**Al-Athfal:**
**Jurnal Pendidikan Anak**

ISSN (p): 2477-4189; ISSN (e): 2477-4715
Vol 11 No 2 December 2025
Pages 337-350

# Muslim Parental Involvement in Indonesian Islamic Primary Schools: Gendered Caregiving, Religious Responsibility, and Uneven School Participation

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Current parental involvement research remains largely shaped by school-centred frameworks that give greater visibility to institutionally recognised forms of participation than to home-based educational labour. This study examines how Muslim parents in Indonesian Islamic primary schools understand and enact parental involvement, with particular attention to religious responsibility, gendered caregiving, and participation in school-based structures.
**Design/methods/approach** – The study uses an interpretive qualitative multiple-case design based on in-depth interviews with 10 Muslim parents, comprising 6 mothers and 4 fathers, whose children attend a public madrasah ibtidaiyah, a private madrasah ibtidaiyah, and an integrated Islamic primary school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Participants were selected purposively to capture varied parental experiences across different Islamic schooling contexts. Data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in how parental roles, caregiving practices, and relations with school authority were understood and negotiated.
**Findings** – The findings indicate that parental involvement was understood primarily as a religious and moral responsibility enacted through home-based educational labour, including academic support, character formation, and religious guidance. These responsibilities were strongly gendered, with mothers assuming the main role in children's everyday educational care. Parents' participation in formal school decision-making remained limited and largely consultative, but this did not necessarily indicate disengagement. Rather, much of their educational involvement took place outside school-recognised forms of participation.
**Research implications/limitations** – Based on a small qualitative sample, the study offers a contextualised rather than generalisable account of Muslim parental involvement. Its findings suggest that parental involvement frameworks need more critical examination in global educational research, especially in Muslim societies and other culturally grounded, underrepresented settings where educational responsibility extends beyond school-recognised participation.
**Practical implications** – The findings suggest that school leaders and teachers need more inclusive ways of recognising home-based caregiving as part of parental involvement, while also creating clearer and more meaningful avenues for parental participation in school life.
**Originality/value** – This study provides contextual evidence from Indonesian Islamic primary schools, highlighting the limits of school-centred models in capturing religious, gendered, and home-based parental involvement. It contributes to global educational theory by supporting the pluralisation of parental involvement research, particularly by foregrounding Muslim societies, the Global South, and other underrepresented contexts.

**Keywords**: Muslim parental involvement, Gendered caregiving, Islamic primary education, Home-based educational labour, Religious responsibility

**Paper type** Research paper

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Email Address: ninisfaoziah@gmail.com
Received: 20 September 2025; Revised: 26 December 2025; Accepted: 30 December 2025

DOI: http://dx.doi.org./10.14421/al-athfal.2025.112-06

## 1. Introduction

Families are widely recognised as children's first educators and primary agents of socialisation, shaping early learning, moral orientations, and socio-emotional development (Grusec & Davidov, 2019). A substantial body of international research shows that parental involvement during the primary years is associated with academic achievement, emotional well-being, and school engagement (Sharkey et al., 2016; Wilder, 2023; Xia, 2024). Much of this research, however, still understands parental involvement mainly through school-centred indicators such as attendance at school events, communication with teachers, and participation in formal decision-making (Epstein, 1987; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020; Sadownik & Višnjić Jevtić, 2023). This emphasis becomes less adequate in settings where parents' educational responsibilities are organised through moral obligation, cultural norms, and religious authority as much as through direct participation in school activities.

Influential frameworks such as Epstein's school-family partnership model and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's parental role construction model have made parental involvement a central concern in educational research and policy (Epstein, 1987, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Yet these models continue to privilege school-recognised participation as the clearest sign of meaningful engagement. Critical scholarship has shown that such assumptions travel unevenly across contexts because family-school relations are shaped not only by institutional opportunity but also by work conditions, cultural expectations, language, social class, and power asymmetries between schools and families (Hill & Torres, 2010; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020; Haisraeli & Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2021). The problem, therefore, is not only one of geographical origin, but of analytical reach: models built around school visibility do not always capture culturally grounded forms of educational responsibility.

