

Gender Equality in The Implementation of The Independent Curriculum at Madrasah Elementary School: A Case Study at Min 1 Banyumas



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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze the implementation of gender equality in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN 1 Banyumas. The Merdeka Curriculum promotes the principles of inclusivity and equality in the learning process, which includes providing equal opportunities for students regardless of gender. Although policies and the curriculum support gender equality, challenges in its practical application are still found, both in task distribution and students' perceptions. The task distribution, which is still based on gender stereotypes, such as female students being more often assigned "feminine" tasks and male students being involved in physical tasks, shows the strong influence of social norms in society. Additionally, students' perceptions of gender roles are still influenced by the social views that develop outside of school, which affects their choices in activities and career aspirations. Teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas are trying to change this perception by giving students the opportunity to explore various roles without being bound by gender norms. However, these changes require time and continuous support from various parties, including parents and the community. This study concludes that although the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides a strong foundation for gender equality, the biggest challenge lies in changing social perceptions and long-standing habits in society. A holistic approach involving the active role of all parties is needed to achieve more effective gender equality in the educational environment.

KEYWORDS- Gender Equality, Merdeka Curriculum, and Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality in education is an aspect that must be considered to create a fair and inclusive education system. Education serves not only as a means to enhance knowledge and skills but also as a medium to instill social values, including the essential value of gender equality. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has responded to the importance of gender equality by introducing the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to create a learning experience more suited to the individual needs of students. This curriculum is expected to encourage students to develop critical, creative, and collaborative skills regardless of gender (Aliyah et al., 2019). However, the implementation of gender equality within the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in religious schools like Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, remains undocumented or poorly understood, especially in contexts such as MIN 1 Banyumas.

This study delves into gender equality in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at madrasahs by utilizing various theories to clarify the urgency and direction of its application in religious-based education. For instance, Social Justice Theory provides a foundation that every student has the right to equal opportunities regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic background. Gender-based discrimination is believed to limit students' opportunities to develop optimally. Through the Merdeka Curriculum, social justice is pursued by policies that accommodate the individual needs of each student. This theory underlines the importance of implementing gender equality to provide equal learning opportunities for male and female students, particularly in their efforts to access educational resources and activities equitably.

Additionally, Feminist Theory in education offers a perspective on how education can empower women and support gender equality. In the context of religious-based schools like madrasahs, structural biases and gender stereotypes may influence the teaching and learning process, both in terms of lesson content and classroom interactions. The Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to address these gender biases by creating a more open and equal learning environment (Ayu & Filzah, 2023). By analyzing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MIN 1 Banyumas through the lens of feminist theory, we can identify whether there are roles limited or differentiated based on gender and how gender equality can be fostered in the school environment.

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Gender Role Theory is also relevant in this context, as it highlights that social roles assigned based on gender can affect students' learning opportunities and experiences. Madrasahs play a significant role in shaping students' gender perceptions, which will later influence how they participate in academic and extracurricular activities. In this regard, the Merdeka Curriculum offers a more flexible approach to accommodate more equal roles, providing equal opportunities for male and female students to contribute and grow without being constrained by rigid gender norms (Alimuddin, 2023).

On the other hand, Critical Pedagogy, developed by Paulo Freire, emphasizes the importance of education as a tool for social awareness and transformation. In the context of gender equality, critical pedagogy stresses the need to empower students to understand and challenge unjust gender norms. Through the Merdeka Curriculum, which places students at the center of learning, teachers are expected to create open spaces for discussion on gender issues so that students can critically reflect on the social roles attached to their gender and question the societal structures that limit their development.

Furthermore, Intersectionality Theory is essential in understanding students' learning experiences in madrasahs. This theory emphasizes that a person's identity is not determined by a single factor but by the interaction between gender, social class, religion, and culture. In madrasah environments, students' religious and gender identities can influence their learning experiences. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasahs must acknowledge that students face unique challenges based on their complex identities. Through this approach, policies and teaching methods applied in madrasahs can become more responsive to the needs of all students, including gender equality (Albar & Mastiah, 2022).

In the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, such as MIN 1 Banyumas, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on the principles of gender equality requires integrating Islamic values with the concepts of social justice and inclusive education. This is not merely about changes to the curriculum but also about building a school culture that supports equality, where both male and female students can participate equally in all aspects of learning. Through these theories, it is hoped that the implementation of gender equality within the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN 1 Banyumas can establish a fair and inclusive learning environment and provide insights into how religious-based schools can support change toward more equitable education for all students.

Previous studies have examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the context of formal education; however, few have specifically addressed how this curriculum is applied from the perspective of gender equality in madrasahs, which are characterized by Islamic education. Furthermore, amidst efforts to promote gender equality at the national level, madrasahs as religious-based educational institutions face distinct challenges (Barlian & Solekah, 2022). This research aims to fill this gap by uncovering how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented at MIN 1 Banyumas from the perspective of gender equality.

Several prior studies have explored the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia's formal education context, but only a few have specifically addressed the application of this curriculum in terms of gender equality, particularly in madrasah settings. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in public elementary schools, focusing on student-centered learning methods and flexible learning. Hidayat found that the Merdeka Curriculum positively impacts students' independence and critical thinking skills. However, his study did not discuss the role of gender in implementing these methods, let alone in the context of religious-based schools (Ainia, 2020).

Another study by Nurhayati examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the secondary school level, focusing on its impact on student learning outcomes. They found that the curriculum allows for more individualized learning (Nurhayati et al., 2022). However, their study only focused on academic aspects and did not address how the curriculum could play a role in promoting gender equality in schools. Meanwhile, research by Wulandari reviewed the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasahs, specifically on how it could strengthen Islamic values through a thematic approach. Although her study successfully demonstrated the adaptation of the Merdeka Curriculum to religious contexts in madrasahs, it did not explore how this approach relates to gender equality issues in madrasah settings (Wulandari et al., 2024).

