

# Multicultural Education Through the Lens of Feminist Ethics and Its Implications in Indonesia

## (A Study of Marilyn Friedman's Progressive-Inclusive Perspective)

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is motivated by the problem of educational development in Indonesia in the contemporary era, which overemphasizes competitive aspects while ignoring multiculturalism and feminist ethics. This is certainly not in line with the principles of diversity that are embraced and will have an impact on the formation of characters that are exclusive, radical, give birth to various other socio-cultural deviations, and are not gender-friendly. This study aims to investigate the idea of multicultural education grounded in feminist ethics from Marilyn Friedman's perspective and to assess its applicability to Islamic education in Indonesia. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, the research draws primarily on Marilyn Friedman's philosophical works, complemented by secondary sources such as books, academic journal articles, and relevant online materials discussing her ideas. The findings indicate that feminist ethics provides strong support for contemporary educational orientations that increasingly emphasize multiculturalism. Friedman conceptualizes this approach through several key stages: first, the articulation of feminist ethical justifications as the normative foundation of multicultural education; second, the continued integration of feminist ethics within multicultural curricula, emphasizing that multicultural education should actively address gender-based oppression, subordination, and marginalization rather than merely promoting awareness of diversity; and third, the necessity of critically resisting forms of moral arrogance originating from patriarchal, cultural, or religious frameworks in order to enhance the quality and inclusivity of multicultural education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a country with a highly diverse population in terms of ethnicity, culture, and religion, faces great challenges in developing an education system that is inclusive and respectful of diversity (Safitri et al., 2022). The current education system in Indonesia tends to emphasize competitive and academic aspects, often ignoring the multicultural values and feminist ethics that are essential in shaping the character of students who respect differences and equality (Vanesia et al., 2023). According to data from the BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik), Indonesia has more than 1300 ethnic groups and more than 700 local languages spoken daily (BPS-Statistics Indonesia, 2024). This diversity is a valuable asset, but it also poses a challenge to providing a fair and equitable education for all levels of society. Education that focuses too much on competition without considering multicultural and gender aspects can lead to exclusivity, radicalism, and various forms of social deviance (Wahyuni et al., 2024).

Acknowledging, appreciating, and incorporating diverse cultures and viewpoints into the teaching and learning process is known as multicultural education (Asriadi, 2023). The aim is to promote awareness and appreciation of diversity and equip learners with the ability to live harmoniously in a diverse society (Nurkholifah et al., 2024). Multicultural education seeks to overcome prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination that may arise due to cultural, ethnic, and religious differences (McIntosh, 2022). Banks explains that multicultural education involves several main dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction processes, reducing prejudice, equal education, and cultural empowerment of educational institutions (Banks, 2006). The implications of multicultural education in Indonesia continue to face a number of obstacles, such as a lack of resources and suitable teaching materials, as well as a lack of understanding and support from various parties.

An approach to moral philosophy that emphasizes women's experiences and gender equality concerns is known as feminist ethics. In addition to promoting a more equitable and just social transformation, it aims to investigate and confront patriarchal social and cultural structures (Nicholson & Pasque, 2023). Marilyn Friedman is one of the important figures in contemporary feminist ethics who has become a reference for the world's intellectuals, but is rarely recognized in Indonesia in particular. This can be seen in the lack of research efforts and studies on her thoughts. Her ideas emphasize the significance of inclusivity and gender justice in many facets of life, including education. Friedman argues that education based on feminist ethics should include several key elements: respect for women's experiences and perspectives, critical analysis of patriarchal power structures, and promotion of gender equality and justice. Feminist ethics also emphasizes the importance of addressing the various forms of oppression and subordination experienced by marginalized groups, including women (M. Friedman, 1995).

Islamic education in Indonesia has historically functioned as a central institution for moral and character formation through pesantren, madrasas, and modern Islamic schools. However, contemporary challenges such as globalization, modernization, and increasing demands for gender equality require Islamic education to move beyond traditional pedagogical frameworks toward more inclusive and justice-oriented models (Hanani, 2011; Meldianto & Hanani, 2022). Recent studies emphasize the need to integrate gender justice and inclusivity into Islamic education, yet they often remain normative or policy-oriented, without a robust ethical framework to guide curriculum design and pedagogical practice.

