

## INTEGRATION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM: A CONTENT STUDY ON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

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Submitted: 26/12/2024

Revised: 27/02/2025

Accepted: 25/04/2025

Published: 29/06/2025

### Abstract

This study aims to explore the extent to which the principle of gender equality has been integrated in Islamic Religious Education textbooks at the elementary school level. The focus of the analysis is on the representation of the roles of men and women in the teaching materials used in the independent curriculum. The main data in this study are six Islamic Religious Education and Budi Pekerti textbooks for Grades 1 to 6, published by the Center for Curriculum and Bookkeeping, Research and Development, and Bookkeeping Agency, Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. These books include Islamic Religious Education and Ethics for Primary School Grade 1 by Muhammad Nurzakun and Joko Santoso in 2021, Islamic Religious Education and Ethics for Primary School Grade 2 by A. Zainal Abidin and Siti Kusri in 2021, and Islamic Religious Education and Ethics for Primary School Grade 3 by Moh. Ghazali and Erwin Wasti in 2022, the book Islamic Religious Education and Ethics for Primary 4 by Ahmad Faozan and Jamaluddin in 2021, the book Islamic Religious Education and Ethics for Primary 5 by Soleh Baedowi and Hairil Muhammad Anwar in 2021, and the book Islamic Religious Education and Ethics for Primary 6 by Nazirwan and Kholili Abdullah in 2022. This research uses a qualitative method with content analysis of the text and illustrations of Islamic Religious Education textbooks. The results of this study show a consistent pattern of gender bias, where male characters are dominant in religious and social roles, while female characters tend to be passive and limited to domestic roles. So then it is necessary to reformulate the content of the textbook to be more responsive to gender, in order to realize a fair Islamic education in accordance with the value of rahmatan lil 'alamin.

### Keywords

Basic Education, Curriculum, Gender Equality, Islamic Religious Education Textbooks.



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## INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental challenges in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) today is how to integrate the principle of gender equality into the curriculum and teaching materials, especially in the context of the elementary school level (Diasworo & Nurfuadi, 2024). Gender equality is one of the values contained in Islamic teachings, as reflected in Q.S. Al-Hujurat:13 and Q.S. At-Taubah:71. However, curricula and textbooks often contain gender stereotyping bias (Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, t.t.). This is also contrary to the will of the government based on institutional commitment to gender justice through Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 and Permendiknas No. 84 of 2008 (Abdurrahman Wahid, 2000). In fact, Islamic Religious Education textbooks have not been able to fully integrate these values. This opens an important gap in academic discourse by looking at how seriously gender mainstreaming efforts can be implemented in materials consumed by children from an early age.

This study critically examines six Islamic Religious Education textbooks published by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia used in the Merdeka Elementary Curriculum (grades 1-6), and finds that the principle of gender equality is still not proportionally integrated. The representation of male characters in the textbooks is very dominant, both in terms of visuals and narrative. They appear as prayer leaders, role models, advice givers, and the main actors in social and religious activities. In contrast, female characters often only play a role as complements, listeners, or domestic figures, such as helping mothers in the kitchen or serving food. In chapters on Asmaul Husna, congregational prayer, zakat, or noble morals, women's names hardly appear as active subjects, which indicates a striking narrative imbalance and has the potential to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes (Umami, 2020).

According to Shabir Ahmad Para in his research, the pedagogical implications of this kind of representation cannot be underestimated, as gender bias in textbooks shapes learners' mental schema of 'natural' social roles for men and women (Para, 2024). When girls are constantly exposed to narratives that limit their space for participation in religious and social life, it can lower their self-confidence and limit their future aspirations (Dewi, 2022). Then, children who are accustomed to biased narratives will unconsciously absorb the structure of unequal gender relations. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education textbooks not only function as dogmatic teaching tools but also as ideological tools that shape students' social understanding (Asrohah, 2008). So, updating the content of Islamic Religious Education textbooks with a gender-responsive approach and based on the

concept of *mubadalah* is an ethical and pedagogical necessity.

