

Gender Equitable Physical Education: A Phenomenological Study in an Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program

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Abstract

Gender equality in physical education remains a critical issue, particularly in the Department of Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education (PGMI) at the State Institute of Islamic Studies of Bone, where social constructs and gender stereotypes often hinder female students' active participation in physical activities. This study aims to explore the experiences, views, and perceptions of students and lecturers regarding gender equality practices in physical education, and how inclusive learning spaces can dismantle symbolic domination and foster social transformation. This qualitative study employed a phenomenological design, involving 10 female students and two lecturers as key participants. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and curriculum document analysis. The findings indicate that female students demonstrated increased self-confidence, active engagement, and a shift in perceptions toward sports after participating in inclusive, gender responsive learning. The learning environment also promoted collaborative interactions between male and female students, supported by the strategic role of lecturers as facilitators of justice-based values. In the context of Islamic higher education institutions, this approach successfully integrates religious values with gender equality principles in a harmonious way. The study concludes that physical education plays a strategic role as a medium for social transformation, not only enhancing physical fitness but also fostering critical awareness of equity and social justice. This study implies that gender-equitable physical education training in PGMI contributes to shaping inclusive future teachers who promote equal participation in primary classrooms.

Keywords: physical education; gender equality; stereotypes; social transformation; islamic higher education

Introduction

Gender equality remains a global issue of ongoing concern and advocacy by various international organizations, including UNESCO and the United Nations (UNESCO, 2019), (UN WOMEN, 2014). Despite growing global awareness of gender equity, disparities in youth physical activity remain significant. According to the Women's Sports Foundation (2020), girls worldwide receive 1.13 million fewer opportunities than boys to participate in school sports. By the age of 14, girls drop out of sports at twice the rate of boys. Furthermore, only 33% of girls aged 6–17 regularly participate in sports, compared to 56% of boys.



A large-scale analysis across 64 Global South countries revealed that adolescent boys are, on average, 1.58 times more active than girls, with a gender gap of 6.7 percentage points ranging from 0.5% in Afghanistan to 15.6% in Laos. Interestingly, these disparities tend to be more pronounced in countries with higher Human Development Index (HDI) scores and lower Gender Inequality Index (GII) scores. This suggests that even in more developed settings, systemic gender inequalities continue to shape access to and participation in physical activity (Isnardi et al., 2022).

These statistics reflect not only limited access but also the presence of cultural and psychological barriers, shaped by gender stereotypes, that continue to marginalize female students in movement-based learning. Within educational contexts, gender inequality is evident not only in access and participation but also in learning experiences that tend to privilege dominant masculine norms, particularly in subjects involving physical activity such as physical education. As Reimers (2022) argues, educational institutions must design inclusive policies that dismantle structural barriers that prevent equitable participation of female learners across all forms of learning, including sports and movement-based instruction.

This global concern resonates locally, particularly in the Indonesian higher education context. In the Indonesian context, these global challenges resonate particularly within religious higher education institutions. The intersection of cultural and religious expectations can complicate efforts toward gender inclusion. At the tertiary level, institutions such as the State Institute of Islamic Studies of Bone face ongoing challenges related to gender equality, particularly in implementing sports and physical activities on campus in ways that uphold both inclusivity and cultural sensitivity.

The discourse on gender in physical education must be situated within a contextual understanding of cultural practices that shape the social construction of masculinity and femininity in physical activities. As articulated by Avraam and Anagnostou (2022), gender role stereotypes continue to prevail in physical education settings across various countries, including those in the Global North, thereby limiting the active participation of female students. This challenge is further compounded by pedagogical frameworks that remain predominantly oriented toward masculine-coded physical activities.

Gender stereotypes frequently pose significant barriers to female students' active participation in physical activities and sports. Activities such as running, football, or other competitive games are often socially constructed as "masculine," thereby creating invisible constraints that limit female students' opportunities to fully engage. Sulistyowati (2021), Judiasih (2022), and Nurdin (2024) assert that rigid societal views on gender roles have produced unwritten norms that position males as the default actors in physical domains, while females are expected to remain passive observers. These stereotypes not only impact participation rates but also undermine female students' self-confidence and body image (Avraam & Anagnostou, 2022).