In efforts to promote gender equality nationally, madrasahs as religious-based educational institutions face unique challenges compared to public schools. Amidst the increasing push for gender equality across various sectors, madrasahs often encounter distinct issues arising from the interaction between religious norms and gender equality values. Therefore, this research aims to address the gap in the literature by revealing how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented at MIN 1 Banyumas from the perspective of gender equality. This study seeks not only to understand how this new curriculum policy is received in madrasahs but also to examine the extent to which gender equality principles are applied and adapted to the Islamic educational characteristics of madrasahs.

This study stems from the observation that religious-based education often faces barriers in implementing gender equality principles, potentially limiting fair learning opportunities for all students. As a religious-based educational institution responsible for shaping a moral generation, MIN 1 Banyumas provides a compelling context to analyze how gender equality can be integrated without conflicting with existing religious values.

This research is expected to find that the Merdeka Curriculum offers greater flexibility for madrasahs to adapt a curriculum that promotes gender equality. The results of this study are expected to show that, through a contextual approach, the Islamic values

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implemented in madrasahs can align with the concept of gender equality, creating an inclusive educational environment that supports the development of all students without discrimination.

This research aims to explore and analyze how gender equality is implemented in the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN 1 Banyumas. Additionally, the study seeks to provide recommendations for other madrasahs on best practices for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum with an emphasis on gender equality principles, thereby encouraging the creation of a more inclusive and equitable education system.

II. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method with a case study approach to explore the implementation of gender equality within the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) at MIN 1 Banyumas. The case study approach was chosen to delve into the specific context of the madrasah as a faith-based educational institution that implements the national curriculum while maintaining its Islamic characteristics. With a focus on the post-positivist paradigm, this research acknowledges that social phenomena, such as the implementation of gender equality, are complex and influenced by various social, cultural, and religious factors. Therefore, this approach is used to explore the diverse realities and social constructs that shape the understanding and application of gender equality within the madrasah (Sugiyono, 2013).

The primary subject of this research is the headmaster, who plays a key role in overseeing and directing the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka at MIN 1 Banyumas. In addition, this research involves teachers from grades 1 to 6, who directly interact with students and implement the curriculum in daily teaching activities. These teachers play a critical role in observing teaching practices and addressing challenges and opportunities related to gender equality. Students are also included as research subjects to understand their experiences with the implementation of gender equality during the learning process and classroom interactions.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with the headmaster and teachers to gain insights into their perspectives, experiences, and practices related to gender equality in teaching. Classroom observations were also carried out to directly observe interactions between teachers and students, as well as behavioral patterns that may reflect attitudes and understandings of gender equality. Additionally, documentation from various sources, such as lesson plans (RPP) and evaluation notes related to the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, was used to provide supplementary data to enrich the research findings.

In this study, data analysis was conducted through the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following the interactive analysis model. The first stage, data reduction, involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying the data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. At this stage, relevant data on the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka and gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas were filtered and grouped by key topics, such as the application of gender equality in teaching, interaction patterns between teachers and students, and the challenges and opportunities faced by the madrasah. This process ensured that the data became more focused and manageable for the subsequent stages.

After the reduction process, the data were presented in the form of narratives and thematic matrices to help the researcher understand the main patterns and relationships within the data. The descriptive presentation of the data allowed the researcher to obtain an overall picture of the implementation of gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas, including how the Kurikulum Merdeka was adapted in the context of the madrasah, the roles of the headmaster and teachers, and the experiences and perceptions of students regarding gender equality in the learning process.

The final stage involved drawing conclusions. In this stage, the researcher synthesized and formulated the main findings based on the reduced and displayed data. Through this process, the conclusions are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of gender equality within the Kurikulum Merdeka at MIN 1 Banyumas, as well as the challenges and strategies employed by the headmaster, teachers, and students in creating an equitable and inclusive learning environment. These conclusions were then formulated into recommendations to support the more optimal implementation of gender equality policies in faith-based educational institutions.

III. RESULT

A. Commitment and School Policies on Gender Equality in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

MIN 1 Banyumas demonstrates a strong commitment to implementing gender equality in the execution of the Merdeka Curriculum. The principal of MIN 1 Banyumas explicitly stated that school policies are designed to ensure that all students, both male and female, have equal and inclusive learning opportunities. This commitment is realized through the creation of regulations that are impartial to any specific gender and ensuring that every student, without exception, has equal access to educational resources and facilities provided by the school.

This commitment is evident in various aspects of school policy. For instance, the school regulations mandate that roles and responsibilities in school activities, both in the classroom and extracurricular programs, are distributed equally without

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considering gender differences. These policies ensure that both male and female students have the same opportunities to participate in class leadership, group discussions, and social activities within the school.

Additionally, in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, the school supports teachers in developing teaching methods that are not only flexible but also inclusive and respectful of gender equality. The principal and teachers acknowledge that although the Merdeka Curriculum allows the integration of Islamic values into learning, these values are adapted to remain consistent with the principles of equality. For example, in Islamic studies, students are taught about gender equality not only as an academic concept but also as a religious teaching that emphasizes the importance of respecting individual rights regardless of gender.

As part of these efforts, the school actively encourages teachers to implement fair approaches in teaching. Teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas receive training and support from the principal to develop teaching methods that respect the principles of gender equality. One example is the use of group discussion methods in the classroom, where teachers ensure that male and female students have equal opportunities to actively participate, lead groups, or express their opinions. This approach reflects the school's commitment to ensuring that gender equality is not merely theoretical but becomes a tangible practice in the classroom.

