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# Gender Controversy in Islamic Education Management (Policy Trends and Inclusion Solutions)

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#### Abstract

This research aims to explore the strengthening of the role of social institutions in women's empowerment and increasing gender equality. The research method used is mixed-method, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data was collected through observations, indepth interviews, surveys, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with women aged 15-50, leaders of social institutions, and government officials. The results show that education and training programs organized by social institutions have significantly increased skills, economic independence, and awareness of women's rights. However, cultural resistance and gaps in educational facilities are still major challenges in the implementation of gender equality programs. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of community-based inclusive strategies to overcome cultural resistance and the need for long-term evaluation of women's empowerment programs. In addition, increased collaboration between social institutions, governments, and the private sector is encouraged to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of these programs.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Women's empowerment and gender equality have become central issues in the global social and development discourse, especially in the context of education and economic participation. Research shows that women's empowerment not only strengthens women's position in society but also contributes to improving overall social and economic well-being (Anderson, 2021; Ellemers, 2020; Kabeer & Huq, 2022; Rusdi et al., 2022; Susilawati & Astuti, 2022). In Indonesia, despite significant progress in terms of gender equality, stark inequalities still exist, especially in areas with strong patriarchal cultures such as Bangkalan Regency, East Java. Studies by Rinaldi et al. (2021), Saleh et al. (2022), Utami & Wijaya (2023), and Wijaya & Khoir (2022) show that women in Indonesia, including Bangkalan Regency, face significant challenges in accessing education and employment due to deep cultural barriers. Social facts show that women in the region often face structural and cultural barriers that prevent them from fully participating in education and the economy (Agrawal & Gupta, 2021; Jha et al., 2022; Nugroho et al., 2023; Chuanchen, 2023; Norman & Paramansyah, 2024).

This inequality not only has an impact on the well-being of individuals, but also on overall social and economic development. Research conducted by Dutta et al. (2021), Kim et al. (2022), Patel et al. (2023), and Maulidah et al. (2023) reinforces these findings by showing that gender inequality in education and the economy directly affects slower economic growth and increased poverty. Based on theories of gender empowerment and equality, it is important to understand the role of social institutions as agents of change that can help overcome these barriers and encourage wider women's participation (Lynch & Kalaitzidis, 2021; Morais et al., 2022; Rivera & Tsai, 2023; Hasanah & Hefniy, 2023; Ansori et al., 2023). Therefore, this research is important to uncover how social institutions can play a strategic role in improving women's empowerment and achieving more inclusive gender equality in regions with complex cultural and structural challenges (Habib et al., 2021; Sharma & Singh, 2022; Thakur & Sinha, 2023; Hamidah, 2023).

The main issue that this research focuses on is how social institutions can contribute effectively to women's empowerment in Bangkalan Regency, amid the challenges of a strong patriarchal culture and limited access to education and economic participation. Although governments have launched various programs to improve gender equality, their implementation is often hampered by cultural resistance and a lack of cross-sectoral collaboration (Ouedraogo, 2022; Rahman, 2021; Singh & Padhi, 2023). As a result, many empowerment programs do not achieve their goals or are sustainable in the long term (Lalor et al., 2022; Beaman et al., 2023; Asadullah & Zafar, 2022). In this context, this study seeks to analyze the role of social institutions in overcoming these barriers and explore effective strategies to strengthen gender equality at the local level (Goksel, 2023; Khalid, 2021; Widiastuti & Putra, 2022). Thus, this research has high relevance in answering the urgent need to empower women and reduce gender inequality in areas with structural and cultural challenges (Majid et al., 2023; Chatterjee, 2023; Zainal & Abdullah, 2021).

