



Qur'anic Gender Equality and Arab Patriarchy: Implications for Islamic Education

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Abstract

This article examines gender interpretation from the perspectives of the Qur'an and Arab tradition and explores its implications for the development of Islamic education grounded in equality and universal Islamic values. The study employs a qualitative literature review using content analysis, historical analysis, and hermeneutic approaches to classical and contemporary scholarship on gender, Qur'anic exegesis, Arab tradition, and Islamic education. The findings reveal that the Qur'an positions men and women as equal moral agents through the principles of ontological equality, the shared mandate of vicegerency (khilāfah), recognition of women's leadership, and equal rights to social, political, and economic participation. In contrast, many forms of women's subordination are rooted in patriarchal social structures and Arab cultural traditions that subsequently influenced certain interpretations of Islamic law and exegesis. These findings underscore the importance of Islamic education as a space for critical literacy that distinguishes between the universal teachings of Islam and historically contingent patriarchal traditions. Islamic education informed by al-musāwah (equality), al-'adālah (justice), al-hurriyyah (freedom), and al-tasāmuḥ (tolerance) has the potential to serve as a strategic instrument for fostering inclusive religious consciousness and addressing the challenges of contemporary global society.

Introduction

Gender has remained one of the most enduring themes in human civilization and continues to occupy a central place in religious, social, and educational discourse (Darojat et al., 2025; Rizwan et al., 2025; Syauqi et al., 2025). Across societies, relations between men and women are often shaped by cultural constructions that position them unequally. This condition has generated fundamental questions concerning women's rights, roles, and access to various spheres of life, including education, leadership, economic participation, and public engagement. Within Muslim societies, these questions become increasingly complex because they are frequently associated with interpretations of religious texts that are perceived to legitimize differences in status and social roles between men and women (Erwani & Siregar, 2025; Ne'eman-Haviv & Saleh).

Gender inequality affects not only social relations but also the production of knowledge and educational practices. When stereotypes about women are reproduced through social environments, educational institutions, and religious understandings, education risks functioning as a mechanism for perpetuating inequality rather than promoting social transformation. Such inequalities may take the form of violence, marginalization, stereotyping, double burdens, and subordination, all of which restrict women's opportunities to develop fully in both social and academic life (Faqih, 1996). In many cases, women's subordination not only

limits access to education but also shapes how women are positioned as both subjects and objects of knowledge.

This issue is particularly significant because education serves as a primary arena for the transmission of values and the formation of social worldviews. When gender-biased constructions are passed down through educational processes, social inequalities tend to be reproduced across generations. Conversely, education grounded in principles of justice and equality has the potential to cultivate critical awareness of discriminatory structures embedded within society. In the contemporary Muslim world, the need for Islamic education that is responsive to gender issues has become increasingly urgent as women's participation expands across social, political, economic, and intellectual spheres (Ahmed, 1992). At the same time, the rise of Islamic feminist discourse and gender equality movements demonstrates that the relationship between religion and gender cannot be understood as fixed and immutable; rather, it constitutes an interpretive space continuously negotiated through changing social and historical contexts (Moghadam, 2002).

Nevertheless, gender is not solely an Islamic concern. Discussions of women and gender relations have long formed part of the broader discourse of world religions. Different religious traditions have developed distinct historical experiences in understanding women's positions within both spiritual and social domains. In many cases, religious teachings interact with local cultural structures, producing diverse forms of gender relations. Consequently, gender should be understood as a phenomenon that transcends specific religious boundaries and forms part of a broader human concern (Sharma, 1987). Such a perspective allows for a more balanced analysis of the relationship between normative religious values and the social practices of religious communities.

Within Islam, debates concerning gender often arise from difficulties in distinguishing normative religious teachings from historically developed social traditions. Numerous social practices rooted in patriarchal culture have come to be perceived as unquestionable religious doctrines. As a result, forms of women's subordination frequently acquire religious legitimacy despite lacking strong foundations in the universal principles of Islam. Historically, Islam emerged within Arab society, which was characterized by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures. Consequently, the reception and implementation of Islamic teachings cannot be separated from the cultural context in which they developed.