This limitation is especially visible in research involving Muslim families and other underrepresented communities. Research on Moroccan Muslim migrant parents in Spain shows that parents may express strong commitment to education while facing structural barriers to formal participation, including language constraints, work schedules, socioeconomic pressures, and weak cultural-religious recognition within schools (Zaragoza, 2025). Research in Finland and Sweden similarly shows that collaboration with Muslim parents depends heavily on how schools interpret parents' cultural capital, sometimes enabling partnership but at other times reproducing deficit-oriented and hierarchical relations (Rissanen, 2020). Studies from rural Pakistan likewise indicate that parental involvement cannot be reduced to formal school participation because parents' educational aspirations and responsibilities are negotiated within broader moral and material constraints (Ahmed et al., 2024). Together, these studies show that Muslim parental involvement is often shaped by structural barriers and uneven school-family relations rather than by parental motivation alone.

A related limitation concerns gender. Recent systematic review evidence shows that parental involvement is strongly mediated by gender, including the gender of the parent, child, and teacher, as well as wider cultural expectations surrounding care and educational responsibility (Alter et al., 2025). Studies of educational labour further show that even in households where fathers are heavily involved in care, mothers often remain more responsible for school communication, educational coordination, and everyday academic support because schools and social norms continue to code educational responsibility as maternal work (Brooks & Hodkinson, 2022; Petts et al., 2021). Evidence from community-based parenting programmes in Kenya and Zambia also suggests that more gender-equal caregiving must be actively negotiated against entrenched social expectations (Okelo et al., 2022). These studies are important because they show that parental involvement concerns not only participation, but also the unequal distribution and recognition of educational labour.

Despite these developments, religion is still often treated as a background variable rather than as an ethical framework shaping responsibility, authority, obligation, and legitimacy in educational life (Mahoney & Boyatzis, 2019; Setyawati et al., 2024). This creates a continuing tension in the literature. On the one hand, empirical studies increasingly recognise that parental involvement is culturally, morally, and relationally embedded. On the other hand, dominant

frameworks still evaluate engagement through school-centred indicators derived largely from secular and institutionally dominant educational systems (Punter et al., 2016; Sadownik & Višnjić Jevtić, 2023). As a result, home-based moral guidance, caregiving, and informal educational labour remain insufficiently recognised even when they form the core of parental responsibility.

These limitations are also evident in the Indonesian literature. Earlier studies tended to adopt descriptive and functional approaches, focusing on supervision, communication, and school participation as general dimensions of involvement (Fitriah et al., 2013; van der Werf et al., 2000). More recent work has expanded the analysis to include parental self-efficacy, socioeconomic background, and differentiated maternal and paternal roles (Fridani, 2021; Yulianti et al., 2023; Fitriana et al., 2025). While these studies provide useful empirical insights, they still rely predominantly on Western-derived typologies and measurable indicators of behaviour. Research on Islamic family parenting in Aceh, for example, highlights the significance of Islamic values and family resilience, but does not directly examine how these values shape the meaning of parental involvement in relation to school authority and gendered educational labour (Abubakar et al., 2023). The Indonesian field therefore still offers limited analysis of how Muslim parents themselves understand and enact educational responsibility within Islamic schooling.

The central research gap lies in the limited conceptual understanding of how parental involvement is organised when religious ethics, gendered caregiving, and unequal parent-school relations structure educational responsibility. Existing models do not adequately explain why parents may be deeply involved in children's education while remaining only marginally visible within formal school structures, nor why mothers' educational labour may be central to children's moral and academic development while receiving limited institutional recognition. This gap is especially significant in primary schooling, where parental involvement is intensive, continuous, and closely tied to everyday caregiving.

This study examines how Muslim parents in Indonesian Islamic primary schools understand and carry out parental involvement in relation to religious responsibility, gendered caregiving, and school-based participation. It considers the extent to which school-centred models can account for forms of involvement enacted mainly through everyday caregiving, moral guidance, and domestic educational coordination. Drawing on Islamic educational concepts such as *amanah* and *akhlak*, the article reads parental involvement as a practice shaped not only by school participation but also by religiously informed responsibility within family life. Using an interpretive qualitative approach, the study foregrounds parents' lived experiences and meaning-making processes, an area that remains less developed in this field (Ter Avest et al., 2015). It thus provides contextual qualitative evidence from Indonesian Islamic primary schooling that clarifies some limits of school-centred models and offers a more context-sensitive account of family-school relations in Muslim communities and other culturally grounded educational settings.

