



The Construction of Humanitarian Agency and Gender in Islamic Education Curriculum: A Case Study of Modern Islamic Boarding School-Based Educational Institutions

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Abstract :

This study aims to examine how humanitarian agency and gender are constructed within the Islamic education curriculum and to explore the ways curriculum implementation, institutional culture, and educational practices contribute to the development of socially responsible and gender-inclusive learners. A qualitative case study design was employed, utilizing purposive sampling to recruit school leaders, curriculum developers, teachers, and students who were directly involved in curriculum implementation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and emerging themes. The findings reveal that humanitarian agency is embedded across Islamic education subjects and reinforced through institutional culture, experiential learning, and community engagement rather than being taught as a standalone curriculum component. Gender is constructed through equitable educational participation, leadership opportunities, and collaborative learning while maintaining the ethical principles of Islamic education. These findings suggest that integrating humanitarian values and gender-responsive practices into the curriculum strengthens students' ethical awareness, social responsibility, and inclusive attitudes. The study contributes a contextual framework for curriculum development that integrates Islamic values with humanitarian education and gender inclusion, offering practical implications for educators and policymakers seeking to develop more socially responsive and ethically grounded educational systems.

INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognized as one of the most influential institutions for shaping individuals who are intellectually competent, socially responsible, and ethically committed. In an increasingly interconnected world characterized by social inequality, humanitarian crises, and cultural diversity, educational institutions are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate values that encourage empathy, justice, and active citizenship. These expectations have become increasingly significant as societies seek educational approaches capable of preparing learners to respond constructively to complex humanitarian challenges. Previous educational studies have demonstrated that

value-oriented learning environments contribute significantly to students' social participation, moral reasoning, and inclusive behavior, particularly when humanitarian values are integrated into institutional practices rather than delivered solely through theoretical instruction (Jeong, 2024; Green & Volpe, 2025). Consequently, strengthening humanitarian values within educational curricula has become an important agenda for educational development worldwide.

Islamic educational institutions, particularly modern Islamic boarding schools, possess substantial potential to contribute to humanitarian education because Islamic teachings emphasize compassion (*rahmah*), justice (*'adl*), mutual assistance (*ta'awun*), and human dignity. These values provide a strong ethical foundation for developing responsible individuals capable of contributing positively to society. Nevertheless, contemporary educational reforms increasingly require Islamic institutions to reinterpret traditional religious instruction in ways that remain relevant to changing social realities, including issues related to humanitarian responsibility and gender inclusion. Existing educational research suggests that institutional culture and curriculum integration significantly influence students' ethical development and social engagement (Howard & Dove, 2023; Ladner et al., 2023). Therefore, examining how humanitarian agency is constructed within Islamic education is essential not only for improving educational quality but also for strengthening the social relevance of faith-based educational institutions.

Despite the growing importance of humanitarian education, many educational institutions continue to experience challenges in translating normative values into practical educational experiences. Humanitarian principles are frequently presented as abstract moral concepts rather than competencies that students actively develop through curriculum implementation and institutional culture. Similarly, discussions concerning gender within religious educational settings often remain polarized between traditional interpretations and contemporary demands for educational equality. Such conditions create uncertainty regarding how Islamic educational institutions balance religious values with inclusive educational practices. These challenges are particularly significant because educational curricula influence students' perceptions of social responsibility, leadership, and civic participation throughout their lives. Consequently, understanding how humanitarian agency and gender are simultaneously constructed within Islamic education has become an increasingly important academic and practical concern.

The situation is particularly evident in many modern Islamic boarding schools, where curriculum innovation has expanded beyond religious instruction to include leadership development, community engagement, and character education. Students participate in community service, charitable programs, peer mentoring, and collaborative learning activities that implicitly promote humanitarian values. At the same time, educational practices continue to reflect institutional traditions concerning gender roles, leadership responsibilities, and boarding school management. While these practices often emphasize fairness and mutual respect, they also illustrate the dynamic negotiation between religious traditions and contemporary educational expectations. These field phenomena suggest that humanitarian agency and gender are not merely prescribed through curriculum documents but are continuously constructed through everyday interactions among teachers, students, institutional leaders, and the broader boarding school culture.