A literature review shows that previous studies have highlighted the role of social institutions in women's empowerment, but most of the studies have focused on urban contexts or regions with lower cultural resistance. For example, Nguyen (2021) showed that collaboration between social institutions and the government can significantly increase women's involvement in empowerment programs in Viet Nam, but this study lacks the emphasis on strong cultural resistance aspects. Njuki et al. (2023) examined the impact of social institution interventions on women's economic empowerment in sub-Saharan Africa, with the finding that women's participation increased significantly when social institutions were directly involved. However, the study did not consider the influence of local culture in a more traditional context. Rahman & Wassalwa (2019) in their research in Bangladesh, found that social institutions play an important role in women's empowerment, but this study does not address issues related to cross-sector collaboration that are essential for the sustainability of the program. The gaps suggest that little attention is paid to how social institutions can be effective in a very traditional cultural context and how cross-sectoral collaboration can strengthen empowerment efforts.

This study identifies a clear gap in the existing literature, namely the lack of exploration of the role of social institutions in women's empowerment in regions with a strong patriarchal culture such as Bangkalan Regency, and how cross-sectoral collaboration can strengthen the sustainability of empowerment programs.

Most previous studies tended to focus on urban areas or areas with lower cultural resistance, while more traditional and complex cultural contexts such as Bangkalan have not received adequate attention. This research aims to fill in the gaps by offering an in-depth analysis of the role of social institutions in overcoming cultural barriers and how collaboration between social institutions, governments, and the private sector can create more effective and sustainable empowerment programs. By filling this gap, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature on women's empowerment and gender equality in Indonesia.

This study offers novelty by combining the analysis of the role of social institutions in a very traditional cultural context with a cross-sectoral collaborative approach that has not been widely explored in previous studies. Uniquely, this study not only explores the role of social institutions individually, but also how synergy between social institutions, the government, and the private sector can increase the effectiveness and sustainability of women's empowerment programs. This study also introduces a new perspective on the importance of understanding cultural resistance in the implementation of empowerment programs, which is an aspect that has often been overlooked in previous studies. Thus, this research not only enriches the existing literature, but also provides significant added value for the development of more inclusive and sustainable empowerment strategies in regions with complex cultural challenges.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the role of social institutions in women's empowerment in Bangkalan Regency and explore how cross-sector collaboration can strengthen these empowerment efforts. This research is important given the significant cultural challenges in the region, which often hamper the implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment programs. By achieving this goal, this research is expected to provide new insights that can be used as a basis for developing more effective, inclusive, and sustainable empowerment policies and strategies, not only in Bangkalan Regency, but also in other areas with similar challenges.

# **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed-method) to provide a comprehensive overview of strengthening the role of social institutions in women's empowerment and gender equality (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Alvarado & Ricoy, 2022). The unit of analysis in this study includes locations, places, cases, agencies/institutions, activities, programs, artifacts, and events relevant to the research topic. The design of this study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain rich and in-depth data. Qualitative research will use case studies to understand the experiences and views of respondents in depth. Grounded research will also be used to develop theories derived from field data. Quantitative research will use surveys to collect numerical data that can be analyzed statistically. With a mixed-method approach, this research is expected to produce valid and reliable findings.

The location of the study is Bangkalan Regency, with a focus on various subdistricts that have different social and cultural characteristics. Research sites include social institutions, educational institutions, government offices, and locations of women's empowerment activities organized by social institutions. The cases studied involved women aged 15-50 years who participated in empowerment programs, as well as institutions involved in the implementation of gender equality policies. Agencies and institutions that are the subject of the research include the Education Office, social institutions for women's empowerment, and community organizations that focus on women's rights.

The data collection process involves several techniques. Desk reviews will be conducted to collect secondary data from the literature, previous research reports, and policy documents. Observation will be carried out at the location of women's empowerment activities to directly observe the implementation of the program and the interaction between participants and facilitators. In-depth interviews with respondents and informants will use structured interview guidelines but still allow for further exploration. The questionnaire will be used in the survey to collect quantitative data from respondents. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) will also be held to obtain collective views from women's groups and other stakeholders. The sources of information in this study consist of respondents, informants, and texts. The main respondents were women aged 15-50 years who had participated in the empowerment program. The informants consist of leaders of social institutions, government officials, and community members who have knowledge and experience related to research topics. The texts to be analyzed include manuscripts, books, online news, and policy documents relevant to women's empowerment and gender equality.