## 2. Methods

### *2.1. Research Design*

This study employed an interpretive qualitative multiple-case study design to examine how Muslim parents in Indonesian Islamic primary schools understood and enacted parental involvement. A multiple-case design was used because parental involvement was not treated as an abstract individual attribute, but as a socially situated practice shaped by school context, religious expectations, and everyday family-school relations (Yin, 2009; Stake, 2006). The study focused on three school settings, each treated as a bounded case: a public *madrasah ibtidaiyah* (MI), a private MI, and an integrated Islamic primary school (IIPS) in Yogyakarta. This design enabled comparison across different institutional arrangements while keeping the broader Muslim sociocultural setting relatively constant.

The interpretive paradigm guided the study's understanding that meanings of parental involvement are constructed through lived experience, interaction, and locally embedded moral frameworks rather than measured as fixed behavioural indicators (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The main unit of analysis was parental involvement as narrated and enacted by parents within each school context, particularly in relation to caregiving practices, educational responsibility,

communication with teachers, and participation in school structures. The schools were selected purposively to capture variation in governance structure, institutional culture, and parent-school relations within Islamic primary education. The logic of case selection was therefore comparative rather than representative, allowing the study to identify recurring patterns as well as context-specific forms of constraint and recognition.

### *2.2. Research Subjects and Researcher Position*

The study involved 10 Muslim parents, comprising 6 mothers and 4 fathers, whose children were enrolled in three types of Islamic primary schools in Yogyakarta: a public MI, a private MI, and an integrated Islamic primary school. Yogyakarta was selected because it combines a strong Islamic intellectual tradition, Javanese cultural heritage, and a socially plural environment, making it a relevant setting for examining how Muslim parents interpret and carry out educational responsibility in contemporary Islamic schooling (de Jong & Twikromo, 2017). Participants were recruited through purposive and community-recommended sampling to obtain information-rich cases rather than statistical representativeness. Selection prioritised parents who had direct and sustained experience with their children's schooling and were able to reflect on everyday practices of educational involvement.

The sample was dominated by parents who were relatively active in their children's education, providing strong experiential depth while also introducing a clear selection bias by reducing the likelihood of capturing parents with weak, conflictual, or highly limited school engagement. The unequal gender composition of the sample was treated not as a basis for statistical comparison but as an empirical indication of the gendered organisation of parental responsibility in Islamic schooling contexts. During fieldwork, the researcher adopted the position of observer-as-participant, with interviews remaining the principal source of data while limited observational attention was given to interactional cues and contextual details surrounding participants' accounts. Reflexive attention was maintained throughout to consider how access, rapport, religious-cultural proximity, and interpretive position may have shaped data generation and analysis. Table 1 presents the participants' background information

Table 1. Table 1. Participants' Biographic Information

| Informant Code | Gender | Ethnicity | Age | Education Level | Religious Affiliation | Children's Grade Level | School Type |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I-01 | Female | Sundanese | 41 | Undergraduate | Salafi | 2nd | IIPS |
| I-02 | Female | Javanese | 35 | Undergraduate | Salafi | 2nd and 5th | IIPS |
| I-03 | Female | Sundanese | 34 | Undergraduate | Muhammadiyah | 4th and 6th | IIPS |
| I-04 | Male | Javanese | 40 | Undergraduate | Salafi | 4th | IIPS |
| I-05 | Male | Sundanese | 37 | Graduate | Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) | 2nd | Public MI |
| I-06 | Female | Madurese | 36 | Undergraduate | NU | 1st and 6th | Public MI |
| I-07 | Female | Javanese | 43 | Graduate | NU | 2nd | Public MI |
| I-08 | Female | Javanese | 40 | Graduate | NU | 5th and 2nd | Private MI |
| I-09 | Female | Javanese | 44 | Undergraduate | Muhammadiyah | 2nd and 5th | IIPS |
| I-10 | Male | Javanese | 37 | High school | Muhammadiyah | 2nd and 6th | IIPS |

### *2.3. Data Collection Methods and Ethical Considerations*

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted from August to October 2024. The interviews explored parents' understandings of educational responsibility, everyday caregiving practices, communication with schools, and experiences of participation or exclusion within school-related structures. Interviews followed a flexible conversational format, lasted approximately 60 to 120 minutes, and were conducted in locations chosen by participants to support comfort, privacy, and accessibility. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-

DOI: http://dx.doi.org./10.14421/al-athfal.2025.112-06

recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then translated into English by the researcher, and selected transcripts underwent back-translation and peer checking to preserve semantic accuracy and cultural nuance (Temple & Young, 2004).

