

## Gender Equality in Islamic Education: Insights from Indonesia's Muslim Heroines

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### ABSTRACT

*Gender equality in Islamic education is becoming increasingly significant in the context of the Industrial Revolution 5.0. This study examines how values exemplified by Indonesia's Muslim heroines, like R.A. Kartini, Dewi Sartika, and Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, can inspire innovative approaches to promoting and supporting women's roles in education. Through a qualitative library study, this research examines Islamic teachings alongside the contributions of these heroines, highlighting core values of justice and social responsibility. It argues that the Islamic educational principles championed by these female role models can significantly contribute to advancing women's leadership capabilities, enhancing their digital literacy, and expanding their access to education. This study addresses challenges such as limited access to higher education, societal expectations, and cultural norms. It also highlights specific initiatives, including leadership programs, digital learning platforms, and family education. The findings suggest that the teachings and values of Indonesia's Muslim Heroines have the potential to help overcome these barriers, it is possible to create supportive environments that empower women to take on leadership roles and actively participate in education.*

**Keywords:** Gender Equality, Values of Justice, Islamic Teachings of Heroines and Social Responsibility

### ABSTRAK

Kesetaraan gender dalam pendidikan Islam menjadi semakin signifikan dalam konteks Revolusi Industri 5.0. Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana nilai-nilai yang dicontohkan oleh pahlawan wanita Muslim Indonesia, seperti R.A. Kartini, Dewi Sartika, dan Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, dapat menginspirasi pendekatan inovatif untuk mempromosikan dan mendukung peran perempuan dalam pendidikan. Melalui studi perpustakaan kualitatif, penelitian ini mengkaji ajaran Islam di samping kontribusi para pahlawan wanita ini, menyoroti nilai-nilai inti keadilan dan tanggung jawab sosial. Ia berpendapat bahwa prinsip-prinsip pendidikan Islam yang diperjuangkan oleh panutan perempuan ini dapat berkontribusi secara signifikan untuk memajukan kemampuan kepemimpinan perempuan, meningkatkan literasi digital mereka, dan memperluas akses mereka ke pendidikan. Studi ini membahas tantangan seperti terbatasnya akses ke pendidikan tinggi, harapan masyarakat, dan norma budaya. Ini juga menyoroti inisiatif khusus, termasuk program kepemimpinan, platform pembelajaran digital, dan pendidikan keluarga. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa ajaran dan nilai-nilai Pahlawan Wanita Muslim Indonesia memiliki potensi untuk membantu mengatasi hambatan ini, dimungkinkan untuk menciptakan lingkungan yang mendukung yang memberdayakan perempuan untuk mengambil peran kepemimpinan dan berpartisipasi aktif dalam pendidikan.

**Kata Kunci:** Kesetaraan Gender, Nilai-nilai Keadilan, Ajaran Islam Pahlawan Wanita dan Tanggung Jawab Sosial

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic education has long been a subject of debate, both within the Muslim community and in the wider world. With the ongoing global conversation on gender equality, the intersection of Islamic education and gender roles has emerged as a particularly contentious topic. While some argue that traditional Islamic education promotes patriarchal norms and reinforces gender inequality (Arat, 2010; Kurdi, 2023), others maintain that Islamic teachings and principles are inherently supportive of gender equality (Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Kurdi 2023).

The significance of gender equality in Islamic education has gained heightened attention, particularly in the context of the Industrial Revolution 5.0, which emphasizes technological advancement and the need for inclusive educational practices. This study aims to investigate how initiatives to strengthen women's involvement in education might be informed and inspired by the values exemplified by Muslim heroines in Indonesia, such as R.A. Kartini, Rahma El Yunusiah, Dewi Sartika, and Nyai Ahmad Dahlan. In addition to being significant characters in Indonesian history, these heroes are also excellent examples of fundamental principles like social responsibility, fairness, and resiliency all of which are critical for creating a fair learning environment.

This study suggests that Islamic educational values might act as a foundation for advancing gender equality in the face of persistent obstacles including limited educational options and deeply ingrained cultural norms. Islamic education may create environments that encourage women to seek knowledge and leadership positions by drawing on the legacy of these heroines. This change of viewpoint is essential to establishing inclusive settings where men and women can participate equally in education and advance society.

