space for engagement and consolidation using the KUPI methodology, enabling participants

³⁷ Petrus Kase, "Government-Business Relations in Policymaking during the New Order Indonesia," *Administration & Society* 56, no. 9–10 (2024), p. 1104–45; Majda El Muhtaj, "A Critical Analysis of the Indonesian Human Rights Action Plan 1998-2020," *Jurnal HAM* 13 (2022), p. 519.

³⁸ Sri Astuti A. Samad et al., "Islamic Educational Approaches To Stunting Prevention And Child Protection," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 2 (2024), p. 163–74.

³⁹ Fahmina Institute institute's program aims to build an equitable social structure that empowers individuals with equal opportunities for political, social, and cultural participation. It operates through four key program divisions: Islam and gender, Islam and democracy, Islam and community autonomy, and the centre for data, information, and media. The organization has strategic focus areas include formal and non-formal education, capacity building, social and digital transformation, gender equity, advocacy for marginalized groups, and environmental sustainability (www.fahmina.id).

to build confidence and replicate similar initiatives in their respective countries to support gender equality, social inclusion, human rights, and justice.⁴⁰

Another institution runs for women *ulama* program is Rahima Institute established on August 5, 2000. By its 10th anniversary in 2010, Rahima repositioned itself as a movement under the banner “*Women Ulama for the Common Good of Humanity*,” shifting from a foundation (*yayasan*) to an association (*perhimpunan*) to better support its growing activist role. A decade later, in 2020, Rahima reaffirmed and expanded its mission to include “*the Protection of Nature*,” emphasizing the responsibility of women *ulama* in environmental stewardship, aligned with the 2017 KUPI fatwa.⁴¹ Functioning as a movement, Rahima actively collaborates with various grassroots networks and Islamic communities nationwide, with a particular focus on *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding schools). The institute’s work is grounded in Islamic principles of justice, challenging patriarchal interpretations in classical *fiqh* and advancing more egalitarian readings of Islamic texts. In doing so, Rahima critiques not only the structural political and cultural barriers that limit women’s roles, but also religious discourses that restrict their opportunities for self-actualization. The organization seeks to promote gender-just interpretations rooted in legitimate classical Islamic methodologies, forming the basis for its education and empowerment programs - especially those focused on women.⁴²

The pioneering programs to empower education of women have already produced female *ulama* at the master's and doctoral levels, many of whom are now committed to serving Muslim communities and contributing to broader societal progress.⁴³ Therefore, this study specifically aims to identify and analyze an emerging model of mosque-based gender education, namely the Women Ulama Education Program (PKUP) implemented at Grand Mosque of Istiqlal. The PKUP is designed to cultivate female religious scholars and leaders equipped to address

⁴⁰ Eytayo Joseph Oyeyipo et al., “Understanding the Importance of Inclusive Techniques in Promoting Peace and Equal Justice,” in *Sustainable Development Goals* (CRC Press, 2024), p. 291–301; Etienne Lwamba et al., “Strengthening Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality in Fragile Contexts towards Peaceful and Inclusive Societies: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis,” *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 18, no. 1 (2022), p. e1214; Melita Louise Grant et al., “Working Together: A Study of Civil Society Partnerships between WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) and GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) Organisations in Timor-Leste,” *Frontiers in Water* 5 (2023), p. 1047955; Michaela Guthridge et al., “Promoting Gender Equality: A Systematic Review of Interventions,” *Social Justice Research* 35, no. 3 (2022), p. 318–43.

⁴¹ Nur Faizah et al., “The Role of Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI) in the Search for Gender Equality-Based Islamic Law,” *Al-Adalah* 21, no. 2 (2024), p. 323.

⁴² Sandra Pertek, “Integrating Gender Sensitivity into Muslim Humanitarianism,” *Muslim Humanitarianism Review* 1, no. 1 (2024); Mohammad Fahri Husaeni, Aceng Kosasih, and Udin Supriadi, “Challenging Gender Mainstreaming through the Narrative of Islamic Youth Organization: A Case Study on Persis in Indonesia,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 29, no. 1 (2023), p. 97–120.

⁴³ Amina Boukheloua, “Identity and Context Change: Case Study of Saudi Women in the UK.” University of Leeds, 2023; Tandos, 2022, 2024)

challenges such as gender injustice, radicalism, and social inequality through moderate Islamic values and gender-sensitive approaches. In addition, the study examines the program's historical development, its gender-inclusive curriculum, and its overall effectiveness in enhancing participants' knowledge, skills, and lived experiences. It also explores the program's impact on graduates' career trajectories, leadership capacities, and their contributions to families, women's groups, and the broader community.

