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## Research Article

# Women's Communication Strategy in Realizing Equality in Pesantren Darussalam: Analysis in the Perspective of Gender Performativity

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**Abstract.** This research examines the gender equality communication strategies employed by women at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School, utilizing Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990) as a framework. Gender performativity in educational institutions signifies a proactive effort to attain equality in leadership, education, commerce, and decision-making. Women now hold public and authoritative positions equivalent to men due to their active participation. The changing communication styles of female leaders signify the dissolution of patriarchal authority and customs in Islamic boarding schools. Despite patriarchal leadership, gender equality is progressing. The rise of women's leadership, scientific expertise, and business management within the institution signifies inclusive governance. The transformation of gender roles in educational institutions is altering

internal dynamics and motivating students and future generations to prioritize equality and inclusion. This gender role shift in school is changing internal dynamics and inspiring students and the next generation to value equality and inclusion. The institution promotes gender equality and balance in traditional Islamic education. The regeneration of Darussalam Islamic Boarding School preserves these progressive values, creating a dynamic, inclusive educational tradition. This study shows that inclusiveness requires constant effort and adaptation, and communication strategies are crucial to gender equality. For women to fully participate in public and educational spaces, structural and cultural changes are needed to achieve gender equality in traditional spaces.

**Keywords:** Woman, Gender, Pesantren, Performance, Communication, Equality

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, or pesantren, in Indonesia occupy a pivotal role as educational institutions that influence community norms and values. In addition to functioning as centres of religious education, pesantren significantly contribute to the formation of Indonesian Muslim identity, especially in influencing perspectives on gender roles and relationships (Smith & Woodward, 2013). Traditionally, pesantren have been predominantly male institutions, with religious authority and leadership, especially the position of kiai (Islamic scholar), nearly entirely occupied by men. The male-dominated leadership framework perpetuates a gender hierarchy that affects the social and religious roles accessible to women in the pesantren context (Munir, 2004; Platt, 2017).

Many pesantren maintain conventional gender roles despite cultural changes and increased gender equality awareness in Indonesia. In this framework, women often play domestic or administrative roles determined by gender norms, rather than leadership or decision-making (Salim, 2021). Women in Indonesia endure persistent gender inequity despite gains in education, politics, and civil society (Rinaldo, 2011). Pesantren women use a variety of ways to talk to each other to work out their roles and push for equal rights for men and women. Some women quietly question social norms, while others fight bravely for changes in religion and education (Anwar, 2006; Robinson, 2014). It might be hard to follow Islam and fight sexism at the same time (Marhumah, 2011). Communication skills are very important for women to be able to negotiate their position, fight for equality, and be able to take part in pesantren religion and education.

This study examines the communication tactics employed by women at Pesantren Darussalam to negotiate their roles and advocate for gender equality. This study employs Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (Butler & Trouble, 1990), to examine how these women enact their gender identities in manners that either contest or uphold prevailing gender hierarchies. Butler maintains that gender is not an immutable or intrinsic characteristic but is formed via recurrent social practices. Within the pesantren framework, women's communication techniques manifest as performative behaviours that either adhere to or challenge the conventional gender norms established by religious organisation (Butler & Trouble, 1990).

This performative framework facilitates a more profound examination of the enactment and contestation of gender within the particular cultural and theological milieu of pesantren. It underscores the fluidity of gender roles within the Islamic educational framework in Indonesia, where women are not merely passive beneficiaries of patriarchal standards but actively engage in the negotiation of their identities and responsibilities. In certain pesantren, there is a substantial disparity in the roles of males and women. Educational administration and religious discussions frequently assign women to subordinate roles (Rinaldo, 2011). The patriarchal institutions that impede women's decision-making are perpetuated by the predominantly male leadership of pesantren (Salim, 2021). This approach can undermine the importance of women's viewpoints by relegating them to traditional roles, hence intensifying gender inequality (Marhumah, 2011). In pesantren, women are often obligated to comply with religious and cultural norms that limit their independence. This exacerbates their quest for equality. It is essential to understand the challenges and potential transformations of gender roles within pesantren by observing the way in which women articulate their identities and advocate for equality. The conventional norms and principles in these locations are similar to those of society as a whole; however, they are not inflexible.