The data analysis in this study was carried out through several stages. The first stage is data reduction, where data obtained from various sources will be sorted, categorized, and filtered to identify relevant information. The second stage is data display, where the reduced data will be presented in the form of tables, graphs, or narratives to facilitate further analysis. The third stage is data verification, where provisional findings will be tested for validity and reliability through data triangulation and confirmation with informants. The analysis methods used include content analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretation analysis. Content analysis will be used to identify key themes from qualitative and quantitative data. Discourse analysis will be used to understand how views and attitudes towards gender equality and women's empowerment are expressed in texts and conversations. Interpretive analysis will be used to interpret the meaning of the research findings in a broader social and cultural context.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study aim to reveal the role of social institutions in women's empowerment and gender equality, especially in the context of education. These findings are based on an analysis of data collected through a variety of methods, including surveys, in-depth interviews, and field observations, which provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of social agency interventions on upskilling, economic independence, and awareness of women's rights.

# **Strengthening Policies and Regulations**

The government needs to strengthen the implementation of gender equality policies in the education sector, including in Islamic educational institutions (Durrani & Halai, 2020; Koburtay et al., 2020; Kosim et al., 2023). Strict supervision and evaluation must be carried out to ensure that this policy is properly implemented.

In the context of the implementation of gender equality policies in the education sector, there are various dynamics that need to be considered, especially when the policies are implemented in areas with strong and traditional cultures. Efforts to ensure that children, both boys and girls, have equal access to quality education face a range of complex challenges. This challenge stems not only from cultural resistance in society, but also from the gap in facilities and access in remote areas. Therefore, it is important to understand how these policies are implemented on the ground as well as the specific challenges they face. This section will interpret interviews with stakeholders involved in the implementation of gender equality policies in the education sector, focusing on the steps that have been taken and the obstacles faced in realizing these goals.

Gender equality in education is a very important issue and is one of our focuses in the Education Office. We recognize that there are major challenges in implementing gender equality policies, especially in areas with strong cultures and traditions such as Bangkalan. However, we are committed to continuing to strengthen regulations and ensure that all children, both boys and girls, have equal access to quality education (Dr.AhFa1-5).

We have taken some concrete steps. First, we conduct socialization and training for school principals and teachers on the importance of gender equality in education. We also work with community organizations and non-governmental organizations to support women's empowerment programs. In addition, we conduct regular monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the policies that have been issued are actually implemented in the field (Dr.AhFa2-5).

The biggest challenge we face is the resistance from several community groups who still hold fast to traditional values. They tend to see women's roles as secondary compared to men, especially in the context of education and work. In addition, there are still gaps in terms of facilities and access to education in some remote areas, which has a greater impact on girls (Dr.AhFa3-5).

The results of the interviews show that although the Office of Education has a strong commitment to implementing gender equality policies, including through socialization, training for school principals and teachers, and collaboration with community organizations and NGOs, significant challenges remain. Cultural resistance that maintains traditional values, where women's roles are still seen as secondary compared to men, is a major obstacle. In addition, disparities in facilities and access to education in remote areas exacerbate the challenges of realizing gender equality in the education sector, which requires further efforts to ensure that these policies can be effectively implemented across the region.

The government needs to strengthen the implementation of gender equality policies in the education sector, including in Islamic educational institutions. Strict supervision and evaluation must be carried out to ensure that this policy is properly implemented. Gender equality in education is a very important issue and is one of the main focuses of the Education Office. They realize that there are major challenges in implementing gender equality policies, especially in areas with strong cultures and traditions. However, their commitment is strong to continue to strengthen regulations and ensure that all children, both boys and girls, have equal access to quality education.

The Education Office has taken several concrete steps to achieve this goal. They conducted socialization and training for school principals and teachers on the importance of gender equality in education. In addition, they work closely with various community organizations and non-governmental organizations to support women's empowerment programs. Regular monitoring and evaluation are also carried out to ensure that the policies that have been issued are actually implemented in the field (Hill & Hupe, 2021; Huber & Helm, 2020; Leeuw, 2020; Sabri & Monia, 2023).

