

Gender Justice Theology-Based Education: Revitalization as A Normative and Transformative Framework for Achieving Dignified Equality

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed to discuss the revitalization of education grounded in the theology of gender justice by questioning the foundations as a normative and transformative space. In this context, gender inequality across social dimensions was reported from social structures, exclusive-textual religious interpretations, patriarchal culture, and education not grounded in equality and freedom. This qualitative literature review examined the relationship among theological values, gender justice, and critical education. The results showed that the theology of gender justice needed to be revitalized through a reinterpretation of religion, free from discriminatory ideologies, emphasizing the human side of dignity, justice, and social responsibility. In principle, education should be understood as a space for the inheritance of normative values and the formation of critical awareness, the uprooting of gender stereotypes, and the strengthening of just relations between men and women. Therefore, dignified gender equality prohibits the use of natural biological differences as a basis for subordination, discrimination, or restrictions on access to education, leadership, and social participation.

KEYWORDS: Gender Justice Theology, Transformative Education, Dignified Equality, Religious Interpretation, Critical Education

I. INTRODUCTION

As a social phenomenon, women are often the objects of exploitation, violence, molestation, and confinement, which marginalizes social space. Various incidents affecting the moral conscience often occur, placing women as objects of exploitation, violence, and harassment. The perpetrators are religious leaders and educators who are well-known in society. Gender justice remains a crucial issue in social, religious, and educational life. Understanding gender concerns the social construction of roles, responsibilities, behaviors, and expectations based on sex. The representative definition of gender is based on WHO provisions. The WHO defines gender as the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys, including the norms, behaviors, and associated roles. Gender injustice is the result of socio-cultural construction, including gender-biased religious interpretations that can be criticized and corrected.

In theological contexts, religion, with the teachings of justice, compassion, equality, and mercy, is often interpreted destructively, deviating from human qualities and respect for human dignity. Islamic scholar Amina Wadud (1999) clarified the position of women in Islam, particularly the Quran, by placing women and men as equal moral subjects before God. Amina Wadud rejects interpretations that position men's experiences as the sole basis of truth and advances the Quran to consider contextual, linguistic, and justice-oriented principles. A rereading of the sacred text from a female perspective is necessary. Meanwhile, Asma Barlas (2002) developed a reading that emphasized the egalitarian and anti-patriarchal nature of the Quran's teachings. As a holy book, the Quran does not support the oppression of women, but paves the way for sexual and moral equality between men and women. The primary issue is often not the text of Revelation but the patriarchal human interpretation.

From this perspective, inequitable and patriarchal interpretations of religion are the triggers for the oppression of women. Women are positioned as subordinates, restricted in movements, or considered to lack equal capacity in the domestic, public, educational, and leadership spheres. Clearly, sacred and religious texts should be read more fairly, inclusively, and without patriarchal bias. Religion truly functions as a blessing in social life, particularly in relations with women.

Education plays a strategic role in upholding egalitarian values and eradicating patriarchal culture, as part of the moral responsibility to address gender inequality. The concept often loses the egalitarian function, allowing patriarchal culture to persist and triggering discriminatory practices in educational institutions supposed to address gender moral deviations. The educational environment can become a tool for reproducing unequal relations, disregarding equality norms and perpetuating gender stereotypes, such as the subordinate status held by men. Education should also serve as a space for social transformation by enhancing critical awareness, promoting equal relationships, and shaping students into individuals who respect the dignity of

Gender Justice Theology-Based Education: Revitalization as A Normative and Transformative Framework for Achieving Dignified Equality

others. UNESCO's 2024 Gender Report emphasized that forms of exclusion and inequality persisted even though women's access to education globally improved over the past two decades. Therefore, education needs to improve the orientation, focusing on the transfer of knowledge, ethical awareness, and just social action.

The commitment to gender equality has a clear legal and policy foundation. Indonesia has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women under Law Number 7 of 1984. Furthermore, Presidential Instruction Number 9 of 2000 mandates gender mainstreaming in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of national development policies. According to Said Agil Husin (2005), gender mainstreaming is a strategy for integrating gender across multiple policy dimensions. This commitment shows that gender equality has become a moral imperative, a noble value, and a public policy agenda integrated into the Islamic religious education system.