The interaction between religion and culture has become one of the primary sources of diverse gender interpretations within Muslim societies. Contemporary Muslim scholars have argued that many assumptions regarding women's inferiority are more closely related to patriarchal social constructions than to the normative message of the Qur'an (Mernissi, 1987). Therefore, understanding gender issues in Islam requires a clear distinction between Islam as a source of values and social traditions as products of human history. When such distinctions are obscured, cultural practices may acquire disproportionate theological legitimacy (Alimi, 2002). In this regard, Islamic feminist scholarship emphasizes that efforts to establish more equitable gender relations should not be viewed as a rejection of religion; rather, they represent attempts to restore religious interpretation to the foundational Islamic principles of justice, equality, and human dignity (Badran, 2009).

Although gender studies within Islam have expanded considerably, much of the existing scholarship continues to focus on family law, marriage, divorce, inheritance, women's leadership, and critiques of patriarchal structures within religious traditions. Many studies have also concentrated on reinterpreting Qur'anic verses and Islamic legal doctrines that are considered gender-biased (Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Hammer, 2012). These contributions have

significantly enriched discussions of gender justice in Islam. However, comparatively little attention has been given to the implications of gender interpretation for the development of Islamic education. This gap is noteworthy because education functions as a strategic medium through which religious values are transmitted to future generations and social perceptions of gender relations are formed.

This limitation is evident in the scarcity of studies that explicitly connect Islamic gender discourse with educational paradigms grounded in equality and universal values. Existing scholarship tends to emphasize normative debates concerning texts and legal rulings, while pedagogical dimensions that address how principles of equality can be integrated into educational processes remain underexplored (Seedat, 2013). Consequently, a significant gap persists between developments in Islamic gender scholarship and educational practices within Islamic institutions.

Against this background, this article aims to analyze gender interpretation from the perspectives of the Qur'an and Arab tradition and to examine its implications for the development of Islamic education based on equality and universal Islamic values. Unlike previous studies that primarily situate gender within the framework of Islamic law or critiques of patriarchy, this study positions Islamic education as a strategic arena for transforming gender justice values embedded within Islamic teachings. By tracing the genealogy of gender thought in Arab and Islamic traditions, examining Qur'anic principles of equality, and analyzing the influence of patriarchal social constructions on religious interpretation, this article seeks to establish a conceptual bridge between Islamic gender studies and contemporary Islamic educational paradigms.

Within the broader landscape of scholarship, this study occupies an integrative position that connects three domains that have often developed independently: Qur'anic and gender studies, critiques of Arab patriarchal traditions, and Islamic education. Its primary contribution lies in reconstructing gender not merely as a legal or social identity issue but as an epistemological foundation for Islamic education rooted in universal Islamic values, including *al-musāwah* (equality), *al-'adālah* (justice), *al-ḥurriyyah* (freedom), and *al-tasāmuh* (tolerance). In doing so, the study seeks to broaden the horizons of gender scholarship in Islam while providing a conceptual framework for developing a more inclusive, humane, and socially just model of Islamic education.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative literature review approach to examine gender interpretation from the perspectives of the Qur'an and Arab tradition and to explore its implications for the development of Islamic education grounded in equality and universal Islamic values. This approach was selected because the study does not seek to measure a particular empirical phenomenon; rather, it aims to understand, interpret, and synthesize the ideas, concepts, and arguments that have emerged within Islamic scholarship and gender studies. Through a literature-based inquiry, the study investigates the interrelationships among religious texts, historical contexts, social constructions, and educational thought that shape understandings of gender within Muslim societies.

The data sources consist of both primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include Qur'anic verses related to gender relations, women's leadership, women's social roles, and principles of equality in Islam, as well as the works of Muslim scholars who specifically address gender issues and Qur'anic interpretation. Secondary sources comprise books, scholarly articles, and academic publications on Islamic feminism, Arab traditions, gender

theory, women's history in Islam, Islamic education, and contemporary studies concerning the relationship between religion and gender. These sources were selected based on their relevance to the research focus and their contribution to explaining the connections among religious texts, social traditions, and educational discourse.