In a broader perspective, MIN 1 Banyumas has successfully implemented gender equality in teaching and learning activities through policies that support inclusivity. Through these policies, the school not only complies with the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum but also takes an active role in guiding policies to build an equitable educational environment for all students.

Below is a table summarizing the data supporting the research findings on the school's commitment and policies regarding gender equality in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN 1 Banyumas:

Aspect	Description
Principal's Commitment to Gender Equality	The principal emphasizes policies that ensure male and female students have equal and inclusive learning opportunities.
School Policies on Gender Equality	The school establishes regulations that are impartial to any specific gender and ensures equal access to educational resources and facilities.
Flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum in Integrating Islamic Values	Islamic values integrated into learning are contextualized with the principles of gender equality.
Training and Support for Teachers	Teachers are trained to develop teaching methods that respect gender equality, including organizing group discussions in class.
Assignment of Roles and Responsibilities in Class	Roles and responsibilities, such as group leadership, are distributed equally regardless of gender.
Inclusive Extracurricular Activities	All students, both male and female, have equal opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities like Scouts and sports.
Equal Facilities for All Students	School facilities, such as classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, are provided with equal access for all students regardless of gender.
Integration of Gender Equality in Learning Materials	In Civics and Islamic Studies, teachers teach the principles of gender equality as part of rights and responsibilities as citizens and believers.

This table provides an overview of the policies and practices implemented at MIN 1 Banyumas to support gender equality in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The data is derived from various sources, including interviews with the principal and teachers, as well as direct classroom and extracurricular observations.

B. Teaching Practices that Support Gender Equality

Observations of teaching and learning activities at MIN 1 Banyumas reveal that teachers actively strive to implement teaching practices that promote gender equality. Teachers in grades 1 through 6 adopt collaborative learning methods that provide opportunities for all students—both boys and girls—to participate actively. A clear example of the implementation of gender equality can be seen in group discussion activities, where teachers do not assign roles based on gender. In these activities, students are free to choose roles they prefer without any gender-based task distribution. This shows that teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas aim to create a non-discriminatory learning environment where every student has equal opportunities to contribute and learn.

Furthermore, teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas demonstrate equal attention to both male and female students in various aspects of learning. Every student is given the same opportunity to ask questions, express opinions, and receive individual guidance. There is no gender-based differentiation in the teaching and learning activities, which illustrates the teachers' concrete efforts to eliminate gender barriers in classroom interactions. Teachers strive to foster an inclusive and respectful atmosphere, ensuring that all students feel valued and are treated equally, regardless of their gender.

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The application of gender equality principles is also reflected in the way teachers provide feedback and attention to students. There are no differences in how teachers provide appreciation or corrections to students' work, whether they are boys or girls. This creates a positive learning climate and supports the development of students' social and emotional skills. These efforts, according to observations, play a crucial role in encouraging students to be more confident and actively participate in the learning process, thereby enhancing the quality of education at MIN 1 Banyumas.

The following table illustrates the data supporting the observation of gender equality practices in teaching and learning activities at MIN 1 Banyumas:

Aspect	Description
Collaborative Learning Methods	Teachers in grades 1 through 6 implement collaborative learning methods, providing equal opportunities for all students, both boys and girls, to participate.
Group Discussion Without Gender-Based Role Assignment	In group discussion activities, teachers do not assign roles based on gender, allowing students to freely choose their preferred roles.
Equal Opportunities to Ask Questions	Teachers provide equal opportunities for all students to ask questions and express their opinions, regardless of gender.
Equal Individual Guidance	Every student, both boys and girls, receives equal attention and guidance from teachers during learning activities.
Equal Feedback Provision	There are no differences in how teachers provide feedback to boys and girls, ensuring fairness and equality.
Equal Appreciation	Teachers give equal recognition to boys and girls, in both academic and non-academic aspects.
Inclusive Learning Environment	Teachers create an inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued and treated equally, regardless of gender.

This table highlights various aspects that support gender equality implemented in teaching and learning activities at MIN 1 Banyumas, including the methods used, opportunities provided to students, and equal treatment for all students regardless of gender. The data were obtained through direct observation, teacher interviews, and classroom learning observations.

C. Challenges in Implementing Gender Equality in the Madrasah Environment

Although MIN 1 Banyumas demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality, this study identifies several challenges still faced in its efforts. One of the primary challenges is the persistence of gender stereotypes in everyday practices at the school. Despite the policies and teaching practices supporting gender equality, the deep-rooted social customs and norms still influence how students are treated and how tasks are divided at school.

The most noticeable example is the division of tasks, which is still largely based on traditional gender roles. Female students are often assigned tasks considered "gentle" or neat, such as organizing classroom materials, arranging books, or cleaning the classroom, while male students are more often involved in tasks that require physical strength, such as lifting items or cleaning the outdoor areas of the school. Although this practice is not based on curriculum instructions, it reflects the deep-seated application of gender stereotypes in society.

Teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas acknowledge that such task assignments are more influenced by existing social customs and norms rather than explicit curriculum policies. The teachers are also aware that while the goal of the Merdeka Curriculum is to create an inclusive and equal environment, their biggest challenge is changing the perceptions about gender roles among students and parents. They are gradually trying to reduce the impact of gender stereotypes in task assignments by giving students the opportunity to take on more diverse roles, not limited to the traditional roles expected based on their gender.

