

Instilling A Culture Of Modesty And Respect For The Opposite Sex Through Gender-Based Classroom Segregation Policies In Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Character education is a fundamental aspect in the formation of students' personalities in primary schools, especially in the midst of increasing social challenges such as sexual harassment and lack of respect between genders. Data from reports from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA) and the Federation of Indonesian Teachers' Unions (FSGI) show an increase in cases of harassment and bullying among elementary school-age students, so preventive measures through appropriate educational policies are needed. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of gender-based classroom segregation policies in strengthening cultural values of shame and respect for the opposite sex as part of character education. A descriptive qualitative research approach was used with data collection through observation, in-depth interviews and documentation in elementary schools that have implemented this policy. The results show that gender-based classroom segregation contributes significantly in shaping students' character, particularly in internalizing shame and mutual respect between genders. In addition, this policy also has the potential to reduce the risk of sexual harassment behavior in the school environment. The implication of this research confirms the importance of a gender-based policy approach in supporting more effective character education in primary schools, as well as providing practical recommendations for the development of educational policies oriented towards strengthening social and moral values in educational institutions.

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Introduction

Education plays a highly significant role in the development of individuals within society. Through education, individuals not only gain the knowledge and skills they need, but are also equipped with the ability to develop their personal potential. Education opens access to various opportunities, both in social and professional aspects of life, and provides a strong foundation for individuals to contribute positively to societal progress (Nurfatimah et al., 2022; Triwiyanto Teguh, 2015; Yanuarti, 2018; Zubaidah, 2017). Education is not merely about teaching children in school;

more importantly, it helps children grow and develop in ways that will benefit the nation, state, religion, and society in the future (Tanu, 2019). Every parent desires the best education for their children so they may become valuable individuals later in life. One of the most valuable investments in improving the quality of human resources is education, because the progress of a nation can be measured through the quality of its education system and the extent to which its people receive education. The higher the educational level of a society, the more advanced the nation becomes. One of the key ways to build a nation's progress is through character education (Aziizu, 2015; Linda, 2020; Sutriyanti, 2016).

Character education is a process aimed at shaping the personality of students, which is one of the primary responsibilities of education. Teachers play an important role in character formation by modeling proper speech, delivering instructional material appropriately, and showing tolerance in their behavior (Hakim, 2015; Hendarman et al., 2018; Palunga & Marzuki, 2017). Character education is an essential component of learning in elementary school because it shapes students' personality and moral values, which influence their attitudes and behavior in the future. Ideally, character education should begin early in childhood, tailored to the needs and developmental stages of young learners. During this sensitive period, appropriate stimulation must be provided optimally to prepare children for future life challenges (Maulana & Supriyanto, 2020).

Data collected by the Indonesian Education Monitoring Network (Kornas JPPI) shows that in 2020, 91 cases of violence occurred in schools, increasing to 142 cases in 2021. The number rose again to 194 cases in 2022, and further increased to 285 cases in 2023. By October 2024, the number had already surpassed the total cases reported in 2023. Most school-based violence involved sexual violence (42%), followed by bullying (31%), physical violence (10%), psychological violence (11%), and other forms of violence (6%). According to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA), in 2024 there were 5,378 cases of violence against children aged 6–12. Regarding violence type, sexual violence ranked first with 11,127 cases, followed by physical violence (8,539 cases) and psychological violence (7,330 cases). Schools rank as the fourth most frequent location for such incidents, including at the elementary school level. Data from the Indonesian Teachers' Union Federation (FSGI), cited by Republika, shows that from January to August 2023, there were 16 reported bullying cases in schools, with the highest rates occurring at the elementary and junior high school levels, accounting for 25% of all reported incidents (KPPPA, 2024; Muhammad, 2024; Suryowati Estu, 2024).

This situation highlights the need for new approaches in education—approaches that do not focus solely on academics but also emphasize the development of strong moral values. Two such values are modesty (*malu*) and respect toward the opposite sex. In this context, modesty refers to the reluctance to engage in inappropriate behavior, especially in front of the opposite sex, while respect refers to treating others with dignity, understanding boundaries, and honoring social norms. In Islamic teachings, modesty holds an important place as part of faith, as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

الإِيمَانُ بَضْعٌ وَسَبْعُونَ شُعْبَةً، وَالْحَيَاءُ شُعْبَةٌ مِنَ الْإِيمَانِ

“Iman itu ada 70 lebih cabang, dan sifat malu itu salah satu cabang iman.” (Alawi Abdelgader al Saggaf, n.d.)