Data analysis was conducted through three complementary stages: content analysis, historical analysis, and hermeneutic analysis. Content analysis was employed to identify major themes related to gender equality, women's leadership, patriarchal constructions, and the universal values of Islam embedded within the selected sources. This technique enabled the identification of recurring patterns of argumentation, dominant intellectual tendencies, and conceptual relationships across the literature.

Historical analysis was subsequently applied to situate texts, ideas, and social practices within their respective historical contexts. This approach is essential because understandings of gender in Muslim societies did not emerge in a social vacuum; rather, they have been shaped by the social, cultural, political, and intellectual dynamics of particular historical periods. Accordingly, distinguishing between the normative values of Islam and the social traditions that developed within Arab societies constitutes a central analytical concern of this study.

The final stage involved hermeneutic analysis to examine the relationship between text, context, and interpretation. From a hermeneutic perspective, meaning is not understood as fixed and immutable but is produced through the interaction between a text and the horizon of understanding brought by its readers. This approach was employed to explore how interpretations of Qur'anic verses concerning gender have evolved across different social and intellectual contexts and how such interpretations have influenced perceptions of women's position in contemporary Muslim life (Derrida, 1999).

To maintain consistency with the Islamic scholarly tradition, the study also draws upon interpretive frameworks derived from *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. These frameworks are not used to formulate new legal rulings; rather, they function as analytical tools for understanding the relationship between scriptural texts, the objectives of Islamic law, and changing social contexts. Principles of legal reasoning (*istinbāṭ*), considerations of public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), and the universal objectives of the Sharī'ah provide the conceptual basis for examining diverse perspectives on gender relations within Islam (Al-Ghazali, n.d.; Al-Shafi'i, 1997; Al-Shatibi, n.d.).

To minimize interpretive bias, the study does not privilege any single school of thought or exegetical approach as the definitive representation of Islam. Instead, competing perspectives within the literature are examined comparatively, taking into account their historical contexts, textual arguments, and relevance to the objectives of the study. In this way, the analysis is not directed toward validating or invalidating particular viewpoints. Rather, it seeks to understand how gender interpretations are constructed, how they relate to Arab social traditions, and how these understandings may contribute to the development of Islamic education grounded in equality, justice, and respect for human dignity.

Results and Discussion

The Genealogy of Gender Thought in Arab and Islamic Traditions

Gender in Islam is often perceived as a modern discourse that emerged alongside contemporary feminist movements. Historical inquiry, however, demonstrates that questions concerning relations between men and women have been part of Muslim social dynamics since the earliest period of Islam. Islam emerged within an Arab society characterized by strong patriarchal structures, and the transformation of women's status took place through a

continuous negotiation between the normative values of religion and deeply rooted social realities.

During the formative period of Islam, women were not merely passive recipients of religious teachings but active participants in social and religious life. Umm Salamah, for example, questioned why women's contributions to the *Hijrah* were not explicitly acknowledged despite their significant sacrifices in the struggle for Islam (Ibn al-Athir, n.d.). Likewise, Umm Ammarah al-Ansariyyah expressed concern about the limited opportunities available to women for participation in early Muslim society (Ibn al-Athir, n.d.). Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad's support for Khansa bint Khidam, who rejected a marriage arranged without her consent, illustrates recognition of women's right to make decisions concerning their own lives (Al-Zayla'i, n.d.). In addition, several narrations indicate that women requested dedicated opportunities to learn directly from the Prophet, a request that was accommodated through the provision of specific instructional sessions (Ibn al-Athir, n.d.). These historical accounts suggest that concerns regarding women's rights, participation, and access to education were already embedded within the social experience of the earliest Muslim community.