This phenomenon is reinforced by studies that emphasize how public perceptions of body and gender influence youth participation in physical activities. Lopez Bartual et al. (2022) found that fear of social judgment and stigma are key factors preventing young women from engaging in competitive sports, particularly in public spaces. Hence, it becomes crucial to design gender-sensitive learning environments that empower all learners regardless of gender. Staurowsky et al. (2024) argue that such inclusive strategies must be integrated into the physical education curriculum and teacher education to produce systemic change.

Gender stereotypes are not only rooted in social norms but are also shaped by deeply embedded religious values that influence campus culture, particularly within Islamic-based institutions. This dual influence adds layers of complexity to efforts aimed at eliminating gender bias. Karim and Rochmahwati (2021) and Yuliantri et al. (2023) suggest that educational approaches must be both culturally and religiously sensitive to avoid ideological friction while still promoting equity.

Physical education thus becomes a strategic space for aligning gender equality principles with religious values. Therefore, there is an urgent need to reformulate policies within Islamic educational institutions to support the transformation of the physical education curriculum into one that is more gender responsive.

In the local context, the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program (PGMI) at IAIN Bone serves as a strategic site for examining gender-equitable physical education reform. Although female students constitute the majority in this program, physical education practices are often still framed within social norms that associate

physical activity with male dominance. This presents a unique challenge in fostering inclusive and equitable movement spaces.

Therefore, PGMI IAIN Bone offers a valuable lens to explore how physical education can act as an agent of social transformation within Islamic educational institutions shaped by strong cultural and religious values. The lived experiences of both students and lecturers in navigating gender dynamics in physical education classrooms warrant deeper exploration to design a more relevant and transformative learning model.

Based on field observations and interviews, many students and lecturers experience a gap between institutional values and the actual implementation of inclusive practices in physical education instruction. Female students report a lack of opportunity to actively participate in structured physical activities. These findings are consistent with global academic discourse. Merma Molina et al. (2023) advocate for the integration of sustainability and equity principles in teacher training programs, while Tien (2020) emphasizes that conventional systems remain ill-equipped to address the demands of gender inclusion in the digital age.

With a well-planned and contextualized approach, physical education in Islamic higher education can serve as a strategic means to promote a more inclusive understanding of gender roles. Based on classroom observations in the PGMI program, group games and gender-based leadership rotations helped encourage active participation among all students.

These findings highlight the importance of creating learning environments that accommodate diverse student identities, including gender, disability, and sociocultural backgrounds (Tamblyn et al., 2023). In addition to enhancing participation, Richardson et al. (2024) emphasize that physical education can challenge gender stereotypes through reflective and inclusive teaching designs. Thus, physical education is not only about physical fitness, but also about cultivating values of social justice and equality.

To build on this, inclusive physical education activities facilitate a shared understanding of gender roles (Nur Ihsan HL, 2021). Integrating gender equality values into the physical education curriculum has been shown to positively influence students' mindsets regarding gender roles (L. Zhang & Zhu, 2024, and Roorda & Jak, 2024. With adaptive instructional designs, physical education can function as a dialogic and practical

space that enables students to overcome social barriers and develop more inclusive perceptions of gender in everyday life, especially through sport (Chusniatun et al., 2022).

Moreover, physical education serves as an effective pedagogical medium that supports the development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, while simultaneously integrating values of gender equity. Prior research underscores its transformative impact. For example, Nur Ihsan HL (2021) found that inclusive physical activities enhance students' self-confidence. Similarly, Maksun et al. (2020) highlighted the role of body image representation in shaping students' personality development through physical and health education.

The implementation of gender equitable physical education requires active teacher involvement in designing activities that are not only engaging from a motor skills perspective but also foster values of equality. As explained by Prieto Ayuso et al., (2020) teachers hold a strategic role in identifying students' potential without gender bias through systematic observation during routine physical education activities.