Despite these challenges, teachers are beginning to encourage students to take roles beyond gender stereotypes, and through this inclusive learning, it is hoped that students will develop a broader understanding of gender equality. However, the change is relatively slow due to the pressure from long-established social customs both inside and outside the school. Teachers hope that by continuing to apply gender equality principles in the curriculum and teaching activities, they can overcome these challenges and create a more equitable educational environment for all students.

The table below illustrates data supporting the challenges in implementing gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas:

Aspect	Description of Challenge
Gender-Based Task Division	Tasks in class are still largely based on gender stereotypes, such as female students being assigned "gentle" tasks (e.g., organizing classroom materials) and male students assigned physical tasks.

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Influence of Social Norms	Tasks at school are often divided based on existing social norms rather than ability or curriculum instructions.
Slow Change in Perception	Teachers are aware of the importance of encouraging students to take on roles beyond gender stereotypes, but change in this practice is slow due to deeply ingrained customs and perceptions.
Challenges in Inclusive Learning	Teachers are trying to create a more inclusive learning environment but face challenges in changing deeply ingrained societal perceptions about gender roles.
Parental Involvement	Some parents still hold traditional views on gender role division, influencing school policies and implementation.

This table highlights the various challenges faced in implementing gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas, including the task division influenced by gender stereotypes, the impact of existing social norms, and the challenges in changing established perceptions and customs in society. This data was obtained through classroom observations, interviews with teachers, and interactions with students' parents.

D. Students' Perceptions of Gender Equality

This study also reveals how students' perceptions of gender equality influence the teaching and learning process at MIN 1 Banyumas. Although the goal of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) is to create more inclusive and equal learning, interviews with students show that their perceptions of gender roles are still influenced by the views of the surrounding community. Some students, both boys and girls, expressed the understanding that certain roles are more suitable for each gender. For example, some girls felt more suited to fields related to social activities or caregiving, while boys tended to prefer careers that are perceived to require physical strength or leadership.

This reflects that despite the push at the policy and curriculum level to foster equality, social views that have long been ingrained in the community still influence how students understand the concept. These perceptions also seem to affect the choice of activities they participate in, where activities considered "masculine" or "feminine" are still selected based on gender. For instance, boys are more likely to choose sports or physically demanding activities, while girls are more often involved in cleaning or organizing the classroom.

Teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas are trying to change these perceptions by giving students the freedom to choose roles in various school activities regardless of gender. In practice, students are given the opportunity to participate in activities previously considered more appropriate for a specific gender. Teachers encourage students to be more open and confident in exploring various roles, both inside and outside the classroom.

However, the teachers recognize that changing these perceptions cannot happen quickly. It requires a more sustained approach and support from various parties, including parents and the community, to change these views. Teachers hope that by continuing to involve students in inclusive activities and supporting them in making decisions without considering gender, students will more easily understand and accept the concept of gender equality. Over time, gender equality is expected to become a more accepted part of students' daily lives, both in and out of school.

Here is a table illustrating data supporting the results regarding students' perceptions of gender equality in the teaching and learning process at MIN 1 Banyumas:

Aspect	Data Description
Students' Understanding of Gender Roles	Some students still perceive that certain roles are more suitable for boys or girls, such as in career choices or activity preferences.
Influence of Community Views	Students' perceptions of gender roles are strongly influenced by the social views in the surrounding community, which often limit choices and roles based on gender.
Activity Choices Based on Gender	Boys are more likely to choose activities related to physical strength or leadership, while girls prefer activities related to social tasks.
Teachers' Approach to Changing Perceptions	Teachers encourage students to choose diverse roles regardless of gender, but this requires time and continued support to change students' perceptions.
Involvement of Parents and Community	Parents and the community also play a role in shaping students' perceptions of gender roles, which can support or hinder the implementation of gender equality at school.

This table illustrates the data supporting the understanding of students' perceptions of gender equality. Data collected through interviews with students, teachers, and parents indicate that although efforts are being made to change gender perceptions through school policies, the influence of the surrounding community, habits, and social norms remains strong and needs further attention.

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Challenges in Implementing Gender Equality at MIN 1 Banyumas are a complex issue, even though the school demonstrates a strong commitment to this effort. One of the main challenges identified is the persistence of gender stereotypes in everyday practices at school. Although the policies and teaching practices in the school support equality, long-standing social norms in the community continue to affect how students are treated and how tasks are divided at school.

One of the most striking examples is the task division, which is still often based on traditional gender roles. Girls are frequently chosen for "gentler" or tidier tasks, such as organizing classroom equipment, arranging books, or cleaning the classroom, while boys are more often involved in physically demanding tasks, such as lifting items or cleaning outdoor areas. This practice, despite no explicit curriculum instructions, still reflects the deeply rooted gender stereotypes in society. Teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas acknowledge that this task division is more influenced by the existing social habits and norms than by any policy outlined in the curriculum.

Nevertheless, teachers also recognize that although the goal of *Kurikulum Merdeka* is to create an inclusive and equal environment, their biggest challenge is changing the deeply ingrained perceptions of gender roles among students and parents. They are working to gradually reduce the influence of gender stereotypes in task division by giving students opportunities to take on more diverse roles, not limited to traditional roles based on gender. This is not an easy task, as change occurs slowly due to the long-established social habits both within and outside the school.

Despite this challenge, teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas are beginning to encourage students to take on more diverse roles, beyond existing gender stereotypes. Through an inclusive learning approach, they hope students will develop a broader understanding of gender equality. However, this change does not happen overnight, as pressure from established social habits in the community continues. Teachers hope that by continuing to implement gender equality principles in the curriculum and teaching activities, they can overcome this challenge and create a more equal educational environment for all students.

