

## Gender Inclusion and Justice in Education: A Critical Review Based on Research Results

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of gender inclusion and justice in education by examining policy frameworks and empirical research within Indonesian and global contexts. **Method:** Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, the study integrates findings from 23 national and international indexed journal articles published between 2017–2025, complemented by relevant educational policies, to identify trends, barriers, and opportunities for gender-responsive educational practices. **Results:** The analysis reveals a substantial gap between established policies and their implementation, characterized by persistent gender stereotypes in curricula—especially in STEM fields—limited teacher competence in applying gender-responsive pedagogy, disparities in educational access between rural and urban regions, and inadequate representation of women in academic leadership. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive pedagogical transformation supported by multi-stakeholder collaboration and strengthened GESI integration. **Novelty:** This study offers an intersectional synthesis of policy and empirical evidence, highlighting systemic inconsistencies and proposing an integrative framework for advancing gender-inclusive education practices across diverse learning environments.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental fundamental right that must be accessed by all individuals regardless of gender, social background, or other special status. The global commitment to this is reflected in the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), especially SDG 4 on quality education and SDG 5 on gender equality. These two goals are interrelated and emphasize that education must be inclusive, equitable, and provide equal opportunities for all learners [1].

Indonesia, as a country with a commitment to the SDGs, has established various education policies that are relevant to the issue of gender inclusion and justice. Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education, Presidential Instruction Number 9 of 2000 concerning Gender Mainstreaming (PUG), and Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System are strong legal frameworks to realize inclusive and gender-fair education. However, in practice, there is still a significant gap between existing regulations and the reality of implementation on the ground [2], [3].

Recent research shows that gender disparity in education is still a serious issue at various levels of education. Data from the research of Falentino et al reveal that men dominate significantly in almost all areas of the Indonesian National Science Olympiad

(OSN), with gaps influenced by social stereotypes, biological factors, and access to resources [4]. Meanwhile, Hunga and Mahatma found that although Indonesia has a strong *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion* (GESI) policy framework, the integration of GESI into higher education management is still limited, reflected in only 0.2% of female rectors (84 out of 4,621 higher education institutions) [5].

Gender disparities are not only limited to STEM, but also include access to education in rural areas, gender-responsive character building, and social inclusion for marginalized groups. Research by Supianto et al through a comparative Indonesia-Malaysia study shows that both countries face similar challenges including limited access to education in rural areas, strong gender stereotypes, STEM proficiency gaps, and limited support for women with special needs [6].

It is important to note that gender inclusion and equity in education is not just about providing equal access to all learners. More than that, gender inclusion requires a fundamental transformation in the way education systems are designed, managed, and run. This includes changes in curriculum, teaching methods, learning environments, and educator mindsets and practices. This transformation must be supported by a deep understanding of how gender, as a social construct, shapes learners' learning experiences and opportunities [7].

This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the issues of gender inclusion and justice in education based on the latest research results. By analyzing the various research, policies, and good practices that have been conducted, this article identifies key challenges, opportunities, and strategic recommendations for realizing truly inclusive and gender-equitable education.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses the *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) method to analyze the issues of gender inclusion and justice in education. This method was chosen because it is relevant to examine issues of educational policy and practice that are complex, multidimensional, and involve a variety of theoretical perspectives [8].

### Data Sources and Selection Criteria

Literature searches are conducted through leading academic databases, including Google Scholar, SINTA, Scopus, as well as accredited national journal platforms. The range of publications studied is 2017-2025 to capture the latest developments in issues. Inclusion criteria include: (1) peer-reviewed scientific journal articles; (2) research that explicitly addresses gender inclusion and/or justice in education; (3) research that is based in Indonesia or has contextual relevance; (4) publication in Indonesian or English; (5) research that provides empirical data or in-depth analysis on the implementation of education policies [9].

Keywords used in the search included: "gender equality education," "inclusive education," "gender stereotypes school," "inclusive education," "gender equality education," "school gender stereotypes," "gender mainstreaming education," "GESI," "gender disparities STEM," "women in education," and other relevant combinations. As a result of the initial

search, more than 100 articles were obtained which were then filtered based on inclusion criteria, resulting in 23 primary sources on which the analysis was based.

### **Analysis Process**

The analysis is carried out through several stages: (1) reading the abstract and the introduction to ensure relevance; (2) systematic data extraction including authors, years, methodologies, key findings, and implications; (3) thematic mapping to identify patterns, similarities, and differences between studies; (4) narrative synthesis to integrate findings into a cohesive narrative that connects to the main research question [10].