This study employed a qualitative research approach, with data collection carried out through in-depth interviews joined by participants (e.g. student, alumni and teacher of Women Ulama Cadre Education Program of the Istiqlal Mosque). The data collection process involved the participants that take part in semi-structured interviews which included a mix of closed and open-ended questions. The data analysis process analysis involved creating memos, transcribing interviews, coding responses and identifying categories, and the data validity was conducted through member-checking.⁴⁴ My knowledge of the PKUP and experience as one of the initiators and program managers of PKUP during the 2021 - 2024 period has significantly enriched the data collection and analytical depth of this study.

This section addresses three main aspects. First, it outlines the establishment and institutional profile of the Women Ulama Cadre Education Program (PKUP) of Masjid Istiqlal, highlighting its role in advancing gender-responsive curriculum design and instructional strategies, particularly in strengthening women's knowledge, competencies, and active participation in broader social transformation through a mosque-based empowerment model. Second, it examines the program's learning design and processes, including its underlying intellectual foundations, curriculum structure, and pedagogical approaches implemented within this formal educational framework. Third, it analyses the program's impact, with particular attention to the contributions of its alumni to both the mosque and the wider community.

The Establishment and Profile of the PKUP of Istiqlal Mosque

Despite its significant Muslim population, Indonesia continues to face a shortage of qualified *ulama*, particularly women *ulama*. The presence of women scholars is essential for addressing pressing socio-religious and national challenges, especially those that directly impact women. To effectively engage in these issues, future women *ulama* must possess not only a strong foundation in classical Islamic scholarship but also a comprehensive understanding of contemporary issues, including those related to society, economics, health, and education at both national and global levels.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Miles & Hubberman, 2014; Sahakyan, 2023; Soysal & Türkmen, 2024.

⁴⁵ David Kloos and Nor Ismah, "Siting Islamic Feminism: The Indonesian Congress of Women Islamic Scholars and the Challenge of Challenging Patriarchal Authority," *History and Anthropology* 34, no. 5 (2023), p. 818–43; Abdullah Sahin, "Reimagining the Vocation of Being a

In response to this need, Masjid Istiqlal, Indonesia's national mosque and the largest mosque in Southeast Asia, has undertaken a strategic initiative to advance women's roles in Islamic scholarship. In September 2021, the mosque launched a major program aimed at addressing pressing social issues through the education and development of future female *ulama*. The Women Ulama Education Program (PKUP) was established as a platform to cultivate a new generation of women scholars equipped to address gender-based inequalities through moderate and gender-responsive interpretations of Islam.

The PKUP envisions becoming a world-class centre for *ulama* education. Its primary goal is to prepare future *ulama*, including women *ulama*, who are well-versed in both classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship, promote moderate and contextual interpretations of Islam, and gain recognition from the *ummah* at the local, national, and international levels. In other words, this program was designed in response to both national and global demands, with a view toward fostering future partnerships and collaborative initiatives.⁴⁶

The PKUP is a two-year master's program, with its inaugural cohort (the 2021 batch) serving as a pilot initiative. This initial phase is being conducted in collaboration with the Jakarta Institute for Quranic Studies (Institut PTIQ Jakarta) and involves both local and international scholars. For subsequent cohorts, the program will adopt a split-model format. Students will complete their first year of coursework at University of Qur'anic Science (PTIQ) Jakarta, followed by a second year at a partner university abroad.

The educators or professors involved must possess a robust foundation of knowledge, skills, and experience across local, national, and international contexts. Their qualifications should be demonstrated not only through academic credentials but also through a proven track record of research, scholarly publications, and practical engagement in relevant fields. This multidimensional expertise ensures that the pedagogical approach is both contextually grounded and globally informed, enabling future women *ulama* to navigate complex socio-religious dynamics with

Scholar at the Intersection of Islamic and Western Higher Education: A Proposal," in *The Contemporary Scholar in Higher Education: Forms, Ethos and World View* (Springer, 2024), p. 251–77; Eric Hariyanto and Moh. Hamzah, "Bibliometric Analysis of the Development of Islamic Economic Dispute Resolution Research in Indonesia," *Juris: Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah* 21, no. 2 (2022).