This study examines how women have championed change and equality in predominantly masculine contexts. This study focuses on the novel application of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity (Butler & Trouble, 1990). within Indonesia's Islamic boarding schools, known as pesantren. Butler's thesis asserts that gender is a collection of actions that individuals undertake to conform to social expectations.

These activities are cyclical and ritualistic, hence generating and perpetuating gender. In this context, gender is regarded not as an intrinsic characteristic but as a performative act (Butler & Trouble, 1990). Employing Butler's framework to analyze women's communication strategies in pesantren offers a fresh perspective on the formation and negotiation of gender within these religious establishments. Traditional gender standards in pesantren are often strictly enforced by religious doctrines and rituals, creating a clear hierarchy where men mostly hold positions of authority.

Women's communicative practices in educational settings, religious dialogues, or engagements with male authority figures can be perceived as performative acts that either uphold or contest existing norms. Research has examined the institutional and structural obstacles that exclude women from Islamic schools (Munir, 2004; Robinson, 2014). Munir (2004) studied how formal sharia influenced women's rights, particularly education, in Indonesia. Robinson (2014) studied how Indonesian gender politics are affected by Islamic educational institutions' oppressive and freeing effects on women.

This study elucidates political and institutional processes, although it does not address women's quotidian communication. This study examines the communication strategies employed by pesantren women to combat patriarchy. This study illustrates that gender functions as both a social performance and an identity, as evidenced by women's language and behavior. This study investigates how female students at

Pesantren Darussalam either challenge or support gender stereotypes to advance the discourse on Islam and gender studies.

This perspective elucidates the dynamics of gender within Islamic educational institutions and examines how women's communicative methods reflect and convey their authority. This study examines the communication patterns among women in pesantren, contributing to the discourse on gender, communication, and Islam. This study employs Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity to elucidate how women in pesantren combat gender stereotypes and advocate for equality.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative design utilizing a case study methodology to investigate the communication strategies employed by women at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School to advance gender equality. The qualitative method is appropriate for analyzing the intricacies of social phenomena, including gender roles and communication practices within this particular context (Creswell, 2014). Methods of Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with female students, educators, and administrators. Open-ended inquiries will prompt participants to articulate their perspectives on communication and gender roles (Kvale, 2009).

**Participant Observation:** The researcher will examine daily activities, concentrating on communication and the negotiation of gender roles. And will compose documents that exemplify power or reinforce gender roles through verbal and non-verbal communication. This will clarify how communication is affected by institutional regulations (Bowen, 2009).

Thematic analysis will be employed to identify patterns, such as empowerment through communication and the reinforcement of gender roles (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity will guide the examination of how communication either reinforces or challenges gender norms (Butler & Trouble, 1990)

### **The communication performance strategy of women in Pesantren plays a vital role in building gender equality**

Women in Darussalam Islamic Boarding School occupy various public positions so as to support women in communicating both verbally and non-verbally adequately. Women communicate in the public space of the Islamic boarding school performing in various roles, including:

- a. As Teachers. Darussalam Islamic Boarding School is an Islamic boarding school that has educational institutions from kindergarten to college. Therefore, there is no difficulty for women to interact and communicate either verbally or non-verbally. Women have the independence to communicate verbally without depending on or getting permission from men. Learning spaces in the classroom become a place for women to communicate with students or students in the Darussalam Islamic boarding school environment. Learning spaces become the first place for women to express their

communication. Through learning spaces, women are able to express freedom of thought, opinion, and ideas in the innovation process to produce scientific knowledge. Learning spaces are spaces that naturally and certainly become spaces for women to express themselves to achieve equality in Darussalam Islamic boarding school. Starting from the classroom, women are able to socialize themselves as figures who are equal to men. Women confidently carry out the communication process without the burden of being women. Women not only communicate verbally in the women's room but also in the men's and women's rooms. Because the condition of the Darussalam Ciamis Islamic boarding school In the learning process, the classrooms are mixed between men and women. Some classes and situations have a separation of male and female students. However, in general, the learning class in one class or room consists of male and female students.

