

The Role of Al-Falah Boarding School in Gender Segregation: An Analysis of the Separation of Men and Women in Islamic Education

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Abstract: This research examines the role of Islamic boarding schools in gender segregation, specifically focusing on the separation of men and women in Islamic education. A case study was conducted at Al-Falah Boarding School in Banjarbaru, Indonesia, using a descriptive-qualitative approach. The main findings indicate that gender segregation at Al-Falah Boarding School has positive impacts on learning, such as creating a focused learning environment and facilitating memorization of study materials without distractions from the opposite gender. Gender-based learning has been implemented in the study of Islamic jurisprudence (fikih). The role of the boarding school in the development of this separation is deemed effective, as evidenced by the achievements in personal and environmental development.

Keywords: *Al-Falah; boarding school; gender; rule; segregation*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini membahas peran *pesantren* dalam segregasi gender, dengan fokus pada keterpisahan laki-laki dan perempuan dalam pendidikan Islam. Studi kasus dilakukan di Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Falah, Banjarbaru, Indonesia, dengan pendekatan deskriptif-kualitatif. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa keterpisahan gender di *pesantren* Al-Falah memberikan dampak positif dalam pembelajaran, seperti terciptanya fokus dalam belajar dan memudahkan untuk para santri menghafal materi belajar tanpa ada gangguan dari lawan jenis begitu pula sebaliknya. pembelajaran berbasis gender sudah diterapkan dalam kajian fikih. peran *pesantren* dalam pengembangan dalam pemisahan ini sudah sangat baik dan dibuktikan dengan prestasi yang didapat dalam pengembangan diri dan lingkungannya.

Kata Kunci: *Al-Falah; aturan; gender; pondok pesantren; segregasi*

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren or Islamic boarding schools are traditional educational institutions found in Indonesia and other Muslim countries. *Pesantren* typically provide religious education and practical skills to students called *santri* who live there. In many *pesantren*, men and women are separated in their facilities and daily activities, resulting in significant gender segregation (Damayanti & Rismaningtyas, 2021). In the context of Islamic education, gender segregation is seen as a practice aimed at preserving the honor and dignity of women, as well as strengthening religious and moral awareness among the *santri*. However, this practice of gender segregation has also been a subject of debate among communities and academics. In the case study of *Pondok Pesantren* Al-Falah in Banjarbaru, Indonesia, it can be

observed that the separation of men and women in Islamic education is strictly enforced. Male and female *santri* live in separate dormitories and follow different schedules of activities. Female *santri* wear clothing that covers their entire bodies, including *hijab* that covers their hair, while male *santri* wear loose and modest clothing.

However, on the other hand, there are concerns that the practice of gender segregation in Islamic education may limit women's access to education and reinforce existing gender stereotypes in society (Kriesi & Imdorf, 2019). Critics argue that gender segregation can cause social isolation and hinder the development of female *santri* (AR & Subaidi, 2019, p. 30). It is important to note that the practice of gender segregation in Islamic education may not be the same in every *pesantren*, and it is necessary to conduct further contextual and in-depth analysis of the role of *pesantren* in gender segregation to better understand its impact and implications (Suhaedi et al., 2022).

Pesantren are traditional Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia that play a significant role in preserving and disseminating Islam. However, the practice of gender segregation or separation of men and women in Islamic education in *pesantren* is often controversial and has faced criticism (Chotimah, 2020; Jayana & Hasna, 2021).

In reality, the practice of gender segregation in Islamic education is still prevalent in many *pesantren* in Indonesia, including Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Falah in Banjarbaru, Indonesia. In this context, researchers have analyzed the separation of men and women in education, which has been in place for a long time. This makes this research interesting and unique because the results of boarding education prioritize noble morals and social skills. Issues related to the practice of gender segregation in Islamic education in *pesantren*, particularly in Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Falah, Banjarbaru, based on the researcher's study, include important reasons such as assumptions that the separation between men and women may limit women's access to education in *pesantren*. Furthermore, the practice of gender segregation in Islamic education in *pesantren* is seen as reinforcing existing gender stereotypes in society, such as the perception that women are weaker or more vulnerable than men. Such perceptions can reinforce patriarchal mindsets and hinder progress towards gender equality.