In the modern era, debates on gender became more systematic through efforts to reinterpret religious texts. Asghar Ali Engineer argued that Islam fundamentally upholds social justice and rejects all forms of oppression, including the oppression of women. According to Engineer, women's subordination derives largely from historically conditioned interpretations shaped by patriarchal culture rather than from the normative message of the Qur'an itself (Engineer, 2000; Esha, 2003). A similar perspective was advanced by Riffat Hassan, who challenged theological assumptions regarding women's inferiority and emphasized the ontological equality of men and women before God (Hasan, 1991; Hasan, 1999; Hasan & Mernissi, 1995).

A more critical engagement with the Qur'an was developed by Amina Wadud through an interpretive approach that places women's experiences at the center of understanding revelation. Wadud argues that many prevailing interpretations reflect the social perspectives of interpreters more than the universal message of the Qur'an itself. Consequently, she advocates a reading that positions men and women as equally legitimate recipients of divine guidance (Wadud, 1998; Wadud, 1999). Similarly, Fatima Mernissi demonstrated that many restrictions imposed upon women are rooted in social and political constructions that later acquired religious legitimacy rather than originating directly from Islamic teachings (Mernissi, 1994; Mernissi, 1999a; Mernissi, 1999b). Despite employing different approaches, these scholars share a common objective: distinguishing the universal values of Islam from historically conditioned interpretations shaped by patriarchal structures.

These intellectual developments cannot be separated from the emergence of Arab feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Qasim Amin played a pivotal role in raising awareness about the importance of women's education and public participation through his critique of social practices that restricted women's opportunities. For Amin, societal progress was impossible without the empowerment of women through education. His ideas were later expanded through the more radical critiques of Nawal El-Saadawi, who highlighted the interconnectedness of gender injustice, political structures, culture, economic systems, and patriarchal religious interpretations (Al-Saadawi, 2001). The contributions of Arab feminism demonstrate that gender issues cannot be understood solely through normative religious frameworks but must also be examined in relation to history, power, and social structures.

In Indonesia, the development of gender thought has emerged through the interaction between Islamic traditions, modernity, and women's educational movements pioneered by figures such as R.A. Kartini and Dewi Sartika. In more contemporary settings, these developments gave rise to what has been termed a "theology of women," an intellectual approach that seeks to reread religious texts and traditions by taking women's experiences and interests seriously as part of the Muslim community (Anwar, 2005). Similar tendencies are evident in the evolution of Qur'anic studies, where classical interpretations have increasingly been reassessed through contextual and historical approaches. In this regard, studies examining feminist perspectives in *Tafsir al-Manar* indicate that gender equality has become an integral component of modern Islamic reformist thought and the development of contemporary exegetical methodologies in Indonesia (Mundhir, 1998).

Overall, the genealogy of gender thought in Arab and Islamic traditions reveals that relations between men and women constitute a dynamic discourse that has continually been reinterpreted in response to changing social, political, cultural, and intellectual contexts. Understanding this historical trajectory is essential for examining how the principles of equality embedded within Islam can be translated into social and educational practices that are more inclusive, humane, and just.

Gender Equality as a Universal Value of the Qur'an

Debates on gender in Islam often originate from partial readings of certain Qur'anic verses that are perceived to legitimize differences in the roles of men and women. A holistic reading of the Qur'an, however, reveals that gender relations are fundamentally grounded in principles of moral, spiritual, and human equality. From this perspective, biological differences do not automatically create social hierarchies or establish the ontological superiority of one sex over the other. Rather, both men and women are positioned as moral agents who share the responsibility of fulfilling divine trust, exercising accountability, and striving for excellence before Allah SWT.

This principle of equality is reflected in the Qur'an's consistent reference to men and women side by side in religious contexts, such as *al-muslimūn wa al-muslimāt* (Muslim men and Muslim women) and *al-mu'minūn wa al-mu'mināt* (believing men and believing women). Such expressions indicate that religious identity is founded upon faith and piety rather than gender (Shahrur, 2004). Consequently, assumptions that portray women as secondary or inherently inferior beings find little support within the Qur'anic worldview. Instead, men and women are presented as human beings who possess equal dignity and an equivalent spiritual relationship with God (Hasan, 1991).