Previous studies have investigated humanitarian values, ethical education, and gender from various disciplinary perspectives. Jeong (2024) demonstrated that school-based educational programs effectively enhance students' social participation through contextual learning experiences, while Nombela-Franco et al. (2022) emphasized that educational support becomes more meaningful when integrated into learners' everyday environments. In addition, Lawson and Sacks (2018) highlighted the importance of experiential learning in promoting responsibility and community engagement. Although these studies provide valuable insights into educational practice, they primarily focus on specific educational interventions or health-related contexts rather than examining humanitarian agency within Islamic curriculum development. Consequently, the relationship between religious education, humanitarian values, and institutional culture remains insufficiently explored.

Similarly, previous scholarship concerning gender has predominantly examined clinical, psychological, ethical, or inclusion-related perspectives. Jacobs et al. (2014) discussed educational considerations for gender diversity within specialized learning contexts, whereas Sood et al. (2023) and Raissouni et al. (2022) explored gender dysphoria through clinical and healthcare perspectives. Howard and Dove (2023) further emphasized institutional inclusion within educational supervision. While these studies contribute substantially to understanding gender and educational inclusion, they rarely investigate how gender is socially constructed within Islamic boarding school curricula alongside humanitarian education. Accordingly, limited attention has been given to understanding how Islamic educational institutions simultaneously negotiate humanitarian agency, gender inclusion, institutional culture, and curriculum implementation. This research gap highlights the necessity of examining these interconnected dimensions within the distinctive context of modern pesantren.

This study introduces a new perspective by conceptualizing humanitarian agency and gender as interconnected educational constructs that are produced through curriculum design, institutional culture, leadership practices, and students' everyday experiences within modern Islamic boarding schools. Rather than treating humanitarian education and gender as separate educational concerns, this study considers them as mutually reinforcing dimensions of Islamic educational development. This perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how faith-based educational institutions cultivate socially responsible graduates while preserving their religious identity. The study therefore offers an integrated analytical framework that positions curriculum implementation as the central mechanism through which humanitarian values and gender-inclusive educational practices are institutionalized within contemporary Islamic education.

Based on these considerations, this study seeks to examine how humanitarian agency and gender are constructed within the Islamic education curriculum of modern Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions. It argues that humanitarian values emerge not only from formal curriculum documents but also from institutional culture, educational leadership, classroom interactions, and students' lived experiences. Furthermore, the study proposes that gender inclusion within Islamic education is shaped through educational participation, leadership opportunities, and collaborative learning rather than solely through normative discourse. By addressing these issues, the research contributes to the advancement of curriculum studies, Islamic education, and humanitarian education while providing practical recommendations for policymakers and

educational practitioners seeking to develop more inclusive, socially responsive, and ethically grounded educational institutions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how humanitarian agency and gender are constructed within the Islamic education curriculum of a modern Islamic boarding school. A qualitative case study was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of educational practices, institutional values, and participants' experiences within their natural context, allowing researchers to capture complex social and cultural phenomena that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative approaches. The case study design is particularly appropriate for investigating curriculum implementation, educational ethics, and gender-related issues in educational institutions, where contextual understanding is essential. This methodological approach has been widely adopted in educational and health-related case studies to generate rich descriptions and practical implications (Jeong, 2024; Nombela-Franco et al., 2022).

