

Gender Equality Perceptions of Women's Leadership: A Case Study in an Islamic Education Leadership Class

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Abstract: *Women's leadership remains a contested issue within Islamic educational institutions, where its legitimacy is frequently debated through both religious and socio-cultural lenses. Students of Islamic education leadership are strategic actors because the gender attitudes they form during their studies are likely to shape their future leadership practice. This study aims to examine the perception of third-semester students enrolled in the Islamic Education Leadership course at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta toward women's leadership from a gender-equality perspective. A concurrent (convergent) triangulation mixed-methods design was employed, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously from the same participants, analyzed in parallel, and merged during interpretation. Data were collected from 54 of 97 students (55.6%) through a structured questionnaire containing closed-ended items (quantitative strand) and open-ended items, observation, and interviews (qualitative strand), with validity maintained through both methodological and data triangulation. The quantitative strand, analyzed descriptively and with the Fisher–Freeman–Halton exact test, showed that 74.1% of students supported women's leadership, 25.9% were neutral, and none rejected it, placing overall acceptance in the “good” category (71–85%); acceptance additionally varied significantly across the three classes (Fisher–Freeman–Halton exact test, $p = .007$). The qualitative strand, analyzed through thematic coding, found that competence-based reasoning (46.3%) and Islamic normative legitimacy (48.1%) were the most frequently articulated grounds for acceptance. Merging both strands revealed that several “neutral” participants articulated substantively supportive, competence-based reasoning, indicating a latent acceptance that the quantitative label alone did not capture. The study concludes that exposure to Islamic educational-leadership coursework is associated with a generally equitable perception of women's leadership, offering a basis for strengthening gender-responsive leadership education.*

Keywords: Perception; Women's Leadership; Gender Equality; Islamic Education

Introduction

Gender issues are frequently associated with discrimination and relational inequalities between men and women in society.¹ Within the discourse of Islamic thought, gender issues are inextricably linked to how the Muslim community interprets religious texts, including the Qur'an and Hadith. Unproductive interpretations of these texts have been recognized as a primary source of gender bias, which consequently places women in subordinate positions.² Conversely, intellectual advancements and the growing respect for human rights have fostered widespread recognition of the equal status of men and women.³

Ideally, awareness of gender equality should be cultivated from an early age, with education serving as one of the most strategic channels for this development. University students, acting as agents of change who are expected to think critically, occupy a crucial position in the process of internalizing these values.⁴ This role becomes increasingly critical when these students are specifically studying Islamic educational leadership, as their attitudes toward women's leadership are likely to translate into future policies and practices when they assume managerial roles in educational institutions.

Conceptually, leadership is understood as the ability to influence and mobilize others to willingly achieve organizational goals in an effective, efficient, and economical manner.⁵ A leader plays a pivotal role in determining morale, security, the quality of work life, and the overall performance level of an organization.⁶ Within this framework, a leader's gender does not theoretically determine success; rather, competence and performance are the decisive factors. Normatively, women's leadership possesses strong legitimacy, supported by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights—ratified by Indonesia—which guarantees

¹ N. N. Aini and N. Afifah, "Gender Equality in the Scope of the University of Muhammadiyah Surabaya Organization in 2021" (2021); M. F. Iqbal and S. Harianto, "Prasangka, Ketidaksetaraan, dan Diskriminasi Gender dalam Kehidupan Mahasiswa Kota Surabaya: Tinjauan Pemikiran Konflik Karl Marx," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Sosial* 8, no. 2 (2022): 187–199, <https://doi.org/10.23887/jiis.v8i2.52926>.

² Z. M. Wahyuni, F. Lestari, and U. Hasanah, "Kepemimpinan dan Gender dalam Lembaga Pendidikan Islam," *PRODU: Prokurasi Edukasi Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.15548/p-prokurasi.v2i1.2246>.