Field notes were used to document contextual observations, interactional dynamics, and non-verbal cues, thereby supporting a more context-sensitive reading of participants' accounts, although interviews remained the principal data source. The study received ethical clearance from the relevant institutional authority prior to data collection, and all participants provided informed consent after being informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage. To protect confidentiality, the names of participants, their children, and all schools were anonymised in the dataset and in the written report. Informant codes were used in place of personal names, and school identities were reported only by institutional type rather than by their actual names. These measures were taken to minimise identifiability in a relatively small and recognisable educational community.

### *2.4. Data Analysis*

The interview data were analysed using the Framework Method (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002), which was selected because it allows systematic comparison across participants and cases while remaining consistent with interpretive qualitative inquiry. Analysis proceeded through five stages: familiarisation, development of a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and interpretation. Coding was conducted manually to maintain close engagement with the data. Transcripts were read repeatedly alongside audio recordings, and initial codes were generated inductively to identify how participants described educational responsibility, caregiving practices, communication with schools, and experiences of participation or exclusion. These early codes were then grouped into provisional categories that captured recurring patterns within and across cases.

After this stage, the thematic framework was refined with reference to the literature on parental involvement, gendered caregiving, and family-school relations. Deductive concepts were used to sharpen comparison, but they did not replace inductive attention to meanings emerging from the interviews. The data were then organised into thematic matrices to compare patterns across school type, parental role, and forms of school participation, allowing the analysis to distinguish shared themes from context-specific dynamics. Analytical rigour was strengthened through iterative recoding, memo writing, and repeated movement between raw transcripts, matrices, and conceptual interpretation. This process ensured that the final themes remained grounded in participants' accounts while producing findings that were analytically clear, comparable across cases, and applicable to the study's central questions.

### *2.5. Trustworthiness*

To strengthen trustworthiness, the study drew on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through procedures that were built directly into data handling and interpretation. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the interview material, reflexive memo writing, and member checking, with transcripts returned to all participants for review and five participants invited to comment more specifically on the interpretation of emerging themes (Merriam, 2009). Transferability was addressed through thick description of the participants, school types, and sociocultural context, while dependability and confirmability were supported through an audit trail consisting of audio files, transcripts, translation notes, coding records, thematic matrices, and analytical memos. Because interviews remained the principal source of evidence, the study did not claim full triangulation in a strong methodological sense; instead, rigour was strengthened through reflexive transparency, consistent coding procedures, and clear documentation of how interpretations were developed from the data.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org./10.14421/al-athfal.2025.112-06

# 3. Result

## *3.1. Fulfilling Religious Obligation as Normative and Gendered Parental Role*

Religion functioned as a normative framework defining parental roles, rather than merely a motivational background. For all participants, parental involvement was constructed as a religiously mandated duty, positioning parents as morally accountable actors whose authority derives from divine trust rather than institutional delegation. In this sense, involvement was not framed as optional support for schooling, but as a non-negotiable parental obligation grounded in Islamic moral order.

Participants consistently drew on the concept of 'Amanah' to articulate their expectations for the role. Although these narratives were expressed in different ways ("God's trust," "sacred duty"), they all shared the same moral logic: children are entrusted to their parents by God, who are responsible for their upbringing. As I-02 explained:

> "Children are *amanah* (a precious trust) that God bestows upon parents. We cannot entirely entrust our children's education to the school. We need to get involved."

I-03 reinforced this accountability:

> "A child is God's trust (*amanah*) and a solemn responsibility. Nurturing and educating our children is a sacred responsibility."

These statements suggest that parental involvement is grounded in religious moral authority. This is a type of legitimacy that comes before and could replace institutional schooling. Rather than positioning themselves as teachers' assistants, parents understood schooling as one domain within a broader moral responsibility that ultimately rested with the family. The gendered dimension of this moral authority was particularly salient.

I-05 described maternal responsibility in explicitly religious terms:

> "A mother is like a *madrasa*. I need to be actively involved in educating our children because, in the future, we will be asked and questioned about our responsibilities as parents."

This metaphor elevates motherhood to a primary source of moral instruction, while also reinforcing the gendered division of educational authority within the home. From a power perspective, this reflects patriarchal role structuring, whereby women take on intensive caregiving and moral labour, while broader institutional authority remains elsewhere. Mothers' authority is therefore morally significant but confined to the home.