Based on the description above, this study aims to explain the revitalization of gender justice theology through normative and transformative education. Normative education includes the process of instilling values of justice, dignity, and moral responsibility. Meanwhile, transformative education is understood as uprooting structures of injustice, building critical awareness, and promoting social change.

II. METHOD

From a methodological perspective, this literature review was conducted using a qualitative approach. The study used different books and scholarly analyses as data sources. Data were collected through a literature review focused on gender justice theology, transformative education, religious interpretation, and gender equality policies. The primary sources included books, scholarly studies, reports from international institutions, and relevant national regulations.

In line with the approach, the analysis was descriptive-critical. The descriptive component presented the concepts of gender justice theology and transformative education. The critical component examined how religious interpretation and educational practices could be sources of inequality and injustice, or instruments of human liberation and dignity.

III. THEORETICAL STUDY

A. Theology of Gender Justice as a Normative Foundation

The initial part of this study is important for emphasizing the meaning of gender justice theology. From various references to thought, gender justice theology refers to the doctrine of divinity as a fundamental principle with teaching values in morality, equality, mutual respect, justice, and respect for human dignity and worth. Gender justice theology is a way of understanding Islamic teachings, specifically the Quran, by placing women and men as equal moral subjects before God. The Quran rejects treating male experience as the sole center of truth. Attention should be given to context, language, and principles of justice when reading the verses. The sacred text of the Quran should be understood from a woman's perspective (Amina Wadud, 1999). A similar opinion is expressed by Nasaruddin Umar (1999), where gender justice theology is a way of reading the Quran fairly since religious texts are not used as a tool to legitimize patriarchal culture. The concept of gender equality clearly distinguishes between natural biological differences and culturally shaped gender roles, ensuring that religious texts are not used as a tool to legitimize patriarchal culture. From this perspective, gender theology transmits a crucial message including the liberation of humanity from all forms of discrimination, the promotion of mutual empowerment, and the strengthening of dignity for women.

Religion is often used as a normative basis for justifying patriarchal relations, due to two main factors, namely (1) minimal understanding of religious values regarding the position of women, and (2) disproportionate and subordinating interpretations of religion for women (Said Agil Husin, 2005). In this context, the interpretation of the verses of the Quran that are patriarchal in nature from the name of God should be free. The main problem of injustice is often not the text of Revelation but the patriarchal way of reading and placing men at the center of socio-religious authority (Asma Barlas, 2002). The Quran, with the doctrine of monotheism and moral values, lays the basis for sexual and moral equality between men and women. A positive understanding of religion produces clear thinking that Islam emphasizes justice, humanity, respect for the nobility of women, and equal relations between men and women. According to Musdah Mulia (2007), Islam should not be understood as a religion that justifies oppression, because the basic value is the glorification of human beings without gender discrimination.

Theologically grounded gender justice emphasizes relationships of mutual empowerment, justice, love, and friendship as manifestations of God's presence in human life (Carter Heyward, 1989). The biological differences between men and women are not a sign of domination but a relational energy that liberates and restores human dignity, including women's. The continued oppression of women through patriarchal religious structures constitutes a violation of women's dignity. Every human being is inherently endowed with freedom, equality, and equity as gifts from God. This theology does not aim to reduce the normative dimension in social life or change religion within the clutches of a particular ideology, but return religious interpretation to the fundamental value, namely justice. From this perspective, religion needs to be interpreted in the historical and socio-cultural context with an inclusive method, not used as a tool to justify the domination of one gender over another.

Gender Justice Theology-Based Education: Revitalization as A Normative and Transformative Framework for Achieving Dignified Equality

In Islamic tradition, the principle of gender justice can be understood through the value of monotheism, which affirms the absolute authority of God. Therefore, no human being has the right to be positioned as the center of authority or to dominate others. This serves as the basis for building the relationship between men and women on the principles of mutual need, responsibility, and dignity as fellow creatures of God. Riffat Hassan (1984) criticized religious assumptions that placed women in a secondary role, particularly regarding the creation, the fall of humanity, and purpose. The Quran affirms that both men and women are God's dignified creations.