However, the biggest challenge faced is the resistance of several community groups who still hold fast to traditional values. These groups tend to see women's roles as secondary compared to men, especially in the context of education and work. In addition, there are still gaps in terms of facilities and access to education in some remote areas, which has a greater impact on girls (Anlimachie & Avoada, 2020; Evans & Yuan, 2022; Jones et al., 2021).

Figure 1. Important Aspects related to the Implementation of Gender Equality Policy in the Education Sector

Aspects	Detail
Purpose	Strengthen the implementation of gender equality policies in the education
	sector, including in Islamic educational institutions.
Required Actions	Strict supervision and evaluation to ensure that this policy is properly implemented.
Main Focus	Gender equality in education is a very important issue and is one of the main
	focuses of the Education Office.
Challenge	Strong cultures and traditions pose a major challenge in implementing gender
	equality policies.
Commitment	A strong commitment to strengthening regulations and ensuring that all children,
	both boys and girls, have equal access to quality education.
Concrete Steps	Socialization and training for school principals and teachers regarding gender
	equality.
	Cooperation with community organizations and non-governmental organizations
	to support women's empowerment programs.
	Periodic monitoring and evaluation to ensure policies are implemented in the
	field.
The Biggest Challenge	Resistance from community groups that hold traditional values.
	The view is that the role of women is secondary compared to men in the context
	of education and work.
	The gap in facilities and access to education in remote areas has a greater impact
	on girls.

The strengthening of policies and regulations related to gender equality in the education sector by the Education Office shows a strong commitment to addressing local cultural and traditional challenges. Concrete measures such as socialization and training for principals and teachers, as well as cooperation with community organizations and non-governmental organizations, show serious efforts in creating an inclusive educational environment. Periodic monitoring and evaluation ensure that the policies that have been implemented are effective in the field. Despite resistance from community groups that still hold traditional values, the efforts made by the Education Office show significant progress in overcoming these barriers and providing equal access to education for all children.

Thus, strengthening policies and regulations in Islamic education has farreaching implications for creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. Key functions such as socialization, cooperation, and monitoring play an important role in ensuring effective implementation, while the correlation between these functions shows progress in addressing challenges and barriers, as well as improving access to education for all children, both boys and girls.

# **Women's Empowerment**

Women's empowerment, especially in the context of education and socioeconomic participation. Women's empowerment is a crucial issue in efforts to achieve gender equality, especially in areas that are still affected by traditional values. This research focuses on the analysis of education levels, economic participation, and perceptions of gender equality among women. Through a survey involving respondents from various backgrounds, this sub-committee explores various factors that affect women's empowerment and the challenges that must be overcome. The results of this analysis are expected to provide a clearer picture of the conditions of women's empowerment and the steps that need to be taken to increase women's participation in various aspects of life.

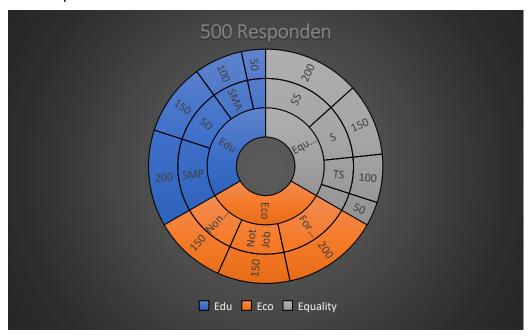


Figure 1. Distribusi Data dari 500 Responden

From Figure 1. Provided that assess the level of women's empowerment, especially in the context of education and socio-economic participation. The survey was conducted to assess the level of women's empowerment, especially in the context of education and socio-economic participation. The population targeted by the survey is women aged 15-50 years. From the population, a sample of 500 respondents was selected. The instrument used in the survey is a questionnaire that covers three aspects, namely, education, economic participation, and perception of gender equality. This is also supported by several interview activities conducted with several respondents where he revealed that,

In terms of education, it shows that the majority of women have completed secondary (40%) and primary education (30%). As many as 20% of respondents have completed further education at the high school or vocational level, while only 10% have continued their education up to the bachelor's or diploma level. These results show the need to increase access and support for higher education for women.