Religious obligation serves as a regulatory framework that allocates responsibility, defines role boundaries, and lends legitimacy to sustained parental engagement, particularly within the domestic sphere. Rather than remaining abstract, the concept of 'Amanah' informs practical activities such as supervising learning, providing moral instruction, and continuously monitoring children's behaviour. Thus, faith-based obligation functions as a governing principle that organises parental action and accountability.

## *3.2. Home-based Educational Guidance as Everyday Moral Governance*

Parents conceptualised involvement as home-based educational governance encompassing learning discipline, moral regulation, and religious instruction. They positioned the home as the primary site of educational authority, with parents as moral regulators rather than auxiliary school supporters. Participants framed learning discipline as moral cultivation directed toward character formation. I-01 illustrated this:

> "What do we want our children to become? For me, it is about raising a righteous child (*anak sholeh)*. That is why we guide them from the beginning and instil strong moral and religious values early on."

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Parents did not separate academic development from religious personhood. I-07 expressed this unified conception:

> "Every parent should support their children in gaining both academic and Islamic knowledge."

Parents enacted their role through daily routines encompassing learning, behaviour, and worship. I-09 described this structuring:

> "I teach my children empathy, creativity, and critical thinking, while also guiding them to be disciplined in their worship, to recite the Quran, and to behave according to Islamic values."

These practices embed moral expectations into family life. Parents supervised learning while regulating prayer and social conduct as interconnected responsibilities. I-04 revealed how parents used reasoning to overrule enforcement:

> "It is not enough to say something is right or wrong. I explain that honesty is a value commanded by Allah."

Parents emphasised helping children to understand the moral basis of behaviour, encouraging internalisation rather than compliance. The goal was to foster self-regulation grounded in religious consciousness.

Mothers played a central role in enacting this governance, overseeing daily routines, guiding religious practice, and engaging in moral conversations. This intensive involvement was understood as maternal religious responsibility. However, while this authority was extensive, it remained within the home rather than extending to institutional settings.

Overall, participants described home-based involvement as continuous, routine-based, and morally inflected. Parents positioned themselves as responsible for shaping not only academic habits but also the ethical dispositions children would carry into schooling and beyond. The following section examines how this strong domestic role contrasts with parents' participation in formal school decision-making.

### *3.3. Limited Parental Participation in School-Decision Making*

Parental participation in school decision-making is formally mandated in Indonesia through school committees (*komite sekolah*), introduced under national education reform to represent parents' interests and support school accountability (Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2002). However, this study found that while parents exercised substantial authority within the home, their involvement in school-level decision-making remained limited and uneven.

Although committees formally invite parental participation, parents' accounts revealed a governance structure in which decision-making authority remains concentrated in school leadership. Most parents described their role as informational rather than deliberative. As I-09 noted:

> "Usually, the school already has its own plan. Parents are informed, not really asked to decide. We trust the school, so we just follow."

This reflects a pattern of institutional power asymmetry, where parental trust and religious deference toward educators legitimise hierarchical governance. Authority is not contested but voluntarily deferred, indicating parents' internalised acceptance of institutional boundaries.

Gendered power relations were particularly evident. Mothers, despite being central to children's daily learning, religious practice, and moral development at home, consistently positioned themselves as lacking authority in formal school decision-making. This pattern held across participants, including those from more conservative religious communities such as Salafi-affiliated families. I-02 explained:

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> "At home, I guide my child's prayers and behaviour every day. However, when it comes to school decisions, I feel that is not my place. The teachers and *ustadz* know better."

Such statements reveal how religious authority and patriarchy intersect to restrict women's participation in formal decision-making spaces. This division was not experienced as exclusion, but as a normative allocation of roles, aligning moral caregiving with women and institutional authority with men.

Fathers ' greater visibility in committees, especially in financial or policy matters, further reflects gendered institutional design, reinforced by both school practices and parental expectations. I-06's observation highlights this structural pattern rather than individual preference. She explained:

> "If there is a meeting about policy or finance, usually fathers attend. And school committees are generally dominated by men, although mothers are more active in participating in their children's education and organising school events."