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Moreover, the legacy of these Muslim heroines underscores the transformative power of education as a tool for social change. By examining their lives and contributions, this study seeks to identify the foundational Islamic values that promote gender equality and to understand how these values can be integrated into contemporary educational frameworks. The narratives of these heroines serve as powerful testimonies to the capacity of Islamic education to nurture leadership and intellectual growth among women.

This research proposes that Islamic educational principles can serve as a foundational platform for advancing gender equality, particularly in societies grappling with persistent challenges such as limited access to education and entrenched cultural norms. By drawing on the inspiring legacies of Indonesia's Muslim heroines, Islamic educational institutions can create environments that encourage women's pursuit of knowledge and leadership roles. Such environments are crucial for fostering inclusive educational settings where both men and women can contribute meaningfully to societal development.

Ultimately, this study advocates for a paradigm shift in Islamic education that recognizes and promotes the equal participation of women in all spheres of learning and leadership. Emphasizing the inherent compatibility of Islamic values with the principles of gender equality, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on educational reform and social justice within the Muslim world and beyond.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically focusing on library research. According to Creswell (2014), library research is a systematic method of collecting and analyzing information from various sources such as books, journals, articles, and reports. Furthermore, library research plays a critical role in qualitative research as it provides access to theoretical perspectives, historical accounts, and empirical data that guide the study's framework and analysis (Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J., 2016). For this study, content analysis is utilized as the primary method to analyze written and lessons of the Muslim heroines systematically. Content analysis in a literature study is a research method used to systematically analyze written, spoken, or visual communication to identify patterns, themes, and meanings within the content. It is often applied in qualitative research to interpret and make sense of textual or symbolic material in a structured manner.

The use of content analysis in this study ensures a critical and systematic examination of the connection between gender equality and Islamic education based on the lessons from Muslim heroines as reflected in literary texts. The methodological steps include gathering relevant references, classifying data into themes, systematically presenting the findings, and interpreting them critically. By following these structured steps, this research achieves a thorough and insightful analysis of the subject matter, aligning well with the goals of qualitative research.

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, specifically utilizing library research to collect and analyze information from various documented sources such as books, academic journals, scholarly articles, and research reports (Creswell, 2014). Library research plays a pivotal role in qualitative studies by offering access to diverse perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and empirical data, which are crucial for developing a comprehensive understanding of gender equality within Islamic education. It facilitates the exploration of historical narratives, theoretical discourses, and documented experiences of Indonesia's Muslim heroines, providing an analytical foundation to connect past and present discourses on gender equality and Islamic teachings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Content analysis is employed as the primary method to systematically examine the written works and teachings of Muslim heroines. This qualitative technique identifies patterns, recurring themes, and underlying meanings within texts, enabling a structured interpretation of textual material. The methodological process includes collecting relevant literature, classifying data into thematic categories, systematically presenting findings, and conducting critical interpretations. This structured approach ensures a rigorous and insightful analysis, aligning with the goals of qualitative research to explore how

concepts of gender equality are represented and discussed within Islamic educational contexts.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the theory used to examine Gender Equality in Islamic Education: Lessons from Indonesia's Muslim Heroines. The search for gender equality in Islamic education can be comprehended through a framework based on Islamic teachings and the efforts of Indonesian Muslim heroines advocating for women's educational access. Figures like as R.A. Kartini, Rahma El Yunusiah, Dewi Sartika, and Nyai Ahmad Dahlan exemplify the embodiment of Islamic principles of justice (adl) and resilience, championing women's rights to education and social participation. These heroines-initiated initiatives in early 20th-century Indonesia, where their aspirations for educational equality established the foundation for revolutionary views on gender within Islamic educational frameworks.

This study is grounded in fundamental Islamic values that advocate for fair educational opportunities. The Quran and Hadith, as primary sources, underscore adl (justice) and ta'dib (ethical cultivation) as fundamental principles that shape Islamic perspectives on social justice and education. This study investigates how these principles advance gender equality by analyzing the efforts of Indonesian Muslim heroines whose educational initiatives were frequently motivated by a commitment to justice and social responsibility. These heroines see education as both a vehicle for personal empowerment and a fulfillment of Islamic duties to community and family, thereby altering women's roles in a manner that honored religious tenets while promoting societal advancement (Ahmad & Naimah, 2023).