E. Efforts and Recommendations to Improve the Implementation of Gender Equality at MIN 1 Banyumas

Based on the research findings, MIN 1 Banyumas has taken positive steps in implementing gender equality, but there is still room for improvement. One of the recommendations from this study is the need for training and awareness programs for teachers and school staff on the importance of gender equality in education. In addition, programs involving parents and the school community are necessary to reduce the gender stereotypes that still exist in society and can influence the school environment.

By organizing targeted awareness and training programs, it is hoped that educators will become more skilled in encouraging students to participate in various activities equally. The school is also expected to integrate gender equality values into various extracurricular activities and student organizations. In conclusion, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at MIN 1 Banyumas can be more effectively implemented in the context of gender equality through strong collaboration between the school, teachers, students, and the community.

Below is a table summarizing the recommendations based on the research findings regarding the implementation of gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas:

Recommendation	Description of Recommendation
Training and Awareness for Teachers and Staff	A training and awareness program is needed for teachers and school staff on the importance of gender equality in education to improve their skills in implementing this concept.
Programs Involving Parents and the School Community	It is important to involve parents and the school community in awareness programs to reduce gender stereotypes still prevalent in society and ensure gender equality at school.
Increasing Student Participation in Equal Activities	Programs that encourage both male and female students to participate in various school activities equally, without gender discrimination.
Integrating Gender Equality in Extracurricular Activities	The school needs to integrate gender equality values into extracurricular activities and student organizations to support the inclusive development of students.
Collaboration between School, Teachers, Students, and the Community	Strong collaboration between the school, teachers, students, and the community is needed to create a more inclusive and equal environment in the implementation of <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> .

This table organizes the recommendations generated from the research on the implementation of gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas, which includes teacher training, programs involving parents, increasing student participation, and integrating gender equality in extracurricular activities. The table also shows the data sources underlying each recommendation, whether from interviews, observations, or research findings.

The perception of students regarding gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas shows that although educational policies and the curriculum support efforts to create inclusive and equal learning, social views prevalent in society still influence how students

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understand and accept the concept of gender equality. Interviews with students revealed that many of them, both boys and girls, believe that certain roles are more suitable for each gender. For example, some female students feel more inclined to choose career paths or activities related to social work or caregiving, while male students are more interested in careers that require physical strength or leadership.

This perception also affects the activities students choose to participate in. Male students tend to choose activities related to physical strength or leadership, such as sports, while female students are more often involved in activities seen as more social, like cleaning and organizing the classroom. This reflects that, despite policy encouragement for gender equality, societal norms still limit the choices and roles students take, both inside and outside the school.

To change this perception, the teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas have made efforts to provide students the freedom to choose roles in various school activities without considering gender. Teachers provide opportunities for students to participate in activities previously seen as more suitable for a particular gender, such as encouraging female students to join sports or urging male students to engage in social activities. Teachers hope that through this approach, students will become more open and confident in exploring various roles, both inside and outside the classroom (Selvira, 2023).

However, changing students' perceptions cannot happen overnight. Teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas recognize that transforming these views requires a more sustained approach and support from various parties, including parents and the community. They hope that by continuously involving students in inclusive activities and allowing them to choose roles without considering gender, students will more easily understand and accept the concept of gender equality. With sufficient time and ongoing support, it is hoped that gender equality will become a more accepted part of students' daily lives.

IV. DUSCUSSION

A. Commitment and School Policies on Gender Equality in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

MIN 1 Banyumas has successfully implemented policies that support gender equality in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The school head's strong commitment to gender equality is clearly reflected in the policies, wher all students, both male and female, are provided equal opportunities in various aspects of education, both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities .

The policies implemented by the school not only emphasize the fair division of roles between male and female students but also ensure that educational facilities, such as classrooms, libraries, and laboratories, are accessible to all students regardless of gender. This provides an overview of the successful implementation of gender equality principles that are consistently applied across all levels of the school (Butler, 2020).

The school's policy ensuring equality of roles in the classroom is reflected in the fair distribution of tasks and responsibilities, regardless of the students' gender. This is also evident in the application of teaching methods that prioritize group discussions, where all students are given equal opportunities to lead groups or express opinions (Davita & Pujiastuti, 2020). This shows the school's effort to create an inclusive learning environment that does not differentiate based on gender, allowing each student to develop to their fullest potential.

In terms of extracurricular activities, such as Scouts and sports, the school also provides equal opportunities for both male and female students to participate. This emphasizes that gender equality is applied not only in classroom learning but also in activities outside the classroom that support students' character development and skills (Huda & Dodi, 2020).

The training and support provided to teachers also play an important role in the success of gender equality policy implementation. Teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas are trained to develop teaching methods that respect gender equality. This allows teachers to implement principles of inclusivity in every aspect of teaching, both in the material and in interactions with students.

The application of gender equality is in line with the educational theories underlying the policies applied at the school. For example, John Rawls' theory of educational justice emphasizes the importance of providing equal opportunities to all individuals without gender discrimination, which is reflected in the policy at MIN 1 Banyumas (Rawls, 2008). Furthermore, the theory of gender equality in education according to Meyer is also emphasized, where education should provide a fair space for all students without limiting their roles based on gender. In this context, MIN 1 Banyumas has successfully ensured that both male and female students have equal opportunities in all activities carried out.

Vygotsky's social constructivism theory also provides the foundation for the learning approach applied at the school. Learning that involves social interaction between male and female students in group discussions supports their understanding of gender equality (Vigotsky et al., 2018). This indicates that MIN 1 Banyumas not only applies inclusive teaching methods but also encourages students to internalize the values of equality through learning experiences with their peers from diverse backgrounds.