Gender is believed to be one of the influencing factors in body image development. Gender stereotypes are often influenced by deeply rooted cultural and social norms, thus requiring education-based approaches to mitigate their negative effects (Chusniatun et al., 2022). These studies emphasize that integrating gender equality values into learning can strengthen an institution's commitment to inclusivity (Merma Molina et al., 2023, and Riyanto et al., 2023). Considering previous research findings, physical education is highly relevant as a solution to address gender stereotypes among university students through the integration of gender equality into the learning process.

Physical education plays a strategic role in promoting inclusive gender understanding within religious academic contexts, particularly in Indonesia, where cultural and religious norms often reinforce gender stereotypes. Religious universities, such as PTKIN, hold the potential to integrate gender equity into learning through contextually grounded approaches (Karim & Rochmahwati, 2021).

However, the use of physical education as a transformative medium for gender equity remains underexplored in these settings. This study focuses on the PGMI Department at IAIN Bone, where most students are female, offering a unique opportunity to examine how inclusive physical education can shift perspectives and contribute to broader social change. Moreover, L. Zhang Zu (2024) emphasizes the importance of

systemic approaches to removing gender-based barriers, particularly in community and institutional settings.

There is growing interest in promoting gender equity within educational practices. However, studies that specifically explore the integration of gender-equal physical education in Islamic higher education institutions remain scarce. Most existing research tends to generalize findings from secular or Western contexts. These findings may not be fully aligned with the cultural and religious dynamics of Islamic educational environments.

In addition, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of students and lecturers when implementing inclusive pedagogical practices. This lack of context-specific investigation reveals a clear research gap. In particular, there is a need to understand how physical education can function as a transformative space to promote gender equity within Islamic institutions. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following research question: *What are the experiences of students and lecturers in dealing with gender-equality-based physical education practices in Islamic educational institutions?*

Research Methods

This study was conducted using a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, views, and perceptions of students and lecturers regarding gender equality in physical education learning within the Department of Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education (PGMI) at the State Institute of Islamic Studies of Bone (Umar Sidiq, 2019). The phenomenological qualitative approach was chosen not to produce statistical generalizations but to gain deep insights into lived experiences.

The research was conducted in a single department to allow contextual depth and analytical transferability. Although variables were not controlled in a quantitative sense, contextual richness was achieved through triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking. The aim was not to measure learning outcomes such as numeracy or cognition, but to explore meaning-making processes of students and lecturers related to gender in physical education.

The population of this study comprised all female students enrolled in the physical education course and the lecturers who taught the course. Participants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: female students who had completed at least one semester of physical education, and lecturers with a minimum of two years of experience teaching the subject. A total of 10 female students (S) and 2 lecturers (L) were selected, deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation according to phenomenological research principles.

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and curriculum document analysis (Darmalaksana, 2020). The interviews were semi-structured, guided by questions developed based on theoretical reviews of gender equality in physical education. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Participatory observation was conducted during five physical education class sessions to observe interaction patterns and female student participation. Document analysis was carried out on course syllabi and lesson plans to identify content related to gender equality values.

The research procedure began with obtaining research approval from the department administrators, followed by participant recruitment and interview scheduling. During data collection, the researcher adhered to ethical research principles, including informed consent, participant confidentiality, and member checking to validate interview transcripts.

Thematic analysis was conducted following Creswell's (2014) steps, including data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme naming, and thematic narrative development. Data validity was maintained through technique triangulation (interviews, observation, document analysis) and source triangulation (students and lecturers), as well as member checking. To enhance credibility, the researcher also engaged in peer debriefing with colleagues in the field of physical education.

Additionally, source and method triangulation were systematically applied to strengthen data trustworthiness and interpretative depth. While the study's primary aim was to understand meaning through a phenomenological lens, theme frequencies were reported as supplementary information. The study's limitation lies in its single-

department scope within one institution, making the findings context-specific rather than broadly generalizable.