There are those who believe that the separation of males and females in Islamic education in boarding schools (*pesantren*) can limit students' opportunities to interact naturally and expand their understanding of the world beyond their own group (Darwis, 2021). This is believed to hinder students' social and emotional development, as found in the study by Majda (2022) on the influence of gender segregation in Islamic education in *pesantren* on students' understanding of religion and life skills (Majda et al., 2022). The study found that students in *pesantren* that implement gender segregation tend to have more conservative views on religion and lack skills in interacting with the opposite gender. Similarly, Chotimah (2020) studied the implications of gender segregation in Islamic education in *pesantren* on students' social and emotional development, and found that separating males and females in education can limit students' opportunities to interact naturally, and may trigger conflicts between groups, which can have negative implications on students' social and emotional development.

Sa'adah ((Sa'adah, 2023) has a different opinion on the influence of gender segregation in Islamic education in *pesantren* on gender equality. The study found that gender segregation practices in Islamic education in *pesantren* can reinforce gender stereotypes and patriarchal mindsets in society, and can limit women's access to education and opportunities in life. Researchers also agree with Sa'adah (2023) that the separation between males and females in *pesantren* is usually based on the belief that mixing between males and females can trigger temptation and indecent behavior that may disrupt the teaching and learning process, as well as the overall life in *pesantren*. Furthermore, this view

is also based on the belief that gender segregation is the appropriate way to maintain purity, righteousness, and social order in *pesantren* (Aliyah, 2018; Amidjaja et al., 1985).

In this context, research that analyzes the separation of males and females in Islamic education at Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School in Banjarbaru, Indonesia becomes very important to provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender segregation practices in *pesantren* and their social and educational implications for students. It is hoped that the results of this research can provide a better understanding of gender segregation practices in Islamic education in *pesantren*, as well as their social and educational implications. This is expected to serve as a basis for a broader debate on the importance of gender inclusivity in Islamic education in Indonesia, particularly in *pesantren*.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with observation and observation techniques for one month in a boarding school. Observation is used to observe gender segregation practices in the *pesantren*, related to the separation of males and females in education (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Data were collected through the results of direct observation at Al-Falah Boarding School. Observations are made by observing gender segregation practices in the *pesantren*, such as the division of separate rooms for males and females, different study times, and restrictions on interaction between male and female students in two different places. Data from observation is analyzed using an inductive approach to identify themes and patterns in the data (Zed, 2008). The results of this analysis are then used to describe the gender segregation practices based on the researcher's observations. Supporting data in this research are several journals that also discuss gender segregation (Sukmadinata, 2007).

The reason for choosing Al-Falah Boarding School, Banjarbaru, Indonesia as the research location is because this *pesantren* is one of the well-known *pesantrens* in South Kalimantan region and has consistent gender segregation practices. In addition, this *pesantren* also has students from various regions in Indonesia, providing a representative overview of gender segregation practices in *pesantrens* in Indonesia in general. Furthermore, the accessibility and availability of facilities needed for research are also considered by the researcher, making Al-Falah Boarding School the appropriate choice for this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Construction Theory and Gender Segregation in Self-Development and Environment

Gender segregation is the social, physical, or cultural separation or restriction between males and females in everyday life, including in education, work, and social life (AR & Subaidi, 2019). Gender segregation often occurs in societies that still hold patriarchal values and strong gender stereotypes, where males and females are considered to have different roles and responsibilities (Jannah, 2022a).

This can result in inequality and discrimination against one gender and limit opportunities and potentials of individuals in achieving progress and success (Pratama, 2017). There are several reasons underlying the occurrence of gender segregation, including in the educational environment such as *pesantren*. Some commonly cited reasons include the belief that limiting contact between males and females will help protect moral and religious values and minimize the risk of indecent behaviour. In addition, some people believe that

gender segregation can enhance students' concentration in learning, due to a quiet and controlled environment (Farisiyah et al., 2022).