Meanwhile, the nature of appreciating and respecting, as mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet SAW:

المُسْلِمُ أَخُو الْمُسْلِمِ، لَا يَظْلِمُهُ وَلَا يُظْلَمُهُ وَلَا يُسْلِمُهُ

“Muslim itu adalah saudara muslim yang lain, tidak akan menzaliminya dan tidak pula akan membiarkannya (dalam bahaya).”

If instilled from an early age, these values can reduce the likelihood of unethical behavior later in life, especially when students enter adolescence. (Abdulghani & Sya'ban, 2026).

Character values must be instilled as early as possible, beginning in elementary school, to ensure that these values are absorbed and firmly rooted in the child. Elementary school is a formative stage where children observe and imitate the actions of adults around them. Children's personality development must be nurtured early so that strong character traits may form. For instance, courage can be fostered through developing communication skills starting in elementary school (Fitriyani, 2019; Irmalia, 2020; Kertamuda, 2015).

Education is defined as the development of individual potential, which requires social interaction—interaction with both same-sex and opposite-sex peers. Such interactions significantly influence children's mental development. In classroom settings, interactions with the opposite sex shape competitiveness in learning and allow children to benchmark their abilities and skills (AR & Subaidi, 2019; Pebriana, 2017). Advancements in science and technology demand constant adaptation, and children today differ significantly from those of past generations. Social media has a profound influence on children's development, who tend to imitate what they see without filtering it. This contributes to moral degradation, wherein one's behavior deviates from accepted norms due to a lack of awareness regarding personal responsibilities. Because of their limited capacity for reasoning, elementary-aged children tend to act based on what they perceive through their senses without thoughtful consideration (Aeni, 2014; Mutmainnah, 2019; Supratman, 2019). This situation can erode moral values and norms.

Numerous incidents reflect this moral decline among elementary school students, including: (1) an elementary student self-harming under the influence of TikTok content (Akbar & Krisiandi, 2023); (2) a student in Tambun being bullied until his leg required amputation (Anugrahadi, 2023); (3) an elementary school brawl in Makassar triggered by a love triangle (Cipto, 2017).

At the elementary level, early attraction to the opposite sex is increasingly common, with some students openly expressing romantic interest without a sense of modesty. Many even attempt to develop deeper relationships. In addition, the use of inappropriate language among children has become more frequent. Elementary school should be a period of play and exploration—not a time for dating or using inappropriate expressions. Such negative interactions fall within the category of deviant behavior or early forms of juvenile delinquency (Amalia, 2019; AR & Subaidi, 2019; Malihah, 2014). Changes in society largely stem from interpersonal interactions.

One educational approach implemented at SD Islam Al Umm, Malang, is *gender-based classroom segregation*. This policy separates boys and girls into different classrooms to create a learning environment that better supports their social and emotional development. By separating students based on gender, inappropriate interactions can be minimized, allowing students to focus on developing positive character traits, such as healthy modesty and respect toward the opposite sex. However, gender segregation has sparked debate among educators, parents, and psychologists. Some argue that it creates a more structured learning environment and encourages students to internalize ethical values in social interactions. Others are concerned that such separation may reinforce gender stereotypes and limit healthy social development between boys and girls. (Permadi et al., 2026).

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of gender-based classroom segregation in fostering modesty and respect toward the opposite sex in elementary schools. It also addresses gaps in the literature regarding gender-segregated approaches in character education, which remain underexplored. The contribution of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on character education by focusing on gender segregation as a pedagogical approach. Practically, the findings can serve as a reference for policymakers and educators in designing more effective learning environments for character development. Thus, this

research not only offers new insights into character education but also supports the formation of morally grounded and ethical future generations.