- b. Women as teachers of religious lessons in Islamic boarding schools that are sourced from classical treasures. The authority of religious knowledge in the traditional view is the power of men. Initially, the dominance of men taught religious lessons at the Darussalam Islamic boarding school. Along with the changing times, women occupy an important position in religious learning at the Islamic boarding school. Women are given the freedom to deliver religious materials that are sourced from classical Islamic treasures. Women appear to explain, explore, and interpret classical Islamic sources from yellow books with a more equal perspective. Study groups with a large number of classes, both male and female, become a public space for women to carry out the communication process. Women in Islamic boarding schools do not only teach in women's classes with religious topics, but also in men's classes. This means that female teachers teach in various classes, there are no restrictions on classes of a certain gender, but classes that are mixed between men and women. The world of Islamic boarding schools is indeed a world of religious studies. In religious sources, women convey messages and teachings contained therein.
- c. Women as lecturers. Darussalam Islamic Boarding School has a college called Darussalam Islamic University. Of course, the classrooms at the university are more challenging and become an open space for women to communicate as a manifestation of equality between men and women. Unlike the traditional view that women are limited in their communication processes in public spaces. Lecture rooms are a place for women in the Islamic boarding school environment to communicate at a higher level. Communication carried out by women in the university environment is more towards communication with high-level analysis. Women who occupy positions as lecturers are given the authority to develop their knowledge in a perspective not only of constructivism but also with a critical perspective. Therefore, there are a number of courses that show development in a critical perspective, including:

Islamic law and gender equality courses, multiculturalism courses, courses on the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence (PKDRT), and Muslim family communication. These courses formally become a critical basis for women to develop their communication in the university environment formally. Therefore, women have an equal communication space between men and women in intellectual development and scientific traditions. Women's ideas and concepts in communicating get equal space, there is no gender discrimination that marginalizes women. Even in some cases women are more productive in the production of knowledge than men. The works of female lecturers, the level of teaching diligence in class, administrative order, and sincerity in assisting students in completing their final assignments, the quality of female lecturers exceeds that of male lecturers.

- d. Women's Communication in Islamic boarding school meetings. Meetings are one of the highest decision-making in the Islamic boarding school environment. The meeting arena becomes a public space for women to express considerations in decisions. Meetings at the Darussalam Islamic boarding school always involve women. The meetings consist of Islamic boarding school teacher meetings, Islamic boarding school teacher meetings, Senior High School Plus teacher meetings, Elementary Islamic boarding school meetings, Kindergarten teacher meetings, University work meetings and Islamic boarding school leadership meetings as the highest meeting. In the meeting rooms, women convey their opinions, ideas and innovations that are considered in the meeting decisions. Women do not feel embarrassed to express their opinions in the dialogue spaces at the meetings. Several meeting moments show that women have more control over the problems faced by the Islamic Boarding School compared to men. This is because women show more and complete concern and good field mastery so that the considerations given by women in the meeting dialogue are seen as more comprehensive. Unlike in the traditional gender view that women experience obstacles in communication in front of men in decision making. Although it must be admitted that in certain cases men are still the ones who determine the decisions of a meeting. However, at least women's voices greatly influence meeting decisions, becoming a communication process in realizing gender equality in the Islamic boarding school environment. In various meetings, meeting leaders are not only men, but women are also given the opportunity to lead meetings. Women's opportunities become wider in communication in decision making with women's positions as meeting leaders. That is why meetings as a high communication space in Islamic boarding schools always involve women. Women always use the meeting room as a process of conveying communication without any burden as women.
- e. Communication of women in the business space of Islamic boarding schools. As an Islamic boarding school that is categorized as a large Islamic boarding

