



Women's Education in Islam: Equal Opportunities vs. Social Realities

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ABSTRACT

This article explores women's education from an Islamic perspective, examining the tension between normative principles affirming the obligation of knowledge for both men and women, and the patriarchal realities restricting women's access to education. The study aims to (1) identify the Qur'anic and Prophetic foundations supporting the pursuit of knowledge, (2) analyze socio-cultural factors perpetuating educational inequality, and (3) evaluate the role of Islamic feminist hermeneutics in providing inclusive reinterpretations. A qualitative library-based methodology is employed, synthesizing academic works published between 2020 and 2025, along with relevant international institutional reports. The findings reveal that while Islam normatively mandates equal access to education, patriarchal practices create structural barriers through family norms, gender-biased policies, and limited roles for women in academic leadership. Cross-regional evidence shows increasing women's participation in education, but disparities in quality and representation—particularly in STEM fields—remain significant. This research contributes by synthesizing contemporary literature that links Islamic normative sources with analyses of global patriarchy, and proposes policy recommendations: curriculum reform, anti-discrimination enforcement, and community advocacy. In conclusion, the article emphasizes the need for a critical-contextual approach to achieving equal educational opportunities for women within the Islamic framework.



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INTRODUCTION

Islamic teachings place the pursuit of knowledge as a moral obligation for all Muslims, regardless of gender (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulfaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulfaidah, et al., 2025); cross-institutional studies affirm that the Qur'an and Hadith provide normative foundations for women's education (Girls-Education-and-Islam, n.d., 2022). This normative foundation should serve as the primary basis for formulating religion-based educational policies in Muslim communities.

Recent scholarly studies show the development of inclusive exegesis methodologies—such as feminist hermeneutics—that aim to reconstruct textual readings to create space for women's education and leadership within contemporary Islamic tradition (Ramadhan, 2024) (Al-Sharmani, 2024). Such textual reinterpretations must be accompanied by institutional strategies to prevent them from remaining merely academic discourse.

Despite normative foundations and interpretative efforts, empirical evidence shows serious barriers: patriarchal structures, gender stereotypes, poverty, and discriminatory policies still obstruct the realization of substantial educational equality for women in many contexts (Sarwari & Adnan, 2023). Understanding these barriers in context is essential to ensure that policy recommendations are not only symbolic but address structural roots.

This article aims to: (1) map textual evidence (the Qur'an & Hadith) on the obligation of seeking knowledge for both men and women; (2) analyze socio-cultural and institutional barriers resulting from patriarchy; and (3) propose a policy framework that combines inclusive hermeneutics and a capabilities approach (Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023; Mukhlis, 2025b). The authors argue that this normative-

empirical synthesis is crucial for generating recommendations that can be adopted by religious actors and education policymakers (Hilal et al., 2024) (Fitriyah & Rahman, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a combined qualitative approach (normative-textual + systematic literature review) to synthesize textual evidence (the Qur'an, Hadith, classical exegesis) and empirical evidence on patriarchal barriers in women's education. For the systematic literature review section, the PRISMA 2020 guidelines serve as the main reference in designing search strategies, inclusion, and reporting results (Page et al., 2021). The use of PRISMA ensures transparency and replicability in the literature selection stages.

Data sources are divided into three groups: (1) primary religious texts (the Qur'an; compiled authentic Hadith; selected exegeses); (2) academic literature—journals, books, policy reports (specifically from 2020–2025); and (3) policy documents/international reports (e.g., UNESCO, GIWPS) providing empirical evidence related to women's access to education. This source triangulation approach aims to link normative foundations with real social conditions (Girls-Education-and-Islam.Pdf, n.d., 2022). Triangulation is crucial to avoid claims based on only one type of evidence.

The literature search strategy follows these steps: formulation of keywords (e.g., “Islam AND education AND women,” “Islamic women knowledge seeking,” “patriarchy AND education Muslim”), selection of databases (Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, institutional repositories), and inclusion-exclusion criteria (years 2020–2025, peer-reviewed/officially published monographs, English/Indonesian). The selection process is reported using a PRISMA flowchart for transparency (Page et al., 2021) (Arar & Orucu, 2022). This procedure minimizes selection bias and facilitates study replication.