An essential component of this concept is the function of ihsan (excellence) in advancing gender equality, motivating both men and women to pursue their utmost in education and societal contributions. Islamic teachings do not intrinsically restrict women's access to education; instead, cultural norms frequently influence these constraints. The narratives of Indonesia's Muslim heroes exemplify that Islamic education may be modified to actively endorse women's roles. R.A. Kartini, for example, underscored women's entitlement to education as a means of enlightenment, benefiting both personal development and societal advancement. Her dedication to education was motivated by an appreciation of Islamic principles that advocate for the enhancement of the community collectively (Fathurrahman, 2022).

The incorporation of gender equality in Islamic educational discourse aligns with the overarching aims of maqasid al-shariah, which emphasize the safeguarding and advancement of essential human interests, including knowledge. Islamic institutions promote women's education to achieve the objectives of safeguarding intellect (hifz al-aql) and dignity (hifz al-ird) for all societal members. The legacy of Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, who created educational opportunities for women, highlights the compatibility of Islamic principles with gender equality. Her efforts underscored the notion that Islam advocates for universal education and that the empowerment of women is a crucial element of a harmonious Islamic society (Usman & Handayani, 2023).

Moreover, contemporary educational frameworks in Islamic education are progressively attuned to gender concerns, recognizing the systemic and societal obstacles encountered by women. Initiatives to implement gender-sensitive policies in Islamic institutions correspond with these theoretical ideas, tackling cultural prejudices while remaining faithful to Islamic norms. This transition is perceived as a reaction to the principles exemplified by Indonesian Muslim heroines, who serve as paradigms for the alignment of Islamic ideals with gender justice and inclusivity (Al-Mu'tasim, 2023). The premise of this study posits that Islamic education can integrate gender equality by modifying curricula and policies to enhance leadership opportunities and academic environments for women, thus honoring the heritage of these heroines.

This theoretical framework examines that Islamic educational institutions can promote gender equality by leveraging fundamental religious principles and the commendable initiatives of historical people who championed women's rights in Indonesia. It asserts that by advocating for inclusive policies and gender-sensitive curricula, Islamic education can enable both men and women to advance social progress, drawing inspiration from the principles of resilience, justice, and ethical development inherent in religious teachings and the legacies of Muslim heroines.

## **Gender Equality and Islam Based on Heroines Perspective**

According to Anastasia et al. (2024), Kartini criticized the social boundaries that her Javanese society forced on women, especially the lack of educational opportunities. Kartini believed that education was the most effective means of achieving gender equality. Educated women would not only improve their own lives but also contribute to the moral and intellectual growth of the nation. Moreover, Kartini wrote letters that describe how local conventions and traditional expectations limited women's potential. However, the letter voiced that women should be free to learn and participate in society with an active role and have a contribution to revolution at the time.

In addition, although Kartini critiqued some feudal practices that justified religion, she valued Islam's core teaching. She viewed Islamic principles as supportive of equality and emphasized that true Islamic teachings advocated for justice and respect for both genders. This theory connects the relationship with gender equality in Islam which is not only possible but essential.

Moreover, another perspective of gender comes from Rahma El Yunusiah which strengthens Kartini's perspective. According to Karimullah (2023), Yunusiah's perspective was grounded in her understanding that Islam promotes justice and equal opportunities for men and women. Islamic teaching emphasizes women's right to education, as women play a vital role in the moral and intellectual upbringing of future generations as an Arabic poet said "*Al-Umm madrasatil ula*" which means that women will be teachers of all generations. Therefore, Yunusiah emphasized the importance of education by founding a Boarding school of girls or *Diniyah Putri*, which specifically addressed the educational needs of Muslim women and prepared them to fulfill roles that balanced Islamic values with societal contributions.

Nevertheless, The interpretations of Islamic teachings on gender equality also marked a unique contrast between the two heroines. Both believed that Islam, at its core, could support gender equality, but Kartini and Yunusiah approached this idea from different perspectives. Kartini, influenced by her limited access to formal Islamic education and her interactions with Dutch intellectuals, was initially critical of how certain religious interpretations and customs appeared to limit women's rights. She viewed Islam as inherently just but believed that it was often misapplied to enforce feudal restrictions on women. Her evolving perspective led her to believe that a more progressive, liberal understanding of Islam could further women's rights.