school in West Java, the Darussalam Islamic boarding school has various business units as a support for the economic sustainability and existence of the Islamic boarding school organization. Interestingly, the positions of those in charge of the Islamic boarding school business sector are mostly held by women. For example, the canteen at Tawazun which is located in the middle of the Islamic boarding school. This canteen serves various needs of students, be it clothing, toiletries, cosmetics, soap, food, drinks, learning equipment, books, and various basic food needs of teachers in the Islamic boarding school environment. This canteen is led by Ustadzah Aam Aminah who was given the authority by the Islamic Boarding School Leader to manage the canteen as widely as possible. Ibu Aam as the canteen manager is seen as successful in advancing the Islamic boarding school business. She is also one of those who has succeeded in providing additional income for the Islamic boarding school to increase the welfare of Islamic boarding school teachers. One of the programs that received appreciation from the wider public of the Islamic boarding school, the profit from the management of the canteen provided an umrah prize for employees in the Islamic boarding school environment, especially at the Darussalam Junior High School. Another business sector, for example, which is controlled by women is the laundry business which is one of the Islamic boarding school business units under the Darussalam Islamic University. This laundry is led by two women, namely Alifah and Sofia. These two women lead the Islamic boarding school laundry business by providing services to the public of the Islamic boarding school as well as the wider community for washing clothes, jackets, and various other equipment. These two women also have employees in the laundry business unit, the number of which is 100% women. The work of managing the laundry business unit is a job that is actually very hard. The men in the Islamic boarding school are not interested in managing the laundry business. These laundry managers have the freedom to determine the development of the laundry business. The profits from the laundry business unit contribute to the welfare of teachers and lecturers in the Darussalam Islamic boarding school environment. Another business unit controlled by women is the canteen of the Darussalam Ciamis State Islamic High School. This canteen is led by Mrs. Chusna Arifah who is also the vice principal at the State Islamic Senior High School Darussalam Ciamis. This canteen serves no less than 1200 students of the State Islamic Senior High School every day. That is why this canteen has a very significant turnover for the economy in the Islamic boarding school environment. At the same time, it also generates large profits, so that the profits can help Islamic boarding school programs at the Senior High School level. In addition, the canteen's profits are also used to help the welfare of non-civil servant workers in the school environment owned by the Islamic boarding school. There is also a business unit that serves the consumption of students, namely the Ladidz

canteen. This canteen serves all students' consumption from Junior High School (MTS) students to students who attend high schools. That is why this canteen is one of the canteens with the largest turnover and profits in the Darussalam Islamic boarding school environment. The management of this canteen is mostly managed by women. The canteen is able to contribute to the welfare of the managers of the Islamic Boarding School and also contribute to the development of the Islamic Boarding School infrastructure. That is why various business units in the Darussalam Islamic Boarding School environment have become performance areas for Islamic Boarding School women to communicate and also build equal power relations between men.

- f. Communication in the Pesantren Leadership Room. Unlike most pesantren in several places in West Java, the Darussalam pesantren has complete educational units, starting from pre-school education units (study groups) to universities. In managing its leadership, it places women as part of the leadership in the pesantren. Women in the Darussalam pesantren occupy leadership positions that have a broad impact on the message of equality in the pesantren environment. Among the leadership positions held by women are: First, as the head of the Foundation. The foundation in the structure and tradition of the pesantren has a very high position. The Darussalam pesantren under the auspices of the Al-Fadlilayah Islamic Education Foundation (YAKPI) is led by a woman named Dra.Hj. Ani Hafni FZL, M.Pd. As the head of the Foundation, she has the authority to determine the direction of the pesantren organization. The power of the head of the Foundation held by women becomes an arena for public communication for women with a dimension of equal power relations between men and women. Even on several occasions, women's power relations exceed men. Various decisions can be determined by women through dialogue and deliberation mechanisms while still considering various inputs from other Islamic boarding school managers, the majority of whom are men. Second, as a Rector. The position of women in the Darussalam Islamic boarding school as a Rector also provides a broad enculturation process of equality for the Islamic boarding school community. The Rector is a prestigious position at the university level. Therefore, the public communication spaces carried out by the Rector who is female do not become obstacles either in terms of body gestures, communication content, and various other communication styles. For example, the Rector leads meetings in the university environment, leads meetings in the faculty environment, study programs, and in the wider student public. These important spaces are a process of communication that is fair between men and women. On various occasions, the Rector appears on stages involving thousands and many people. Therefore, the Rector's public communication provides a symbol of equality between men and women. On several occasions, women have faced resistance from the patriarchal culture which considers women unworthy of holding