The principle of equality is further reinforced through the Qur'anic concept of humanity as God's vicegerent (*khalīfah*) on earth. QS Al-Baqarah (2):30 affirms that the mandate of vicegerency is bestowed upon humanity without distinction between men and women. The responsibility to cultivate the earth, uphold justice, and contribute to civilization is therefore a shared obligation (Wadud, 1999). This perspective is strengthened by QS Al-Nisa' (4):124, which emphasizes that all righteous deeds, whether performed by men or women, are equally valued and rewarded by Allah SWT. In this framework, the primary criterion of human worth is not gender but faithfulness and moral action (Barlas, 2002).

The same principle is reflected in the Qur'anic narrative of Queen Balqis in QS Al-Naml. Contrary to patriarchal traditions that associate leadership primarily with men, the Qur'an portrays Balqis as a ruler endowed with political legitimacy, wisdom, and the capacity for rational decision-making. Significantly, the narrative offers no negative judgment regarding

her gender; instead, it highlights the quality of her leadership (Shahrur, 2004). The story of Balqis therefore suggests that leadership in the Qur'anic perspective is determined by competence, integrity, and the ability to fulfill social responsibilities rather than by biological sex (Barlas, 2006).

This verse presents men and women as partners in carrying out collective religious and social responsibilities. The term *awliyā'* conveys not only mutual support but also participation in public affairs, decision-making processes, and social accountability. Consequently, women's involvement in social and political life is not merely permissible but constitutes part of a collective religious mandate (Hasan, 1999).

Recognition of women's political agency is further evident in QS Al-Mumtahanah (60):12, which describes women's participation in the pledge of allegiance (*bay'ah*) to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Their inclusion in this process demonstrates that women were acknowledged as autonomous moral and political actors capable of making independent commitments and decisions. Likewise, QS Al-Nahl (16):97 affirms that righteous deeds and productive contributions are equally rewarded regardless of gender. Accordingly, women possess the same right as men to engage in economic activities, develop their capacities, and contribute to the welfare of society (Wadud, 2007).

Taken together, these verses demonstrate that gender equality is not an external concept imposed upon Islam but rather an integral component of the Qur'an's universal message. It is rooted in the recognition of human dignity, the shared mandate of vicegerency, opportunities for leadership, and equal participation in social, political, and economic life. This understanding provides an essential foundation for distinguishing between the normative teachings of the Qur'an and the patriarchal social constructions that have developed throughout the historical experience of Muslim societies, a distinction that will be explored in the following section.

Arab Tradition and the Production of Gender Bias

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that the Qur'an positions men and women as equal moral, spiritual, and social agents. Throughout the history of Muslim societies, however, these egalitarian values have not always been fully reflected in social practice. One of the primary reasons lies in the enduring influence of patriarchal Arab traditions that shaped perceptions of women, family, honor, and authority. Consequently, gender bias within Muslim societies cannot be attributed solely to Islamic teachings, as many of its manifestations emerged from the interaction between religious texts, patriarchal social structures, and historically conditioned interpretive traditions.

Both pre-Islamic Arab society and the early Islamic period were characterized by social concepts closely associated with male honor and control over women's bodies. Terms such as *al-sharaf*, *al-'ird*, *al-nakhwah*, and *al-murū'ah* embodied notions of prestige, dignity, authority, and honor that were deeply embedded in patrilineal kinship systems. Although these concepts were local, historical, and culturally specific, they often acquired normative force in social life, eventually resembling religious doctrines. This dynamic produced a fundamental problem: traditions rooted in particular social experiences came to be perceived as intrinsic components of Islam itself. As a result, understandings of women's roles were frequently shaped by patriarchal honor codes rather than by the universal principles of the Qur'an (Ahmed, 1992; Shahrur, 2004).