Method

This research employed a qualitative approach aimed at understanding the case study in depth and generating descriptive data. Qualitative research is a type of inquiry that seeks to thoroughly understand various phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions. This understanding is developed through narrative descriptions expressed in words and language within natural contexts, using methods that are inherently naturalistic. Within this framework, the researcher seeks to understand the process through an emic perspective—an approach that interprets phenomena from the internal viewpoint of the subjects themselves (Ulfatin, 2022). This approach emphasizes the exploration of individual perspectives and the case study occurring within the research environment. The study was conducted at SD Islam Al Umm, with particular attention to the gender-based classroom segregation policy implemented to cultivate modesty and respect toward the opposite sex.

Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to directly examine the implementation of the class segregation policy in both instructional and non-instructional activities. This included observing patterns of student interaction, the application of character values, and the dynamics occurring within and outside the gender-segregated classrooms. To obtain deeper insights, interviews were conducted with various stakeholders, including one of the foundation's founders, the principal, teachers, and students. Additionally, documentation was used to complement the data, consisting of school policy documents and records of student activities.

The collected data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive analysis approach. The first stage was data reduction, during which information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation was filtered and focused on aspects relevant to the research objectives. The reduced data were then presented in the form of descriptive narratives to systematically illustrate the study's findings. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verification, in which the researcher formulated conclusions based on the analysis and verified them through data triangulation from multiple sources. Through this method, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of gender-based classroom segregation in shaping students' character values, as well as identifying potential benefits and challenges associated with its implementation.

Result

Gender refers to biological sex, which includes the biological differences between males and females. Generally, sex is determined by physical factors such as chromosomes, hormones, and the structure of sexual organs. The term *segregation* comes from the word *segregate*, meaning to separate; thus, segregation can be defined as a process of dividing, isolating, or separating one group from another. Segregation is essentially separation (Casmini, 2013). In the context of gender-based classroom segregation, Islamic teachings note that interactions between males and females can potentially lead to inappropriate desires if they meet and exchange meaningful glances. Therefore, classroom segregation becomes a solution to prevent direct interaction between boys and girls. The segregation policy implemented at SD Islam Al Umm is grounded in religious principles.

Gender-based classroom segregation can be implemented in several models, each with its own strengths depending on the social and cultural context. There are three primary types of gender-based segregation:

1. **Total segregation**

This model separates students entirely in all aspects, including organizational structure, classrooms, and overall school environment, leaving no opportunity for interaction between students of different genders.

2. **Partial segregation**

In this model, segregation is applied only within classroom learning, while the school foundation and organizational structure remain integrated.

3. Subject-based segregation

This model separates male and female students only during certain subjects, while other school structures and facilities remain shared (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2013).

Based on observations, SD Islam Al Umm applies gender-based classroom segregation using the partial segregation model. The school has implemented classroom separation from Grade 1 through Grade 6. The division applies specifically to classroom spaces, while facilities and the school's organizational structure remain in the same building. The policy has been in place since the school's establishment in 2015 and continues to this day.

The school building has three floors. The first floor contains the principal's office, library, administration room, and four classrooms for Grade 1 and Grade 2, separated into boys' (banin) and girls' (banat) classes. The second floor is used for the female teachers' office, canteen, and four classrooms for female students in Grades 3–6. The third floor consists of the laboratory, male teachers' office, and four classrooms for male students in Grades 3–6.

Although boys and girls share the same break time, observations show minimal direct interaction between them because they tend to occupy different areas. Female students usually stay on the second floor, while male students remain on the third floor. Students on the first floor were observed playing in the schoolyard or in front of their respective classrooms within same-gender groups.

The researcher observed that when boys and girls encountered each other on the stairs during break time, they showed signs of modesty, avoiding eye contact or conversation. This is supported by statements from Grade 5 students, who expressed feeling more comfortable and free to express themselves when playing and learning with peers of the same gender. Gender segregation was found to encourage positive interactions, foster respect, empathy, and healthy communication among students.

Not only are student classrooms segregated, but teacher offices are also separated based on gender. This separation indirectly serves as a model for students, although it does not eliminate interaction entirely. Male and female teachers still coordinate when necessary while maintaining proper etiquette and avoiding unnecessary interaction.

The segregation policy aims to create a conducive learning environment where students can maximize their academic potential and character development. Additionally, the policy is designed to limit inappropriate interactions between genders that may disrupt learning concentration and character formation. The school also teaches students about the dangers of unnecessary interaction between non-mahram males and females. The Bina Al Mujtama Foundation, which oversees SD Islam Al Umm, applies this policy as a preventive measure. Based on an interview with one of the foundation's founders, gender segregation is considered essential because it provides many benefits. Beyond serving as a form of religious practice, the policy is intended to prevent potential harm arising from mixed-gender interaction. Early implementation is crucial, as education especially character education requires habituation and time for values to become deeply rooted in children.