Data analysis is conducted in two cross-levels: (a) hermeneutic analysis of religious texts and exegesis—using inclusive hermeneutics to interpret the relevance of the obligation for women to seek knowledge; and (b) qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis of literature and reports to extract themes related to patriarchal barriers, access indicators, and policy practices. The analytical methods refer to guidelines by Mayring (2020), Lindgren et al., (2020), and best practices in thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This combination allows in-depth analysis both at the textual and social context levels.

To ensure validity and ethics, the study applies source triangulation, audit trail (records of analytical decisions), and researcher reflexivity memos. Additionally, the findings will be compared with international reports to check for consistency in policy findings (Evans et al., 2024). These steps strengthen the credibility of the results and make policy recommendations more accountable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quranic Verses & Hadith: The Pursuit of Knowledge for Both Men and Women

Allah SWT and Prophet Muhammad SAW have emphasized gender equality in the field of knowledge. This is evident in several verses of the Quran and hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, including the following:

QS. Al-'Alaq [96:1-5]:

إِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ
خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ
إِقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ
الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

“Read in the name of your Lord who created. He created man from a clot of blood. Read! And your Lord is the most Generous, Who taught by the pen, taught man that which he knew not.”

The Tafsir Tahlili explains that Allah commands humans to read (study, research, etc.) whatever He has created, both the manifest verses (qauliyah) like the Quran, and the implied verses, referring to the universe (kauniyah). Reading should be done in His name, seeking His assistance. Therefore, the goal of reading and understanding Allah's verses is to gain knowledge or something beneficial for humanity that is pleasing to Him. Allah commands humans to read again, meaning that learning and faith must be pursued repeatedly, at least twice. If the Quran or the universe is read and explored repeatedly, humans will find that Allah is generous, pouring His knowledge upon them, and strengthening their faith. (Tafsir Tahlili QS. Al-‘Alaq [96:1-5], n.d.)

QS Ali Imran [3:195]:

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّمَّنْ ذَكَرَ آؤُاُنْثَىٰ ۖ

“Then their Lord responded to them: 'Indeed, I do not allow the work of any worker among you to be lost, whether male or female...’”

In Tafsir Tahlili, it is explained that Ummi Salamah once said, “O Messenger of Allah! I do not hear Allah mentioning women in relation to hijrah.” Thus, this verse was revealed. Due to their persistent good deeds, sincerity, and earnest prayers, Allah granted their request. It is explained that Allah will not waste the deeds of anyone who is obedient, and He will not differentiate between men and women in granting rewards, for both genders are interdependent, with women originating from men and vice versa (Mukhlis et al., 2024; Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023). Therefore, whoever migrates, whether male or female, is exiled from their hometown, tortured for being steadfast in the way of Allah, or dies as a martyr on the battlefield, Allah will erase all their mistakes, forgive their sins, and certainly admit them into Paradise as a reward from Him, fulfilling their prayer. How blessed they are to receive rewards from Allah, for the best rewards are those granted by Him. (Tafsir Tahlili QS. Ali 'Imran [3:195], n.d.)

QS Al-Mujadilah [58:11]:

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

“Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge by degrees...”

In Tafsir Al-Muyassar, it is explained that Allah will elevate the position of the believers among you, and Allah will raise the degree of those who possess knowledge by several degrees in goodness and His pleasure. Allah is always aware of everything you do, nothing is hidden from Him, and He is the Most Rewarding for your deeds. This verse contains the glory and superiority of the scholars and their high status. (Tafsir Al-Muyassar QS. Al-Mujadilah [58:11], n.d.)

QS. Al-Hujurat [49:13]:

يَأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۚ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.”

Tafsir Tahlili interprets this verse by explaining that Allah created humans from a man (Adam) and a woman (Eve) and made them into nations and tribes, different in skin color, not to boast but to know and help each other. Allah does not like people who show pride in their lineage, rank, or wealth, for the most noble among people in His sight are those who are most pious. Human beings often associate nobility with nationality and wealth, but according to Allah’s perspective, the most noble are

those who are the most God-fearing. Allah is the Most Merciful and the Most Knowledgeable about what is hidden in human hearts. (Tafsir Tahlili QS. Al-Hujurat [49:13], n.d.)