Previous studies with a similar focus to this study include research by Para (2024), which found that gender representation in textbooks is still heavily biased toward males, and there is a serious mismatch between the national curriculum policy vision and textbook development practices. Therefore, the importance of revising teaching materials with a more gender-fair and inclusive perspective is emphasized (Para, 2024). Meanwhile, research by Wahyudi and Lutfauziah (2023) revealed that the 2013 Curriculum Grade IV elementary school thematic textbook contains significant gender bias, evident in the dominance of male representation in the text, images, and social stereotypes that have the potential to reinforce patriarchal constructs from an early age (Wahyudi & Lutfauziah, 2023). On the other hand, Shafa's (2023) research shows that Islamic Education and Ethics textbooks for grade XI tend to be gender-neutral, with gender-equal illustrations and texts being more dominant than biased ones (Shafa et al., 2023). Furthermore, research by Selvira and Utomo (2021) also found a dominance of male figures in Islamic Culture History textbooks for elementary schools, reaching 82%, which contributes to the reproduction of the subordination and marginalization of women (Selvira & Utomo, 2021). Furthermore, research by Kurdi (2020) also highlights that in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Fiqh curriculum, there is hidden gender bias in the curriculum structure and learning practices (Core Competencies and Basic Competencies), which tends to place men as the main subjects and women as passive objects (Kurdi, 2020).

From the five previous studies, it can be concluded that teaching materials at the elementary level and above still contain gender bias. These biases are found in the curriculum, book visuals, story narratives, and characters in books. However, none of the previous studies have specifically discussed gender bias in the Merdeka Curriculum from grades 1 to 6. Seeing this gap, this study will focus on critiquing textbooks by combining content analysis of six Islamic Education textbooks from grades 1 to 6 of the Merdeka Curriculum. Using indicators of visual representation, language, narrative, and role construction, the analysis will be conducted based on the principle of *mubadalah*, a theological-ethical principle that establishes the relationship between men and women in Islam as complementary and equal (Kodir, 2023). Furthermore, this study not only critiques gender representation in text and images but also analyzes how these narratives construct social and spiritual constructions of the roles of boys and girls in religious and social life (Khotimah, 2008). This also shows that bias in Islamic Religious Education textbooks is not only about visual dominance

but also exists in word choice, role distribution, and the exclusion of women's experiences from religious public spaces (Tierney, 2001). Thus, this research adopts a comprehensive and ethical approach rooted in Islamic values to assess gender representation disparities, emphasizing the importance of curriculum reformulation with a gender-responsive perspective aligned with Islamic principles of justice.

## **METHOD**

This research is qualitative. This research was conducted to explore the Integration of Gender Equality in the Islamic Education Curriculum: Study of the Content of Elementary School Textbooks (Islamic Religious Education and Budi Pekerti Elementary School, Grades 1-6, 2021-2022, KEMENDIKBUDRISTEK). The data in this study are in the form of teaching materials contained in Islamic Religious Education and Budi Pekerti textbooks from grades 1-6. The data sources refer to the book Islamic Religious Education and Budi Pekerti Elementary School Grade 1 by Muhammad Nurzakun and Joko Santoso in 2021, the book Islamic Religious Education and Budi Pekerti Elementary School Grade 2 by A. Zainal Abidin and Siti Kusrini in 2021, and the book Islamic Religious Education and Budi Pekerti Elementary School Grade 3 by Moh. Ghozali and Erwin Wasti in 2022, the book Islamic Religious Education and Ethics for Primary Grade 4 by Ahmad Faozan and Jamaluddin in 2021, the book Islamic Religious Education and Ethics for Primary Grade 5 by Soleh Baedowi and Hairil Muhammad Anwar in 2021, the book Islamic Religious Education and Ethics for Primary Grade 6 by Nazirwan and Kholili Abdullah in 2022, and all of them were published by the Center for Curriculum and Bookkeeping, Research and Development, and Bookkeeping Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. This study also uses books, articles, and other studies that are still on the same topic of relevant discussion as supporting data.