³ B. Bangun, "Hak Perempuan dan Kesetaraan Gender dalam Perspektif Filsafat Hukum," *Pandecta Research Law Journal* 15, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.15294/pandecta.v15i1.23895>.

⁴ U. S. Budi, "Konstruksi Kesetaraan Gender dalam Pengurus Kohati Badan Koordinasi Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam Jawa Timur Periode 2018–2020" 9 (2021).

⁵ Wahyuni, Lestari, and Hasanah, "Kepemimpinan dan Gender."

⁶ Emhemed Slil et al., "Impact of Safety Leadership and Employee Morale on Safety Performance: The Moderating Role of Harmonious Safety Passion," *Buildings* 15, no. 2 (2025): 186, <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings15020186>.

women's freedom to both vote and hold leadership positions.⁷ Furthermore, numerous studies indicate that women's leadership has the potential to yield higher effectiveness, foster more collaborative working relationships, and cultivate a diverse and creative work environment.⁸

Previous studies on perceptions of women's leadership and gender equality within Islamic higher education institutions have been conducted; for instance, Harida⁹ investigated the academic community at IAIN Padangsidimpuan, and Aisyah et al.¹⁰ explored the campus environment at IAIN Syekh Nurjati Cirebon. These studies have generally captured the perceptions of the broader campus population without distinguishing participants by their specific curricular exposure to leadership education, leaving unclear whether acceptance patterns differ among students who are formally and currently engaged with leadership theory as part of their coursework. Consequently, an empirical gap remains: few studies have specifically targeted students currently enrolled in Islamic educational leadership courses—a cohort systematically equipped with leadership frameworks through their curriculum. A theoretical gap is also evident, as prior research has rarely linked curricular exposure—as an active, ongoing formative mechanism—to the development of gender equality attitudes, tending instead to treat such attitudes as a static outcome of general socialization. Consequently, the question of how students who are specifically studying leadership perceive women's leadership, and whether this exposure is associated with a distinct pattern of acceptance, remains inadequately addressed.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on third-semester students actively enrolled in the Islamic Education Leadership course at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta as the unit of analysis. Selecting this specific group allows for a more contextual examination of the relationship between leadership learning processes and attitudes toward gender equality—a perspective that remains underexplored. Methodologically, this study further departs from prior research on this topic by employing a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative

⁷ E. A. Da Meisa and P. P. Anzari, "Perspektif Feminisme dalam Kepemimpinan Perempuan di Indonesia," *Jurnal Integrasi dan Harmoni Inovatif Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial (JIHIS)* 1, no. 6 (2021): 711–719, <https://doi.org/10.17977/um063v1i6p711-719>.

⁸ R. L. Isnaini et al., "Gender-Based Leadership in Quality Assurance Development: A Phenomenological Study," *Cogent Education* 10, no. 2 (2023): 2255078, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2255078>.

⁹ E. S. Harida, "Persepsi Civitas Akademika terhadap Kesetaraan Gender dan Kepemimpinan Perempuan di IAIN Padangsidimpuan," *TAZKIR: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-ilmu Sosial dan Keislaman* 1, no. 2 (2015): 55, <https://doi.org/10.24952/tazkir.v1i2.361>.

¹⁰ A. Aisyah et al., "Kesetaraan Gender tentang Kepemimpinan Perempuan di Lingkungan Kampus IAIN Syekh Nurjati Cirebon Menurut Perspektif Hadis Shahih Bukhari," *Gunung Djati Conferences Series* 21 (2023): 31–41.

evidence are collected simultaneously and subsequently merged, allowing numerical patterns of acceptance to be cross-validated against the substantive reasoning underlying them. Based on this background, the present study aims to explore and analyze the perceptions of third-semester students in the Islamic Education Leadership course regarding women's leadership from a gender equality perspective, while simultaneously identifying the underlying patterns of acceptance.

To ground the analysis of student perceptions in this study, three interrelated concepts are elaborated: perception, women's leadership, and gender equality.