⁴⁶ The Women Ulama Cadre Education (PKUP) of Istiqlal Mosque emerged through a joint effort between the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak (KemenPPPA), the Istiqlal Mosque Management Board (BPMI), the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP), and the Jakarta University for Quranic Studies (PTIQ) in Jakarta. The PKUP seeks to empower its participants with the intellectual foundation and practical skills needed to become influential leaders and role models within Muslim communities in Indonesia and beyond. Moreover, as a hub for community empowerment, the Istiqlal Mosque remains dedicated to advancing gender justice, safeguarding the rights of women and children, and promoting inclusive social development.

intellectual rigor and ethical sensitivity. Furthermore, the presence of such qualified educators contributes to the credibility and transformative potential of the program, positioning it as a model for gender-just religious education within and beyond Indonesia.

The PKUP is designed to achieve the following key outcomes: 1) Enhanced gender awareness across religious, social, and national contexts, 2) Greater participation of women in religious, societal, and national leadership roles, 3) Advancement of Islamic gender discourses, supported by qualitative and quantitative research, the development of gender theories, improved best practices, and more effective women's empowerment and child protection programs—particularly those based in mosques, 4) An increase in the number of women *ulama* with a comprehensive understanding of Islam, Islamic studies, moderation in religious interpretation, gender equality, and the practical application of empowerment policies, grounded in Islamic virtues, 5) Strengthened leadership abilities, critical thinking skills, and expanded global perspectives on Islam and Muslim societies. These points are reflected Islamic gender perspective and enhance women's roles as agents of change as individuals and members of families, communities, organizations and society.⁴⁷

Finally, students seeking to deepen their expertise in Islamic studies have the opportunity to participate in a short-term academic program at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which substantially enriches the Islamic studies component of their overall curriculum. Additional academic collaborations are established with Al-Qarawiyyin University in Morocco, as well as Hartford International University, the University of California, Riverside, and Harvard University in the United States. During their time abroad, students undertake coursework in areas such as gender and women's studies, alongside critical contemporary issues including modernism, radicalism, and terrorism. Furthermore, they benefit from access to extensive academic resources, engage in joint research projects and scholarly publications, and complete a master's thesis under the supervision of faculty members at the host institutions. As reported by the majority of participants, the short-term study abroad program is particularly meaningful in fostering international academic exposure and intercultural competence, enabling students not only to immerse themselves in global academic environments but also to engage with diverse communities within and beyond the university setting.

Learning Design and Process

Several studies on Gender and Islamic focused on certain issues such as education for women and developing learning methods including gender curriculum, researches and improving women's roles in communities. Banks (as cited in)⁴⁸ delineates four approaches to incorporating gender in curricula: 1)

⁴⁷ Al-Hmaid et al., 2025; Becsei et al., 2021; Tandos, 2020; Zohery, 2024.

⁴⁸ Shih & Wang, 2022.

Contribution or introducing gender content into existing material; 2) Additive or adding new gender elements without restructuring the core curriculum; 3) Transformational or fundamentally redesigning curriculum from a gender-sensitive standpoint; 4) Social Action or encouraging gender-sensitive behaviours and decisions in academic and social settings. These models offer a theoretical foundation for curriculum reform toward gender inclusion. According to⁴⁹ the expected outcomes of gender-focused learning in the classroom should encompass a balanced integration of cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitudes, values, and emotional responses), and psychomotor (skills) domains.⁵⁰ It is essential that learning is not limited solely to intellectual understanding, while neglecting the attitudinal and behavioural aspects - doing so would undermine the holistic nature of education.

As previously noted, this study aimed to investigate the impact of the Women *Ulama Program* (PKU-P) on the development of gender-responsive curricula and teaching methods, with particular emphasis on enhancing women's knowledge, skills, and active participation in promoting social transformation. The analysis was guided by three interconnected theoretical frameworks: the Islamic perspective, gender theory, and a community development approach, reflecting the core objectives of Islamic Higher Education. These intended learning outcomes should be explicitly reflected in the Semester Learning Plan (RPS) to ensure coherence across cognitive, affective, and practical domains.⁵¹

As previously noted, introducing gender issues in PKU-P curriculum is effectively achieved through the integration of relevant themes within course syllabi or through specialized courses dedicated to gender discourse. It highlights the necessity of embedding historical context into gender education, moving beyond a purely textual approach, and examining the socio-historical circumstances surrounding the revelation of the Qur'an (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and the narration of Hadith (*asbāb al-wurūd*), and connecting these insights to present-day social realities. To deepen their understandings, the students are encouraged to explore gender theories through diverse scholarly perspectives, including Sufism and Islamic jurisprudence.