Feminist ethics offers a promising theoretical foundation for inclusive multicultural education. Marilyn Friedman's feminist ethical framework particularly her concepts of relational autonomy and resistance to arrogant moralism has been applied in various educational and professional contexts to address discrimination, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity (Azizaturroesyidah, Amali, Fatimah, & Nurhayati, 2023; Bell, 2007; Friedman, 1995). These studies demonstrate the relevance of feminist ethics for recognizing marginalized experiences and challenging patriarchal structures. However, existing research largely situates Friedman's ideas within Western contexts or secular educational fields, such as nursing education and political participation, rather than within Islamic education.

In the Indonesian context, recent scholarship has examined feminist and anti-feminist discourses in education and digital spaces, highlighting tensions between gender equality, religious interpretations, and multiculturalism (Mantu, 2022; Maryani, Janitra, & Ratmita, 2021). While these studies provide valuable sociocultural analysis, they tend to focus on discourse, activism, or policy debates, rather than on ethical theory as a foundation for educational design. Similarly, research on multicultural and gender education within Indonesia's Curriculum 2013 and Merdeka Curriculum underscores the importance of sociocultural diversity and differentiated learning (Hardi & Mudjiran, 2022; Putra, Rivauzi, Nafsan, Setiawan, & Chomariah, 2024), yet does not sufficiently engage feminist ethical concepts as normative and philosophical tools.

Based on the literature review, a clear research gap emerges: although feminist ethics, particularly Marilyn Friedman's framework has been recognized as relevant for advancing gender justice and inclusivity, there remains limited scholarly work that systematically applies her ethical concepts to the design of multicultural Islamic education in Indonesia. Addressing this gap, the present study employs Friedman's notions of relational autonomy and her critique of arrogant moralism to develop a conceptual foundation for inclusive, gender-just, and culturally responsive Islamic educational practices. By situating feminist ethics within Indonesia's plural social and religious context, this study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive and sustained strategy encompassing curriculum reform, teacher education, women's empowerment, collaboration with religious institutions, and the development of inclusive learning materials, thereby contributing to the advancement of an equitable Islamic education system aligned with the values of diversity and gender justice.

## 2. METHODS

This study adopts a philosophical descriptive-analytical approach grounded in feminist ethics (Lindemann, 2005). Rather than conducting empirical field research, it aims to conceptually examine multicultural education through the feminist ethical framework developed by Marilyn Friedman and to analyze its relevance for Islamic education in Indonesia. The primary unit of analysis consists of Friedman's key texts, particularly her article on *Arrogant Moralism* (1995) and her book *Autonomy, Gender, and Politics* (2003), along with related writings that articulate her views on relational autonomy, moral agency, and social justice. Secondary sources include scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and relevant academic discussions that interpret or critique Friedman's work within broader debates on feminist ethics, multiculturalism, and education.

Data analysis is conducted through conceptual analysis, hermeneutic textual reading, and critical feminist analysis. Conceptual analysis is used to clarify and

systematize Friedman's core ethical concepts, while hermeneutic reading enables an interpretive engagement with her texts in relation to their philosophical and socio-political contexts. Critical feminist analysis is employed to assess the implications of these concepts for the development of inclusive and gender-just multicultural Islamic education in Indonesia. As a philosophical inquiry, this study does not seek to produce empirical generalizations but rather to offer a normative and conceptual contribution that can inform future empirical research, policy formulation, and pedagogical practice in Islamic education (Moleong, 2018).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Intellectual Biography and Thoughts of Marilyn Friedman

Marilyn Friedman's philosophical position is rooted in feminist ethics and a relational conception of autonomy that challenges both liberal individualism and abstract moral universalism. In *What Are Friends For? Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory* (1993), Friedman argues that moral identity and ethical reasoning are shaped through personal relationships and social contexts rather than formed independently of them. This insight is further developed in *Autonomy, Gender, and Politics* (2003), where she introduces the concept of relational autonomy, emphasizing that individuals' capacities for self-determination are structured by gendered power relations, cultural norms, and institutional conditions. Friedman also critiques arrogant moralism, namely the imposition of dominant moral standards that ignore marginalized experiences, particularly those of women and minority groups (M. Friedman, 1995). Feminist ethics, in her view, must therefore attend to lived experience, care, and social embeddedness as essential components of moral theory.