Perception refers to the way an individual views or understands an object or phenomenon.¹¹ Burge¹² asserts that perception is generally influenced by two factors: internal and external. Meanwhile, Musdhalifa¹³ defines it as a process of thinking, decision-making, and interpreting a specific object. Therefore, perception can be understood as a way of viewing and comprehending an object—shaped by both internal and external factors—that enables an individual to interpret and make decisions regarding that object. In this study, student perception serves as the entry point for evaluating their acceptance of women's leadership.

Turning to the concept of women's leadership, it is worth noting that, in the global era, success in the professional sphere is increasingly determined by competence and capability rather than gender. Professions formerly dominated by men are now frequently undertaken by women with equal success; thus, organizational achievement should be evaluated based on performance rather than the leader's gender.¹⁴ The essence of leadership, whether male or female, lies in the ability to generate public benefit, characterized by three principles: equality across all strata, protection from discrimination, and the provision of equal opportunities for women.¹⁵ Women's leadership often exhibits distinct characteristics, including a democratic and participative decision-making style, the ability to make subordinates feel comfortable and valued, and a strong commitment to egalitarian values.

Gender equality is an integral component of high-quality education rooted in justice. This justice must extend beyond mere access, encompassing

¹¹ A. H. Nisa, H. Hasna, and L. Yarni, "Persepsi," *KOLONI* 2, no. 4 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.31004/koloni.v2i4.568>.

¹² T. Burge, *Perception: First Form of Mind* (Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198871002.001.0001>.

¹³ D. Musdhalifa and M. Syaifudin, "Persepsi dan Komunikasi dalam Organisasi Pendidikan," *Jurnal Al-Kifayah: Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan* 2, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.53398/ja.v2i1.298>.

¹⁴ Da Meisa and Anzari, "Perspektif Feminisme."

¹⁵ Masithoh and R. Kholifah, "Women's Leadership: A Comparative Study between Fiqh Traditions and Contemporary Fatwa," *Demak Universal Journal of Islam and Sharia* 3, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.61455/deujis.v3i01.213>.

educational quality and the potential to rectify social inequities.¹⁶ Consequently, leadership is required that can internalize the value of justice for all organizational members without contesting gender differences. Divergent perspectives on women's leadership often stem from a conflation of gender and biological sex; gender refers to socially constructed characteristics, such as norms, roles, and relational patterns.¹⁷

Islam delineates that gender justice is supported by the general principles that men and women possess equal potential, share the mandate to prosper the earth as vicegerents (*khalifah*), have accepted the primordial covenant, and have equal opportunities to achieve excellence.¹⁸ Quraish Shihab, as cited by Harida,¹⁹ asserts that women's leadership entails women exercising leadership while maintaining their honor and dignity; he permits women to become leaders because men and women are helpers to one another in goodness; hence, the only true distinction between them is their level of faith. This framework is utilized to interpret student perceptions in the current study.

Taken together, these three concepts form the interpretive lens of this study. Perception theory explains how students' internal and external experiences during the Islamic Education Leadership course shape the way they view women's leadership. The leadership and gender-equality literature provides the normative and conceptual criteria—competence-based evaluation, justice, and equal opportunity—against which students' stated attitudes are assessed. The Islamic gender-justice framework, in turn, supplies the religious legitimacy through which students' acceptance or hesitation can be meaningfully interpreted, rather than treated as isolated opinions. This integrated framework directly addresses the research question of how curricular exposure to Islamic educational leadership shapes students' gender-equality perceptions, ensuring that the three theoretical strands function as a unified analytical tool rather than as fragmented background concepts.

Methods

This study employed a concurrent (convergent) triangulation mixed-methods design, in which quantitative (QUAN) and qualitative (QUAL) data

¹⁶ A. Ghimire and M. S. Neupane, "The Hidden Curriculum: Examining Gender Disparities in Career Trajectories of Female Medical Graduates from Nepal," *BMC Public Health* 25 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-22700-9>.