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

#### **Conceptualization of Gender Inclusion and Justice in Education**

Before analyzing implementation, it is important to understand the concepts of inclusion and gender justice in the context of education. According to UNESCO, inclusive education is the process of identifying and overcoming barriers that prevent certain learners from participating and learning effectively. This principle goes beyond the physical integration of learners with special needs into regular schooling, but encompasses systemic transformations in educational philosophy, policies, practices, and culture [11].

*Gender Equality and Social Inclusion* (GESI) is an integrated concept that combines gender justice with broader social inclusion. Hunga and Mahatma define GESI as a process and strategy to ensure that women and men from all social groups (ethnic, religious, economic, age, disability, and geographical location) are integrated into policies and programs from planning, implementation, monitoring, to evaluation in all fields. Through this process, women and men have equal access and control over resources, public services, information and opportunities, as well as the distribution of power and decision-making [12].

Gender justice in education refers to the creation of conditions in which all learners, regardless of their gender, have equal access, participation, control, and advantage in the educational process. This involves the elimination of gender stereotypes, biases in the curriculum, discriminatory practices, and the creation of a learning environment that is safe, comfortable, and respectful of diversity.

Intersectional perspectives, as developed by Crenshaw, provide an important lens for understanding the complexities of gender inclusion and justice. This theory suggests that gender identity does not stand alone, but intersects with other identities such as disability, socio-economic class, ethnicity, religion, and geography. This intersection of identities creates a unique and layered experience of marginalization. For example, a girl with a disability from a low-income family faces barriers that stem not only from gender or disability, but from a complex combination of these three factors [13].

## **Gender Disparity in the Indonesian Education System**

### **Gender Disparity in STEM Fields**

One consistent finding in the current literature is the persistence of significant gender disparities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Research at SMK PGRI 2 Ponorogo shows that even though access and learning opportunities between men and women are formally equal, the stereotype that women are underprivileged in engineering practice is still strong, so that women are a minority in engineering majors [14].

Falentino et al.'s research on the implementation of the Indonesian National Science Olympiad (OSN) during the 2013–2023 period revealed a number of findings that have high significance. The study showed that male participants consistently dominated almost all areas of the competition, with a statistically higher achievement difference than female participants. Overall, the proportion of female medalists only ranges from 10–30% depending on the field being pursued, while Physics, Mathematics, and Informatics are recorded as the fields that feature the most striking male dominance [15].

Deep learning-based sentiment analysis of public conversations on social media shows support for women in STEM, but there is also a lot of criticism of discrimination and gender stereotypes. This research emphasizes the importance of policies that support an inclusive work and education environment [16].

Gender stereotypes are formed from socio-cultural constructions that place men in the public space and women in the domestic space. This affects women's interest and participation in STEM fields. Therefore, the urgency of gender equality knowledge in vocational education curricula is essential to increase women's interest and participation in STEM [17].

### **Representation of Women's Leadership in Higher Education**

Hunga and Mahatma report alarming findings on women's representation in Indonesian higher education leadership [18]:

1. Of the 4,621 higher education institutions in Indonesia, only 84 (0.2%) are led by female rectors
2. Although female student participation is higher (54% in 2019), this proportion is not reflected in academic leadership positions
3. A pattern of gender segregation remains evident in the choice of study program: accounting, midwifery, pharmacy, medicine, biology, and chemistry are dominated by women (>80%), while informatics, information technology, and civil engineering are dominated by men

This phenomenon shows the so-called "*leaky pipeline*" in women's education and careers, although participation at the initial level is high, representation is significantly reduced at the leadership level.

### **Rural-Urban Education Access Gap**

Supianto et al through a comparative study of Indonesia and Malaysia highlight a serious gap in access to education between urban and rural areas [19]:

1. Women in rural areas face significant limited access to quality schools

2. Geographical factors and limited infrastructure make it difficult for women to reach quality schools
3. Lower educational enrolment rates in rural areas, especially for women
4. Women in remote areas face layered barriers that combine gender issues with geographical and economic limitations.

### **Persistence of Gender Stereotypes and Bias in the Education System**

One of the consistent findings in the literature is that gender stereotypes remain deeply rooted in the education system, both at the curriculum level, teaching materials, teacher-student interaction, and the school environment. Qualitative research in a variety of contexts shows a consistent pattern:

Indriani et al in their research on pedagogic transformations to eliminate gender stereotypes found that [19]:

1. Textbooks and learning materials often contain stereotypical gender representations
2. Men are featured in leadership roles and technical professions, while women are associated with domestic roles and jobs that require empathy
3. Teachers tend to have different expectations of men and women in terms of academic abilities and career interests
4. There is a clear pattern in participation: men are more dominant in physical activities and sports, while women are more active in arts and activities that are considered calmer

Nengyanti et al. report that when learning is designed with the principle of gender diversity, student participation increases, achievement gaps decrease, and awareness of diversity increases. The use of gender-responsive differentiated learning approaches has been proven effective in ensuring that all students have optimal learning opportunities [1].