These concepts fundamentally reshape the design of multicultural education. Drawing on Friedman's relational autonomy, multicultural education cannot be limited to celebrating cultural differences or promoting autonomy as individual choice alone; instead, it must recognize learners as socially situated moral agents whose identities are formed through relationships and power structures (M. Friedman, 2003). By rejecting arrogant moralism, educators are encouraged to avoid moral and cultural domination and to create dialogical learning spaces that value diverse experiences as legitimate sources of moral knowledge (M. Friedman, 1995). Consequently, multicultural education informed by feminist ethics becomes a critical moral project aimed at social justice, gender equality, and the ethical empowerment of students within pluralistic societies.

#### 3.2 Multicultural Education Based on Marilyn Friedman's Feminist Ethics

One of the key figures in modern feminist ethics is Marilyn Friedman. Her ideas emphasize the significance of inclusivity and gender justice in many facets of life, including education. Some of the key concepts in Friedman's thinking include:

*First*, respect for women's experiences. Friedman emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing women's experiences and perspectives in the development of moral and ethical theories. *Second*, in his critical analysis of power structures, Friedman criticizes patriarchal social and cultural structures and emphasizes the importance of overcoming gender oppression. *Third*, the promotion of gender equality and justice. Friedman argues that education should promote gender equality and justice and address various forms of subordination and marginalization (M. Friedman, 2005).

Friedman explains the integration of feminist ethics in multicultural education, including:

*First*, the unraveling of feminist ethical justifications. Multicultural education should be based on feminist ethical justifications, which recognize and value women's experiences and address patriarchal social structures. *Second*, integration in the curriculum. The study of feminist ethics should be integrated into the multicultural education curriculum. Giving students a thorough understanding of gender equality and cultural diversity is crucial. *Third*, resistance to Arrogant Moralism (M. Friedman, 1985). Multicultural education must be aware of arrogant moralism, whether from patriarchal, cultural, or religious groups. This is important to prevent exclusivity and discrimination in education.(M. Friedman, 1995)

Several key principles need to be considered. *First*, recognition and respect for women's experiences. Friedman emphasizes that multicultural education must recognize and value women's experiences. This means that women's experiences and perspectives should be integrated into the curriculum and teaching (M. Friedman, 1991). *Second*, inclusive curriculum. Curriculum development that includes women's contributions in various fields, including history, science, art, and literature. *Third*, critical analysis of social and cultural structures. Friedman argues that multicultural education should include a critical analysis of patriarchal social and cultural structures (M. Friedman, 2004). *Fourth*, critical discussion and debate. Encourage learners to participate in critical discussions and debates on issues of gender and power structures. *Fifth*, research and development. Encourage learners to conduct research and development that explores issues of gender and social justice (M. Friedman, 1995).

Friedman emphasizes the importance of promoting gender equality and justice in multicultural education. The implications of educational institution policies needs to ensure gender equality, including anti-discrimination policies and policies to support female learners. In addition, there is a need for intensive training and debriefing for educators and educational institution staff on gender equality and the importance of valuing diversity.

### 3.3 Implications for Islamic Education in Indonesia

Even in Indonesia, a nation with a majority Muslim population, education is a vital component of national development. In this regard, Islamic education is essential for developing the moral character and integrity of the next generation (Astuti et al., 2023). However, the challenges faced by Islamic education in Indonesia are not only limited to providing access and facilities but also include issues of gender and social justice. In this context, the ethics of feminism promoted by Marilyn Friedman offer a critical perspective that can provide new insights into the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

#### 3.3.1. Respect for Women's Experience

Marilyn Friedman underscores the necessity of recognizing and valuing women's lived experiences and perspectives in the formulation of moral and ethical theory (M. Friedman, 2005). When situated within the framework of Islamic education in Indonesia, this perspective carries important and far-reaching implications. Respect for women's experiences can be translated in the following ways:

First, recognition of women's contributions in Islamic history. Islamic education in Indonesia can enrich its curriculum by recognizing and appreciating the contributions of women in Islamic history. For example, the role of Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with

her), Aisyah, the Prophet Muhammad's wife, was a prosperous merchant and a strong advocate of the prophet's teachings, who is known as one of the main sources of Hadith and Islamic science. The introduction of these female figures in the subject matter can inspire female students and provide them with role models in their daily lives.