The implications of the value of monotheism for gender justice are as follows. First, no individual has the right to dominate or enslave another because God possesses absolute authority and human beings are obligated to worship Him. This principle rejects hierarchical relationships that position men as dominant authority figures and women as subordinate or complementary subjects. These hierarchical arrangements institutionalize unequal power relations by granting men authority over women. Second, all human beings are created with equal dignity and status. Even though men and women possess distinct biological characteristics, the differences do not justify exploitation or unequal treatment. Biological differences signify mutual interdependence and complementarity rather than a basis for domination or oppression. Third, human beings are endowed with emotions to cultivate harmonious relationships founded on love, mutual responsibility, and freedom from violence. The capacity for emotional connection reflects the inherent dignity and worth shared equally by both genders. Fourth, human beings are created with a profound spiritual purpose. Human dignity before God is determined by piety and devotion to the Almighty Creator.

From another perspective, gender justice theology provides an equal path and creates space to express experiences through thought and action, free from unilateral male domination. Women automatically gain adequate space in the reproduction of knowledge and in social and religious matters. However, women face obstacles in the expression of active subjects in the social space of equality. The gender continues to be subordinate subjects in the social system, even though competence is constrained by the veil of injustice. This is a result of the legitimacy of patriarchal culture, gender-biased interpretations of Quranic verses, and the placement of men at the center of socio-religious authority. Based on this perspective, religious understanding should be reoriented to recognize the shared nature and inherent dignity of all human beings within a framework that promotes equality.

The essence of this section of discussion is that revitalizing the theology of gender justice requires the intellectual courage to distinguish between normative religious teachings and biased interpretations of the Quran. Religious teachings have universal value, while the interpretation is influenced by social, cultural, and political contexts as well as power relations. Therefore, interpretations that perpetuate the subordination of women require scientific and ethical reexamination.

B. Education as a Normative Space

Education is loaded with noble values, intended to elevate human dignity. The orientation space is related to the spiritual dimensions of human life that need to be fulfilled. Education functions to cultivate fundamental values concerning human dignity, including justice, responsibility, and respect for others when understood as a normative space. This is very necessary in the middle of an era of sophisticated technology. The nation is facing human problems in the form of violence, anarchy, and conflict (Abd. Rachman Assegaf, 2011). In the middle of the nation's social mosaic, students are experiencing multidimensional crises. For example, social, religious, and cultural conflicts, as well as character crises, are caused by education that is not grounded in humanity and civilization (Juwono Sudarsono, 2008). In the context of gender justice, civilization-based education is necessary to avoid a crisis in relations with women. Furthermore, education should teach that men and women have equal rights to learn, think, lead, express opinions, create, and make decisions. This platform is used for internalizing normative values in students. The realization of the values requires the comprehensive use of educational instruments to achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes. These values should be integrated into the curriculum, teaching materials, instructional language, teacher–student relationships, and the institutional culture of educational institutions. The interactions in educational institutions within the learning space and the broader educational environment collectively constitute a learning environment that strengthens gender equality. Education indirectly perpetuates gender stereotypes when textbooks continue to portray men as leaders, breadwinners, and primary decision-makers while confining women to domestic roles. Conversely, a more equitable social imagination is enhanced when teaching materials present women and men as equally active, rational, spiritual, and social actors. From this perspective, education plays a key role in preventing and overcoming the culture of gender stereotypes, providing hope for upholding the principles of equality and gender justice.

The primary task of education extends beyond developing knowledge and competencies. The concept improves spiritual awareness and sensitivity to the importance of dignified, humane equality. Normative education is crucial in enhancing awareness that equality is not a threat to religion, family, or culture. Dignified equality strengthens social life because every human being is given the space to develop according to potential and responsibilities. In this framework, men and women are not perceived as losing position and seeking dominance, respectively.

Gender Justice Theology-Based Education: Revitalization as A Normative and Transformative Framework for Achieving Dignified Equality

C. Education as a Transformative Space

Education as a transformative space refers to a shift from an educator-centered, instruction-based system to an educational approach that emphasizes active participation in the exploration and construction of knowledge (A. Mappadjantji Amien, 2005). Transformative education promotes changes in awareness and social structures. Paulo Freire (1970) criticized the “banking” education model, which positioned students as passive recipients. According to the study, education should improve critical awareness, allowing people to interpret reality and transform oppressive conditions. To interpret realities that deviate from norms and transform all forms of character crises, education should be directed at three dimensions of quality, namely (1) Independence accompanied by competence, (2) Freedom to discover the meaning of reality, and (3) Awareness accompanied by responsibility (A. Mappadjantji Amien, 2005).