Result

Students' Experiences in Gender-Equitable Physical Education

The findings of this study indicate that students in the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education Program (PGMI) at the State Institute of Islamic Studies of Bone experienced notable perceptual and behavioral changes following the implementation of a gender-equitable approach to physical education. Female students who previously felt reluctant or excluded began to express greater confidence, comfort, and motivation in participating in physical activities. The following are selected excerpts from interviews broadly representing the perspectives of PGMI students who participated in physical education classes.

One student shared her initial hesitation due to gendered expectations:

"At first, I felt embarrassed to play ball because I was afraid people would think it was weird. But after the lecturer explained that everyone could participate, I became more confident." (S-1)

This statement reflects the internalized psychological barriers stemming from longstanding gender stereotypes and how inclusive teaching practices played a role in overcoming them.

Another participant highlighted the shifting classroom atmosphere and support from male classmates:

"Now I feel more comfortable because the male classmates are also supportive and no longer mock girls for running or playing." (S-2)

This response demonstrates a significant change in peer dynamics, suggesting a more inclusive and respectful learning environment.

A third student emphasized her increased enthusiasm and engagement due to equal opportunities provided by the lecturer:

"I'm more enthusiastic about physical education now because our lecturer gives equal opportunities to everyone, and we often play in mixed groups." (S-3)

This suggests that gender-neutral instructional design has a motivating effect on student participation.

Several female students also acknowledged the lecturer's role in shaping inclusive values during class. One student noted:

“Our lecturer always says that sports are not just for boys, and that makes me feel valued.” (S-4).

This kind of affirmation from educators reinforces student self-worth and encourages broader participation across gender lines.

Another student reflected on the positive experience of learning in mixed-gender groups:

“With rotating group arrangements and no gender-based separation, I feel more included in the activities.” (S-5)

Such inclusive practices contributed to a greater sense of belonging and agency among female students.

Overall, these narratives affirm that the gender-equitable physical education model has positively influenced student attitudes and social dynamics. The learning environment has shifted toward a more collaborative, respectful, and participatory space.

Lecturers’ Pedagogical Approaches to Inclusive Physical Education

The role of lecturers in fostering inclusive physical education was found to be highly significant in this study. Lecturers who consistently integrated gender-equitable principles into their teaching were recognized as key agents of change. Their strategies included rotating leadership roles during group activities, explicitly affirming that sports are for all genders, and creating psychologically safe environments where both male and female students could engage equally.

Several students highlighted the importance of their lecturers’ sensitivity and proactive attitudes toward gender issues.

One student (S-4) shared,

“Our lecturer always says that sports are for everyone, not just boys. That makes me feel seen and motivated to participate.”

Another student (S-5) added,

“He often reminds us that both girls and boys can lead the warm-ups or be the team captain.”

These comments illustrate how pedagogical decisions influenced not only the structure of activities but also the attitudes of students.

Observational data also confirmed that lecturers who implemented inclusive practices helped reshape classroom norms. During sessions observed, lecturers deliberately avoided gender segregation, encouraged mixed-gender collaboration, and ensured equal opportunities for physical performance. As a result, female students, who previously remained passive or hesitant, gradually became more engaged and confident.

This was echoed by a participant (S-6), who stated,

"At first, I just watched others play, but the way our lecturer divided roles fairly helped me gain the courage to join."

Moreover, curriculum documentation revealed that some lecturers had revised their lesson plans (RPS) to include explicit goals on gender equality and non-discriminatory practices. This institutional alignment reinforced inclusive pedagogy and demonstrated a commitment to transformative education. The findings suggest that pedagogical practices grounded in gender responsiveness can create more equitable and empowering physical education experiences, particularly in religious academic settings such as PGMI at IAIN Bone.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of gender equality values into the physical education learning process has led to tangible participatory transformation, contributing to enhanced learning experiences, healthier social relationships, and the development of a more equitable academic culture within religious higher education institutions, particularly in the Department of Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education at IAIN Bone.

Discussion

This discussion is organized into two main sub-themes based on the research focus: (1) Students' Experiences in Gender Equitable Physical Education and (2) Lecturers' Pedagogical Approaches to Inclusive Physical Education.