Additionally, Ainscow's inclusive education theory can be applied to this school policy, which emphasizes that every student should be given equal opportunities to develop without distinguishing gender. This is reflected in the policy that ensures equal access to all school facilities and activities.

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The importance of gender equality in education is also supported by the feminist theory presented by Apple, which emphasizes the need to create an educational environment that is responsive to gender inequality. At MIN 1 Banyumas, the policy of fair task division and inclusive extracurricular activities shows that the school is striving to create an environment that supports diversity and avoids all forms of gender discrimination.

Finally, the human rights theory expressed by Amartya Sen in "Development as Freedom" also serves as the foundation for the gender equality policy at this school. Education is considered a fundamental right of every individual, and the gender equality policy at MIN 1 Banyumas ensures that every student has the same right to develop in an equal and inclusive environment.

Overall, this study shows that MIN 1 Banyumas has successfully integrated the principles of gender equality into school policies and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The steps taken by the school head and teachers to create a fair and inclusive educational environment have successfully provided equal opportunities for all students, regardless of gender, allowing them to develop well both academically and in social skills and character.

B. Teaching Practices that Support Gender Equality

The teaching practices that support gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas are reflected in the active efforts of the teachers to implement inclusive and non-discriminatory learning methods. Based on observations, teachers in grades 1 through 6 adopt collaborative learning methods that provide equal opportunities for all students, both boys and girls, to participate actively. One clear example of the application of gender equality is seen in group discussions, where the teacher does not differentiate student roles based on gender. Students are free to choose roles according to their preferences, without any task division based on gender. This emphasizes that learning at MIN 1 Banyumas is focused on the value of inclusivity, where all students have equal opportunities to contribute and participate.

In addition, the teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas show equal attention to both male and female students in various aspects of learning. Every student is given the same opportunity to ask questions, express opinions, and receive personal guidance without any differential treatment based on gender. This creates a positive learning atmosphere that supports the development of students' social and emotional skills. The teachers strive to create an inclusive environment where every student feels valued and treated equally, regardless of their gender.

The application of gender equality is also reflected in the way teachers provide feedback and appreciation for students' work. There is no difference in how teachers give praise or corrections to students, whether male or female (Luthfiyah et al., 2023). This creates a positive learning climate that encourages students to be more confident and actively participate in the learning process. This shows that the teachers not only avoid gender discrimination but also actively work to create equal opportunities for all students.

These teaching practices that support gender equality align with various educational theories that emphasize fairness, inclusivity, and active participation. Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory highlights the importance of social interaction in learning. Vygotsky stated that knowledge is built through collaboration, and by applying collaborative learning methods, the teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas have created a space for both boys and girls to exchange ideas and build knowledge together. This collaboration provides equal opportunities for all students to learn without gender-based limitations.

Moreover, the critical pedagogy theory developed by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is highly relevant to MIN 1 Banyumas's efforts to create a discrimination-free learning environment. Freire argued that education should allow all students to actively participate in the learning process without discrimination, and the practices implemented at MIN 1 Banyumas reflect this principle. The teachers at this school give equal opportunities for all students to ask questions, express opinions, and receive individual guidance without considering gender, creating a space where all students feel valued (Freire, 2018).

Nelly Stromquist's theory of gender equality in education is also relevant in this context. Stromquist suggests that education must eliminate gender stereotypes and provide equal opportunities for all individuals to develop. The practices at MIN 1 Banyumas, where feedback and appreciation are given equally to both male and female students, demonstrate the implementation of this theory. The teachers do not differentiate between students based on gender, allowing them to feel valued and encouraged to participate actively without being hindered by gender roles or expectations (Kumalasari, 2022).

Ainscow's inclusive education theory also supports the application of gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas. Ainscow argues that education must accommodate the needs and potential of every student without exception. The teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas create an inclusive environment by providing equal opportunities for all students, both male and female, to develop. This shows that MIN 1 Banyumas not only avoids gender discrimination but also strives to create a space where every student, regardless of gender, can grow and develop to their fullest potential.

Overall, the teaching practices at MIN 1 Banyumas reflect the integration of various educational theories that support gender equality. The teachers at this school not only avoid gender discrimination but also actively create spaces that allow all students to learn, grow, and contribute without gender limitations. This illustrates the school's commitment to creating an equal and inclusive educational environment that supports the development of all students, both male and female, in every aspect of their learning.

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C. Challenges in Implementing Gender Equality in the Madrasah Environment

The implementation of gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas faces several challenges, despite the strong commitment to creating an inclusive and fair learning environment. One of the main challenges identified is the persistence of gender stereotypes that continue to emerge in daily practices at school. Although there are policies supporting gender equality, deeply rooted social norms in society still influence how students are treated, including in the division of tasks at school.

For instance, the division of tasks in the classroom is still often based on traditional gender roles. Female students are more often selected for tasks considered “gentler,” such as organizing classroom materials, arranging books, or cleaning the classroom, while male students are usually assigned tasks involving physical strength, such as lifting objects or cleaning the school’s outdoor areas (Maspupah, 2018). This practice, although not based on curriculum instructions, still reflects strong gender stereotypes that are deeply ingrained in society and influence children's perceptions from an early age.

A relevant theory to analyze this phenomenon is Albert Bandura's theory of social influence, which shows how gender norms and stereotypes are formed and reinforced through social models. In this context, the social norm expecting females to perform domestic work and males to engage in physical tasks is learned and accepted by students through observation of their social environment. Bandura argues that this behavior is learned through observation and imitation, meaning that, although the school’s curriculum encourages equality, everyday practices influenced by these social norms still dominate and are difficult to change (Bandura, 2001).

The teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas recognize that the influence of social norms is much stronger and more ingrained than the existing policies. They also admit that, despite their efforts to encourage students to take roles beyond gender stereotypes, changes in these habits and perceptions are slow. This indicates a tension between formal policies promoting equality and the social reality on the ground. Teachers feel that, to overcome this challenge, they need to take a more systematic and gradual approach, involving all parties, including students and parents, in the process of change (R. B. Nugroho, 2022).

One relevant educational theory in this context is Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of education in liberating students from oppressive influences, including gender stereotypes. Freire argued that education should open spaces for students to become agents of change who can transform existing social structures (Salami & Widyanto, 2018). In this case, education at MIN 1 Banyumas should not only teach knowledge but also create critical awareness about gender stereotypes in society. Teachers need to become facilitators who help students identify and overcome obstacles, including social norms that limit their potential.

Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development can also provide a deeper perspective on the process of changing perceptions about gender roles. Kohlberg proposed that moral development occurs in stages, where individuals begin to form a more complex understanding of justice and equality (Kohlberg, 1966). In this context, students at MIN 1 Banyumas may be at a stage of moral development where they begin to understand that equality is not only about the opportunity to perform the same tasks, but also about removing limitations based on gender. However, this change requires time and a continuous process because traditional perceptions formed over a long period are difficult to alter quickly.

Additionally, this challenge is also related to the involvement of parents in supporting gender equality. Many parents still hold traditional views on gender roles, which can influence policies and implementation at school. This aligns with Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which states that individual development is influenced by various interacting systems, including family and society. In this case, parents who still hold traditional views on gender roles can become barriers to implementing gender equality at school, even though teachers are trying to encourage change.

Thus, although MIN 1 Banyumas has shown strong commitment to gender equality, the challenges faced, such as entrenched social norms, slow perception changes, and parental involvement, remain obstacles that need to be addressed. The implementation of inclusive education based on gender equality requires a holistic and integrated approach that involves students, teachers, parents, and the wider community. In this way, gender equality in education is expected to be realized more comprehensively and sustainably.

D. Students' Perceptions of Gender Equality

The implementation of gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas faces quite complex challenges, even though the school demonstrates a strong commitment to implementing the inclusive and equitable Merdeka Curriculum. This study shows that despite the existence of policies supporting gender equality, students' perceptions of gender roles are still heavily influenced by the social norms prevailing in the surrounding community. This is reflected in the students' understanding, where they still believe that certain roles are more suitable for either boys or girls. For example, many female students feel more inclined to engage in social or caregiving fields, while male students are more interested in roles that require physical strength or leadership. This phenomenon illustrates the strong influence of social factors shaping gender perceptions among children, even though the curriculum is directed toward more inclusive learning (Selvira, 2023).

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In this context, gender socialization theories are highly relevant in explaining these phenomena. Gender Socialization Theory, as explained by Kumalasari shows that children begin to be shaped by the social norms present in their environment from an early age, whether at home, in school, or in the community (Kumalasari, 2022). Formal education at school plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of gender roles, but at the same time, the influence of the social environment, including family and society, remains significant in shaping the way students think and behave regarding gender. In this regard, although MIN 1 Banyumas has made efforts to promote inclusive learning, the application of gender equality theory cannot be realized quickly without profound changes in the social norms existing outside the school.

The division of tasks still based on gender stereotypes at school, such as assigning female students to tasks related to cleanliness and tidiness, while male students are tasked with physically demanding roles, also reflects the strong influence of these social norms. Although there is no explicit instruction in the school's policies that mandates gender-based task assignments, this habit remains deeply ingrained in daily practices. According to Social Role Theory, as proposed by Nugroho this gender-based task division reflects the social expectations that have been formed in society, where men and women are considered to have different roles (B. Nugroho, 2023). This influence is difficult to change because it has been formed in society, both in cultural and social contexts. Therefore, addressing this issue requires joint efforts from various parties, including teachers, parents, and the community, to gradually change perceptions of gender roles.

The biggest challenge faced by teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas is changing the deeply rooted perceptions of students and parents regarding gender roles. Although the Merdeka Curriculum encourages equal learning, changing these views requires time and a consistent approach. Teachers strive to provide students with the freedom to choose various roles without considering gender, even though they realize that this change will not happen overnight. As explained in the Social Change Theory, that changes in attitudes and perceptions toward gender roles can indeed occur slowly, but with a systematic and consistent approach, these changes can be achieved. Teachers hope that by involving students in more inclusive activities and supporting them in making decisions regardless of gender, they can accelerate this change (Hasbullah et al., 2022).

Moreover, Educational Feminism Theory offers a deeper perspective on the importance of education not only teaching gender equality but also eliminating differences based on sex. In this context, the application of feminist theory in practice at MIN 1 Banyumas is expected to create a more inclusive classroom and provide equal opportunities for all students to take part in all types of activities. This theory emphasizes that education should eliminate gender-based discrimination and provide equal space for both men and women to develop.

On the other hand, the Social Constructionism Theory, as explained by Bandura can help explain why gender-based task division still persists because the existing gender roles are social constructs formed through social interaction in society. The formation of gender perceptions does not only occur within the school context but is also reinforced by the social norms present in society (Bandura, 1989). Therefore, to change these established gender roles, changes in social interactions both inside and outside of school are required. With an awareness of this social construction, it is hoped that there will be a shift in the way students view gender roles, especially if they are taught to be more open to various roles regardless of gender.

Overall, the implementation of gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas shows that although policies and curricula support equality, changing gender perceptions among students and the community takes time and continuous effort. By integrating relevant theories, such as gender socialization theory, social role theory, social change theory, educational feminism, and social constructionism, it is hoped that educators can find effective solutions to address gender stereotypes. The application of gender equality principles in education at MIN 1 Banyumas is expected to create a more equal educational environment for all students, without exception.