Based on the entirety of these verses and their interpretations, the researcher believes that Islam emphasizes the importance of education for all humans, regardless of gender. QS. Al-'Alaq stresses the importance of knowledge as the foundation of human dignity, while QS. Ali 'Imran emphasizes the equal reward for both men and women in their deeds and struggles. QS. Al-Mujadilah and QS. Al-Hujurat further emphasize that human status is determined by faith, knowledge, and piety, not gender or social status. Therefore, Islam views women's education as both a right and a means to attain dignity and piety, equal to that of men before Allah SWT.

The Hadith of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ explicitly mentions the obligation to seek knowledge for both genders. It is narrated that Prophet ﷺ said:

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ

“Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim.” (HR. Ibn Majah no. 224, from the companion Anas bin Malik radhiyallahu ‘anhu, authenticated by Al-Albani in Shahih al-Jaami’ish Shaghiir no. 3913). (The Book of the Sunnah, n.d.)

The general understanding of the phrase "every Muslim" includes women. Sheikh Ibn Baz clarified that what is obligatory for men (Muslims) is also obligatory for women (Muslimahs) (Ruling on the Hadith: “Seeking Knowledge Is an Obligation upon Every Muslim,” n.d.). Yusuf al-Qaradawi also affirmed that the term “Muslim” in this hadith refers to every Muslim, both male and female—“a Muslimah (woman) is equal to a Muslim in seeking knowledge” (Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, n.d.).

This understanding reinforces that Islam places an equal obligation on men and women to seek knowledge, regardless of cultural stereotypes; every Muslim individual must seek knowledge to cultivate faith and the welfare of the ummah.

Recent studies support this vision of equality while observing patriarchal barriers in practice. Effendi (2020) asserts in his academic study that in Islam, the right to education is not differentiated between men and women (Zulham Effendi, 2020). However, social realities reveal cultural challenges. Hanifah et al. (2025) found that patriarchy still strongly limits women's roles: most respondents stated that social norms view women as less competent than men, restricting their rights (Hanifah et al., 2025). Dahri et al. (2025) concluded that such discrimination stems more from patriarchal constructs and misinterpretations of religion than from Islam itself (Dahri et al., 2025). These study results show the need for a strengthened understanding of religion in a contextual manner and social education to eliminate gender stereotypes. Thus, women can be empowered to pursue knowledge according to their rights guaranteed by Islam and for the benefit of the ummah.

Gender Equality in Islamic Education: Concepts and Social Realities

In the purest perspective of Islam, education is mandatory for every Muslim, regardless of gender. For example, the hadith of Prophet Muhammad clearly states, "Knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim (male and female)" (The Book of the Sunnah, n.d.). This statement emphasizes that Islam commands equal education for both men and women. This noble principle underpins Islamic teachings, which do not prohibit women from seeking knowledge, as their position and right to education are essentially equal to those of men.

Contemporary scholars also affirm the concept of gender equality in Islamic education. For instance, the Qur'an asserts that Allah created human beings "from male and female" and that differentiation is based solely on piety (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). Therefore, physical or biological differences should not be a reason to limit women's education. Religious interpretation needs to emphasize universal values: as long as it does not lead to injustice, gender differences are not inherently an issue in Islam (Firdaus, 2018).

However, social realities in various Muslim societies reveal persistent patriarchal cultural barriers. A literature review finds that Islamic curriculum and textbooks often position male figures at the center and marginalize women. This imbalance in representation reflects a social structure that is

not yet fully aligned with Islamic ideals. UNESCO's global data reveals an education access gap: in 2023, 122 million girls were out of school, with more than 80% of school-age girls in Afghanistan not receiving formal education. This data serves as tangible proof that many Muslim-majority countries have not yet achieved the gender equality principles upheld by Islam.