Data collection techniques will involve a systematic literature review for journal articles and content analysis of Grade 1 to Grade 6 PAI and Budi Pekerti textbooks. The content analysis will focus on examining textual content (language, narrative, examples, exercises) and visual content (illustrations, pictures) (Rozali, 2022). The analytical framework will identify the frequency and visibility of male and female characters, the representation of gender roles and responsibilities such as, domestic with public, leadership, nurturing, characteristics and qualities between men and women in the aspects of strength, intelligence, emotionality as well as the inclusion of content related to the rights and obligations of men and women in Islam. Then the collected data is analyzed in the

form of descriptive analysis using theory by presenting a detailed description of the gender representation observed in the textbook.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

Islamic Religious Education at the elementary school level has a strategic role in shaping students' understanding and character from an early age (Nadirah et al., 2024), including in the construction, an understanding of gender roles and positions from an Islamic perspective (Haris, 2021). Textbooks as the primary learning medium significantly influence the formation of students' mindsets regarding religious values and gender relations (Yasin et al., 2012). Therefore, analyzing gender representation in Islamic Religious Education textbooks is important to ensure that religious education content reflects Islamic values that respect gender equality and justice (Farhan & Erihadiana, 2021).

This study analyzed six Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education textbooks from grades one to six of elementary school level using the mubadalah perspective, which emphasizes the principles of reciprocity and equality in gender relations based on Islamic values (Azizaturrosyidah et al., 2023). The analysis focused on three main indicators: visual representation, language and narrative use, and role construction. The results of the analysis showed variations in gender representations that indicated certain biases, which require special attention in the development of more inclusive and gender-equitable learning materials (Noorzanah, 2017). The following is the representation of gender in Islamic Religious Education and Moral Education textbooks in the independent curriculum:

**Table 1.** Contents of Islamic Religious Education and Ethics Textbook for Grade 1: Authors Muhammad Nurzakun and Joko Santoso (Nurzakun & Santoso, 2021)

| Chapter/Theme                                 | Gender Bias Indicator  | Findings                                                                                                                                                   | Analysis                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 1:</b><br><b>I Love the Qur'an</b> | Visual Representation  | Ahmad always appears active as the main character in learning, such as the image of reading the Qur'an (pp. 3, 5). Fatimah appears as a passive companion. | The male character (Ahmad) is more dominant in visuals and narratives as the leader and main actor, while the female (Fatimah) is only a passive companion. |
|                                               | Language and Narrative | Ahmad's name is used more often, while Fatimah's role is only mentioned in the context of helping or accompanying Ahmad.                                   | There is no active role or leadership for women.                                                                                                            |

|                                                                    |                        |                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 2:<br/>Getting to Know<br/>the Pillars of Faith</b>     | Role Construction      | Men are shown as the leaders of the study group, while women are not given leading or leadership roles.                |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                    | Visual Representation  | The initial illustration shows the boys engaged in nature activities (p. 19), with the girls as extras.                | Men are shown as active and role models of faith, while women are extras and recipients of information. This representation reinforces gender stereotypes in religious roles. |
|                                                                    | Language and Narration | Dialogue and narration mostly mention and feature Ahmad as an active actor in religious activities.                    |                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Chapter 3:<br/>I Like to Read<br/>Basmalah and<br/>Hamdalah</b> | Role Construction      | Men are shown as role models and explainers of faith, and women as spectators or recipients.                           |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                    | Visual Representation  | Ahmad leads a prayer in class (pp. 37, 38), and Fatimah and her female friends sit and listen.                         | The male is the center of the narrative and the leader of the prayer; the female is only a listener.                                                                          |
|                                                                    | Language and Narrative | The narrative of prayer and practice is mostly centered on male characters, and women only appear in supporting roles. | There is no balance of spiritual roles between men and women.                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Chapter 5:<br/>I Like to Be<br/>Thankful</b>                    | Role Construction      | Men act as prayer leaders and main readers, while women act as supporters or followers.                                |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                    | Visual Representation  | The picture shows Ahmad giving to others, while Fatimah is seen as the recipient or helping in the kitchen.            | Ahmad is depicted as actively giving, while Fatimah only assists or is in the domestic space.                                                                                 |
|                                                                    | Language and Narrative | Gratitude and examples of positive behavior are shown more by male characters.                                         | Positive roles are mostly displayed by men.                                                                                                                                   |
|                                                                    | Role Construction      | Men are shown as the main perpetrators of acts of gratitude, while women only accompany or complement activities.      |                                                                                                                                                                               |

Based on the content of the Grade 1 Islamic Religious Education and Cultivation Textbook, there is a consistent pattern of gender bias in visual representation, narrative, and role construction. Male characters such as Ahmad are dominantly shown as leaders, main actors, and role models in religious learning activities, such as reading the Qur'an, leading prayers, and showing gratitude behavior. In contrast, female characters such as Fatimah are often presented only as companions,

recipients, or complements to male roles, with no space to play an active or leading role. The illustrations and language used reinforce traditional stereotypes that position men as active subjects in the public sphere, while women are placed in passive and domestic roles. This imbalance shows that the textbook has not applied the principle of gender equality fairly, so it has the potential to form students' mindsets from an early age that the main role in religious and social life is only worthy of being carried out by men.