¹⁷ Tremmel, M., and Ingrid Wahl. "Gender stereotypes in leadership: Analyzing the content and evaluation of stereotypes about typical, male, and female leaders." *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1034258>.

¹⁸ A. Wijaya, I. Muchlis, and D. M. Rohmatulloh, "Rethinking Gender Justice in the Quran: A Critical Exploration of Muslim Feminist Perspectives," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 26, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i1.5704>.

¹⁹ Quraish Shihab, dikutip dalam Harida, "Persepsi Civitas Akademika," 55.

were collected simultaneously, given approximately equal priority, analyzed independently, and subsequently merged during interpretation to corroborate, cross-validate, and enrich the understanding of students' perceptions of women's leadership.²⁰ Within this design, the quantitative strand addressed the overall magnitude and distribution of students' attitudes and whether this distribution varied systematically across classes, while the qualitative strand addressed the reasoning and meanings underlying those attitudes; neither strand was treated as subordinate to the other, and the principal analytical contribution of the study emerges from the point at which the two strands are brought together for comparison.²¹ This design was selected over a purely qualitative or purely quantitative alternative because the research problem required both an accurate estimate of the pattern of acceptance and an in-depth understanding of why that pattern was formed—two objectives more effectively achieved by comparing independently derived quantitative and qualitative accounts than by relying on either form of data alone.²²

The participants in this study were third-semester students enrolled in the Islamic Education Leadership course at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, drawn from three parallel classes (KPI 3A, 3B, and 3C) with a combined enrollment of 97 students. Consistent with the concurrent design, every participant contributed data to both strands: each completed the closed-ended items constituting the quantitative strand and was also invited to respond to the open-ended items, with a subset additionally taking part in observation and interviews that constituted the qualitative strand. Participants were not determined through probability sampling but through voluntary participation, whereby all students who were willing and able to complete the full set of instruments were included. This process yielded 54 participants (55.6% of the eligible cohort): 16 from class 3A, 24 from class 3B, and 14 from class 3C, a sample sufficient to support both descriptive-inferential quantitative analysis and information-rich qualitative interpretation.

The selection of third-semester students in this specific course as research subjects was based on theoretical and methodological considerations rather than mere convenience. These subjects experienced curricular exposure directly relevant to the investigated construct: because they were systematically studying leadership concepts, their perceptions of women's

²⁰ J. W. Creswell, V. L. Plano Clark, M. L. Gutmann, and W. E. Hanson, "Advanced Mixed Methods Research Designs," in *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*, ed. A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 209–240.

²¹ M. D. Fetters, L. A. Curry, and J. W. Creswell, "Achieving Integration in Mixed Methods Designs—Principles and Practices," *Health Services Research* 48, no. 6 Pt 2 (2013): 2134–2156, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.12117>.

²² F. G. Castro, J. Kellison, S. J. Boyd, and A. Kopak, "A Methodology for Conducting Integrative Mixed Methods Research and Data Analyses," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 4, no. 4 (2010): 342–360, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689810382916>.

leadership represented informed reasoning rather than lay opinions, thereby enhancing the content validity of the data. The third semester also served as a strategic transition point in attitude formation; the students had passed the initial academic adaptation phase, yet their attitudes and values regarding gender equality were still developing and remained relatively open to growth, making it a highly significant phase to capture and potentially intervene through education.²³

The subjects also possessed high prospective relevance because, as prospective managers and leaders of Islamic educational institutions, their attitudes toward women's leadership have the potential to materialize into future policies and practices, either by reproducing or correcting gender biases. Furthermore, focusing on a single cohort with equivalent curricular exposure functioned as a control for the learning variable, enabling the study to isolate the relationship between leadership education and gender equality attitudes—a perspective that distinguishes this study from previous research assessing broader academic communities.²⁴