leadership positions. Their leadership positions also tend to be under the control of men. But the process of public communication that is continuously played by women in various public communication spaces makes the process of equality continue to develop, grow, and manifest towards complete equality.

- g. As Principal and Vice Principal. Women in the Islamic Boarding School environment occupy the status of principal and vice principal as a representation of women in the Islamic boarding school environment. There are several women who become principals including kindergarten principals, MI or SD or SD principals, vice principals of junior high schools, vice principals of high schools, and vice principals of State Islamic High Schools. their positions as principals and vice principals, women have a wide space to communicate with the public. The structural position of women strengthens the communication carried out by women. The structure of women occupying the principal she leads her subordinates consisting of men and women. the performance of women's leadership in the Islamic boarding school institution environment places women as trendsetters in equality. Women as principals and/or vice principals are symbols of equality practiced in the Darussalam Islamic boarding school environment.
- h. Women as administrators of Islamic boarding schools. Women as administrators of Islamic boarding schools as raisah (leaders of female students) whose communication process is not only in the limited community of women, but leadership also includes the affairs of male students. As female administrators, they continue to coordinate and communicate in the public space of men. Verbal communication, complete physical appearance, and the power relations that they build. At the Darussalam Ciamis Islamic boarding school, students consist of men and women. To take care of the thousands of students, Rois and Raisah are leaders at the student level and become administrators of the Islamic boarding school whose work area is in the male public and also in the female public without being separated.
- i. Female students as administrators of the Intra-School Student Organization (OSIS). As a process of leadership cadreship in the Islamic boarding school environment, schools in the Darussalam Islamic boarding school environment make female students become administrators of OSIS. they are selected through a democratic election mechanism. Some female students are elected as the general chairperson of OSIS such as in SMA Plus Darussalam, some are also elected as the deputy chairperson of OSIS in the Darussalam State Islamic Senior High School, and Darussalam Junior High School. From an early age, female and male students have space to express themselves and perform as leaders who are not hindered by the traditional gender culture that girls, female students, and/or female students are prohibited from becoming leaders. The democratic tradition applied in Islamic boarding schools

encourages the process of equality. From an early age, students understand that the communication process between men and women in an organization has equal rights and roles. There is no differentiation and subordination of children or female students. This space for freedom of expression is utilized by female students.

- j. Dialogue between male and female students. In the process of interacting in the world of knowledge in an arena that widely involves male and female students, male and female teachers, and male and female Islamic boarding school leaders, the female students are given the opportunity to have a dialogue, answer questions, answer quizzes, and re-explain the material presented by the Islamic boarding school leader. The female students do not feel uncomfortable and inferior to speak in front of thousands of male and female students. The female students have a dialogue without being burdened by their status as female students. They stand tall in front of the students and Islamic boarding school leaders in explaining the contents of the lessons and other Islamic studies. A dialogue space like this is usually difficult to find in Islamic boarding school culture which tends to maintain a patriarchal culture, where men are considered more important, more entitled to speak than women.

### **Gender Performativity in Women's Communication at Pesantren Darussalam**

Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in various activities shows gender performativity that is manifested in the variety of women's roles in multi-aspects of Islamic boarding school activities. Both in the process of gender discourse in the educational space in the classroom and also the public space of society, and leadership in the education management sector and business leadership of Islamic boarding schools. In Butler's view (1990) gender equality can be realized through a series of activities and traditions in continuous performative actions as is the case at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School in Ciamis.