**Table 2.** Contents of Islamic Religious Education and Cultivation Textbooks for Grade 2

Authors A. Zainal Abidin and Siti Kusriani (Abidin & Kusriani, 2021)

| Chapter/Theme                                                    | Gender Bias Indicator  | Findings                                                                                                                             | Analysis                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 1:</b><br><b>Let's Learn the Qur'an</b>               | Visual Representation  | The dominant illustration shows a male character reciting the Quran and becoming an imam.                                            | Reflects stereotypes of men as religious leaders and women as passive followers. Need to balance role representation. The dominant mention of men shows a habitual pattern that can reinforce the symbolic inequality of roles. Tends to position women in the role of recipients, not active initiative takers in worship activities. |
|                                                                  | Language and Narrative | Neutral writing, but many interactive narratives use male names first (Boaz, Fauzan).                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                  | Role Construction      | Men lead memorization, reciting the Quran. Women are said to enjoy reading and listening.                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Chapter 3:</b><br><b>Let's Practice Praiseworthy Behavior</b> | Visual Representation  | The illustrations show boys giving advice and helping, girls appearing passive or crying.                                            | Visuals reinforce the role of men as saviors or mediators, while women are the ones being helped. Language tends to be neutral, but the narrative structure prioritizes the male experience as the main reference. The contribution of female characters is still complementary to the main narrative centered on male roles.          |
|                                                                  | Language and Narrative | The narrative mentions male names such as Andi, Iqbal more often in giving examples of honest and polite behavior.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                  | Role Construction      | Men are associated with leadership behavior (forgiving, helping friends), while women are more symbolized as victims or complements. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Chapter 9:</b><br><b>Let's Zikr and Pray After Prayer</b>     | Visual Representation  | Men are shown as the leaders of prayer and dhikr.                                                                                    | This emphasizes the exclusivity of men in leading congregational worship. The lack of representation of women in religious                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                  | Language and Narrative | Use of collective language, but no examples of female characters who actively pray.                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

|                   |                                                 |                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Role Construction | Active roles are only owned by male characters. | narratives leads to the omission of women's spiritual role models. The image of women as spiritual subjects needs to be more prominent. |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The Grade 2 Islamic Education textbook still shows gender bias by presenting male dominance in visual illustrations, narratives, and religious roles. Boys are actively depicted as leaders, readers of the Qur'an, and main characters. Meanwhile, girls are often portrayed as passive or not visible at all. Although the narrative language appears neutral on the surface, examples of good behavior and activities are almost entirely performed by male characters without showcasing active female roles. This imbalance has the potential to reinforce gender stereotypes from an early age and hinder children's understanding of equality (Azhari, 2019). To achieve a vision of equitable education, textbooks must present balanced representations and roles for both males and females.

**Table 3.** Contents of Grade 3 Islamic Religious Education and Cultivation Textbooks

Authors Moh. Ghozali and Erwin Wasti (Ghozali & Wasti, 2021)

| Chapter/Theme                                                 | Gender Bias Indicator  | Findings                                                                                                                                                                          | Analysis                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 1:</b><br><b>The Fun of Learning Surah Al-Alaq</b> | Visual Representation  | The initial illustration is dominated by boys reciting the Quran with a male teacher. Girls reciting the Quran are separated and shown on a different page with a female teacher. | The role of men is shown to be more dominant in Quranic activities and learning, while women are depicted in domestic roles and visually separated, reinforcing the traditional division of roles. |
|                                                               | Language and Narrative | The narrative emphasizes Quranic and learning activities that are dominated by male characters such as Wawan and Muwarriq. Women are only mentioned in accompanying activities.   |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                               | Role Construction      | Boys are portrayed as active, leading, and studying with their fathers; women like Halimah are portrayed as helping their mothers in the kitchen or in domestic roles.            |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Chapter 2:</b><br><b>Asmaul Husna is Beautiful</b>         | Visual Representation  | The images show boys as questioners or tellers, while girls are shown as listeners or followers.                                                                                  | Men are shown as active characters who ask and deliver, while women are only                                                                                                                       |