Second, a gender-inclusive curriculum. Islamic education curricula in Indonesia need to be designed to recognize and value women's perspectives. This can be done by integrating the study of women in Islam, including the study of Islamic laws relating to women's rights, the role of women in Islamic society, and contemporary issues facing Muslim women. This teaching should emphasize gender justice and appreciate women's contributions in various aspects of life.

Third, respect for the everyday experiences of women. In Islamic education, women's experiences in the home, community, and workplace must be respected and included in the conversation. This includes recognizing women's roles as mothers, wives, workers, and leaders in society. Thus, students can learn to appreciate and respect the role of women in various life contexts.

### 3.3.2. Critical Analysis of Social and Cultural Structures

Friedman emphasizes the importance of critical analysis of patriarchal social and cultural structures (M. Friedman, 2004). This analysis can be used in a number of ways in Indonesian Islamic education:

*First*, dismantling gender stereotypes. Islamic education must play a role in dismantling gender stereotypes that harm women. For example, the stereotype that women are only suitable for domestic roles or that women are less capable in the fields of science and technology. Through education, students can be invited to criticize and challenge these stereotypes and be given the understanding that men and women have the same potential to contribute in various fields.

*Second*, discussion of gender injustice in society. The Islamic education curriculum can include discussions about gender injustices that still occur in society, such as discrimination in employment, violence against women, and early marriage. This discussion needs to be done with an empathetic approach and based on Islamic teachings that emphasize justice and respect for women's rights.

*Third*, changes in attitudes and behavior. Islamic education should encourage changes in attitudes and behaviors towards women. This includes valuing women's contributions to the family and society and supporting gender equality in all aspects of life. Through education, students can learn to become active agents of change in creating a more just and equal society.

### 3.3.3. Promotion of Gender Equality and Equity

Friedman argues that education should promote gender equality and justice and address various forms of subordination and marginalization (M. Friedman, 2000). There are various ways to promote Islamic education in Indonesia:

*First*, gender-inclusive education policies. Islamic education institutions need to develop policies that support gender equality. This includes anti-discrimination policies, support for female students who face barriers in education, and the provision of facilities that support women's participation in all aspects of school life. These policies should be consistently implicated and monitored to ensure their effective implications.

*Second*, training and debriefing for educators. Educators need to be equipped with an understanding of gender equality and the importance of valuing diversity. This training

should include how to integrate a gender perspective in teaching, how to handle cases of gender discrimination, and how to support female students in reaching their full potential. Thus, educators can be effective agents of change in creating an inclusive and equitable educational environment.

*Third*, community involvement in the promotion of gender equality. Islamic education should involve the community in gender equality promotion efforts. This includes parents, religious leaders, and local communities. Through dialogue and cooperation, communities can be persuaded to support educational initiatives that respect and promote women's rights. This engagement is important to create sustainable and lasting change in society.

### 3.3.4. Integration of Feminist Ethics in Multicultural Education

Friedman emphasizes that multicultural education must be based on feminist ethical justifications, which recognize and value women's experiences and overcome patriarchal social structures (M. Friedman, 1995). This has the following ramifications for Indonesian Islamic education:

*First*, the unraveling of feminist ethical justifications. Islamic education should be based on feminist ethical principles, which value women's experiences and recognize their contributions in various fields. This includes Islam's acknowledgement of women's rights and the significance of upholding and defending these rights in day-to-day interactions.

*Second*, integration in the curriculum. The study of feminist ethics should be integrated into the Islamic education curriculum. Giving students a thorough understanding of gender equality and cultural diversity is crucial. The curriculum should include the study of women in Islamic history, Islamic laws relating to women, and contemporary issues facing Muslim women.

*Third*, resistance to moralistic arrogance. Multicultural education must guard against arrogant moralism, whether from patriarchal, cultural, or religious groups. This is important to prevent exclusivity and discrimination in education. The principles of inclusivity, tolerance, and respect for diversity must be taught in Islamic education, and attitudes that disparage or discriminate against other groups must be avoided (Ali et al., 2020).