At Pesantren Darussalam, women are afforded the opportunity to engage in teaching, leadership, and the administration of the pesantren's operational activities, which are fundamentally performative. These actions not only embody conventional gender roles but also forge new social realities, wherein women are embraced in public spheres that have been historically governed by men. This transition may be viewed as a critical examination of gender norms within the framework of Islamic practices in pesantren. Conventional narratives that depict women as inferior to men are progressively transforming, as women increasingly educate on religious topics and occupy pivotal positions in the interpretation of Islamic doctrines. These actions illustrate the role of performativity in transforming and contesting gender hegemony.

At Pesantren Darussalam, women are integral to the decision-making process, as evidenced by the pesantren meetings. Women frequently take on leadership roles in these meetings, present innovative ideas, and sometimes guide discussions, owing to their deeper understanding of certain topics relative to their male counterparts.

Butler (1990) argues that these actions serve as performative expressions that enhance women's visibility in positions of power and authority. These represent not only leadership tasks but also a cyclical process that shapes their identity as leaders. In this context, women are equal participants in the decision-making processes of the pesantren, rather than subordinates.

Butler (1990) emphasizes that gender performativity transcends verbal behavior or language, incorporating multiple facets of life, including economic roles. At Pesantren Darussalam, women engage actively in commercial sectors, overseeing the canteen, laundry services, and various other business units. This participation contests conventional views of women's roles, which were frequently restricted to the domestic domain. These performative acts redefine the portrayal of women as empowered economic agents, progressively creating a new social reality in which gender roles are no longer confined to the private sphere but expand into public and economic realms.

Women in the pesantren have made progress in leadership, education, and business, but patriarchal challenges remain. Butler recognizes that gender performativity challenges social norms. Pesantren Darussalam faces patriarchal resistance when women become rector or head of school. Women may face cultural resistance that still views men as more entitled to these positions. Women's performance of these roles challenges patriarchal norms and advances gender equality. Gender performativity in the pesantren affects future generations. Female students in student organizations and other leadership activities learn that women have equal leadership and decision-making rights. Gender performativity redefines gender roles today and shapes a more inclusive and egalitarian generation.

Within the framework of Pesantren Darussalam, gender performativity, as articulated by Judith Butler (1990), is exhibited through a sequence of actions by women that simultaneously contest and reinforce conventional gender norms. The women in this pesantren surpass conventional roles; they are actively reconstituting their identities as leaders, educators, and economic contributors, on par with their male counterparts. The performative acts are promoting a gradual shift in gender norms within the pesantren, progressing towards greater equality.

## CONCLUSIONS

Gender performativity in Darussalam Islamic Boarding School is a dynamic and futuristic process to realize overall equality in various aspects of life. Futuristic performance on the right track towards perfect equality is reflected in the field of leadership in education, business units, and the structure of the Islamic boarding school. The form of communication performance in three important aspects of Islamic boarding school life in Butler's perspective (1990) produces a new social reality as an ongoing dynamic process that makes women recognized as equal by men authoritatively and in performance in the public space.

The process of transformation in women's communication performance in the leadership structure of Islamic boarding schools, scientific authority, and control of Islamic boarding school business units and power in decision-making is a process of eliminating the patriarchal culture that has historically dominated Islamic boarding

schools. Although the roots of patriarchy still exist, especially in the authority of decision-making in the position of women as leaders, futuristic performance towards equality continues to manifest in various aspects of Islamic boarding school life.

The implications of this permotivation to the younger generation and students at the Darussalam Islamic boarding school who internationalize equal and inclusive gender roles, thus making the Islamic boarding school tradition more egalitarian. This step is a regeneration process that performs in the inheritance of equality and inclusive values in Islamic boarding schools that continue to manifest dynamically.

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