Taken together, these findings reveal a discrepancy between the ideals of participation set out in policy and the realities of governance in practice. While parental involvement is extensive, it is differentially valued: it is morally central in the home, yet institutionally marginal in school governance. This suggests that, in Islamic schooling, parental involvement operates within a dual power structure in which moral and institutional authority are separated, gendered, and distributed unevenly.

The findings suggest that parental involvement in Islamic primary schooling is not best understood primarily through school-based participation, formal communication, or involvement in decision-making structures. Rather, it takes the form of gendered moral-educational labour: a sustained mode of educational responsibility organised through religious obligation, everyday caregiving, and moral guidance within family life. In this context, concepts such as *amanah* do not function merely as symbolic religious language or personal motivation. They operate as normative principles that define parental accountability, legitimise intensive involvement in children's development, and shape how educational responsibility is distributed within the household. This helps explain why parents may be deeply engaged in their children's education even when their role remains only weakly visible within school-recognised forms of participation.

At the same time, the findings indicate that this labour is structured within a differentiated order of authority between home and school. Mothers occupy a central position in children's daily moral and educational formation, yet this intensive responsibility does not translate into equivalent authority within formal school governance. What emerges, therefore, is not simply a contrast between active parents and passive schools, but a patterned relationship in which moral authority is concentrated in the domestic sphere while institutional authority remains concentrated in school structures. Read in this way, the study does more than describe religiously informed parenting practices. It shows that parental involvement in this setting is organised through a dual dynamic of moral centrality and institutional partial recognition, which helps clarify why school-centred models remain insufficient for understanding parental involvement in Muslim and other culturally grounded educational contexts. To clarify the analytical relationships emerging from the findings, Figure 1 presents a conceptual interpretation of how parental involvement operates within Islamic primary schooling.

The figure 1 summarises the study's interpretation of parental involvement in Islamic primary schooling. Parental involvement is shaped by religious responsibility, organised through gendered moral-educational labour primarily enacted in home-based educational practices, and only partially recognised within formal school participation due to institutional boundaries of school authority.

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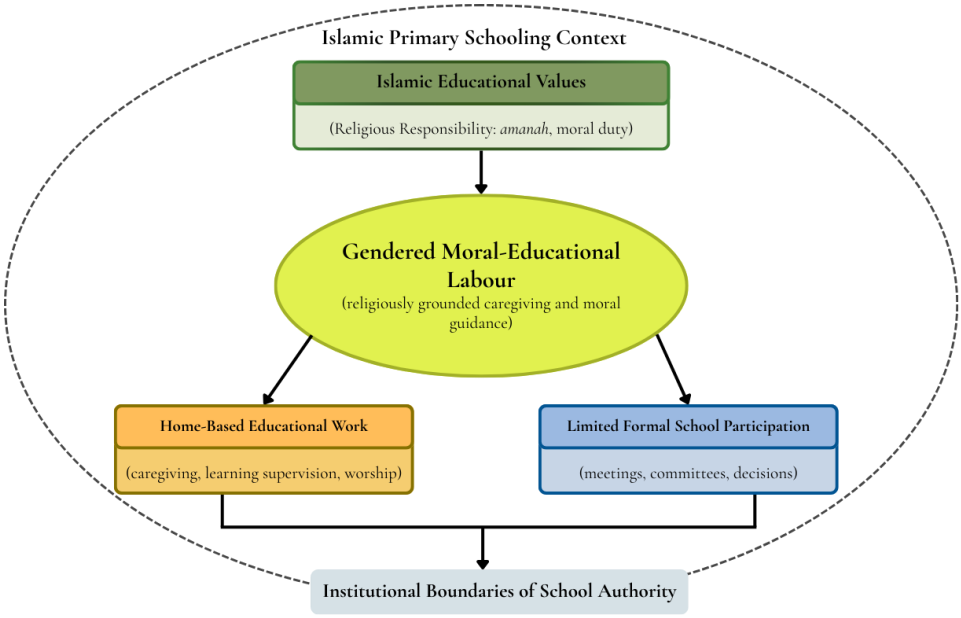


Figure 1. Conceptual interpretation of gendered moral-educational labour in Muslim parental involvement

## 4. Discussion

Parental involvement in Indonesian Islamic primary schooling cannot be understood adequately when it is reduced to school-based participation, formal communication, or visible involvement in decision-making structures alone. Across the cases, educational responsibility was described primarily through religious obligation and everyday moral practice within family life. In this setting, *ibadah* and *amanah* did not function merely as spiritual vocabulary but as normative categories through which child-rearing was understood as a morally accountable task. This finding does not require abandoning parental involvement theory, but it does indicate that prevailing indicators capture only part of how responsibility is defined and enacted. Read in relation to parental role construction theory (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995), the findings suggest that parental roles are shaped not only through invitations, efficacy, and school-family interaction, but also through religious obligations that precede school contact and frame educational responsibility from the outset. In this respect, school-family interaction remains relevant, but it operates within an already normatively organised field, a point that is consistent with broader work showing that parental engagement is mediated by social context rather than simply by school invitation alone (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020).