In Indonesia, various indicators show both progress and challenges. According to the 2024 BPS survey, the gender inequality index has decreased to 0.447 (from 0.472 in 2020) (KEMENP3A, 2025), but only 37.6% of women aged 25+ have graduated from high school or higher, compared to 42.6% of men. Furthermore, child marriage practices hinder education: 8.16% of girls marry for the first time between the ages of 10–15 (2024), almost certainly ending their schooling. Patriarchal barriers at the grassroots level—such as the mindset that "girls only need to study to a certain level"—still need to be addressed. Educational sociologists emphasize the importance of family support and affirmative policies to open up greater access to higher education for women.

Overall, despite policy advancements (e.g., national commitment to SDGs and affirmative funding allocations) (KEMENP3A, 2025), researchers note that achieving gender equality in Islamic education requires the integration of Islamic democratic values into actual practice. This includes revising curricula, training teachers, and creating learning environments free from gender bias. This study concludes that in order to realize the egalitarian vision of Islam, structural transformation must accompany formal rhetoric so that the Islamic ideal of equal education can be demonstrated in social realities.

Patriarchal Cultural Barriers to Women's Education

Patriarchal culture refers to a social system that places men in a higher position than women in various aspects of life. In such cultures, women's roles are often restricted and stereotypically perceived as weak, unfit to work in the public sphere. For example, an Islamic Education Survey noted that 64% of Muslim female students felt that social norms still limit women's roles and perceive them as less competent than men (Hanifah et al., 2025). This statement indicates that patriarchal structures directly limit women's access to education. This means that although religious texts (such as the hadith "seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim") encourage education for all, patriarchal cultural practices still hinder its implementation. Thus, male dominance in the social realm has become a real barrier for women who wish to pursue higher education.

The marriage of patriarchy with misinterpretations of religious teachings also strengthens the barriers to women's education. Often, local traditions monopolize religious interpretations to justify the subordination of women. As shown in the study (Hanifah et al., 2025), local cultural thinking has a far greater influence on restricting women's freedom than Islamic teachings, which fundamentally affirm equal rights between men and women. This suggests that the patriarchal current in Muslim societies is more cultural than doctrinal. In other words, traditional practices that confine women to the domestic sphere indirectly reduce women's access to education. This study notes that if religious interpretations are examined inclusively and contextually, these patriarchal barriers can be dismantled, because Islam encourages both genders to seek knowledge (see the hadith about seeking knowledge).

Islamic feminist thinkers also emphasize that patriarchy is not actually at the core of religious teachings. According to Prof. Asma Barlas, a prominent Islamic scholar, "Patriarchy in religion is a result of cultural construction, not the religion itself." This statement underscores that male dominance is not a religious teaching, but rather a cultural legacy. With this understanding, the author stresses the need to distinguish between the original teachings of Islam and ancient cultural norms. However, patriarchal culture is often maintained through textual interpretations that do not consider the social context. Researchers exemplify how biased religious interpretations are commonly used to uphold patriarchal norms, such as justifying the inferior role of women. Therefore, critical efforts to reinterpret religious texts are necessary so that women have full freedom in education, as the just teachings of Islam demand.

The reality of local cultures in various Muslim societies also emphasizes the patriarchal barriers to women's education. A field study in the Lamaholot community (East Nusa Tenggara) found that traditional views consider women as "transferred" to their husband's family after marriage, leading

parents to feel it is a loss to provide education for daughters. The research results show an education access gap between boys (who are prioritized) and girls. This indicates that patriarchal construction is deeply entrenched in the culture; women are seen only as family complements, while education is primarily viewed as a resource for male heirs. The researcher observes that this stereotype is also found in many other communities, both in Indonesia and other Muslim countries. Such research illustrates how patriarchal culture concretely restricts women's rights to education. Therefore, the researcher argues that long-term solutions must involve changing cultural mindsets so that educational opportunities are truly open and equal for women.