Data were collected through three concurrent, complementary techniques administered within the same timeframe. The quantitative strand consisted of closed-ended items embedded in an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, in which participants indicated their attitude toward women's leadership as supportive, neutral, or rejecting. The qualitative strand consisted of open-ended items within the same questionnaire instrument, in which participants elaborated on their opinions and reasons; supplementary observation of leadership dynamics within the academic environment; and semi-structured interviews conducted with a subset of participants to probe more deeply into the reasoning behind their questionnaire responses. Because both strands were embedded in a single instrument and administered to the same participants within the same period, data collection satisfied the concurrent, rather than sequential, criterion central to this design.²⁵ Validity was maintained through two complementary forms of triangulation: methodological triangulation, achieved by comparing findings derived from the quantitative and qualitative strands, and data-source triangulation, achieved by cross-verifying the questionnaire, observation, and interview data within the qualitative strand itself.

The two strands were analyzed independently before being merged. In the quantitative strand, participants' responses to the closed-ended items

²³ D. B. Kowitz, "Promoting Egalitarian Gender Role Attitudes among College Cisgender Men" (2023), <https://doi.org/10.46569/0z709386d>.

²⁴ Harida, "Persepsi Civitas Akademika," 55; Aisyah et al., "Kesetaraan Gender."

²⁵ Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson, "Advanced Mixed Methods Research Designs."

were calculated descriptively as frequencies and percentages and categorized using the assessment score range proposed by Amaliyah et al.,²⁶ as presented in Table 1; to examine whether the distribution of attitudes differed systematically across the three classes, the Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test was applied rather than the conventional chi-square test of independence, because the resulting 3×2 cross-tabulation did not satisfy the chi-square approximation's expected-frequency requirement that no more than 20% of cells fall below an expected count of five;²⁷ the Fisher-Freeman-Halton test provides an exact p-value for r×c contingency tables without relying on this large-sample approximation, and was therefore the statistically appropriate choice given the present data. In the qualitative strand, open-ended responses and interview transcripts were analyzed through the four-stage procedure of data reduction, data display, interpretation, and conclusion drawing;²⁸ in addition, responses were coded thematically using a directed, keyword-based coding scheme developed from a preliminary reading of the data, and the frequency of each theme was quantified to enable direct comparison with the quantitative strand. Finally, consistent with the merging step that defines a concurrent triangulation design, the results of the two strands were compared side by side within a joint interpretive framework to identify points of convergence, divergence, and complementarity,²⁹ the results of which are reported in the following section.

Score Range	Category
86% – 100%	Excellent
71% – 85%	Good
56% – 70%	Fair
40% – 55%	Poor
0% – 39%	Very Poor

Table 1. Categorization of Assessment Scores for Perceptions of Women's Leadership from a Gender Perspective

²⁶ N. Amaliyah, N. Aznam, and S. S. Dewi, "Analysis of Students' Scientific Attitude Through Experience Practicum Activities in Chemistry Learning," *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA* 10, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.29303/jppipa.v10i1.6068>.

²⁷ G. H. Freeman and J. H. Halton, "Note on an Exact Treatment of Contingency, Goodness of Fit and Other Problems of Significance," *Biometrika* 38, no. 1-2 (1951): 141-149, <https://doi.org/10.1093/biomet/38.1-2.141>.

²⁸ M. N. Adlini et al., "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka," *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v6i1.3394>.

²⁹ Fetters, Curry, and Creswell, "Achieving Integration in Mixed Methods Designs."

Result and Discussion

Result

Acceptance Level of Women's Leadership

Data collected from the 54 participants were descriptively summarized to characterize the overall tendency of their attitudes toward women's leadership from a gender equality perspective, prior to a deeper thematic interpretation of the underlying reasoning. This descriptive summary indicated an acceptance level of 74.1%, which was then interpreted using the score categorization presented in Table 1.