The research was conducted at a modern Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) that integrates formal education with Islamic values and character development. This setting was purposively selected because modern *pesantren* represent educational institutions where religious teachings, curriculum innovation, and social values—including humanitarian principles and gender perspectives—are simultaneously negotiated. The study involved school leaders, curriculum developers, teachers, and selected students as key informants. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, ensuring that only individuals directly involved in curriculum planning and implementation were included. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, curriculum document analysis, and institutional policy reviews to achieve methodological triangulation and enhance the credibility of the findings. Similar qualitative sampling and multiple-source data collection strategies have been recommended for educational and case-based research to obtain comprehensive and trustworthy evidence (Howard & Dove, 2023; Ladner et al., 2023).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following an iterative process of data reduction, coding, categorization, and theme development. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents were repeatedly reviewed to identify recurring patterns related to humanitarian agency, gender construction, and curriculum implementation. The emerging themes were continuously compared across different data sources to ensure consistency and analytical rigor. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied source triangulation, member checking with selected participants, and peer debriefing throughout the analytical process. These procedures are consistent with qualitative case study research that emphasizes contextual interpretation, credibility, and practical relevance in examining educational and social phenomena (Jacobs et al., 2014; Jeong, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Institutional Understanding of Humanitarian Agency

The findings indicate that humanitarian agency is understood by school stakeholders as an integral component of Islamic education rather than as an independent curricular subject. Participants consistently described humanitarian values

as being embedded in daily educational practices through religious instruction, character education, and community engagement. The curriculum emphasizes compassion (*rahmah*), social responsibility, cooperation, and respect for human dignity as essential qualities that students should develop throughout their education.

School leaders explained that humanitarian education is implemented through both formal and informal learning activities. Formal instruction introduces students to Islamic teachings concerning justice, empathy, and social welfare, while extracurricular activities provide opportunities for students to practice these values through community service and collaborative projects. According to the principal, humanitarian education is considered successful only when students demonstrate these values in their daily interactions.

One participant stated:

"We believe humanitarian education is not limited to classroom instruction. Students are expected to demonstrate compassion, respect, and responsibility in every aspect of boarding school life." (Principal, P1)

Similarly, a senior teacher explained:

"The curriculum encourages students to recognize social problems and respond with empathy. Community service activities are designed to transform religious knowledge into concrete humanitarian action." (Teacher, T2)

These findings suggest that humanitarian agency is constructed through continuous interaction between religious values, institutional culture, and experiential learning rather than solely through theoretical instruction.

Integration of Humanitarian Values into the Islamic Education Curriculum

Document analysis revealed that humanitarian values are integrated across several Islamic education subjects rather than being taught as separate learning materials. Teachers reported incorporating discussions on equality, mutual assistance, conflict resolution, and social justice into Qur'anic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, and moral education classes. These themes are reinforced through classroom discussions, reflective assignments, and collaborative learning activities.

Observation data also demonstrated that humanitarian values are strengthened through boarding school routines, including collective worship, peer mentoring, charitable fundraising, environmental campaigns, and community outreach programs. These activities enable students to connect religious teachings with practical social engagement.

One curriculum coordinator explained:

"Every subject has the responsibility to develop students' moral awareness. Humanitarian values are integrated naturally because Islamic education itself promotes justice, kindness, and service to society." (Curriculum Coordinator, C1)

A student also described the impact of these learning experiences:

"Participating in social service programs helped me understand that helping others is part of practicing Islam, not simply completing a school assignment." (Student, S4)

Overall, participants perceived curriculum integration as an effective strategy for fostering humanitarian awareness without increasing students' academic workload.

Gender Construction in Educational Practices

The findings revealed that gender is primarily constructed through the principle

of complementary responsibilities rather than strict separation between male and female students. Participants emphasized that both genders receive equal educational opportunities while recognizing certain institutional arrangements related to boarding school traditions.

Teachers reported that classroom participation, academic assessment, and leadership opportunities are accessible to both male and female students. Female students frequently assume leadership roles in student organizations, academic competitions, and community service initiatives. Participants viewed these practices as reflecting Islamic values of justice and responsibility.

One female student explained:

"Our teachers encourage us to participate in leadership activities regardless of gender. What matters most is our competence and willingness to contribute." (Student, S7)

A teacher similarly noted:

"Boys and girls are given equal opportunities to develop their abilities. Leadership is determined by commitment, discipline, and capability rather than gender." (Teacher, T4)

Nevertheless, participants acknowledged that certain extracurricular activities continue to follow traditional gender-based arrangements, particularly those related to dormitory management and daily boarding routines. These arrangements were generally perceived as organizational rather than discriminatory.