### **Policy and Implementation Gaps**

Although Indonesia has a comprehensive policy framework on gender inclusion and justice in education, research shows significant gaps between policies and their implementation.

GESI policies in Indonesia include:

1. Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System
2. Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 70 of 2009 concerning Inclusive Education
3. Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 concerning Gender Mainstreaming (PUG)

However, the research of Hunga and Mahatma provides an important overview of the sustainability of disparities in higher education governance, especially because the principles of *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion* (GESI) have not been fully embedded in the organizational structure and operational practices of academic institutions [20]. Although the Gender Mainstreaming (PUG) policy is available, its implementation still tends to be additional and has not been fully integrated with the learning planning process and institutional culture. This situation creates a paradox, where some

policymakers think that gender issues and social inclusion are not big issues in the context of higher education, an assumption that is not in line with empirical evidence in the field. This reality is evident from the ongoing cases of gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the campus environment, which underscores the need for fundamental changes to create a truly safe and inclusive academic ecosystem for the entire academic community.

### **Capacity and Competence of Teachers in Inclusive Education and Gender Equality**

Teachers are key actors in realizing inclusive and gender-equitable education. However, research shows that teachers' understanding and capacity on these issues is still limited [21]. On the other hand, pedagogic skills that are able to integrate gender perspectives into the learning process also still need strengthening. Moreover, there is still a lack of training that focuses on an inclusive and gender-responsive learning approach, so that the competence of educators in this field has not developed optimally.

Other literature confirms that there are still many teachers who show discriminatory values, attitudes, and behaviors due to a lack of awareness and understanding of the correct concept of gender. Teachers often do not realize that their behavior is gender-biased because it is considered part of the culture of society [22].

Jamiin shows that when teachers have strong pedagogic competencies based on a deep understanding of the diversity of students, they are better able to adapt inclusive learning strategies and gender equality. The experience at SDN Balirejo Yogyakarta demonstrates that a reflective and collaborative approach in developing inclusive learning can create significant positive change [23].

### **Pedagogic Transformation Strategies for Gender Inclusion and Justice**

Pedagogic transformation is a process of updating teaching methods and approaches to create a more inclusive and empowering learning experience. This strategy involves changes at multiple levels: individual (teachers and students), institutional (school), and systemic (education policy).

### **Development of a Gender-Responsive Curriculum**

A gender-responsive curriculum should be designed with the following principles: (1) it does not contain gender bias or stereotypes; (2) integrating multi-gender perspectives and experiences; (3) develop critical skills to analyze and challenge gender injustice; (4) creating space for diverse gender identity expressions [24].

Zulaiha and Priatmoko show that the integration of gender inclusion into all components of the curriculum ranging from learning objectives, materials, methods, media, to evaluation is very important. This is not just adding a module on gender to the existing curriculum, but changing the way all materials are taught to be responsive to gender issues [25].

Research by Isnaeni and Prasetyono shows that the development of learning modules that integrate gender inclusion and equality can increase students' critical awareness of gender issues while improving their learning outcomes. A systematic literature review-based approach with the PRISMA method allows the identification of the best strategies that can be implemented [26].

Gender-responsive curriculum must avoid bias and stereotypes, integrate multi-gender experiences, and encourage critical skills to challenge injustice. Studies show that the integration of gender equality values in all components of the curriculum – objectives, materials, methods, media, and evaluation – is essential, not just adding gender modules separately [27]. The Merdeka Curriculum, for example, is beginning to adopt a multidimensional and feminist narrative, but its implementation in the classroom still needs to be further evaluated [28]. The research also highlights the importance of teacher training to be able to implement a truly gender-responsive curriculum [29].

### **Gender-Responsive Differentiated Learning**

Differentiated learning is a strategy that adapts the learning process to the individual needs, readiness, and characteristics of learners. Nengyanti et al. (2025) report that this strategy includes: (1) an initial assessment to understand each student's learning profile, including learning styles that may be influenced by gender factors; (2) flexible grouping that does not reinforce gender segregation; (3) provide different levels of assignment difficulty so that all students can learn at their capacity; (4) using various media and learning methods that are interesting to various groups of students.