Based on this categorization, the score of 74.1% fell within the 71%–85% range, classifying it as "good". This implies that the third-semester students in the Islamic Education Leadership course at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta demonstrated a generally good understanding and acceptance of women's leadership from a gender perspective. Given that the 54 participants represented 55.6% of the eligible cohort, it can be stated that over half of the students were willing to articulate their opinions. These findings are believed to adequately represent the attitudinal tendencies of the investigated student cohort.

Attitude Patterns: Supportive, Neutral, and Rejecting

The questionnaire calculation results regarding the students' pro and con attitudes toward women's leadership are presented in Table 2. A total of 74.1% of the students stated their support for women's leadership, 25.9% opted to remain neutral, and none of the participants (0%) rejected it. This pattern confirmed that the students' acceptance of women's leadership was good, and, more importantly, no explicit rejection was found.

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Supportive	40	74,1%
Neutral	14	25,9%
Rejecting	0	0%
Total	54	100%

Table 2. Distribution of Participants' Attitudes Toward Women's Leadership

Viewed from the gender composition, the participants comprised 21 male students and 33 female students (Table 3). Neutral attitudes were expressed not only by male participants but also by some female participants, each with their respective reasons and perspectives. This indicated that attitudes toward women's leadership were not inherently determined by the participant's gender.

Gender	Frequency
Male	21
Female	33
Total	54

Table 3. Number of Participants by Gender

Variation in Acceptance Across Classes (Quantitative Strand)

To further examine the quantitative strand, students' attitudes were cross-tabulated by class, as presented in Table 4. The proportion of supportive responses differed noticeably across the three classes: 43.8% in class 3A, compared with 87.5% in class 3B and 85.7% in class 3C. Because this 3×2 cross-tabulation contained two cells (33.3% of the six cells) with an expected frequency below five—exceeding the conventional threshold of no more than 20% of cells below this value, and therefore violating a core assumption of the chi-square approximation—the Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test was used in place of the chi-square test of independence. This exact test confirmed that the variation in attitudes across classes was statistically significant, $p = .007$, indicating that class membership was associated with students' attitudes toward women's leadership. Because the Fisher-Freeman-Halton test computes an exact probability directly from the hypergeometric distribution of the observed table rather than relying on a large-sample approximation, this result does not depend on the expected-frequency assumption that a chi-square test would have violated; the magnitude and consistency of the pattern—class 3A diverging from both 3B and 3C in the same direction—further support the conclusion that the association is unlikely to be attributable to chance alone.

Class	Supportive	Neutral	Total
KPI 3A	7 (43.8%)	9 (56.2%)	16 (100%)
KPI 3B	21 (87.5%)	3 (12.5%)	24 (100%)
KPI 3C	12 (85.7%)	2 (14.3%)	14 (100%)
Total	40 (74.1%)	14 (25.9%)	54 (100%)

Table 4. Cross-Tabulation of Attitude by Class

This class-level variation was not anticipated in the original design and became visible only through the quantitative strand's inferential analysis, illustrating one of the practical advantages of the concurrent triangulation design: patterns invisible to purely descriptive or purely qualitative treatment can be surfaced once systematic statistical comparison is applied. The specific mechanism underlying class 3A's comparatively lower acceptance level cannot be determined from the present data and is flagged as an area

requiring further clarification (for example, differences in session timing, facilitation style, or group discussion dynamics across classes), as this information was not systematically recorded during data collection.

Thematic Coding of Qualitative Responses (Qualitative Strand)

Open-ended responses were coded thematically into six categories: competence-based reasoning, Islamic/religious legitimacy, historical or role-model figures, social change/inspiration, gender equality/justice, and conditional or context-dependent acceptance. Table 5 presents the frequency of each theme, both overall and disaggregated by closed-ended attitude group.