Students' Experiences in Gender-Equitable Physical Education

The findings of this study affirm that gender-equitable physical education can act as a transformative force within religious higher education institutions, particularly for female students. These students, who often feel marginalized in physical activity spaces, experienced a shift from passive disengagement to empowered participation. This shift aligns with Paulo Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which emphasizes that education should serve as a tool of liberation rather than oppression. In this context, physical education became a medium through which oppressive gender norms were challenged and redefined, fostering inclusivity and equity in practice.

Moreover, the interplay between critical pedagogy and feminist educational thought positions gender-responsive physical education not merely as skill instruction but

as a socio-political act of agency. As Thorpe (2021) contends, learning spaces must be reimaged to center marginalized voices and to enable empowerment through embodied experience. By framing movement as a form of cultural and critical discourse, this study affirms that gender-equitable physical education is not a peripheral concern, but a central pillar of justice oriented education reform.

It provides a model of how inclusive pedagogy can reconstruct the meanings of participation, challenge internalized stereotypes, and create democratic learning environments. This conceptual framing finds tangible expression in the lived experiences of students, where the shift from theory to practice becomes evident in their evolving engagement with physical activities.

The significant transformation observed among female students from passive to active engagement in physical activities illustrates how education can drive social change. Margaret Whitehead (2010), through her concept of *physical literacy*, asserts that active and meaningful participation in movement is integral to the development of self-identity and one's capacity to interact with the world. When women are provided equal opportunities in sports, the impact extends beyond physical benefits; it nurtures their social confidence, emotional well-being, and personal agency. This transformation reflects not just a shift in physical involvement but a deeper process of reclaiming space and visibility in traditionally male-dominated environments.

This shift is further supported by Whitehead's emphasis on embodied learning as a foundation for self-expression and identity development. When physical activity is inclusive and purposeful, it strengthens learners' sense of agency. Complementing this, Giroux's (2002) theory of the *transformative intellectual* repositions educators as moral agents who cultivate critical awareness and civic responsibility. Together, these ideas form a coherent theoretical synergy: Freire (2000) provides the philosophical grounding for liberation, Whitehead offers the pedagogical embodiment of equity through movement, and Giroux asserts the educator's power to drive systemic change.

Observed pedagogical practices such as rotating leadership roles during group games reflect Freire's praxis and Whitehead's embodied meaning. Here, equality is not only taught through dialogue but enacted through lived, cooperative physical experiences. Students do not just learn *about* equity; they *live* it. This embodied experience of equity

forms the foundation for understanding how inclusive pedagogy influences students' motivation and reshapes their perception of participation.

These findings are consistent with prior research showing that gender-equitable physical education can enhance female students' motivation and dismantle psychological barriers rooted in social stereotypes (Nur Ihsan HL, 2021). Active participation by female students is not an immediate outcome, but rather the result of a reconstructed perception of who has the right to occupy spaces of physical activity facilitated not merely by instructional media, but by intentionally inclusive pedagogical approaches. Arufe-Giráldez et al., (2023) further support this by highlighting how collaborative teaching models promote social cohesion and challenge gender-based exclusion.

The observed shift in male students' attitudes where they began to open up participatory space for female peers serves as a crucial indicator of the development of an inclusive classroom culture in physical education. This supports Ortega Benavent's (2024) theory of symbolic interactionism, which posits that social identity is constructed through interaction and symbolic interpretation within a social context. As classroom norms evolve for example, from male dominance to gender collaboration there is a corresponding shift in meaning-making and behavior construction.

In practice, male students who were previously dominant began to realize that success in physical education activities is not solely determined by physical strength, but also by cooperation, mutual respect, and empathy (Baiti et al., 2020). Highlights that sports can serve as a highly effective medium for social dialogue to deconstruct gender stereotypes, particularly when designed through participatory and reflective approaches.

In other words, physical education classes are not merely spaces for acquiring motor skills but also function as social laboratories where the values of justice, solidarity, and equality are cultivated and enacted. This becomes especially relevant in religious higher education settings, which often face challenges in bridging religious values with modern principles of gender equality.