Globally, similar patterns are also seen in various patriarchal societies. For example, a case study in Afghanistan confirms that patriarchal family norms and family economic factors significantly limit women's access to education. The research found that family restrictions and discriminatory cultural norms pushed many women to leave school or never attend at all. This finding reflects similar patterns in other local studies in Asia and Africa. Researchers emphasize that patriarchy is cross-cultural and cross-temporal: it exists equally in both urban and rural areas, in any part of the world. The researcher underscores that understanding patriarchy as a social construct makes it easier to identify its barriers, so efforts to empower women's education must address these cultural obstacles.

Global figures also emphasize the importance of education in eliminating patriarchy. For example, Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, stated, "One child, one teacher, one pen, and one book can change the world." This inspirational quote emphasizes the transformational power of education. Malala's statement reaffirms that by ensuring every child—including girls—receives quality education, we open up extraordinary potential for social change. This message is relevant to the patriarchal situation; education gives women the tools to overcome cultural limitations and contribute to societal development. Therefore, serious investment in women's education is a crucial step in dismantling patriarchal barriers.

UNESCO also highlights the urgency of eradicating patriarchal traditions through education. According to Kuniko Inoguchi, former Minister of Gender Equality in Japan, "The pressure of patriarchal traditions" needs to be removed comprehensively through education. The 2023 UNESCO report states that development without education is unsustainable, and that equal education for men and women is key to empowering all sectors. This statement by UNESCO aligns with the findings of research: only by opening up fair education access can patriarchal norms be loosened. With inclusive education, women can take on social roles equal to those of men, in line with the true values of Islamic teachings.

Implementing Inclusive Education: Policies & Social Roles

The effort to implement inclusive education in Muslim-majority countries must be understood as a series of public policies and social interventions that eliminate barriers to access based on gender, economic status, location, and other factors of marginalization (UNESCO, 2020). The broad definition of inclusion—"all means all"—requires systemic transformation, not just partial programs at the school level.

On a global scale, a review of large-scale policies shows several effective interventions to expand women's access to education, such as scholarship programs, conditional cash transfers, transportation improvements, and gender-sensitive curriculum reforms; a meta-review by (Evans et al., 2024) emphasizes that successful large-scale interventions take local contexts, community support, and funding sustainability into account. National policies should be evidence-based and designed to be scalable to local policies to ensure widespread effectiveness.

In Indonesia, the framework for inclusive policies and gender mainstreaming has evolved; guidelines for implementing inclusive education and various regulations encourage the provision of equitable services for students with diverse needs (KEMDIKBUD, 2022). However, recent policy findings highlight implementation issues: gender disparities in leadership positions in education, and bureaucratic barriers that slow the conversion of training into leadership placements (KEMDIKDASMEN, 2025). Laws and guidelines must be combined with quantitative targets and clear accountability mechanisms to ensure that policy commitments do not remain on paper.

Gender-sensitive inclusive education also requires curriculum reforms and teaching materials that do not reproduce stereotypes—such as the marginalization of women's roles in historical narratives or biographies of figures in textbooks (INOVASI, 2020). Curriculum revisions must be accompanied by teacher training guidelines on implicit bias and gender-responsive pedagogy to ensure content changes are reflected in the classroom.

The role of social actors—families, religious leaders, civil society organizations (CSOs), and local leaders—has proven crucial in opening or closing access to education for women. A report (*Girls-Education-and-Islam*, n.d.) shows that advocacy programs involving local ulema and religious leaders have successfully reduced cultural resistance in some communities because religious messages supporting women's education were communicated through authoritative local figures. The author responds that such community-based advocacy strategies must be a core part of inclusive policy because social legitimacy often has a stronger influence than formal regulations.

Successful technical interventions also showcase a multisectoral approach: combining formal education, non-formal programs (skills/vocational training), and support services (reproductive health assistance, child care) enables women to continue their education without having to choose between studying and domestic responsibilities (Evans et al., 2024). These programs should be designed with an analysis of women's workload and local family patterns so that the solutions offered truly reduce real barriers, rather than adding new administrative burdens.

Financial aspects also play a decisive role: adequate budget allocations for women's scholarships, cost subsidies, and infrastructure investments (safe toilets, school transportation) increase retention and participation of women in secondary schools and higher education (UNESCO, 2020). The author responds that pro-gender fiscal strategies need to be combined with gender-responsive budgeting at the local level to ensure that financing truly reaches the most vulnerable groups.