|                                                 |                        |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 3:<br/>Let's Pray on Time</b>        | Language and Narrative | Examples and dialog in learning the names of God are more often using boys' names.                                           | listeners, showing the tendency of gender unequal narratives.                                     |
|                                                 | Role Construction      | The role of men is portrayed as more active in conveying or asking questions, while women remain in a passive position.      |                                                                                                   |
|                                                 | Visual Representation  | Illustrations of congregational prayers show boys being the imam, girls praying at the back without active involvement.      | Men are given the main role as imam and guide, while women are not actively involved, showing the |
|                                                 | Language and Narration | Dialogue shows fathers guiding boys; the roles of mothers and daughters are not explicitly mentioned.                        | subordination of women's roles in religious activities.                                           |
| <b>Chapter 4:<br/>The Beauty of<br/>Honesty</b> | Role Construction      | Men lead the prayer, and women are depicted participating without an active role, reinforcing the subordinate role of women. |                                                                                                   |
|                                                 | Visual Representation  | The picture shows boys giving advice or reprimanding, while girls look down or listen.                                       | Honesty is portrayed through male characters as enforcers and role models, while women            |
|                                                 | Language and Narration | Honesty stories are told from a male perspective, and girls are rarely mentioned as the main actors.                         | are only present as listeners or witnesses, showing a passive and less participatory role.        |
|                                                 | Role Construction      | Men are portrayed as the main role models, women as recipients of advice or as witnesses to events.                          |                                                                                                   |

Grade 3 Islamic Religious Education textbooks still maintain systematic patterns of gender bias, both through visual representations and narrative structures. Male characters are consistently shown as the main subject in worship activities, moral examples, and stories of prophets. In contrast, women are more often depicted as passive complements, listeners, or executors of domestic duties. These representations not only reinforce traditional stereotypes regarding the social and spiritual roles of boys and girls but also create inequality in the role models that students receive from an early age (Handayani, 2018). The absence of female figures in leadership or spiritual roles has an impact on the limited space for affirmation of women's roles in religious life. To build a fair awareness of equality since basic education, religious teaching materials need to be rewritten to

include a balanced representation of men and women, both in active roles, inspirational narratives, and exemplary values.

**Table 4.** Contents of Grade 4 Islamic Religious Education and Cultivation Textbooks

Authors Ahmad Faozan and Jamaluddin (Faozan & Jamaluddin, 2021)

| Chapter/Theme                                                                                             | Gender Bias Indicator  | Findings                                                                                                                                                               | Analysis                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 1:<br/>Let Us Study and<br/>Examine Q.S. Al-<br/>Hujurat/49:13 and<br/>Hadith on Diversity</b> | Visual Representation  | Images of boys are dominant in illustrations of learning the Qur'an. Girls are depicted separately or in the background.                                               | Men are shown dominant in active religious roles, such as reciting the Quran and leading memorization,                     |
|                                                                                                           | Language and Narrative | Male characters dominate active narratives such as reciting the Quran and leading memorization. Women's names and roles are barely mentioned.                          | while women are only present as complements, without significant involvement.                                              |
|                                                                                                           | Role Construction      | Men are portrayed as active in the practice of worship and leadership, while women are only present as complements to the narrative without significant contributions. |                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Chapter 2:<br/>The Noble Example<br/>of Asmaul Husna</b>                                               | Visual Representation  | Images of men (children and adults) praying, writing, and actively working are shown repeatedly. Women only appear occasionally and not in leading roles.              | Active roles such as praying, working, and exemplifying the value of Asmaul Husna are more often given to male characters. |
|                                                                                                           | Language and Narration | Examples of positive behavior are mostly associated with male characters. Women are used as objects in illustrations or are not explained in the narrative.            | Women are underrepresented in the main narrative and visuals.                                                              |
|                                                                                                           | Role Construction      | Values such as leadership, independence, and maintaining order are strongly associated with boys. Women are not given equal roles.                                     |                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Chapter 4:<br/>Honesty Brings<br/>Blessings</b>                                                        | Visual Representation  | Boys are depicted reprimanding and reminding friends, while girls are only listeners.                                                                                  | Male characters are portrayed as the main actors of honesty and decision-makers, while                                     |
|                                                                                                           | Language and Narrative | The narrative gives more male characters the main                                                                                                                      | women are only listeners or objects of                                                                                     |