The transformation demonstrated by students in this study transcends the boundaries of the physical education classroom, yielding long-term effects on their views of social roles, gender responsibilities, and equitable community life. In this regard, physical education has functioned as an agent of social justice, as described by Zhang et al. (2024), who argue that inclusive physical activities foster critical awareness and social

empathy among students. This emerging awareness serves as a foundational element for developing youth capable of challenging societal stereotypes and advocating for justice in their everyday interactions.

When embedded with the principles of spirituality, inclusivity, and social justice, physical education within PGMI can become a transformative medium for societal change. However, realizing this potential requires more than curriculum reform; it demands courage, critical reflection, and data-driven policy initiatives that promote equity. Pautu et al., (2025) affirm that the correlation between structured recreational programs and fair student engagement serves as a strong indicator of success in contemporary physical education. Supporting this, Richardson et al. (2024) found that inclusive participation in physical activities enhances classroom climate and reduces the risk of social exclusion in higher education settings.

Lecturers' Pedagogical Approaches to Inclusive Physical Education

The results also underscore the pivotal role of lecturers in shaping a classroom culture grounded in justice and gender equity. Their influence extends beyond technical instruction; they hold ethical and symbolic authority in regulating social interactions, constructing classroom narratives, and establishing norms that embody inclusive values (Solà-Santèsmases et al., 2024). This becomes particularly salient in Southeast Asian contexts, where religious conservatism may clash with gender-inclusive pedagogy. Studies by Sulistyowati (2021), Judiasih (2022), and Nurdin (2024) have acknowledged these tensions, yet few offer practical strategies for harmonizing faith-based principles with transformative teaching.

This research fills that gap by presenting lived classroom evidence of gender dialogue and bodily co-participation that honors both Islamic identity and the ideals of emancipatory education. However, while much of the existing literature is situated in secular or Western contexts, this study contributes a unique perspective by embedding gender transformation within the specific setting of Islamic teacher education, where pedagogical innovation intersects with religious and cultural values.

This perspective aligns with Henry Giroux's (2002) notion of the *transformative intellectual*, in which educators are viewed as organic intellectuals tasked with nurturing critical consciousness and driving social change through education. In this framework, lecturers are expected not only to deconstruct gender biases but also to construct learning

environments that embody broader principles of social justice. Research by Lamb (Anastasia et al., 2024) supports this view, demonstrating that gender equity-focused pedagogical training significantly enhances lecturers' reflective practices and their capacity to lead students toward more critical understandings of gender dynamics in physical activity and sport.

Students in this study stated that their lecturers explicitly conveyed messages of equality, provided space for gender discussions, and distributed roles in physical activities fairly. These strategies are consistent with the principles of *inclusive pedagogy*, which, according to Florian (2020), emphasize the importance of designing instruction that is responsive to learner diversity and rejecting exclusionary practices, whether intentional or unconscious, that perpetuate discrimination.

The inclusive teaching practices observed among PGMI lecturers resonate with Paulo Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which emphasizes the importance of dialogical relationships between educators and learners. By creating a classroom atmosphere where all students, regardless of gender, feel valued and empowered to participate, lecturers are not merely delivering content but also fostering critical consciousness. One student affirmed, "Our lecturer always says that sports are not just for boys, and that really motivates me to join in." This reflects a transformative approach that seeks to dismantle internalized gender barriers through dialogic and participatory learning

Although gender equality values have begun to appear in curriculum documents (RPS), classroom practices still heavily depend on lecturers' individual initiatives. This reveals a gap between the *intended curriculum* (what is planned) and the *enacted curriculum* (what is actually implemented). Therefore, it is essential for higher education institutions to move beyond normative inclusion of gender equality values in curriculum documents and to provide pedagogical training and mentoring for lecturers to build their inclusive competencies. As emphasized by UNESCO (2019), inclusive education requires systemic transformation encompassing curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and the overall institutional climate.