However, structural challenges remain: conservative resistance, child marriage, and the inability of the education system to meet the needs of female students—such as the lack of female teachers in remote areas—hinder the sustainability of inclusive progress (UNESCO, 2020). The author responds that overcoming these barriers requires long-term political commitment, cross-sectoral cooperation, and gender-specific monitoring indicators to measure the sustainability of progress.

Finally, normative transformation is needed: progressive religious figures and contemporary Islamic thinkers such as Siti Musdah Mulia and Amina Wadud emphasize the need for inclusive interpretations that affirm women's right to knowledge as both a theological and social duty; the involvement of religious leaders in inclusive education programs enhances the legitimacy of social change (Wadud, 2022) (Fidhayanti et al., 2024). The researcher responds that successful inclusive education policies are not just technical, but also normative: they must overhaul the cultural narrative that marginalizes women through credible and relevant religious arguments.

In summary, implementing inclusive education for women in the context of Islam requires a combination of fiscal-programmatic policies, curriculum reforms, community-based advocacy by local ulema, and gender-specific monitoring mechanisms; without these integrated efforts, the principle of “seeking knowledge for every Muslim” will not be fully realized in the social realm (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025). The researcher concludes this section with recommendations: design integrated multisectoral policy packages, ensure community support through religious leaders, and measure outcomes with detailed gender indicators to ensure sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores that the normative foundation of Islam firmly supports the obligation of seeking knowledge for all Muslims—both male and female—as emphasized in the Qur'anic verses and Hadith traditions, with contemporary authoritative interpretations providing necessary contextualization. This theological foundation should serve as the primary basis for developing inclusive and equitable educational policies, rendering any claim to restrict education on religious grounds unjustifiable.

Conceptually, Islam offers a framework for gender equality in education when sacred texts are interpreted inclusively and in line with contemporary needs. Thought leaders like Amina Wadud and Quraish Shihab advocate for *ijtihad* that responds to modern-day challenges, thereby securing women's scholarly rights. The synergy between progressive interpretations and critical education has the potential to bridge the gap between normative ideals and actual social practices in Muslim communities.

However, persistent social realities—such as patriarchal cultural barriers, biased interpretations, domestic roles for women, child marriage, and gendered curricula—continue to obstruct the realization of women's educational rights across many contexts. Addressing these challenges requires structural interventions that go beyond formal access, actively dismantling cultural norms that limit women's educational aspirations.

To overcome these barriers, this study recommends the adoption of a comprehensive policy package: (1) fiscal-programmatic policies (scholarships, gender-responsive budgeting, and safe infrastructure); (2) curriculum reforms that incorporate gender inclusivity; and (3) the active involvement of religious leaders and civil society. Previous large-scale interventions have demonstrated the effectiveness of such strategies. Implementing these policies successfully requires context-sensitive design, social legitimacy through local scholars, and clear accountability mechanisms.

Empowering women through education demands multidimensional strategies: combining quality formal education with non-formal economic skills programs, recontextualizing religious interpretations (gender *ijtihad*), and establishing gender-specific monitoring systems to assess long-term outcomes. The novelty of this study lies in recommending an integrative, community-based policy package that combines religious legitimacy, economic support, and educational reform as the most feasible approach to achieving gender equality in education within the Islamic framework.

The findings of this research highlight the following: (1) religious legitimacy supports women's right to education; (2) patriarchal cultural norms create significant barriers; (3) effective solutions require a blend of inclusive interpretations, multisectoral policies, and community engagement; and (4) the synergy between knowledge (*ilm*), justice (*'adl*), and social responsibility (*amanah*) in Islamic philosophy provides the ethical foundation for sustainable transformation.

To translate these findings into practice, this study calls for a coordinated, collective effort: the state, educational institutions, religious leaders, and society must collaborate to ensure that the obligation to seek knowledge becomes a tangible right and reality for women. Future research should focus on the implementation and impact of these policy recommendations in various local and global contexts, examining both successes and challenges in achieving tangible progress toward gender equality in education.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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