Social construction of gender states that gender is not a biological or natural characteristic, but a social construction shaped by the values, norms, and roles produced by society (Anwar, 2020). In the context of Islamic education in *pesantren*, social construction of gender can be reflected in the gender segregation practices that occur in learning and daily activities. Gender segregation in *pesantren* is considered as a form of separation between males and females in the arrangement of space and time, as well as the division of tasks and obligations according to gender roles deemed appropriate by society (Sahoo & Klasen, 2021). This research will analyze the role of *pesantren* in the formation of social construction of gender through gender segregation practices in Islamic education, and its impact on students' experiences in learning and interactions with fellow students and teachers.

Gender segregation theory is used to understand how the separation practices between males and females can occur in various aspects of life, including in Islamic education in *pesantren* (Blackburn et al., 2002; Martell et al., 2012). This theory can help understand the role of *pesantren* in the formation of social construction of gender through consistent gender segregation practices, and its impact on students' experiences in learning and interactions with fellow students and teachers. By understanding gender segregation theory, we can gain a deeper insight into the gender segregation practices that occur in *pesantren* and how these practices affect students in their educational process. Furthermore, this theory can also provide a framework for analyzing and interpreting the findings of the research, and generating recommendations for addressing gender segregation practices in *pesantren*.

According to Rania Salem, gender segregation is the practice of separating males and females in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social life. Gender segregation practices can create gender gaps and discrimination that disadvantage women. Women's need to preserve their reputations in order to maintain the support of their families and their own marriageability has come to light as a major driver of their decision to limit connections with men. Qatari women's ongoing adherence to the patriarchal bargain, whereby they restrain their behavior in exchange for protection from male family members, is revealed by their desire for gender-segregated workplaces (Salem & Yount, 2019).

The theory of gender segregation can also create gender inequality in educational practices. This occurs because gender segregation practices can limit access and learning opportunities for students based on their gender (Cotter et al., 2003). For example, if Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) only facilitate education for male students, then female students will miss out on opportunities to learn and access religious knowledge. In addition, gender segregation practices can also create stereotypical perceptions of gender roles in society, which can limit the abilities and skills of students (Bandiah, 2020).

In fact, gender segregation practices in Islamic education in *pesantren* can also reinforce social norms that limit women's access and participation in society as a whole. Therefore, it is important to understand and address gender segregation practices in Islamic education in *pesantren* to avoid creating gender inequality in access to education and career development in the future.

Based on our observations, we found several findings to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students, including adopting inclusive and exclusive education approaches, the role of women in education and skill development, potential in joint activities in a large event, and the development of religious skills.

At *Pesantren* Al-Falah, an inclusive education approach has been adopted by integrating principles of gender equality in the curriculum and teaching methods. This includes the use of diverse literature and resources, as well as organizing activities that promote gender equality, including gender-based fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) studies. (Farago et al., 2022; Jannah, 2022b; Lessky et al., 2022)

Efforts from the teaching and administrative team of the Islamic boarding school to encourage women's participation in education and remove barriers that may hinder them from learning, such as regulations that restrict women's activities outside the boarding school, have been observed. The boarding school has provided sufficient support for female students, such as study rooms and adequate sports facilities. This is evident through several activities observed in the boarding school, including:

1. Gender-based education access in Islamic jurisprudence or similar subjects that also discuss education and skills for both males and females, and provide gender-appropriate facilities that are easily accessible and safe for women when they are in the boarding school dormitory.
2. Involvement of external parties in the development of knowledge or skills through various programs or competitions.
3. Strengthening family and community awareness of the importance of education for women and men, through community engagement in their respective locations, to overcome gender stereotypes that are detrimental.

Pesantren Al-Falah needs to promote dialogue between men and women to create better understanding of gender issues and promote gender equality in the boarding school community. This can be achieved through group discussions or social activities that involve men and women.

To promote dialogue between men and women in the context of education, the boarding school has implemented several approaches, including:

1. Creating open and safe spaces for discussion among all students, both males and females. This is done by introducing and implementing clear rules, such as rules against insulting or demeaning different views or opinions. Providing supportive facilities, such as spacious classrooms, open spaces, or technological facilities that facilitate interaction and discussion among students.
2. Organizing activities or events that involve men and women in the same team. Such activities are usually conducted in the boarding school mosque in the form of public lectures.
3. Encouraging active participation of men and women in activities or organizations in the boarding school, such as study groups or social organizations. This can help students develop social skills within the community.
4. Involving teachers and staff of the boarding school in supporting gender-sensitive education in addressing issues, such as studying women's jurisprudence in the boys' boarding school and vice versa.