The stages of gender education of PKUP begin with introducing fundamental concepts and theories related to gender equality, justice, and gender-based empowerment. This initial phase emphasizes contextual understanding by engaging students with real-world issues, fostering critical dialogue, analyzing academic texts, and comparing family law frameworks across different cultural and national settings. This contextualized approach promotes a more nuanced and

⁴⁹ Tandos, (2020)

⁵⁰ Kurniati Abidin et al., "Determinants of Domestic Violence in Indonesia from a Gender and Sociology of Law Perspective," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 8, no. 2 (2025): p. 701–23.

⁵¹ Teguh Budiharso et al., "Using Bloom's Taxonomy in Rubrics for Assessing Writing and Speaking Skills," *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)* 18, no. 2 (2024), p. 146–59.

comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings on gender, enabling students to critically assess traditional interpretations and apply them to contemporary gender issues. Moreover, the PKUP applies pedagogical strategies that promote critical thinking, which is essential for cultivating a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of gender in Islamic scholarship.

Within the program, in-class strategies-such as open dialogue and the sharing of personal experiences, particularly those grounded in students' local, cultural, and religious contexts- serve as powerful tools for expanding perspectives and cultivating empathy. These discussions not only validate diverse lived experiences but also help students critically engage with gender issues through an Islamic lens. Beyond the classroom, students are encouraged to explore gender-related challenges within their own communities through various research methods, including literature reviews, fieldwork, and case studies. These experiential learning activities are instrumental in bridging theoretical frameworks with real-world practice, enabling students to develop contextually relevant insights.⁵² To further enrich the learning process, educators may incorporate interactive and creative pedagogies such as role-playing, quizzes, film analysis, and other participatory methods. These approaches foster critical thinking, facilitate meaningful dialogue, and empower students to articulate and advocate for gender justice solutions that are responsive to both local realities and global discourses within Islamic scholarship.

Third, gender-focused learning assignments play a crucial role in reinforcing theoretical knowledge through practical engagement. Like other academic disciplines, gender education should extend beyond the classroom and actively involve community-based interactions to challenge and transform gender-biased mindsets. At this point, the PKUP also offers students valuable opportunities to engage in internships with institutions that play a significant role in shaping and advancing gender equality and justice in both policy and practice. These include key governmental and religious bodies such as the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah. Through these placements, students gain first-hand experience in institutional processes, advocacy strategies, and policy implementation related to gender issues within Islamic and national frameworks.⁵³

Furthermore, the PKUP actively promotes interreligious understanding and a culture of mutual respect by incorporating structured visits to religious

⁵² Matthew Daniels et al., "Global Perspectives, Local Impact: Facilitating Responsible Management Learning Outcomes through International Experiential Learning," *The International Journal of Management Education* 23, no. 3 (2025), p. 101243; Stefania Fantinelli et al., "Bridging the Gap between Theoretical Learning and Practical Application: A Qualitative Study in the Italian Educational Context," *Education Sciences* 14, no. 2 (2024), p. 198.

⁵³ Muhammad Rasyid et al., "Science And Its Role In Changes In Islamic Legal Thought (An Analysis Of Changes In The Fatwa Of The Indonesian Ulema Council Due To Recent Scientific Findings)," *Syariah: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pemikiran* 23, no. 2 (2024), p. 120–37.

institutions representing diverse faith traditions. These experiential engagements are complemented by inviting leaders from various religious communities to participate as guest speakers in classroom settings. Such initiatives are thoughtfully designed to expand students' awareness of religious pluralism and deepen their appreciation for the complexities of interfaith dialogue. By engaging directly with diverse beliefs and practices, students develop the critical skills and empathetic perspectives necessary to foster inclusive and socially responsive Islamic scholarship. This commitment to interreligious engagement not only enriches the educational experience but also equips future women ulama with the knowledge and sensitivity required to contribute constructively to peaceful coexistence and collaborative efforts in multicultural societies.