Another perspective about gender equality comes from Dewi Sartika. Dewi Sartika's perspective on gender equality aligns with and expands upon Kartini's and Yunusiah's views by emphasizing women's empowerment through education, particularly in the Sundanese context. Like Kartini, who advocated for education as a path to gender equality, Dewi Sartika founded schools to provide practical and intellectual knowledge for Sundanese women (Jamilatun et al., 2024). However, Sartika's approach complements Kartini's broader call for gender equality that focuses on the local, cultural Sundanese women, thus respecting regional identity within the push for women's empowerment.

Furthermore, the lessons of the Muslim heroines suggest that gender equality nowadays can also be advanced through digital learning platforms that provide accessible education for women. Platforms like Ruangguru and Qalam Academy enable women, especially in rural areas, to learn at their own pace, overcoming barriers such as location and societal restrictions. These platforms embody Kartini's belief in education as a tool for empowerment and Dewi Sartika's focus on practical knowledge to improve women's roles in society (Hidayatillah & Hakim, 2023)

Moreover, by incorporating Islamic values into their content, digital platforms also align with Rahma El Yunusiah's vision of education as a means to strengthen both individual potential and community resilience. These tools ensure that women can gain knowledge while upholding cultural and religious principles. As a modern extension of the heroines' advocacy, digital platforms demonstrate how education, combined with technology, can foster gender equality and support women's contributions to their families and societies (Santosa et al., 2024).

## **Core Values of Justice**

According to Karimullah (2023), Islamic teachings call for justice and equality, which are essential to the gender equality debate in Islamic education. The materials emphasize that gender equality in Islam is based on Qur'anic principles, such as the verse in Surah An-Nahl that states that men and women are equally entitled to rewards for their good conduct (Qur'an, 16:97). Kartini and Yunusiah's activities are consistent with these principles, as they worked to implement justice by campaigning for women's rights in education. According to the analysis, Islamic education requires a balance that respects individual roles while giving equal possibilities, emphasizing that justice is a guiding concept for both genders in fulfilling societal and religious responsibilities. The analysis suggests that Islamic education should harmonize respect for distinct individual roles with the provision of equal opportunities, with

justice serving as a central principle guiding both genders in their societal and religious roles.

## **Social Responsibility and Women's Contributions in Islamic Teaching**

In Islamic education, social responsibility isn't only an individual obligation but also a collective one, where everyone is responsible for the welfare of the community. Islamic teachings encourage both men and women to contribute to societal well-being (Hidayatillah & Hakim, 2023). This was a principle that Kartini and Yunusiah upheld, as both saw education not just as self-improvement but as a duty to society, where educated women would strengthen families and communities.

Furthermore, Kartini and Yunusiah both acknowledged the importance of women's contributions to family and community but envisioned different applications of these roles. Kartini's perspective extended beyond the family and imagined women participating in public life, pursuing intellectual and leadership roles alongside men. Inspired by Western feminist ideas, Kartini thought a future where women's contributions would be recognized in all spheres, thereby challenging the idea that women's roles should be limited to the domestic domain (Haris & Bustam, n.d.). On the other hand, Yunusiah emphasized the significance of women's roles within the Islamic family and community structures. She saw family and community responsibilities as a powerful sphere where women could apply their knowledge to nurture future generations and contribute to social harmony. This view reflects a more community-centered approach, with Yunusiah advocating for women's involvement as educators and moral guides, particularly within a religious context (Hidayatillah & Hakim, 2023). However, their visions encompass a balanced view of societal roles, where women's contributions are valued both within and beyond the family unit.

In addition, Dewi Sartika's vision shares similarities with Rahma El Yunusiah's focus on women's roles as educators within an Islamic framework. While Yunusiah established Diniyah Putri to nurture young Muslim women's potential, Sartika's initiatives also highlighted women's responsibility to become teachers and role models, embodying both traditional values and progressive ideals (Jamilatun et al., 2024). This effort highlights that gender equality, supported by education, is not only compatible with Islamic teachings but also essential to social and moral development.