In terms of economic participation, as many as 40% of women work in the formal sector as civil servants, private employees, and so on. As many as 30% work in the informal sector, including small businesses and agriculture, while another 30% are not working and are working as housewives or looking for work. This data shows that there are opportunities to increase women's participation in the formal economy sector through training and economic empowerment.

Meanwhile, in terms of perception of gender equality, as many as 40% of respondents strongly agree that women and men should have the same rights, while 30% agree that women have some of the same rights as men. As many as 20% of respondents disagree and believe that women have different roles than men, and 10% strongly disagree that women need to have the same rights as men. These results reflect the existence of cultural resistance that needs to be overcome through education and awareness campaigns.

So, it can be concluded that the majority of women have completed secondary and primary education, but only a small part continues to higher education. This shows the need for increased access and support for higher education for women. Women's participation in the formal sector is significant, but there are still many who work in the informal sector or do not work. This shows that there is an opportunity to increase women's participation in the formal economic sector through training and economic empowerment. Perceptions of gender equality show that most respondents agree that women and men should have equal rights, but there are still resistances that need to be overcome through education and awareness campaigns. Collaborative efforts between the government, community organizations, and educational institutions are needed to encourage more holistic and sustainable women's empowerment (Kimbu et al., 2020; Wisnumurti et al., 2020).

## Strengthening the Role of Social Institutions

The findings of the study show that social institutions play a crucial role in providing education and training programs that help women improve their skills as well as economic independence. In addition, the government is also actively involved in organizing education and training programs, including life skills, vocational education, and entrepreneurship training specifically designed to support women. Strengthening the role of these social institutions not only provides direct benefits to women, but also creates a stronger foundation to achieve broader gender equality in society. This collaborative effort between the government and social institutions is key in creating sustainable change and empowering women in various aspects of life. Strengthening the role of social institutions has had a significant positive impact on women's empowerment and increasing gender equality (Nguyen, 2021; Njuki et al., 2023; Rahman & Wassalwa, 2019; Rehman et al., 2020).

Education and training programs organized by social institutions have helped many women improve their skills and economic independence.

The government is active in organizing education and training programs for women that include life skills, vocational education, and entrepreneurship training (I Pemr-5).

Community social organizations provide psychosocial support for women who experience domestic violence or family problems (I\_Ormasy-6).

Women's empowerment social institutions are active in holding awareness campaigns on gender equality and women's rights (I Pempu-7).

Community social institutions collaborate with local governments and the private sector to expand the reach of their programs (I\_LSM-8).

The results of the interviews show that various social institutions and the government play an active role in women's empowerment through various integrated initiatives. The government is taking concrete steps by organizing education and training programs that include life skills, vocational education, and entrepreneurship training aimed at increasing women's economic independence. On the other hand, community social organizations provide psychosocial support to women who experience domestic violence or family problems, helping them recover from trauma and rebuild their lives. In addition, women's empowerment institutions are active in organizing awareness campaigns on gender equality and women's rights, which effectively increase public understanding of these issues. Collaboration between community social agencies, local governments, and the private sector is also strengthened to expand the reach of these programs, ensuring that more women can benefit from these empowerment initiatives. This interpretation indicates that a collaborative and comprehensive approach from various parties plays an important role in creating sustainable change and strengthening the position of women in society.