The curricula implemented in the PKUP – as a program studying Islam, gender and development - are designed to provide a comprehensive platform for the discussion and critical analysis of pressing global issues such as peace, human rights, security, and sustainable development.⁵⁴ These topics are explored through an intersectional gender lens, with the aim of fostering a deeper understanding of how global and local structures affect women and marginalized groups. Central to the curriculum is the promotion of gender equality and social justice, particularly in the context of development processes. This is reflected in the evaluation and formulation of public policies, programs, and services, especially those targeting women and children.⁵⁵ By engaging with both theoretical frameworks and practical case studies, students are encouraged to critically examine the ways in which development initiatives can either reinforce or challenge systemic inequalities. Ultimately, the PKUP curriculum seeks to equip students with the analytical tools and advocacy skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to the creation of more inclusive and equitable societies.

Alumni's Perspective and Contributions to Communities

Alumni of the Women Ulama Cadre Education Program (PKUP) of Istiqlal Mosque play a vital role in advancing gender justice and transformative religious leadership within their communities and beyond. Furthermore, the alumni become influential agents of change, contributing significantly to both religious discourse and community development at local, national, and even international levels.

⁵⁴ Khalid Ibrahim H. Alhassan et al., "Reproducing Legal Culture Thru Cultural Capital: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia," *Nurani: Jurnal Kajian Syari'ah Dan Masyarakat* 25, no. 2 (2025), p. 716–31.

⁵⁵ Muslim Zainuddin et al., "Protection of Women and Children in the Perspective of Legal Pluralism: A Study in Aceh and West Nusa Tenggara," *Samarah* 8, no. 3 (2024), p. 1948–73; Fajri M Kasim et al., "The Protection of Women and Children Post-Divorce in Sharia Courts in Aceh: A Sociological Perspective," *AHKAM : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 22, no. 2 (2022).

The PKUP facilitates interactions with experienced practitioners working in the fields of women's empowerment, education, and religious leadership.⁵⁶ In addition, structured visits to strategic institutions and organizations - such as ministries, religious councils, and civil society groups - allowed participants to observe and learn from best practices in advancing gender equality and community development. These experiences not only broadened the participants' knowledge base but also fostered meaningful collaborations and mentorship opportunities that continue to benefit them in their professional and community-based roles.

Through direct engagement with leading scholars - both Indonesian and international who participated in the program's offline and online sessions, participants gained exposure to diverse perspectives in Islamic scholarship, gender studies, and social justice. One participant explained:

" ... Through the program, I have developed a critical understanding of and awareness of the importance of issues of justice and gender equality in life at the local, national, and international levels... I was able to expand my network and meet professors with strong academic expertise in gender-related issues, gaining valuable knowledge for my profession as a gender-sensitive religious counsellor and for community service.

Another participant added:

"..Completing the PKUP provided me with a comprehensive understanding of justice, compassion, and social balance in relation to my role as a leader, as well as in becoming a better person, woman, and servant of God... I became deeply aware of how the program enriched my knowledge, character, and sense of social responsibility toward society. I felt that this program marked a turning point in my life, as I gained new insights into gender perspectives within Islam."

Equipped with interdisciplinary knowledge, critical theological insight, and a strong commitment to gender justice, the graduates of the Women Ulama Program actively contribute across various sectors, including education, religious leadership, social advocacy, and policymaking. In fact, many have taken on roles as Islamic preachers (*muballighat*), educators in *pesantren* and universities, and facilitators in grassroots organizations addressing gender-based violence, women's rights, and interfaith dialogue.⁵⁷

While some alumni return to their previous institutions to strengthen existing programs, others embark on new professional paths - such as teaching at

⁵⁶ Mukhsin Aseri et al., "Negotiating Authority and Knowledge: Religion, Science, and Politics in the Fatwa Transformations of the Indonesian Ulema Council," *Journal of Islamic Law* 6, no. 2 (2025), p. 286–316.

⁵⁷ Luigi Achilli and Giulia Melotti, "Targeted by Terrorists: Child Recruitment, Exploitation and Reintegration in Indonesia, Iraq and Nigeria" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024); Izzul Haq, "Exploring a Muslim Congregation and Leadership in Refugee Resettlement: A Case Study of Mosque Refugee Sponsorship in Montreal," 2025.

higher education institutions or working in government ministries - demonstrating the program's wide-reaching impact and relevance in diverse professional arenas. An alumni explained:

“Having had valuable experiences during my studies in the PKUP program has helped me significantly in developing my future career. I am now working as a lecturer at Universitas Indonesia (UI), where I apply the intellectual tools I gained to explore contemporary issues and contribute to public life and society.”