### 3.3.5. Challenges and Opportunities in the Implications of Multicultural Education Based on Feminist Ethics Challenges

*First*, cultural and social resistance. The implications of education that respects gender equality may face resistance from a society that is still thick with patriarchal values. Changing people's attitudes and views requires time and consistent effort.

*Second*, limited resources. Implicating a gender-inclusive curriculum requires adequate resources, including trained educators and appropriate teaching materials. These resource limitations can be an obstacle to effective education implications.

*Third*, lack of comprehension and assistance. Efforts to advance gender equality in Islamic education may be hampered by a lack of understanding and support from a variety of stakeholders, including the government, society, and educational institutions.

### 3.3.6. Opportunities

*First*, increased awareness and support. Increased awareness of the importance of gender equality and social justice provides opportunities for the implications of

multicultural education based on feminist ethics. Support from various parties, including the government, community organizations, and religious leaders, can accelerate change.

*Second*, curriculum and teaching materials development. Developing curriculum and teaching materials that value women's contributions and cultural diversity provides an opportunity to create an inclusive and equitable educational environment. Collaboration with various institutions and organizations can help in this development.

*Third*, training and development of educators. Training and developing educators with an understanding of gender equality and multiculturalism can improve the quality of education. Trained educators can be effective agents of change in creating an inclusive and equitable education environment.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study was initiated by the concern, articulated in the Introduction, that Indonesian education particularly Islamic education has not yet fully integrated multicultural values and gender justice, despite the country's profound cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. Rather than evaluating existing educational practices, this research was designed as a conceptual and normative inquiry that examines whether feminist ethics, as developed by Marilyn Friedman, can offer an inclusive ethical framework to strengthen multicultural Islamic education in Indonesia. The analysis confirms that Friedman's feminist ethics is conceptually compatible with and normatively supportive of the objectives of multicultural education within Islamic educational contexts.

The examination of Marilyn Friedman's intellectual contributions demonstrates that her feminist ethics emphasizes respect for women's experiences, relational autonomy, critical engagement with power structures, and resistance to arrogant moralism. At a theoretical level, these principles provide a robust ethical foundation for multicultural education, as they move beyond a superficial recognition of diversity toward an active critique of structural inequalities and gender-based marginalization. Conceptually, this framework directly addresses the risks identified in the Introduction such as exclusivity, moral absolutism, and social injustice that may arise when education neglects multicultural and gender-sensitive perspectives.

The study further argues, at a normative and philosophical level, that integrating feminist ethical values into Islamic education does not contradict Islamic teachings. On the contrary, feminist ethics can reinforce core Islamic principles such as justice ('adl), human dignity (*karāmah*), and moral equality. By rethinking curricula, pedagogical orientations, and institutional norms through a feminist ethical lens particularly by foregrounding women's contributions and critically engaging patriarchal interpretations Islamic education can be conceptually reoriented toward greater inclusivity and social responsibility. These arguments do not represent an assessment of current practices but rather propose an ethical model that can guide future educational development.

Importantly, this study also identifies, at a theoretical level, potential challenges and opportunities related to the application of feminist ethics in Islamic education. Cultural resistance, institutional inertia, and limited structural support are recognized as conceptual constraints, while growing public awareness of gender justice, curriculum reform discourses, and educator professional development are identified as enabling conditions. These considerations reinforce the argument that any future reform must be comprehensive, context-sensitive, and supported by multiple stakeholders.

Looking ahead, this research opens important avenues for further inquiry. Theoretically, future studies may deepen the dialogue between feminist ethics and Islamic ethical traditions by exploring how concepts such as relational autonomy, care, and gender justice can be further grounded in Islamic epistemology and Indonesian local wisdom. Empirically, subsequent research may build upon this conceptual framework by investigating its practical relevance and implementation in specific Islamic educational institutions such as *pesantren*, *madrasas*, and Islamic universities through qualitative or mixed-method approaches.

From an applied perspective, policymakers, curriculum designers, and educators may use the findings of this study as a conceptual reference rather than an evaluative benchmark when developing multicultural and gender-inclusive Islamic education models. In this way, the study contributes conceptually and normatively to ongoing debates on inclusive education and supports the long-term advancement of equitable, culturally sensitive, and justice-oriented Islamic education in Indonesia.

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