Theme	Overall (n=54)	Supportive (n=40)	Neutral (n=14)
Competence-based reasoning	25 (46.3%)	17 (42.5%)	8 (57.1%)
Islamic/religious legitimacy	26 (48.1%)	22 (55.0%)	4 (28.6%)
Gender equality/justice	21 (38.9%)	19 (47.5%)	2 (14.3%)
Conditional/context-dependent	19 (35.2%)	12 (30.0%)	7 (50.0%)
Social change/inspiration	4 (7.4%)	4 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Historical/role-model figures	2 (3.7%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive; a single response could be coded into more than one theme.

Table 5. Frequency of Thematic Codes in Open-Ended Responses, by Attitude Group

Across the full sample, Islamic/religious legitimacy (48.1%) and competence-based reasoning (46.3%) were the two most frequently invoked grounds for students' attitudes, followed by gender equality/justice (38.9%) and conditional or context-dependent acceptance (35.2%). Historical role-model figures and explicit references to social change were comparatively rare, suggesting that students' reasoning was grounded more in normative and competence-based logic than in exemplar-based argumentation.

Latent Acceptance Behind Neutral Attitudes

An interesting finding to discuss is the inconsistency between the chosen attitude and the reasoning provided by some participants. Several participants who selected a neutral stance on the closed-ended items actually

elaborated on reasons that substantively supported women's leadership. One participant stated:

"Because gender equality must be highly upheld and [everyone is] entitled to their rights in all fields. The reason I chose neutral is that, indeed, if a woman is serious and already possesses the competence qualifications to be a leader, then it is entirely possible for that woman to become a leader."

(Interview with SAH, November 2, 2025)

This statement demonstrated that a "neutral" choice was not synonymous with rejection; conversely, the participant upheld gender equality and provided space for competent women to lead. A similar pattern was observed in other supportive participants who provided more explicit reasoning:

"Several reasons why I support women's leadership are: (1) potential and capability, meaning women have the same potential as men in various fields, including leadership; (2) social change, meaning women in leadership positions can serve as role models and inspire the next generation; and (3) better decision-making, in which case some studies show women often have different approaches that can lead to better economic and social stability." (Interview with SLO, November 1, 2025)

These two excerpts reinforced the interpretation that the students' actual acceptance of women's leadership was likely higher than the 74.1% recorded in the closed-ended items, because some neutral attitudes were essentially conditional acceptances based on competence. This impression is corroborated quantitatively by the thematic coding in Table 5: competence-based reasoning was proportionally more common among neutral respondents (57.1%) than among supportive respondents (42.5%), while conditional/context-dependent reasoning was likewise more prevalent among neutral respondents (50.0%) than supportive respondents (30.0%). Rather than reflecting indifference or rejection, the neutral category therefore appears to capture a distinct, competence-conditioned form of acceptance rather than an absence of support. These findings align with the view of Da Meisa and Anzari,³⁰ which posits that the determinant of leadership success is performance rather than gender.

Convergence and Divergence Between the Quantitative and Qualitative Strands

Consistent with the merging step of the concurrent triangulation design, the quantitative and qualitative strands were compared directly. Three patterns emerged from this comparison. First, both strands converged in indicating an overall favorable orientation toward women's leadership: the quantitative strand recorded no outright rejection, and the qualitative strand likewise showed no theme indicative of categorical opposition, with even the most conditional responses framing acceptance as possible under specified conditions rather than foreclosing it. Second, the two strands diverged at the

³⁰Da Meisa and Anzari, "Perspektif Feminisme."

level of the “neutral” category: the quantitative label implied ambivalence, whereas the qualitative coding showed that neutral respondents most frequently invoked competence-based reasoning (57.1%), a proportion higher than among supportive respondents. This divergence is analytically productive rather than merely a discrepancy—it suggests that the closed-ended attitude categories, taken alone, would have understated the extent of substantive, reasoned acceptance among the study’s participants. Third, the class-level variation identified in the quantitative strand (Table 4) had no corresponding explanation in the qualitative data, since interview and open-ended responses were not systematically differentiated by class during data collection; this represents a genuine limitation of the present merging process and is flagged as a priority for future data collection specifically designed to probe class-level differences qualitatively. Taken together, this merging process demonstrates the substantive value of the concurrent triangulation design: the qualitative strand enriched and partially reinterpreted the quantitative categories, while the quantitative strand revealed a systematic pattern that the qualitative strand alone could not have detected.