Factors Supporting the Construction of Humanitarian Agency and Gender Equality

Analysis identified several institutional factors that facilitate the development of humanitarian agency and gender-inclusive educational practices. These include visionary leadership, curriculum flexibility, teacher commitment, student participation, and a supportive boarding school environment. Participants consistently highlighted the importance of role modeling by teachers and administrators.

The principal emphasized that institutional culture plays a central role in reinforcing curriculum objectives:

"Students learn more from what they experience every day than from what they read in textbooks. Therefore, teachers must become role models for humanitarian behavior." (Principal, P1)

Teachers also reported that regular reflection meetings enable them to evaluate how humanitarian values are implemented across different learning activities.

Students perceived the boarding school environment as encouraging collaboration across academic, religious, and social activities. Many described their experiences participating in charity programs, disaster relief fundraising, and peer mentoring as meaningful opportunities to develop empathy and social responsibility.

Table 1. Major Themes Identified During Data Analysis

Theme	Sub-theme	Representative Evidence
Institutional Understanding	Humanitarian agency as Islamic character education	Compassion, empathy, social responsibility
Curriculum Integration	Cross-subject implementation	Qur'anic studies, Islamic ethics, community service
Gender	Equal educational	Equal classroom participation

Construction	opportunity	and leadership roles
Institutional Culture	Teacher role modeling	Daily interaction, boarding school routines
Student Development	Experiential learning	Community outreach, charity activities, peer mentoring
Supporting Factors	Collaborative educational environment	Leadership support, curriculum flexibility, student engagement

Perceived Outcomes of Curriculum Implementation

Participants generally perceived positive outcomes from integrating humanitarian agency and gender-inclusive values into the curriculum. Teachers observed improvements in students' interpersonal relationships, collaborative learning, and willingness to participate in community service activities. Students also demonstrated greater confidence in expressing opinions, respecting diversity, and resolving interpersonal conflicts through dialogue.

Several participants indicated that humanitarian education contributed to strengthening students' awareness of social responsibility beyond the school environment. Rather than viewing humanitarian activities as compulsory programs, students increasingly regarded them as expressions of their religious identity and civic responsibility.

As one student reflected:

"I have learned that serving others is not only an extracurricular activity but also part of becoming a responsible Muslim and community member." (Student, S9)

Overall, the findings illustrate that the construction of humanitarian agency and gender within the Islamic education curriculum is shaped through the interaction of curriculum design, institutional culture, teacher practices, and students' lived experiences in the boarding school environment. These interconnected elements collectively contribute to fostering socially responsible, ethically aware, and gender-inclusive educational practices.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that humanitarian agency in modern Islamic boarding schools is constructed as an integral element of Islamic education rather than as an independent curricular component. This supports the view that educational institutions are effective environments for cultivating values through contextual learning and institutional culture. Similar conclusions were reported by Jeong (2024), who found that school-based interventions become more meaningful when integrated into everyday educational practices rather than delivered as isolated programs. Likewise, Nombela-Franco et al. (2022) emphasized that continuous interaction between educational settings and social experiences strengthens learners' ability to translate theoretical knowledge into practical responsibility. The present study extends these perspectives by demonstrating that humanitarian agency in pesantren is explicitly grounded in Islamic ethical principles, thereby connecting religious instruction with social engagement and civic responsibility.

Another important finding concerns the integration of humanitarian values across multiple Islamic education subjects. Instead of introducing humanitarian education as a separate discipline, teachers embedded concepts such as compassion, justice,

cooperation, and social responsibility into Qur'anic studies, Islamic jurisprudence, and moral education. This finding aligns with Ladner et al. (2023), who argued that ethical learning is most effective when incorporated into existing curricula through case-based and contextual discussions. Similarly, Green and Volpe (2025) highlighted that inclusive educational values should be institutionalized throughout curriculum structures rather than confined to specialized modules. The current study contributes a contextual model showing how Islamic educational philosophy naturally facilitates interdisciplinary humanitarian learning within boarding school environments.