Furthermore, several participants noted that the PKUP offered valuable opportunities to expand their professional and intellectual networks. A very important point added by another participant:

“... The most important lesson I learned through my study is the importance of ‘women supporting other women’, because in the workplace this is often not fully recognized without first having a deep understanding of issues related to women, gender, and empowerment. This has had a real impact on my teaching of the course ‘Personality, Women, and Islam,’ where students responded very positively, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to learn about gender equality and justice from an Islamic scholar an alumna of the PKUP program at Masjid Istiqlal.”

The alumni's presence has challenged traditionally male-dominated spaces of religious authority, offering alternative interpretations of Islamic teachings that promote inclusivity and social equity.⁵⁸

Towards A Global Women Ulama Cadre Education

Indonesia exemplifies a national framework supportive of this vision through its legislative and policy measures. The ratification of Law No. 7 of 1984, endorsing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), alongside Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 promoting Gender Mainstreaming in National Development, reflects a strong commitment to gender equality (Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection Indonesia, 2017).⁵⁹ However, challenges such as political commitment, organizational culture, and technical capacity continue to pose barriers

Furthermore, the proposed Gender Equality and Justice Bill or “*Rancangan Undang-Undang Kesetaraan dan Keadilan Gender*” (KKG) represents a significant step toward establishing a comprehensive legal framework aimed at preventing and addressing gender-based discrimination in Indonesia. The bill seeks to institutionalize principles of gender equality across various sectors—such as education, employment, health, and governance—while promoting structural reforms to eliminate systemic barriers faced by women and marginalized groups. If

⁵⁸ Alghamdi, 2024; Nasri & Rahmatullah, 2024; Samier & ElKaleh, 2021.

⁵⁹ Rossa Ilma Silfiah and Humiati Humiati, “The Relevance of Gender Mainstreaming in Indonesia to Women's Rights in Islamic Law,” *Lampung Journal of International Law* 5, no. 1 (2023), p. 15–26.

enacted, the KKG Bill would provide clearer legal definitions, mechanisms for enforcement, and accountability measures to ensure that gender justice is upheld both in policy and practice. These legislative efforts are further strengthened by Indonesia's international commitments, including its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as well as ongoing collaborations with international organizations such as UN Women.⁶⁰ Together, these national and international frameworks highlight the growing recognition of gender equality not only as a matter of social justice but also as a fundamental human right that must be protected and advanced through both legal and institutional means.

Nevertheless, legal frameworks alone cannot achieve gender justice without concomitant shifts in societal values and individual behaviours. Gender education must move beyond the mere transmission of knowledge to the internalization of gender-equitable values such as empathy, fairness, and respect in everyday interpersonal interactions. This requires fostering critical consciousness that challenges entrenched gender norms and encourages reflective engagement with the socio-cultural and historical underpinnings of Islamic law and gender roles.⁶¹

The intersection of religious and gender justice frameworks is important to enhance the understanding, policies, and practises. This might be addressed through educational initiatives and programs. An effective gender education must cultivate growth across three interrelated domains: attitudes, cognitive comprehension, and practical skills. Students of such programs are expected to embody gender-equitable values deeply, critically analyse gender-related content - especially within the Islamic intellectual tradition - and devise innovative solutions to gender issues that resonate within their socio-cultural contexts. Crucially, gender justice is conceptualized not as the erasure of gender differences but as an appreciation of complementary roles without marginalization. Islamic teachings, when reinterpreted through contextual and socio-historical analyses, support the principles of gender equality.⁶²

⁶⁰ Laura Michelle Vaca Moreno, "The Effects of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on Mobilization: Analysis of Mobilization as a Compliance Mechanism" (Oklahoma State University, 2023).

⁶¹ AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm, "Gender, Marginalization, and Digital Technology in Islamic Learning: A Nigerian Perspective," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 27, no. 3 (2025), p. 1–13; Abdulaziz Al-Qahtani, "Navigating Modernity and Tradition: A CDA of Saudi News Articles on Women's Rights," *SAGE Open* 15, no. 3 (2025), p. 21582440251365750; Sadaf Zahra, "Women's Liberation? A Study of Cultural Diaspora" (Macquarie University, n.d.); Nur Fadhilah et al., "Reevaluating Nafkah Obligations: Female Muslim Scholars' Insight and Ethics of Gendered Finance in Indonesian Families," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 20, no. 2 (2025), p. 458–89.