In gender issues, transformative education is the idea that students understand the definition of equality and recognize forms of gender injustice in everyday life. For example, the unfair division of domestic labor, the labeling of women as less rational, the assumption that men should not show emotion, restrictions on women’s leadership, and the normalization of symbolic violence in language and culture. In this context, recognizing symptoms of gender injustice requires independent freedom and critical awareness. This process can be achieved through education that appropriately internalizes ethical awareness of equality among students.

Jack Mezirow (1997) explained that transformative learning comprised changing frameworks of thinking through critical reflection on assumptions taken for granted. In this context, gender equity education needs to allow students to reconsider socio-religious assumptions considered “normal” but discriminatory. Education becomes a process of liberation from ways of thinking biased toward injustice. This can only offer intellectual capacity and competence. The concept is weak in developing moral sensitivity and conscience in dignified relationships. Students living in a social mosaic experience a socio-religious crisis and a character crisis concerning the glorification and respect for women.

Transformative education demands institutional change. Schools, madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, universities, and religious educational institutions need to develop gender-friendly policies. This includes preventing violence, providing safe spaces for students, providing women with access to leadership, training teachers on gender equality, and evaluating biased teaching materials. Equality remains only a moral slogan without institutional change. This institutional change is expected to enable educational institutions to become welcoming, safe environments where mutual respect and appreciation are upheld.

D. Education and the Revitalization of Gender Justice Theology

Education is a social institution with a crucial role in developing students’ quality and improving moral attitudes and humanistic traits. The impact will be clearly visible when ignored, deviating from the norm and giving rise to several moral decadences, such as violence against women, exploitation, harassment, and discrimination. Conversely, the values are transferred into students’ attitudes and personalities when education can effectively reconstruct the concept of civilization-based education. In the actualization process, this aspect should be integrated with students’ cognitive abilities and competencies. A revitalization of education centered on gender justice is necessary. Revitalizing the theology of gender justice in education can be achieved through several strategies.

First, a renewal of the paradigm of religious interpretation. As an effort to avoid exclusive interpretations, students need to be introduced to the historical background, context, and diversity of perspectives. This approach enables individuals to critically evaluate gender-biased religious interpretations rather than accepting as absolute truth. Religious education needs to teach the ability to differentiate between texts, interpretations, culturally derived understandings, and social interests.

Second, the integration of gender justice values into the curriculum. The implementation process integrates religious, civic, social, and cultural education materials as well as includes discussions on human dignity, women’s rights, men’s responsibilities, family reciprocity, and equal participation in society. This integration does not need to be a dedicated topic but can be incorporated into various learning themes.

Third, the use of dialogic pedagogy. Teachers should create space for critical conversation and position students as active thinkers. Students should be allowed to analyze concrete examples of gender injustice in the family, school, media, and community. The impact of this dialogue is that justice is an abstract concept and a concrete practice in everyday relationships. Furthermore, religious and cultural symbolism that marginalizes women is mentally non-normative.

Fourth, the revitalization of gender justice theology should be evident in institutional governance by strengthening role models. Educational institutions will not effectively teach gender justice when internal practices remain discriminatory. For example, the moral message of equality becomes inconsistent when female students are rarely given leadership positions in organizations, or teachers continue to use language that demeans one gender.