|                                                                        |                        |                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 7:<br/>Let's Be Dutiful to<br/>Parents and<br/>Teachers</b> | Role Construction      | role in examples of honesty and decision-making. Men are the main role models; women tend to be portrayed as complements or objects of learning. | learning, without an active role.                                                                                                                     |
|                                                                        | Visual Representation  | Girls are depicted serving food, and boys are discussing with parents or teachers.                                                               | Men are associated with discussion and critical thinking, while women are shown as servants and obedient, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. |
|                                                                        | Language and Narrative | Language shows boys in active dialog with teachers; girls are only mentioned in the context of obedience and service.                            |                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                        | Role Construction      | Boys are associated with independence and critical thinking, girls with obedience and service.                                                   |                                                                                                                                                       |

The fourth-grade Islamic Education textbook displays a pattern of systemic gender bias, in which men are predominantly portrayed as the main characters in religious and moral activities such as reciting the Quran, leading, and discussing. Meanwhile, women only appear in passive roles or as complements, such as helping at home or being listeners. The narrative and visuals reinforce stereotypes that leadership and intelligence are the domain of men, while girls are given little space to appear as active learners. This representation risks shaping the perception that Islamic values such as honesty and discipline are only relevant to men, whereas these values should be instilled equally regardless of gender.

**Table 5.** Contents of Grade 5 Islamic Religious Education and Cultivation Textbooks

Authors Soleh Baedowi and Hairil Muhammad Anwar (Baedowi & Anwar, 2021)

| Chapter/Theme                        | Gender Bias Indicator  | Findings                                                                                                                                             | Analysis                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 1:<br/>Loving Orphans</b> | Visual Representation  | The illustrations on the home page and the activities section (pp. 3-13) more often show active and dominant boys, with girls mostly as complements. | Male characters are dominant in social and religious activities such as giving and advising, while women are only present as complements, without active or leadership roles. |
|                                      | Language and Narrative | Male characters are more often used in the activities of giving, learning, and imitating the Prophet.                                                |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                      | Role Construction      | Major and exemplary roles, such as giving and advising, are attributed to male                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                               |

|                                                                |                        |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                |                        | characters, while women are not shown leading social activities.                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Chapter 2:<br/>Getting Closer to<br/>the Names of Allah</b> | Visual Representation  | Visualizations mostly show boys in scenes of learning, leading, and helping, while girls are shown in gentle activities such as writing or praying. | The values of leadership and strength are more associated with boys, while girls are depicted in gentle activities without equal space.                |
|                                                                | Language and Narrative | The use of examples of strength and might is associated with male characters, creating a dominance of certain gender characters.                    |                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                | Role Construction      | Concepts of leadership, courage, and sacrifice are more often associated with boys, while female roles are not constructed equally.                 |                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Chapter 3:<br/>I am a Pious Child</b>                       | Visual Representation  | Illustrations of boys leading discussions (p. 67) and prayers (p. 70), girls appear as listeners or complements to the narrative.                   | The role of men as leaders and decision-makers is highly emphasized, while women are only as listeners or complements in the narrative and visuals.    |
|                                                                | Language and Narrative | Caliph duties, such as protecting the earth, leading, and making collective decisions, are mostly associated with men.                              |                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                | Role Construction      | Men are given the role of decision-makers and leaders; women are not given an equal share in active role-taking.                                    |                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Chapter 4:<br/>Living Well by<br/>Sharing</b>               | Visual Representation  | Many images, such as those on pages 81, 83, 87-91, show boys as givers of zakat and alms, with girls in the receiving position or not shown.        | Men are shown as the main actors of zakat and alms, while women are only the recipients or not even shown, reinforcing the inequality of social roles. |
|                                                                | Language and Narrative | Giving, sharing, and social contribution are mostly depicted through male narratives.                                                               |                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                | Role Construction      | Men are the main actors of philanthropy and zakat; women are not given the opportunity to be the main actors in social activities.                  |                                                                                                                                                        |