Observations show that strengthening the role of social institutions has had a significant positive impact on women's empowerment and increasing gender equality. Education and training programs organized by social institutions have helped many women improve their skills and economic independence. The government is active in organizing education and training programs for women that include life skills, vocational education, and entrepreneurship training. Community social organizations also provide psychosocial support for women experiencing domestic violence or family problems, providing them with much-needed help (Carney, 2024; Chadambuka & Warria, 2022; Murugan et al., 2023). In addition, social institutions for women's empowerment are active in holding awareness campaigns on gender equality and women's rights, which have succeeded in raising public awareness of these issues. Community social institutions are also working with local governments and the private sector to expand the reach of their programs, ensuring that more women can benefit from these empowerment initiatives. This collaboration between various parties demonstrates the importance of an integrated approach in achieving the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment.

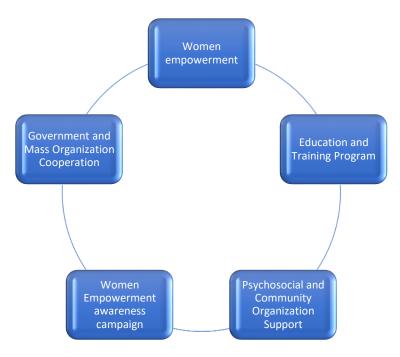


Figure 2. Women's Empowerment Process

From Figure 2. Social institutions function as agents of change that are active in organizing education and training programs to improve women's skills and economic independence. In addition, they provide psychosocial support for women experiencing domestic violence or family problems, providing much-needed help to restart their lives. Social institutions also play an important role in raising public awareness of gender equality and women's rights through campaigns and educational activities. Collaborations between social institutions, local governments, and the private sector expand the reach and effectiveness of empowerment programs, ensuring that more women can benefit from these initiatives (Engida, 2021; Korolczuk, 2020). This formal object reflects the integration and synergy of various efforts to overcome cultural and traditional barriers that hinder gender equality. With strong support from various parties, social institutions serve as a catalyst in realizing a more inclusive and equal environment for all women. These collaborative efforts demonstrate a strong commitment to improving women's quality of life and ensuring their full participation in social and economic life.

Thus, strengthening the role of social institutions has a positive correlation with increasing gender equality and women's empowerment. Interventions undertaken by social institutions not only provide direct benefits for women but also create long-term impacts that strengthen the social and economic structures in the region. This collaborative and integrated effort shows that strengthening the role of social institutions is an effective strategy for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. This research makes a significant contribution to the field of education management by offering in-depth insights into the strategic role of social institutions in supporting gender equality and women's empowerment policies in the education sector. Through a comprehensive analysis, the study reveals how tailor-made education and training programs, psychosocial support, and awareness campaigns conducted by social institutions can effectively increase women's participation in education and the economy.

In addition, the collaboration between governments, community organizations, and the private sector identified in this study demonstrates the importance of an integrated approach in addressing cultural and structural barriers that hinder gender equality in educational settings. The results of this study not only enrich the literature on education management, but also provide practical recommendations for managers of educational institutions in designing more inclusive and sustainable policies.

#### CONCLUSION

This study reveals important findings regarding the strategic role of social institutions in supporting gender equality and women's empowerment policies, especially in the context of education. Through education, training, and psychosocial support programs organized by social institutions, this research shows that women can significantly improve their skills and economic independence. These findings provide new insights into the importance of a comprehensive and synergistic approach to addressing the structural and cultural challenges that impede gender equality. The takeaway from this study is that collaboration between governments, community organizations, and the private sector is critical in realizing sustainable change, where inclusive and community-based strategies have proven effective in encouraging women's participation in various aspects of life, especially in education and the economy.

This research makes a significant contribution to science by enriching the literature on education management through the introduction of a new perspective on the importance of the role of social institutions in supporting gender equality policies. This research updates the existing understanding by showing that cross-sector collaboration is not only effective in women's empowerment, but also crucial in creating a more inclusive educational environment. However, this research has limitations, especially related to the scope that may be limited to certain cultural and geographical contexts. Variations in educational approaches and gender roles in different locations may influence the generalization of these findings. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the role of social institutions in a wider range of contexts, as well as to deepen understanding of how gender, age, and survey methods can affect research outcomes. Thus, future research can provide a more comprehensive and in-depth picture, which can be used as a basis for more targeted and sustainable policies.

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