Fifth, the evaluation of teaching materials and school culture. Teaching materials need to be examined to determine gender-based stereotypes, subordination, marginalization, or symbolic violence. An evaluation of the division of roles in school activities

Gender Justice Theology-Based Education: Revitalization as A Normative and Transformative Framework for Achieving Dignified Equality

is also necessary. The tasks of leading, speaking, making decisions, maintaining cleanliness, and managing activities should be assigned fairly. Essentially, the educational environment should be internally cleansed of practices that marginalize women

E. Dignified Equality

According to Muhammad Aldi et al. (2005), gender equality is a situation in which men and women have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in all aspects. This includes rights and obligations in religious, social, and economic spheres (Fathurrohman et al., 2024). Sociologically, the terms “male” and “female” are only natural typological differences (Anwar, 2021). This shows that the concept of gender is natural and a direct gift from God to humans. Therefore, no human being has the right to revoke the inherent equality of another. Humans’ duty is simply to support, need, and strengthen one another, regardless of gender. This equality means fairness in treatment and opportunities in accordance with each person’s natural disposition. Islam normatively regulates several basic principles of equality to build relationships that respect human nature. According to Anzalman et al. (2025), the principle of equality in the Quran and Hadith includes equality in spiritual values, social responsibility, rights and obligations, education, as well as leadership and public participation.

Dignified equality affirms that every human being possesses inherent dignity from birth as well as deserves protection and respect. Dignity is not determined by a person’s background, such as gender, culture, or religion, but is an intrinsic value inherent in every human being. From this perspective, dignified equality has various meanings. First, from an Islamic perspective, humans were created by God with equal dignity, determined by the quality of piety. Second, the moral perspective holds that every human being has inherent value. In this context, any form of exploitation, violence, or abuse is contrary to the principle of respect for human dignity. Third, every human being has equal rights and opportunities, and this equality is not seen as negating characteristics, abilities, or social roles. Restrictions on basic human rights constitute a denial of natural human rights. Fourth, from an educational perspective, dignified equality is realized through nondiscriminatory educational services. Therefore, students should be respected regardless of diverse backgrounds. Human dignity and values should be upheld, and the educational environment must be inclusive, equitable, and respectful.

The main problem of equality is the gap between normative theological values that uphold justice and equality (Muktamar Ibrahim, Imron Hadi, 2025). This is characterized by behavior that renders women subordinate subjects, easily exploited. Men and women are genders with the same status, equal rights, and dignity. Dignified equality does not erase spiritual values, family ethics, and social responsibilities. This variable shows that everyone has equal rights, access, protection, and respect. Biological differences should not be used as a reason to limit the right to education, employment opportunities, leadership, public participation, or scientific authority.

The theology of justice is grounded in the core values of monotheism and the implications for moral conduct, particularly in relation to gender interactions. Therefore, dignified equality is rooted in the belief that humans are created equal in status and natural rights. Asma Barlas (2002) emphasized that the Quran did not inherently justify gender inequality through a hermeneutic approach. This is because inequality arises from biased interpretation. Gender equality in Islam is based on the principles of justice and respect for nature stipulated in Revelation. Discrimination, violence, subordination, and the weakening of women contradict basic human values. Gender justice is a modern social agenda and an integral aspect of the responsibility of faith to promote a more equitable and just society.

Education plays a crucial role in ensuring that equality is not interpreted superficially, particularly through interpretations justifying the degradation of women's dignity as secondary beings. Equality needs to be positioned as a life ethic and human responsibility, not simply a demand to satisfy the ego of power relations. Religion and education (normative and transformative) work to liberate humanity from injustice.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, revitalizing the theology of gender justice is crucial for advancing the normative values of equality in building a more humane religious and educational life. The establishment of a normative foundation rooted in divine values is important to uphold human dignity and honor. Gender injustice is reported from religious teachings, patriarchal interpretations, culture, and social structures. Therefore, theology needs to be revitalized by placing justice, human dignity, mutuality, and social responsibility at the foundation of interpretation.

Education plays a moral and conscious role in the process. As a normative space, the concept instills values of justice and respect for human dignity. From a transformative context, education dismantles stereotypes, builds critical awareness, and enhances change toward more equal social relations. Dignified equality can be achieved when religious education, the curriculum, learning methods, and the culture of institutions are directed toward liberating people from discrimination and subordination. Revitalizing gender justice theology is an academic program to be transmitted to students, as well as moral, spiritual, and social responsibility, accompanied by accountability realized to recognize and appreciate noble human values. Gender-just education

Gender Justice Theology-Based Education: Revitalization as A Normative and Transformative Framework for Achieving Dignified Equality

cultivates a generation that is intellectually capable, ethically mature, and equipped to improve social relations characterized by justice, equality, and dignity.

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