One of the religious foundations of this policy is the instruction regarding the separation of sleeping arrangements between boys and girls, as narrated by Abu Daud.

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ -صلى الله عليه وسلم- «مُرُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَهُمْ أَبْنَاءُ سَبْعِ سِنِينَ وَاصْرِبْهُمْ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ أَبْنَاءُ عَشْرِ سِنِينَ وَفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَهُمْ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ».

Rasulullah SAW bersabda, "Perintahkan anak-anakmu untuk sholat di usia mereka 7 tahun, dan pukulah mereka jika tidak mau, saat usia mereka 10 tahun, dan pisahkanlah mereka dalam tempat tidur." (Alawi Abdelgader al Saggaf, n.d.)

Scholars explain that the instruction "Separate them in their beds" contains two implications: first, children should be separated in their sleeping arrangements, with each child having their own bed; and second, there is a specific command to separate boys and girls. From

this, it is understood that even siblings—especially those of different genders—must be separated in their sleeping arrangements. This serves as an effort to train children and introduce boundaries between males and females, with the hope that each child will develop a sense of responsibility and respect toward one another, preventing future moral harm or undesirable acts. Therefore, applying gender segregation among students from the primary education level is seen as beneficial (*maslahah*), because anything commanded in the religion brings goodness, and anything prohibited brings harm.

A similar explanation was conveyed by the school principal, emphasizing that the classroom segregation policy is rooted in Islamic teachings, instilling values from an early age, such as lowering the gaze, developing modesty, and fostering respect toward the opposite sex. The implementation of gender-based classroom segregation is based on Islamic principles that highlight the importance of maintaining gender boundaries in social interactions. This serves as an initial step to cultivate awareness of gender boundaries and to develop modesty and respect for the opposite sex.

Elementary school age is a stage in which students experience the concrete operational phase—seeing the world objectively while their thinking gradually becomes more reflective and systematic (Mahendra, 2019). At this age, students begin to think rationally and use logic to categorize their surroundings. Teachers, therefore, play a crucial role in instilling character values at the elementary level. Elementary school is the ideal time to begin character formation, and teachers are key figures in determining the success of character education. To shape a child's character, all parties must be involved. Children tend to imitate the behavior of adults around them, and this contributes significantly to character formation. Modeling is therefore essential in character education. In the educational setting, modeling refers to the behavior and attitudes demonstrated by teachers and educational staff both inside and outside the classroom, which later become examples for students.

A person's character is shaped by three integrated elements:

1. Knowing the good

The individual understands the difference between right and wrong, recognizes the actions that should be taken, and has the ability to prioritize good actions. Character building is not only about performing good deeds but also understanding why they are important.

2. Feeling the good

This refers to the individual's emotional response in appreciating good actions and rejecting wrongdoing. This stage aims to inspire individuals to love good deeds. Here, individuals experience the positive impact of their actions, which strengthens their motivation to continue performing good deeds and reduce negative behaviors.

3. Acting the good

This means that individuals know how to perform good actions and are accustomed to doing them. Without real actions, knowledge and feelings have no true meaning (Hasibuan et al., 2024; Hidayah et al., 2023; Wahyudin, 2024).

Character education can be strengthened through the existing school curriculum structure, particularly through classroom-based and school culture-based programs (Maisaroh & Untari, 2024; Untari et al., 2020). Based on observations, character education at SD Islam Al Umm is implemented by:

1. Integrating character education into the curriculum and learning process.
2. Emphasizing daily behavioral routines, such as praying before and after lessons, greeting others, smiling, and showing respect.
3. Empowering school management and administration.
4. Developing and providing opportunities for students' potential through co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
5. Providing exemplary behavior for students.
6. Implementing school norms, rules, and culture.

Classroom observations revealed differences in dynamics between boys and girls. Female students tended to be more organized and quicker to settle before lessons, while male students

required a more flexible approach to manage the learning environment. However, both boys and girls were actively engaged in discussions, asking questions, and participating in class activities—indicating high levels of engagement. Teachers reported that segregation allowed them to focus more effectively on the learning styles and needs of each gender group.