E. Efforts and Recommendations to Improve the Implementation of Gender Equality at MIN 1 Banyumas

The findings from the study on gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas indicate that while the school has taken positive steps towards implementing gender equality, there is still room for improvement. One key recommendation from the study is the need for training and awareness programs for teachers and staff regarding the importance of gender equality in education. These programs would help educators become more skilled at implementing gender-inclusive practices in their teaching. Furthermore, involving parents and the school community in awareness initiatives is crucial in reducing gender stereotypes that continue to influence society and, consequently, the school environment. The involvement of the community and parents could play a significant role in minimizing societal gender biases within the school setting (Rasmuin et al., 2023).

By organizing targeted awareness and training programs, it is hoped that educators will be better equipped to encourage students to participate equally in various school activities, regardless of their gender. Schools are also encouraged to integrate gender equality values into extracurricular activities and student organizations, creating an inclusive learning environment that supports the development of both male and female students. Ultimately, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIN 1 Banyumas can be optimized by fostering strong collaboration among the school, teachers, students, and the broader community, ensuring that gender equality is embraced in all facets of school life.

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Despite the school's efforts, students' perceptions of gender equality remain influenced by societal norms. Interviews with students revealed that many, both male and female, continue to hold views that certain roles are more suited to their gender. For example, some female students felt that their future careers or activities should align with caregiving or social work, while male students leaned toward careers that were perceived to require physical strength or leadership qualities. These perceptions also influence their participation in school activities, with male students gravitating towards sports or leadership roles, while female students tended to engage in activities related to social tasks or classroom management (Wahab & Kahar, 2022). This shows that, despite educational policies promoting gender equality, students' understanding of gender roles is still shaped by the broader social context in which they live.

The efforts of teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas to address this issue involve offering students the freedom to choose roles in various school activities regardless of gender. Teachers encourage female students to engage in sports, while urging male students to participate in social or caregiving activities. This approach is designed to help students become more open-minded and confident in exploring roles that are traditionally seen as gender-specific. However, changing students' perceptions is not a quick process, and the teachers are aware that sustained efforts and support from various stakeholders, including parents and the wider community, are necessary. They hope that through continuous involvement in inclusive activities and providing students with the freedom to choose roles based on interest rather than gender, students will better understand and accept the concept of gender equality. Over time, and with ongoing support, gender equality will likely become more ingrained in students' daily lives.

To delve deeper into the influence of students' perceptions of gender equality, several social and educational theories can be referenced. Socialization Theory explains that from an early age, individuals are exposed to social norms that distinguish the roles of males and females (Ulfah & Felicia, 2019). In the context of schools, children learn about gender roles through interactions with parents, peers, and educators. While the curriculum promotes more inclusive learning, the influence of family and the broader social environment still plays a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of gender roles.

Moreover, the Social Role Theory is also relevant for understanding how the division of tasks and roles in everyday life is often based on socially constructed ideas of what is deemed "appropriate" for males and females. In this case, students' perceptions, influenced by societal norms, lead them to see certain activities as suitable for one gender or the other. For instance, male students tend to choose activities involving physical strength, while female students prefer socially-oriented activities because they perceive these choices as part of their gender identity (Utami, 2019).

Social Constructivism also helps to explain why gender perceptions are formed and persist. This theory posits that perceptions about gender are constructed through social interactions and daily experiences. Although students learn about gender equality at school, their experiences outside of school, particularly in the home and the community, play a significant role in shaping their views. Therefore, changing students' perceptions of gender requires a holistic approach that involves the active participation of families, communities, and the school itself (Setiawan et al., 2022)

Social Learning Theory, introduced by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the importance of role models in shaping behavior. Students learn by observing and imitating the behaviors of those around them. If they consistently observe a division of tasks and roles based on traditional gender norms, they are likely to imitate such behaviors (Bandura, 1982). Therefore, teachers who model gender equality are critical in helping students reshape their perceptions.

Overall, changing students' perceptions of gender equality at MIN 1 Banyumas requires sustained effort over time. The support of the school, parents, and the community is crucial for creating more comprehensive changes. With a better understanding of these theories, the process of changing students' gender perceptions can be more effective, and gender equality can be more readily accepted and integrated into students' everyday lives.

CONCLUSIONS

Gender equality within the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at MIN 1 Banyumas is aimed at creating an inclusive and equal educational environment for all students, regardless of gender. Although policies and the curriculum explicitly support gender equality, challenges in its implementation persist at both the policy level and in everyday practices. The Kurikulum Merdeka provides flexibility for teachers to develop teaching materials that promote equality and fairness, including in terms of task division and roles in school activities. However, despite these efforts, task allocation in the classroom is still influenced by gender stereotypes that prevail in society. Female students are often chosen for tasks considered "delicate" or requiring attention to detail, while male students are more often involved in tasks that demand physical strength. Teachers at MIN 1 Banyumas are working to reduce the influence of these stereotypes by offering wider opportunities for students to participate in various roles, without being tied to traditional gender-based roles. Additionally, students' perceptions of gender equality are still influenced by social views in the surrounding community. Despite teachers' efforts to guide students to be more open and choose roles without considering gender, changes in these perceptions do not happen instantly. A sustained effort and support from various parties, including parents and the community, are needed to help students better understand and accept the concept of gender equality in a broader sense. Overall, while the Kurikulum Merdeka provides a strong foundation for the implementation of gender equality, the

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challenge of changing social habits and perceptions in the community remains a barrier. To achieve more effective gender equality, a more holistic and collaborative approach is required, involving active roles from all parties both inside and outside the school.

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