⁶² Esha Chatterjee, "Gender and the Changing Feminist Discourse in Islam—A Socio-Historical Analysis," *Journal of E-Science Letters* 5, no. 1 (2024), p. 1–6; Maulida Khasanah, Moh Nor Ichwan, and Muhammad Yusuf Pratama, "Challenging Gender Inequality through Qur'anic Reinterpretation: The Hermeneutics of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 10, no. 1 (2025), p. 17–38; Yuliharti Yuliharti et al., "Reconstruction

The intersection of religious and gender justice frameworks is critical for developing more nuanced understandings and for informing inclusive policies and practices. Advancing this intersectionality requires well-designed educational initiatives that foster growth across three interrelated dimensions: attitudinal transformation, cognitive engagement, and the development of practical competencies. Participants in such programs are expected to internalize gender-equitable values, critically interrogate gender constructs - particularly within the Islamic intellectual tradition - and formulate innovative, context-sensitive responses to gender-based challenges.⁶³ Crucially, gender justice is not conceived as the erasure of gender distinctions, but rather as the recognition of complementary roles grounded in equity and devoid of marginalization. When approached through contextual and socio-historical hermeneutics, Islamic teachings can be reinterpreted to align with and support the principles of gender equality

Building on the foundational work of,⁶⁴ it is evident that the ultimate goal of gender education in this context transcends theoretical understanding, aiming instead for the tangible integration of gender equality principles into everyday life. This transformation requires that students not only internalize the concept of equal rights between men and women - particularly regarding access to knowledge and participation across societal sectors, but also actively engage in recognizing and addressing gender-based disparities within their communities. Such engagement necessitates advocacy for inclusive practices and the promotion of gender awareness that transcends cultural and institutional barriers.⁶⁵

A transformative gender education model emphasizes re-examining religious texts and interpretations, often influenced by patriarchal cultural and historical forces. By integrating insights from both Eastern and Western intellectual traditions, students are empowered to critique inherited biases and develop progressive understandings of Islamic ethics, law, and spirituality - particularly regarding women's roles, rights, and dignity.⁶⁶ This holistic educational framework

of Gender Interpretation in Misogynistic Hadiths: Implications for Islamic Education Reform,” *Journal of Posthumanism* 5, no. 3 (2025), p. 1654–66; Sukron Ma’Mun and Ibnu Akbar Maliki, “A Socio-Historical Study of Women’s Rights Advocacy in Islamic Legal Construction,” *JSEAHR* 7 (2023), p. 1.

⁶³ Khasanah, Ichwan, and Pratama, “Challenging Gender Inequality through Qur’anic Reinterpretation: The Hermeneutics of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid”; Chatterjee, “Gender and the Changing Feminist Discourse in Islam—A Socio-Historical Analysis.”

⁶⁴ Tandos (2020)

⁶⁵ Hüseyin Okur et al., “Academic Discourses On Women In The Context Of Islamic Law: A Bibliometric Approach,” *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar’iah* 17, no. 1 (2025), p. 224–54; Mufrod Teguh Mulyo, Mifedwil Jandra, and Munifah, “From Margin to Authority: Islamic Legal Discourse on Women’s Political Rights in a Global Human Rights Framework,” *Al-Manahij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam*, 2025, p. 133–48.

⁶⁶ Eugenie Samier and Eman ElKaleh, “Towards a Model of Muslim Women’s Management Empowerment: Philosophical and Historical Evidence and Critical Approaches,” *Administrative Sciences* 11, no. 2 (2021), p. 47; Galym Zhussipbek, Assyltay Tasbolat, and Zhanar Nagayeva, “Interdisciplinary Approach to Overcoming the Persistence of Patriarchal Islamic

aims to nurture not only scholarly excellence but also ethical commitment and social awareness, cultivating future women ulama as agents of change capable of advancing gender justice within diverse Muslim communities worldwide.⁶⁷

Considering all the points above, there is an urgent need to enhance women education has inspired several countries including Indonesia that consider the first to put the formal educational program in the national scale. One notable initiative is the Women Ulama Cadre Education Program (PKU-P) of Istiqlal Mosque, conducted in collaboration with various governmental institutions, as previously mentioned. This program is recognized by scholars and practitioners as a pioneering model for preparing women ulama through a structured formal education framework that integrates multiple disciplines and combines theoretical and practical learning. Professors involved in the program have emphasized its importance in equipping participants with the tools necessary to critically engage with contemporary issues of gender equality and justice from both national and global perspectives. By incorporating Islamic theological foundations, gender studies, and social sciences, the program fosters a nuanced understanding of gender justice rooted in Islamic teachings while remaining responsive to the realities of modern society. This interdisciplinary and intercultural approach enables graduates to contribute meaningfully to religious discourse, community empowerment, and policy advocacy in Indonesia and beyond.⁶⁸

Furthermore, the educational empowerment of women ulama represents a critical dimension in advancing gender justice within Islamic societies globally. This educational approach seeks to shift prevailing paradigms from blame and bias towards mutual respect and partnership. According to ⁶⁹, educating women help foster a culturally grounded yet globally informed understanding of gender roles, empowering men and women alike to collaborate effectively in families, communities, and broader society.