Grade 5 Islamic Religious Education textbooks display a fairly clear pattern of gender bias, where male characters are consistently positioned as the main actors in various religious and social activities, such as giving donations, leading discussions, emulating the Prophet, and distributing zakat. Meanwhile, female characters only appear in passive roles such as listeners, complementing the narrative, or receiving assistance. Visual and narrative representations reinforce the stereotype that values such as leadership, courage, and social contribution are more appropriate for men, while women are limited to soft and inactive roles. This inequality creates unequal perceptions of the ideal roles of boys and girls in religious and social life.

**Table 6.** Contents of Grade 6 Islamic Religious Education and Cultivation Textbooks

Authors Nazirwan and Kholili Abdullah (Nazirwan & Abdullah, 2022)

| Chapter/Theme                                                                       | Gender Bias Indicator  | Findings                                                                                                                                                                               | Analysis                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Chapter 1:</b><br><b>Learning the</b><br><b>Qur'an and hadith</b>                | Visual Representation  | The opening images (pp. 19, 32, 36) show boys actively learning and praying, while girls are only seen sitting or passively in the background.                                         | Men appear dominant as active actors and religious role models, while women are only present in the background without a significant role, either in the visuals or narrative. |
|                                                                                     | Language and Narrative | Narratives such as 'your job' or 'children' use masculine forms without mentioning equal roles for women.                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                     | Role Construction      | Men play an active role as memorizers, givers, and religious role models (e.g., the story of Abu Bakr and the Companions); women are not given significant roles in da'wah or charity. |                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Chapter 2:</b><br><b>Modeling Allah</b><br><b>through Asmaul</b><br><b>Husna</b> | Visual Representation  | Boys are depicted helping others, leading prayers, or providing assistance; girls are only seen assisting or doing chores.                                                             | Values such as leadership and caring are mostly illustrated through male characters, while women only appear as companions or in domestic roles.                               |
|                                                                                     | Language and Narrative | Narratives and conversations mostly mention men's names when modeling honesty, fairness, and patience.                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                     | Role Construction      | Active roles, such as solution giver or leader, are mostly portrayed as being attached to men.                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Chapter 4:</b><br><b>The Beauty of</b>                                           | Visual Representation  | Boys are seen actively giving advice and                                                                                                                                               | Male characters are portrayed as giving                                                                                                                                        |

|                                                             |                        |                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Mutual Respect</b>                                       |                        | mediating conflicts; girls are depicted as compliant or silent.                                         | advice and resolving conflicts, while girls are only the compliant party, without equal position in social roles.                                    |
|                                                             | Language and Narrative | Examples of respect, cooperation, and leadership are given more through male characters.                |                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                                             | Role Construction      | Women are more often given submissive or supporting roles in narratives of social virtue.               |                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Chapter 6:<br/>Loving Others and<br/>the Environment</b> | Visual Representation  | Boys are seen leading hygiene actions and providing assistance, while girls are seen passively helping. | Men lead social and environmental actions, and women are depicted as passively helping, reinforcing inequalities in leadership and initiative roles. |
|                                                             | Language and Narrative | Male characters dominate instructions and conversations around social care.                             |                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                                             | Role Construction      | Women are portrayed as having a supportive or passive role, rarely appearing as initiators.             |                                                                                                                                                      |

The Grade 6 Islamic Religious Education book shows a consistent trend of gender bias, where male characters are presented as the main actors in various religious, social, and leadership activities. Men are depicted as leading prayers, giving advice, performing social actions, and being the central characters in narratives and illustrations. In contrast, female characters are more often present as passive appendages, such as sitting in the background, listening, or helping without an initiative role. Narratives also rarely mention or feature women as role models or leaders. This representation indirectly reinforces the stereotype that men are more worthy of holding the main role in religious and social life (David P. Schmitt et al., 2017) While women only support from behind the scenes, which can limit students' views on gender role equality in everyday life.