Furthermore, another perspectives come from Nyai Ahmad Dahlan or Siti Walidah that complements and deepens the visions of all three heroines. According to Santosa et al., (2024), Nyai Ahmad Dahlan's approach is combined religious understanding with a commitment to emphasize that education should lead to service to the community. This in line with Islamic principles of collective responsibility where social well-being is an obligation. Moreover, Similar to Yunusiah's approach, Walidah saw the family and local community as essential spaces for implementing knowledge and religious principles.

In contrast with Kartini's vision, which leaned toward integrating women into the public intellectual sphere, Walidah believed in fusing religious knowledge with practical application, grounding women's roles in both faith and social service (Diahsafitri et al., 2024). This perspective illustrates that gender equality, from an

Islamic humanist viewpoint, involves integrating both spiritual and practical contributions to society. In conclude, by fostering education and personal growth, Walidah contributed to a legacy where women's roles were central to communal unity and the moral fabric of society, emphasizing the transformative impact of women's empowerment within their cultural and religious frameworks.

Based on the lessons of Muslim heroines above, the social responses of women and Islamic teaching can be practiced through modern tools such as leadership programs. Leadership programs aimed at women reflect the legacy of figures like Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, who emphasized the importance of women contributing to both their communities and their faith. For instance, initiatives such as the Muslim Women Leadership Academy (MWLA) mirror this vision by providing training in public speaking, advocacy, and community engagement (Santosa et al., 2024). These programs empower women to become leaders in educational, social, and religious settings, reinforcing the idea that leadership and service are essential components of Islamic teachings. They also align with Kartini's belief in the potential of educated women to drive societal progress through intellectual and moral contributions.

Furthermore, family education programs nowadays align with Rahma El Yunusiah's lessons that emphasis on the mother as the first educator. Initiatives like *Parenting Islamiyah* integrate Islamic values into family life, teaching parents—especially mothers—how to nurture children who embody justice and ethical principles. These programs promote a balanced view of family roles, advocating shared responsibilities between parents to create harmonious households (Karimullah, 2023). Therefore, it reflects Yunusiah's vision of education as a means to cultivate societal harmony while respecting cultural and religious values. Moreover, such efforts align with Dewi Sartika's focus on regional identity by addressing local traditions within the context of Islamic teachings.

## CONCLUSION

The perspectives of Indonesian heroines such as Kartini, Dewi Sartika, Rahma El Yunusiah, and Nyai Ahmad Dahlan converge on the principle that gender equality is both compatible with and essential to Islamic teachings, particularly through education. Their collective efforts highlight how education serves as a powerful tool for fostering gender equality while aligning with Islamic values. Kartini championed gender equality by emphasizing the necessity of women's education, arguing that education enables women to contribute intellectually and morally to society. She believed that empowering women through knowledge was essential for their active participation in societal development, aligning with Islamic principles of individual dignity and equality. Building on Kartini's ideas, Rahma El Yunusiah reinforced the role of education in upholding justice and creating equal opportunities. She grounded her advocacy in Islam's clear support for women's rights, asserting that education is not merely a privilege but a fundamental right for both genders. Her perspective emphasized that justice in education is a cornerstone for broader societal equity.

Dewi Sartika expanded this notion by founding educational initiatives that respected regional identities while simultaneously promoting women's

empowerment through knowledge. Her work demonstrated that education could bridge cultural values with progressive ideals, encouraging women to embrace both their heritage and their potential as agents of change. Nyai Ahmad Dahlan further deepened this discourse by linking education to social responsibility. She argued that empowerment women through education not only benefits individuals but also strengthens communities. Women's knowledge and skills, she believed, are critical for addressing societal challenges and promoting collective welfare. These heroines collectively grounded their advocacy in Islamic values, particularly the Qur'anic principles of fairness and justice. They asserted that men and women deserve equal opportunities, particularly in education, as a means to achieve societal balance. Their efforts illustrate an Islamic humanist approach that intertwines spiritual values with practical contributions, demonstrating how education can be a catalyst for justice, empowerment, and societal betterment. Together, the visions of Kartini, Dewi Sartika, Rahma El Yunusiah, and Nyai Ahmad Dahlan present a balanced model of gender equality. This model respects individual roles while advocating for justice and encouraging women's active contributions to both family, community, and society at large. Their legacy underscores the essential role of education in advancing gender equality in a way that aligns with both Islamic teachings and contemporary societal needs.

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