Gender-responsive differentiated learning strategies include an initial assessment of students' learning profiles, flexible grouping without gender segregation, and the use of a variety of media and methods that appeal to all groups of student [20]. The implementation of this strategy has been proven to increase participation, reduce achievement gaps, and foster awareness of diversity [18]. However, challenges still arise related to limited resources, teacher knowledge, and social expectations that have not yet fully supported [21].

When learning is designed with this principle in mind, student participation increases, achievement gaps decrease, and awareness of diversity increases.

### **Creating an Inclusive and Safe Learning Environment**

An inclusive and safe learning environment includes physical access, respectful social relationships, and an anti-discrimination culture. The research emphasizes the need for clear school policies, discrimination reporting mechanisms, continuous education, and school community involvement [18], [22]. Community-based approaches and intersectionality are also recommended to strengthen inclusive practices, especially for vulnerable groups such as girls with disabilities [28].

The creation of a safe environment requires: (1) a clear policy on equality and anti-discrimination; (2) a responsive reporting and case handling mechanism that protects victims; (3) ongoing education for students, teachers, and the school community about the importance of diversity and respect for differences; (4) the active involvement of the entire school community in encouraging an inclusive culture.

### **Good Practices and Innovative Models**

Despite the challenges, there are also several initiatives and good practices that show potential in realizing gender-responsive inclusive education.

### **Community-Based Approach**

Community-based initiatives that involve the active participation of schools, families, and local communities in designing and implementing gender-responsive inclusion programs tend to be more effective and sustainable. Pranidhi shows that a holistic approach that integrates intersectional perspectives and local wisdom can create a truly inclusive and gender-responsive learning environment [21], [23].

### **Gender-Responsive Literacy Development**

Wachidah and Fathoni in their research on the instructional design of literacy lecture modules shows that gender-responsive literacy can promote equality and inclusion in primary education. Learning modules designed with gender sensitivity and inclusion perspectives in mind can improve the literacy skills of all students [13], [19].

### **Transformative Training for Teachers**

Several teacher training initiatives have shown promising results in increasing teachers' capacity and commitment to gender-responsive inclusive education. Effective training is one that: (1) is sustainable and integrated in the professional development of teachers; (2) combining theory and practice; (3) integrating intersectional perspectives; (4) involves critical reflection on teachers' own biases and stereotypes; (5) support teachers in creating a collaborative and mutually supportive learning community.

## ***Discussion***

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research confirms that gender inclusion and justice in education cannot be understood or addressed as separate issues. These two concepts are interrelated and require an integrated and comprehensive approach. Intersectionality theory provides an important framework for understanding how various social identities intersect in creating unique and layered educational experiences for learners. Furthermore, the understanding of gender as a changeable social construct provides hope that the transformation of education towards gender justice is possible.

### **Practical Implications and Strategic Recommendations**

Curriculum reform based on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion demands a thorough reform to eliminate gender bias and stereotypes in various disciplines. The integration of gender perspectives from the beginning of STEM learning is important to foster students' critical awareness, while presenting the role of women in history, science, and technology in a more proportional manner. This effort needs to be accompanied by strengthening the capacity of educators through continuous training that emphasizes inclusive pedagogy, gender sensitivity, and the ability to handle cases of gender-based violence in the school environment.

In the policy realm, an intersectionality approach must be explicitly integrated so that education policies are able to respond to the complexity of students' identities influenced by factors such as ethnicity, social class, disability, and geographical context. To ensure effective implementation, clear standards and assessment mechanisms are



needed, supported by disaggregated data and performance indicators that enable evidence-based monitoring and evaluation processes.

The success of inclusive education programs also requires synergy across government actors, schools, families, civil society, research institutions, and international organizations to strengthen advocacy and change in social norms. In addition, the empowerment of local initiatives needs to be supported through the allocation of resources and training in accordance with the needs of local communities, so that gender inclusion strategies can be adapted contextually and gain real support from the community.

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding :** This study concludes that gender inclusion and justice in education remain hindered by persistent structural barriers, including entrenched gender stereotypes, uneven teacher competence, policy fragmentation, urban–rural accessibility gaps, and limited female representation in educational leadership. **Implication :** These findings underscore the urgent need for systemic educational transformation through the development of gender-responsive curricula, differentiated and inclusive pedagogical practices, multisectoral collaboration, and the comprehensive integration of GESI principles into policy planning, implementation, and evaluation. **Limitation :** The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data from published literature and policies, which may not fully capture emerging on-the-ground dynamics or recent micro-level institutional practices. **Future Research :** Further empirical studies are needed to explore classroom-level implementation of gender-responsive pedagogy, longitudinal impacts of GESI integration, and comparative analyses across regions to strengthen evidence-based strategies for achieving equitable and inclusive education systems.

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