The findings also complicate school-centred models that treat institutional participation as the most visible or legitimate indicator of engagement. Epstein's framework remains influential because it made parental involvement legible within school systems, yet its categories privilege forms of participation that schools can easily recognise over forms of educational labour located in domestic and moral space (Epstein, 1995). In this study, limited participation in formal decision-making did not automatically indicate indifference or withdrawal; rather, it reflected a differentiated order of responsibility in which home and school were not treated as equivalent sites of authority. Comparable studies on Muslim parents in Europe point in a similar direction, although the mechanisms are not identical. In Spain, Moroccan Muslim parents expressed strong concern for their children's education while facing barriers related to language, work, and weak cultural-religious recognition (Torres Zaragoza, 2025). In Finland and Sweden, collaboration with Muslim parents was shaped by how schools interpreted parents' cultural resources, often reproducing asymmetries in whose participation counted as legitimate (Rissanen, 2022). What distinguishes the present study is that the issue is not only limited recognition by schools, but also the presence of a morally grounded model of responsibility centred in family practice rather than institutional visibility.

This pattern also resonates with recent synthesis work on parental involvement in religious schooling. A recent synthesis of parental involvement in religious schooling found that parental involvement in religious communities often takes the form of trust in staff competence and the school's moral mission rather than intensive participation in formal governance (Pusztai et al., 2024). The present study is broadly consistent with that pattern, but it extends it by showing how trust is tied to religious obligation, household labour, and differentiated authority within Islamic schooling. What emerges is not a simple claim that existing models are wrong, but a more specific argument that their assumptions travel unevenly across contexts. What counts as involvement, who is recognised as involved, and where educational authority is located are historically and culturally variable. This argument is reinforced by wider research showing that school-defined engagement is never neutral, but shaped by institutional expectations, work arrangements, and social norms (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020; Haisraeli & Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2023).

The gender dimension of these findings is equally important. Mothers occupied a central role in children's everyday moral and educational formation through caregiving, learning supervision, and religious guidance at home. This pattern is consistent with broader literature showing that parental involvement remains strongly gendered even where fathers become more active in care. Systematic review evidence confirms that gender affects not only who performs parental involvement, but also how that involvement is interpreted and valued across educational settings (Alter et al., 2025). Research on educational labour likewise shows that even in families where fathers assume equal or primary caregiving roles, mothers often remain more closely tied to school-facing and child-centred educational work because institutions continue to treat maternal responsibility as normative (Brooks & Hodkinson, 2022). The present study supports that line of analysis by showing that intensive maternal labour was not mirrored by equivalent authority within formal school governance.

At the same time, the findings do not justify reducing women's religious educational role either to empowerment or to subordination. Mothers' moral authority in domestic life was substantial, but it did not translate automatically into formal authority within school structures. The issue, therefore, is not the absence of women's agency, but the uneven distribution of authority across domains. This reading is compatible with feminist ethics of care and feminist Islamic scholarship, yet it also raises a harder question about whether recognition within the domestic sphere can coexist with restricted access to public decision-making without reproducing hierarchy. The data do not resolve that tension, but they do show that moral centrality within family life and partial exclusion from institutional authority can operate simultaneously. Comparable narratives from rural Pakistan similarly show that parental commitment to education can coexist with dissatisfaction, constraint, and unequal conditions of action (Ahmed et al., 2024).

The broader implication of the study lies in shifting the analysis of parental involvement away from participation deficit and toward normative organisation. Similar to research on Muslim parents in minority settings, the findings confirm that parental commitment may remain strong even when schools recognise only limited forms of participation (Rissanen, 2022; Torres Zaragoza, 2025). Similar to research on parent engagement more generally, they also show that institutional participation is only one possible expression of involvement rather than its universal benchmark (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). In this case, parental involvement was organised through religious responsibility, gendered educational labour, and differentiated authority between home and school. The argument is therefore not that school-based models should be discarded, but that their explanatory reach remains partial unless they can account for contexts in which educational responsibility is morally organised before it becomes institutionally visible. That is where this study contributes to the literature on faith-based schooling and culturally grounded family-school relations.