The dominance of these honor-based values is evident in practices of violence against women justified in the name of family honor. Data from Jordan indicate the existence of crimes

classified as *jarīmat al-sharaf* (honor crimes). Between 1995 and 1998, 119 cases of female homicide were recorded, 64 of which were reportedly motivated by concerns related to family honor. The majority of perpetrators were close male relatives, particularly brothers, fathers, and husbands (*Majallat al-Wasath*, 1999). These statistics illustrate how women's bodies and behavior are often constructed as symbols of male family honor. Within patriarchal social systems, women become not only vulnerable to physical violence but also subject to moral surveillance and control legitimized through prevailing honor norms (Ahmed, 1992; Al-Saadawi, 2001). Such cases demonstrate that gender relations are shaped not merely by biological differences but by broader cultural and power structures that place women under the symbolic burden of preserving family and communal reputation.

This phenomenon aligns with critiques of modern Arab societies that identify violence against women as deeply intertwined with political structures, cultural norms, economic conditions, and religious interpretations that normalize gender inequality (Al-Saadawi, 2001). In this context, honor-based violence should not be understood simply as individual deviance but rather as a social manifestation of patriarchal logic regulating women's social position. A critical examination of the relationship between Arab traditions and religious understandings is therefore essential to prevent discriminatory cultural practices from continuing to derive legitimacy from religion (Ahmed, 1992).

The influence of patriarchy is also evident in the formation of certain juridical traditions within Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). As a product of human reasoning (*ijtihād*), *fiqh* emerged within specific social contexts and was therefore not entirely free from the cultural structures, power relations, and gender assumptions of its time. Historically, many legal formulations concerning family relations, marriage, divorce, male authority, and women's status reflected patriarchal social configurations that positioned men as the primary locus of authority. Consequently, it is important to distinguish between *Sharī'ah* as a divine framework oriented toward justice and *fiqh* as a human intellectual endeavor that remains open to reassessment and reinterpretation (Ali, 2006; Mir-Hosseini, 2006).

Within contemporary Islamic family law scholarship, this issue is particularly evident in the construction of male authority as both a social and legal norm. The concept of men as those who “manage” or “lead” women has often been interpreted hierarchically, despite its original connection to economic responsibility, protection, and family organization within a specific historical context. As social conditions evolve—including higher levels of education, increased economic independence, and greater public participation among women—strictly hierarchical readings become increasingly problematic. Consequently, authority within Islamic legal traditions should be reconsidered through the lenses of justice, reciprocity, and public welfare (*maṣlahah*) rather than as a framework of absolute male domination over women (Mir-Hosseini et al., 2015).

In this regard, the reinterpretation of Qur'anic verses frequently regarded as gender-biased becomes particularly significant. QS Al-Nisa' (4):34, for instance, is often cited to justify male superiority through the concept of *qiwāmah*. Contextual readings, however, suggest that *qiwāmah* cannot be separated from the social and economic responsibilities explicitly mentioned within the verse itself. Accordingly, the verse should not be understood as establishing men's ontological superiority but rather as regulating responsibilities within a particular social setting (Shahrur, 2004; Wadud, 1999). Patriarchal interpretations that transform *qiwāmah* into a justification for male domination deserve critical scrutiny because they conflict with the broader Qur'anic principles of moral equality and shared responsibility (Barlas, 2002).

A similar argument applies to QS Al-Nisa' (4):11 concerning inheritance and QS Al-Baqarah (2):282 concerning testimony. These verses are often interpreted literally as evidence of women's lower status relative to men. Yet contextual readings that take into account the social structure, economic realities, and position of women at the time of revelation suggest that these provisions cannot be detached from their historical circumstances. In early Arab society, men generally bore primary economic responsibility for the family, while women's participation in public and commercial transactions remained relatively limited. Consequently, interpretations of these verses should consider the relationship between text, context, and the ethical objectives of the Qur'an (Hammer, 2012; Seedat, 2013).