In line with this, Giroux's (2002) concept of the transformative intellectual positions educators as cultural agents who challenge social inequities through critical pedagogy. Lecturers who deliberately rotate leadership roles, design mixed-gender group

tasks, and integrate equity-focused reflections into physical education exemplify this intellectual stance. Their pedagogical strategies not only enhance student engagement but also serve as acts of resistance against traditional gender hierarchies. This is evident in how students reported feeling more included, confident, and respected within the learning environment.

One of the most significant contributions of this study lies in its contextualization within religious higher education, where cultural and religious norms play a decisive role in shaping gender perceptions. In such environments, physical education faces the unique challenge of navigating between entrenched Islamic values and the global call for gender equality. Hence, rather than adopting a confrontational stance, a dialogical approach is essential, one that opens space for critical reflection while honoring religious beliefs (Karnadi et al., 2023). Religious campuses serve as crucial social laboratories for reconciling faith-based norms with justice-oriented gender discourse.

The physical education classroom, therefore, holds strategic potential as a site for initiating meaningful conversations about gender equity, not in opposition to religious principles, but through their harmonization within inclusive and reflective dialogue. This approach aligns with reflective pedagogy that acknowledges the diverse identities and spiritual beliefs of students, as Siljamäki & Anttila (2021) have shown, pedagogical models that are both intercultural and faith-sensitive enhance student engagement in discussions about gender roles on campus. Thus, physical education in Islamic higher education is uniquely positioned to foster both physical fitness and socially grounded ethical consciousness.

In this regard, the concept of religious pedagogy can be realized through an approach that bridges spiritual values with contemporary social ideals. Pradana (2021) and Tadege et al. (2022) argue that character and moral education in religious contexts can be nurtured through instructional strategies emphasizing dialogue, empathy, and respect for diversity. In this light, value-based physical education serves not only to strengthen the body but also to cultivate social justice and collective consciousness. This view is supported by Sreejith et al. (2023), who found that value-oriented physical education significantly promotes moral identity and social solidarity among university students.

The integration of Islamic values into physical education must also be viewed as a response to symbolic domination within educational systems. Core values such as '*adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) can serve as foundations for humanistic and inclusive teaching. A moderate and contextualized Islamic framework allows physical education to become a reflective space where learners of all genders can participate without undermining their religious beliefs. Tadege et al. (2022) emphasize that spirituality-based learning enables deeper connections between the body, ethical values, and social practice.

This study argues that embedding Islamic values into physical education is not merely an act of spiritualization but represents resistance to social inequality. Physical education can function as a platform for social advocacy, especially when inclusively designed to accommodate the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities. Flynn et al., (2024) highlight that inclusive curriculum design significantly enhances the meaningful participation of visually impaired students in physical activities. Similarly, Fatimah et al., (2024) stress the importance of teacher preparation in identifying participation barriers and fostering inclusive, value-rich learning environments.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study in terms of institutional scope and the number of participants. Therefore, further research is necessary to reach a broader range of institutions, across regions and diverse cultural contexts, in order to strengthen the validity of the findings and expand adaptive models of inclusive learning. A mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gender equality is implemented and received within physical education settings.

Conclusion

This study highlights the transformative potential of gender-equitable physical education practices within Islamic higher education institutions, particularly in the PGMI program at IAIN Bone. The integration of gender values into instructional design significantly enhanced female students' confidence, participation, and perceptions of physical activity. Inclusive pedagogical approaches by lecturers also played a critical role in fostering supportive and collaborative learning environments.

These findings are highly relevant to elementary education, as PGMI students are future elementary school teachers. By receiving gender-responsive physical education training, they are better prepared to promote inclusivity and equity in their future classrooms. Thus, this study contributes to the broader aim of fostering gender equality from early educational experiences.

Future research is recommended to examine how these inclusive strategies are implemented by PGMI graduates in elementary schools and how they affect students' development over time. Moreover, further exploration of culturally contextualized models of inclusive physical education across other Islamic institutions is encouraged to establish a more comprehensive framework grounded in educational equity theories.

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