Lastly, the global movement for empowering women ulama hinges on combining robust legal frameworks with transformative gender education. It involves nurturing critical thinking and ethical values, reinterpreting religious knowledge through a gender justice lens, and promoting inclusive participation. As

Interpretations: Gender Equality, the Development of Empathy and Children's Rights, and Insights from the Reformist Eurasian Scholars of Early Twentieth Century," *Open Theology* 10, no. 1 (2024), p. 20220243; Bibi Faatima Kader, "Promoting Women's Rights in Islam: The Role of Female Madrasah Teachers in the Economic and Social Empowerment of Indian Muslim Girls" (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (South Africa), 2022).

⁶⁷ Tazeen M Ali, "Qur'anic Literacy as Women's Empowerment: Cultivating Interpretive Authority at the Women's Mosque of America," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89, no. 4 (2021), p. 1434–61; Adeaga, "The Role of Muslim Women in Nigeria's Socioeconomic Development Through the Implementation of The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals."

⁶⁸ Tarmizi M. Jakfar et al., "Efforts to Moderate Islamic Law through Hadith Studies Gathering in Aceh and West Sumatra Mosques," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum Dan Pranata Sosial* 20, no. 1 (2025).

⁶⁹ Dhiman, (2023)

this movement gains momentum, it holds the potential to reshape religious leadership and contribute significantly to social transformation, fostering gender-equitable Muslim societies globally.

Conclusion

This study analyses the Women Ulama Education Program (PKUP) at Masjid Istiqlal in developing gender-responsive curricula and transformative teaching approaches aimed at strengthening women's knowledge, skills, and participation in social change. It highlights a mosque-based empowerment model that integrates Islamic scholarship, formal education, and gender studies, positioning the mosque as both a place of worship and a centre for advancing gender justice and educational reform. The development of a gender-responsive curriculum constitutes an urgent imperative that must be addressed through a holistic framework integrating education, research, and community service, as prescribed by the *Tri Dharma* of Islamic Higher Education (educating, researching and engaging community). In the Indonesian context, this initiative is strategically significant for advancing the formation of women ulama (Islamic scholars) capable of contributing meaningfully to religious discourse, social transformation, and policymaking. Realizing these ambitions necessitates unwavering commitment, critical awareness, and active engagement from both academic institutions and wider society to collaboratively design strategies, synthesize knowledge, and implement practices within and beyond the university. Using Islamic perspectives alongside gender and social welfare theories, the study examines how the PKUP empowers participants to become influential female religious leaders and social agents capable of addressing gender issues at individual, family, and community levels. Islamic gender education must be anchored in contextualized, interdisciplinary approaches that effectively respond to global challenges related to gender justice within Islamic paradigms. Moreover, cross-sector collaboration among scholars, policymakers, religious authorities, and civil society is essential to ensure the fulfilment of educational and empowerment objectives. When thoughtfully executed, these efforts not only reinforce higher education institutions but also generate broader societal impact, thereby aligning with the core missions of *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*: Education, Research, and Community Service. Finally, the study also traces their development across stages as both students and alumni of the program. Drawing on the interdisciplinary knowledge, critical thinking skills, and ethical foundations acquired during their training, these graduates actively engage in various sectors including education, religious institutions, community development, and policymaking. Many have become influential preachers, educators, researchers, and advocates, offering gender-sensitive interpretations of Islamic texts and challenging patriarchal norms that perpetuate inequality. Their work often involves leading community discussions, issuing gender-aware religious guidance, supporting survivors of gender-based violence, and promoting inclusive policies at local and national levels.

Additionally, alumni contribute to building interfaith and intercultural understanding, particularly in pluralistic societies such as Indonesia. Their presence not only reshapes the traditionally male-dominated landscape of religious authority but also exemplifies the transformative impact of women's leadership in promoting justice, compassion, and social harmony rooted in Islamic values.

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