Overall, the production of gender bias within Islamic traditions cannot be explained solely by reference to religious texts themselves but must also be understood through the ways those texts have been interpreted within patriarchal social structures. When local traditions, social interests, and interpretive authority converge without critical reflection, religious teachings originally oriented toward justice may become instruments for legitimizing inequality. Therefore, the reinterpretation of gender-related verses should not be viewed as an attempt to subordinate the Qur'an to modernity. Rather, it seeks to ensure that religious understanding remains aligned with the universal values of Islam: justice, equality, public welfare, and respect for human dignity.

Implications for Islamic Education Based on Equality and Universal Islamic Values

The preceding discussion demonstrates that the principle of gender equality is firmly grounded in the Qur'an, whereas many forms of women's subordination are more closely associated with patriarchal social constructions and historically conditioned interpretive traditions. These findings carry significant implications for Islamic education because educational institutions constitute primary sites for the transmission of knowledge, the formation of religious worldviews, and the reproduction of social values. Consequently, Islamic education should function not only as a mechanism for preserving religious traditions but also as a critical arena for ensuring that the universal values of Islam are understood in their entirety and not reduced by culturally embedded biases.

At its core, Islamic education is concerned not merely with the transmission of religious knowledge but also with the formation of individuals capable of embodying Islamic values in social life. In this regard, education possesses a transformative function, shaping students' understandings of social relations, justice, and human dignity. When religious understandings of women are constructed upon patriarchal assumptions, educational institutions risk reproducing inequalities that have persisted for centuries. Conversely, when educational practices are grounded in the universal principles of Islam, they can foster more equitable relationships between men and women.

Historical evidence suggests that many forms of women's subordination have been legitimized through processes of cultural and educational socialization. Islamic education therefore bears the responsibility of critically reassessing inherited knowledge rather than merely reproducing social structures that conflict with Islamic principles of justice. From this perspective, strengthening gender equality should not be viewed as the incorporation of external values into Islam but rather as the actualization of Islam's foundational commitments to justice, human dignity, and social responsibility (Ahmed, 1992; Badran, 2009).

One of the major challenges facing Islamic education is the tendency to conflate normative religious teachings with historically and culturally specific social traditions. As discussed earlier, many views concerning women's status in Muslim societies originate from patriarchal

cultural constructions that later acquired religious legitimacy. As a result, students are not always able to distinguish between universal Islamic principles and historical products of particular societies.

To address this issue, Islamic education should cultivate critical engagement with the formation of religious knowledge. Students need to recognize that religious understanding emerges through the interaction of text, context, and interpretation. Religious learning should therefore extend beyond literal readings of texts to include awareness of the historical and social circumstances that shape interpretive processes (Alimi, 2002). Such an approach is consistent with hermeneutic perspectives that view meaning as emerging through dynamic interactions between texts and their readers rather than as a fixed and isolated entity (Derrida, 1999).

The ability to distinguish between religion and tradition is essential because it enables students to understand that not every practice found within Muslim societies carries the same normative religious status. In this way, Islamic education can foster a more reflective, open, and critical religious outlook that prioritizes universal Islamic values as guiding principles for social life.

A further implication concerns the need to reconstruct gender literacy within Islamic education. Gender discussions are often narrowly understood as women's issues or even perceived as agendas incompatible with religion. From an educational perspective, however, gender literacy refers to the capacity to understand how gender relations are constructed, maintained, and negotiated within diverse social contexts.

Such reconstruction should begin by introducing students to the plurality of interpretive perspectives within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Students need to recognize that Qur'anic verses concerning gender have been approached through diverse methodologies, ranging from textualist readings to contextual and historical interpretations. This awareness is essential for preventing educational processes from producing monolithic and closed understandings of religious texts (Wadud, 2006).

At the same time, gender literacy should strengthen students' ability to connect Qur'anic values with contemporary social realities. This includes identifying persistent forms of gender injustice, understanding their social and cultural roots, and evaluating gender-related issues through the lenses of justice and public welfare (*maṣlahah*), which constitute central objectives of Islamic law (Wadud, 2007). In this way, Islamic education can move beyond merely transmitting normative understandings of gender and instead cultivate social sensitivity that enables students to translate Islamic values into everyday practice. Such efforts also create space for more inclusive religious interpretations that are not constrained by inherited patriarchal assumptions (Barlas, 2006).