By promoting inclusive dialogue between men and women, the boarding school can create an equitable and inclusive educational environment for all students.

The Impact of Gender Segregation

The impact of gender segregation in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) can have both positive and negative effects. Let's explore these impacts further:

Positive impacts of gender segregation in *pesantren*:

1. Improved concentration in learning: In a gender-segregated environment, students can focus on their studies without distractions from the opposite gender.
2. Enhanced safety: In a separate environment, students may feel safer from the threat of violence or sexual harassment that can occur in mixed-gender environments.
3. Increased self-development: In a segregated environment, students may have more freedom to explore their interests and talents without pressure from the opposite gender.

Negative impacts of gender segregation in *pesantren*:

1. Reinforcement of gender stereotypes: Gender segregation can reinforce gender stereotypes and reduce opportunities for interaction and understanding of the perspectives of the opposite gender.
2. Gender segregation can influence the mindset of students in viewing the roles, abilities, and responsibilities of each gender. Students may be exposed to narrow views on gender, which can affect their perception of the roles and contributions of other genders in society.
3. Gender segregation can result in imbalances in the holistic development of students. For example, if a *pesantren* only focuses on religious teachings and specific skills for one gender, while the other gender does not have the same opportunities, it can hinder holistic self-development potential for students.
4. Extreme or poorly managed gender segregation can potentially lead to negative behaviors such as inappropriate jokes, gender prejudice or discrimination, or even sexual harassment. This can disrupt the harmonious and safe environment of the *pesantren* for all students.

In this context, it is important to carefully manage gender segregation in *pesantren* to minimize potential negative impacts and ensure that *pesantren* remains an inclusive environment that respects gender diversity and supports holistic development of students.

However, according to researchers, the practice of gender segregation at Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Falah is considered to be beneficial and improves the quality of Islamic education during the students' stay at the *pesantren*. Some arguments that arise include:

1. Security reasons: Some argue that gender segregation in education at *pesantren* is necessary to maintain the safety and honor of students, especially to avoid free mingling and juvenile delinquency.
2. Religious reasons: Some argue that gender segregation in education at *pesantren* is based on Islamic teachings that regulate the etiquette of interaction between males and females.
3. Traditional reasons: Some argue that gender segregation in education at *pesantren* is part of local tradition and culture that has been practiced for years.

Gender segregation in *Pesantren* al-Falah can have complex impacts. On one hand, proponents argue that it helps preserve traditions, religious values, and creates a safer and more controlled environment. However, there are negative impacts that need consideration.

Firstly, gender segregation can reinforce stereotypes and gender differences, leading to inequalities in education and social life. Women may have limited access to educational

opportunities and self-development if the curriculum or facilities available to them are restricted, potentially limiting their future potential. Moreover, gender segregation may restrict social interactions between genders, reducing understanding and openness towards gender differences and hindering the ability to learn cooperation and communication between genders in the real world.

Beyond social impacts, gender segregation can influence societal perceptions of gender roles, creating paradigms that confine women to specific spaces and impeding their participation in various fields. It's crucial to strike a balance between preserving religious values and traditions while ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunities to access education, self-development, and social opportunities without being constrained by gender differences present in Pesantren al-Falah, Banjarbaru.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that Al-Falah *pesantren* in Banjarbaru, Indonesia practices gender segregation in education by physically separating males and females. This gender segregation can limit the opportunities for males and females to interact in the same classrooms or dormitories, as it emphasizes the importance of maintaining Islamic morals that prioritize the benefits of education, memorization, focus in worship, and others. However, this research also shows that positive efforts can be made to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students regardless of their gender. These efforts include adopting a more inclusive educational approach, promoting gender-based fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) participation in education, developing skills between males and females, and involving the *pesantren* community in discussions on gender and sexuality issues to avoid social tendencies towards same-sex interactions.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that negative behaviors may also arise, such as jokes that cross the line of appropriateness. It should be noted that there are limitations to this research, such as the data limitations obtained from only one *pesantren* and the qualitative research approach used. Therefore, further research with larger samples and different approaches is needed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue of gender segregation in Islamic education in Indonesia.

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