Interviews with students showed that they felt more comfortable and expressive in gender-homogeneous classrooms. In social interactions outside the classroom, students demonstrated healthy modesty when encountering peers of the opposite sex, reflecting internalized moral values instilled from an early age. Teachers noted that incidents of verbal or physical harassment between genders were extremely rare, demonstrating the positive impact of gender-based segregation in creating a safe and comfortable environment. Homogeneity within a class also contributed to positive character development and reduced distractions, allowing students to focus on academic achievement and character formation. Gender segregation at SD Islam Al Umm helps build two key elements of character education: healthy modesty and respect for the opposite sex. Healthy modesty, as explained by teachers, reflects a reluctance to engage in inappropriate behavior—a foundational element of moral strength. Respect for the opposite sex encourages students to understand gender differences positively and foster healthy social interactions.

Discussion

Based on field findings and interviews, the researcher analyzed data related to cultivating modesty and respect toward the opposite sex through gender-based classroom segregation:

1. **Instilling healthy modesty**

Interviews with teachers revealed that segregation creates a more controlled environment in which boys and girls can focus on academic and character development without being distracted by age-inappropriate gender dynamics. Students in separate classes showed improved positive modesty—reluctance to engage in inappropriate behavior, teasing, or physical interactions with the opposite sex. Teachers also reported that students were more cautious and respectful when interacting with the opposite sex during break time or outside the classroom.

2. **Increasing respect for the opposite sex**

Another key finding was the improved attitudes of mutual respect between boys and girls. Interviews showed that students felt they respected the opposite sex more when learning in separate classrooms. They recognized gender differences, which allowed them to better understand the importance of respecting boundaries in line with Islamic teachings. Teachers also reported that cases of verbal or physical harassment between genders were extremely rare.

3. **Parental acceptance of the policy**

The segregation policy receives strong support from parents. They observed improvements in their children's behavior and respect for the opposite sex and believed that segregation provided a more focused learning environment. Parents expressed that this policy was one of the main reasons they chose SD Islam Al Umm, as they felt that their children could learn safely and comfortably.

Policy Implications

These findings have significant implications for educational policy development:

1. Gender-based segregation can be an effective strategy for creating a focused, controlled learning environment that supports positive character formation. In Islamic educational contexts, this policy reinforces moral values and offers a competitive advantage for schools in attracting parent interest.
2. Collaboration between teachers, schools, and parents is crucial for supporting policies rooted in local and religious values. Parental support was a key factor in the policy's success, as they witnessed tangible improvements in their children's character.
3. Gender segregation allows teachers to develop more targeted approaches to teaching and character-building. By understanding gender-specific needs and characteristics, teachers

can design more effective educational strategies, enhancing both academic performance and character development.

Overall, this study provides an empirical foundation for developing educational policies focused on character formation through gender-based classroom segregation. These findings are relevant not only to Islamic schools but also to other educational institutions seeking to foster moral and ethical values through structured pedagogical approaches.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study on cultivating a sense of modesty and respect toward the opposite sex through gender-based classroom segregation policies in elementary schools, it was found that this policy has a positive impact on strengthening students' character education. The cultivation of healthy modesty was achieved because the policy created a more controlled learning environment, allowing students to focus on both academic and character development. Students demonstrated an increased sense of healthy modesty, becoming more cautious and aware of inappropriate behaviors, particularly in their interactions with the opposite sex. This, in turn, reduced the potential for unethical behavior and enhanced politeness in daily social interactions.

Gender segregation also contributed to strengthening respect toward the opposite sex. Learning in separated environments helped students recognize differences in emotional needs and learning styles between genders, which enhanced mutual respect. The minimal occurrence of verbal and physical harassment among students indicates the effectiveness of this policy in preventing unethical behavior. The policy gained positive support from teachers and parents, who considered it important for their children's character development, especially in fostering respect toward the opposite sex. This support also made gender-based segregation a key factor attracting parents to enroll their children at SD Islam Al Umm, Malang.

Overall, the gender-based classroom segregation policy proved effective in cultivating a healthy sense of modesty and respect toward the opposite sex, and it significantly contributed to strengthening students' character education.

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