Promoting gender equality within Islamic education also requires curricular support that positions women not merely as subjects of discussion but as active contributors to Islamic history and civilization. Educational narratives have often focused predominantly on male figures, resulting in the marginalization of women's contributions. Consequently, students may develop the impression that intellectual, social, and political achievements in Islam were exclusively male domains.

To address this imbalance, Islamic educational curricula should broaden the representation of influential female figures in Islamic history. Khadijah can be presented as a model of economic leadership and strategic support for the early Islamic mission. Aisyah exemplifies women's roles as authorities in knowledge production and the transmission of hadith. Fatimah represents moral and spiritual excellence within the Islamic tradition. Meanwhile, the story of

Queen Balqis provides an example of female political leadership that is explicitly recognized within the Qur'an (Mernissi, 1999a). Integrating these figures into educational materials does not seek to create a dichotomy between men and women but rather to broaden students' historical horizons regarding women's diverse contributions to Islamic civilization. Such integration provides a more balanced understanding of Islamic history while offering role models consistent with principles of equality and respect for human dignity (Ahmed, 1992).

Islamic education grounded in universal Islamic values should also contribute to raising awareness of women's rights as an integral component of human rights recognized within Islam. This includes the right to education, participation in social and public life, and protection and justice within family relationships.

In the Indonesian context, these principles have received recognition within the framework of national Islamic law. The Compilation of Islamic Law (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam*) recognizes women as legal subjects possessing specific rights and responsibilities within family life, including rights to protection, rights within marriage, and access to legal remedies when principles of justice are violated within the household (Direktorat Pembinaan Badan Peradilan Agama, 1998/1999). Islamic education should therefore help students understand that the protection of women's rights is not contrary to Islam but rather forms part of the broader objective of safeguarding human dignity, justice, and public welfare.

Ultimately, Islamic education grounded in equality functions not only as a means of transmitting religious knowledge but also as a medium for cultivating social consciousness that enables students to understand gender relations in more equitable, critical, and humane ways. Through education, universal Islamic values such as *al-musāwah* (equality), *al-'adālah* (justice), *al-hurriyyah* (freedom), and *al-tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) can be translated into social practices that uphold the equal dignity of both men and women.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that gender equality constitutes an integral component of the Qur'an's universal message. Through the principles of ontological equality, the shared mandate of vicegerency (*khilāfah*), recognition of women's leadership, and equal rights to social, political, and economic participation, the Qur'an positions men and women as moral agents endowed with equal dignity, responsibility, and opportunities before Allah SWT. Consequently, gender relations in Islam are not founded upon biological hierarchy but upon faith, righteous action, and contributions to human flourishing.

In contrast, many forms of women's subordination that have emerged within certain Muslim societies are more closely associated with patriarchal social constructions and cultural traditions that subsequently acquired legitimacy through historical interpretive processes. Concepts of honor, patrilineal social structures, and decontextualized textual readings have contributed to religious understandings that do not always reflect the Qur'an's broader commitment to justice and equality.

These findings have significant implications for Islamic education. Education should function not merely as a vehicle for transmitting religious knowledge but also as a space for critical literacy that enables students to distinguish between the universal teachings of Islam and historically contingent social traditions. Through such an approach, Islamic education can cultivate more reflective, inclusive, and socially responsive forms of religious consciousness.

In this regard, the values of *al-musāwah* (equality), *al-‘adālah* (justice), *al-ḥurriyyah* (freedom), and *al-tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) should serve as foundational principles for contemporary Islamic education. These values are not only relevant to Muslim communities but also resonate with global commitments to human dignity, inclusive education, and gender equality. Accordingly, this study positions itself at the intersection of Qur’anic gender studies and Islamic educational thought by arguing that an equality-based model of Islamic education should not be understood as the adoption of external values. Rather, it represents the actualization of Islam’s universal principles in responding to the challenges of an increasingly pluralistic, democratic, and justice-oriented global society.

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