### *4.1. Research Contribution*

This study contributes an empirically grounded account of how Muslim parents in Indonesian Islamic primary schooling understand educational responsibility through the religious ideas of *ibadah* and *amanah*, showing that these concepts do not merely motivate parental action but also structure how parental roles are interpreted and enacted. Rather, parental involvement takes the

form of gendered moral-educational labour: a sustained mode of educational responsibility organised through religious obligation, everyday caregiving, and moral guidance within family life, while formal participation in school remains limited and unevenly recognised. By comparing three types of Islamic schools, the study further shows that shared religious commitments do not produce a single form of parental involvement, because similar moral orientations are expressed through different governance structures, pedagogical cultures, and local configurations of authority. Based on a small qualitative sample, the study offers a contextualised rather than generalisable account of Muslim parental involvement, while suggesting that parental involvement frameworks require more critical examination in global educational research, especially in Muslim societies and other culturally grounded, underrepresented settings where educational responsibility extends beyond school-recognised participation.

### *4.2. Limitations*

The findings should be read as a contextual rather than generalisable account of Muslim parental involvement. The small sample and school-based recruitment may have underrepresented parents with weaker school connections or more critical perspectives, while the predominance of mothers limited the study's ability to examine fathers' authority claims and gendered differences in how parental responsibility is narrated. Although the study included three types of Islamic schools, the uneven depth of evidence across cases makes the analysis stronger in identifying recurring patterns than in offering a fully developed cross-case comparison. These limitations do not negate the argument, but they do narrow its scope and indicate the need for broader evidence across participants, institutions, and settings.

### *4.3. Suggestions*

Future research should examine whether similar patterns of religiously framed parental responsibility appear across different regions, school types, and social settings. It should also include a wider range of actors, especially fathers and school authorities, so that differentiated authority between home and school can be analysed more directly. More balanced cross-case and longitudinal evidence would help clarify how parental roles are negotiated across institutional contexts and over time. Comparative research across Muslim and non-Muslim settings would further show which aspects of these findings are specific to Islamic schooling and which reflect broader culturally grounded forms of parental involvement.

## 5. Conclusion

This study shows that parental involvement in Indonesian Islamic primary schooling is not adequately understood when it is defined mainly through school-based participation, formal communication, or visibility in decision-making structures. Instead, parental involvement is organised through gendered moral-educational labour, in which educational responsibility is enacted through religious obligation, everyday caregiving, and moral guidance within family life. In this setting, concepts such as *ibadah* and *amanah* shape how parents understand their responsibility for children's development, while mothers occupy a particularly central role in children's daily moral and educational formation. At the same time, this centrality in domestic educational labour is not matched by equivalent authority within formal school structures, indicating that parental involvement operates through an uneven distribution of responsibility and recognition across home and school domains.

These findings do not warrant a wholesale rejection of existing parental involvement frameworks, but they do show that school-centred models remain partial when applied to contexts in which educational responsibility is morally and religiously organised before it becomes institutionally visible. The study therefore contributes a contextualised argument that parental involvement should be understood not only as participation in school-recognised activities, but also as a culturally and normatively grounded form of responsibility embedded in family life. Given the small qualitative sample and the uneven depth of evidence across cases, this argument should be read as an analytically grounded interpretation rather than a generalisable

account of Muslim parental involvement. Even so, the study indicates the need for more context-sensitive frameworks in global educational research, especially in Muslim societies and other underrepresented settings where the meanings, practices, and authority structures of parental involvement extend beyond school-defined participation.

## Declarations

### Author contribution statement

Niswatin Faoziah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - Original Draft, Project administration, Validation, Supervision, Investigation, Data curation, and Writing - Review & Editing.

### Funding statement

This research received a research grant from the Research Funding Program at the Islamic Higher Education Institution, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Republic of Indonesia, in 2024.

### Data availability statement

The datasets generated and analysed during this study are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions concerning participant confidentiality, but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### Declaration of interests statement

The author declare that they have no financial or personal interests that could influence the work presented in this manuscript.

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