## Discussion

An analysis of the content of Islamic Religious Education textbooks from grades 1 to 6 elementary schools shows a tendency toward unequal gender representation, both visually, linguistically, and in role construction. Male characters are more often shown as prayer leaders, advisors, role models for good behavior, and main actors of social activities. Meanwhile, female characters are only portrayed as companions, complements, or recipients of roles, without room for active participation in religious and social narratives. Women's roles are often associated with

domestic or emotional activities, such as helping in the kitchen, sitting and listening, or being obedient. This imbalance is consistently found in various chapters and classes, indicating a pattern of representation that is not responsive to the principle of gender equality.

In the *mubadalah* perspective, as developed by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, the relationship between men and women in Islam should be *reciprocal*, complementing each other in equal value and spiritual position (Kodir, 2023). This concept stems from basic values in the Qur'an, such as Q.S. At-Taubah:71, which emphasizes that men and women are guardians (helpers) for each other in upholding *amar makruf nahi munkar* (Thoriquttyas, 2018). However, the findings in Islamic Religious Education textbooks reproduce a hierarchical relationship that positions men as the center of authority and women as passive parties. This is contrary to the Islamic principle of justice, which places every human being as a whole subject, active, and has the same spiritual and social potential before Allah SWT (Nadirah et al., 2024).

Then the principle of *mubadalah* also emphasizes that when a religious text speaks to one gender (men), then in principle the meaning and message it contains also applies to women, unless there is a special argument that excludes. Islamic Religious Education textbooks that only include male figures as the main actors of worship, leadership, and social practices, without reflecting the dimensions of women as subjects, have lost the spirit of *mubadalah* as an ethical approach in Islamic education (Werdiningsih & Natsir, 2020).

This finding is consistent with the research by Arifin et al. (2023), which highlights that the curriculum and textbooks for Islamic education in Indonesia still tend to display patriarchal bias in illustrations and narratives, particularly in limiting women's active roles in religious public spaces (Arifin et al, 2023). Asniah's (2023) research also reveals that religious narratives in textbooks do not fully reflect the principle of gender justice, despite Islam itself upholding this principle (Asniah et al., 2023). Furthermore, research by Aziz et al. (2020) confirms that Islamic Religious Education at the elementary school level tends to place male figures at the center of spiritual and social representation, which impacts the formation of asymmetrical perceptions of children's religious identities (Aziz et al., 2020). Furthermore, a study by Momen (2024) at the international level also shows that a religion-based education system that does not incorporate the principle of equality will produce a generation that is not critical of social inequality (Momen, 2024). Furthermore, according to Az-Zahra et al. (2024), gender bias in textbooks hinders the achievement of transformative educational goals and positions women in inferior social positions (Az-Zahra et al., 2024).

Based on these findings, the author argues that elementary school Islamic Religious Education textbooks should not only be a means of strengthening faith and morals but also a tool for social transformation to build awareness of justice from an early age. Gender representation in textbooks should present women and men as equal subjects in carrying out Islamic values such as trustworthiness, honesty, responsibility, social care, and leadership (Adriana, 2009). The author proposes an antithesis to religious education practices that limit women to the domestic or affective sphere. Women have the same spiritual rights and social responsibilities as described in many Qur'anic verses and female role models in Islamic history, such as Khadijah, Aisha, and Ummu Salamah (Sari et al., t.t.).

Therefore, the rewriting of Islamic Religious Education textbooks with the mubadalah principle approach is not a mere ideological demand, but an ethical call to realize substantive justice in education. The curriculum and textbooks must reflect the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, which protects all people without exception (Purwojuono, 2015). Gender-responsive Islamic education is the key to creating a generation of Muslims who are just, inclusive, and ready to face the challenges of the times wisely.

## CONCLUSION

The integration of gender equality values in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum is a strategic and urgent step to realize education that is inclusive, fair, and responsive to social dynamics. This research shows that the dominance of patriarchal narratives in Islamic Religious Education teaching materials, especially in elementary schools, needs to be reconstructed through a more contextual and gender-equitable approach. Strengthening gender perspectives in the curriculum is not only important to erase stereotypes and gender role biases, but also part of efforts to uphold Islamic values that are *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. Representation in textbook content is able to build students' critical awareness from an early age, and the Islamic Religious Education curriculum can be an effective means of forming a generation that upholds the values of justice, equality, and humanity. Therefore, the reformulation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum with a gender perspective is not only an option, but a necessity to realize the goals of national education with justice and equality.

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