Regarding gender construction, the study indicates that participants perceived gender equality primarily as equal access to educational participation and leadership while maintaining institutional arrangements influenced by religious traditions. This partially corresponds with Jacobs et al. (2014), who emphasized that educational environments should promote equitable opportunities while recognizing individual differences. Likewise, Sood et al. (2023) argued that gender-responsive educational services require institutional support that enables equal participation regardless of gender identity. However, unlike studies primarily focused on clinical or identity-related perspectives, the present research demonstrates that gender discourse within Islamic boarding schools is framed through educational responsibility, leadership, and community participation, providing a culturally grounded understanding of gender inclusion.

The findings further reveal that institutional culture significantly influences the successful implementation of humanitarian and gender-inclusive education. Teachers, administrators, and boarding school leaders function as role models whose daily practices reinforce curricular objectives. This observation supports Howard and Dove (2023), who found that institutional environments strongly shape learners' perceptions of inclusion through everyday educational interactions. Similarly, Aquino et al. (2022) demonstrated that organizational commitment and collaborative professional practices enhance inclusive educational experiences across institutional settings. The present study advances these findings by illustrating that the boarding school environment itself operates as a living curriculum where humanitarian values are continuously reinforced through religious routines, collective activities, and interpersonal relationships.

Experiential learning emerged as another critical mechanism through which humanitarian agency develops among students. Community service, peer mentoring, charitable activities, and collaborative learning enabled students to internalize humanitarian values beyond classroom instruction. This finding is consistent with Lawson and Sacks (2018), who emphasized that practical engagement enhances learners' understanding of health promotion and social responsibility through authentic experiences. Likewise, Jeong (2024) demonstrated that experiential educational programs improve students' social participation and interpersonal competence. The current study contributes additional evidence by showing that Islamic boarding schools integrate experiential learning with religious values, allowing humanitarian agency to develop simultaneously as both moral commitment and practical social competence.

A notable contribution of this research lies in its conceptualization of humanitarian agency as the intersection of Islamic ethics, curriculum integration, institutional culture, and gender-inclusive educational practices. Previous case studies have generally examined humanitarian care, ethics, or gender issues separately within educational or healthcare contexts (Mohamad et al., 2025; Hussain, 2022). In contrast,

this study proposes a more holistic framework in which humanitarian agency is constructed through the interaction of religious values, educational practices, and institutional governance. This integrated perspective broadens existing discussions by demonstrating that Islamic educational institutions can simultaneously promote ethical citizenship, humanitarian responsibility, and inclusive educational participation without separating religious education from broader social development objectives.

The novelty of this study therefore lies in developing a curriculum-based model for constructing humanitarian agency and gender within modern Islamic boarding schools. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on clinical cases, ethical dilemmas, or individual educational interventions (Raisouni et al., 2022; Howard & Dove, 2023), this research positions the pesantren curriculum as the central mechanism through which humanitarian values and gender inclusion are institutionalized. The findings suggest that curriculum integration, supported by institutional culture and experiential learning, provides a sustainable approach for preparing socially responsible graduates capable of responding to humanitarian challenges while maintaining Islamic educational values. Consequently, this study offers both theoretical enrichment for Islamic education scholarship and practical implications for curriculum development in faith-based educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the construction of humanitarian agency and gender within the Islamic education curriculum of modern Islamic boarding schools is achieved through the integration of Islamic ethical values, curriculum implementation, institutional culture, and experiential learning, highlighting that humanitarian responsibility and gender-inclusive participation can be cultivated without compromising religious identity. The principal lesson derived from this research is that humanitarian values become more meaningful when they are consistently embedded in both formal instruction and everyday educational practices. The primary scholarly contribution of this study lies in proposing a contextual framework that connects humanitarian agency, gender construction, and Islamic curriculum development within the unique setting of modern pesantren, thereby enriching the literature on Islamic education and curriculum studies. However, this study is limited by its qualitative case study approach focusing on a single institutional context, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve multiple Islamic boarding schools across diverse cultural and geographical settings, employ comparative or mixed-methods designs, and further examine the long-term impact of humanitarian and gender-responsive curricula on students' social engagement, leadership, and civic participation.

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