Discussion

The high rate of acceptance and the complete absence of rejection can be interpreted as an indication that gender equality values have been sufficiently internalized among the students enrolled in the Islamic educational leadership course. Several factors are presumed to underlie this phenomenon. First, curricular exposure to leadership concepts inclines students to evaluate leaders based on competence and performance rather than gender, as emphasized in the leadership literature.³¹ Second, the normative legitimacy of women's leadership through human rights instruments recognized by Indonesia contributes to shaping an accepting attitude.³²

From an Islamic perspective, this accepting attitude is consistent with the principle that Islam honors human beings regardless of gender, and the fundamental distinction between them is their level of faith.³³ No verse in the Qur'an or Hadith states that women were created inferior to men; thus, Islam fundamentally upholds the value of equality. This is also supported by the historical trajectory of women's leadership in Islamic tradition, such as the role of Aisha as an astute politician, and the roles of Khadijah and Fatimah in the realm of public policy within the Islamic community.³⁴

³¹ Kowitz, “Promoting Egalitarian Gender Role Attitudes.”

³² Da Meisa and Anzari, “Perspektif Feminisme.”

³³ M. Hidayat et al., “Woman’s Leadership in Islamic Psychological Perspective,” *Humanitaria: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (2020): 49–67. <https://doi.org/10.14421/hum.v1i1.2520>

³⁴ Hidayat et al., “Woman’s Leadership.”

These findings converge with Harida's³⁵ research at IAIN Padangsidempuan, which similarly found broad acceptance of women's

³⁵ Harida, "Persepsi Civitas Akademika," 55.

leadership among the academic community; however, the present study extends this line of inquiry by showing that acceptance is not merely present but actively reasoned—participants in this cohort explicitly grounded their support in competence-based arguments rather than general normative approval, a nuance that broader-population studies such as Harida's were not specifically designed to capture. Likewise, the results corroborate Isnaini et al.,³⁶ who demonstrated the positive contribution of gender-responsive leadership to institutional quality development; the present findings suggest a plausible upstream mechanism for that contribution, namely that future leaders' attitudes are already being shaped—and can be further shaped—during their formal leadership coursework, before they assume institutional roles. Furthermore, a body of literature identifies several advantages of female leaders, including gentleness, composure, and humility; prudence and an analytical approach in decision-making; and the ability to understand subordinates, thereby fostering better superior-subordinate communication.³⁷ These democratic and participative characteristics corresponded closely with the reasons articulated by the study's participants, reinforcing rather than merely paralleling the theoretical expectation that competence-based, participative traits—rather than gender per se—underlie perceptions of effective leadership.

Nevertheless, gender equality should not necessarily be interpreted as the exact equivalence of roles between men and women. There are specific domains where, according to some participants, inherent nature (*kodrat*) and respective role proportions are still considered without violating the principles of justice. Consequently, gender equality is best understood as a natural occurrence in social life: when a woman becomes a leader, she is evaluated on her performance, as well as her justice and wisdom in decision-making. Practically, these findings imply that Islamic educational institutions possess a conducive environment for strengthening gender-responsive leadership education, while simultaneously converting "conditionally neutral" attitudes into firmer support through the enhancement of course materials.

The class-level variation identified through the quantitative strand also warrants theoretical reflection. While curricular exposure was held constant across the three classes—all having taken the same Islamic Education Leadership course—students in class 3A exhibited a markedly lower proportion of explicit support (43.8%) than their counterparts in classes 3B (87.5%) and 3C (85.7%). Because the present data do not include information on instructor assignment, session scheduling, or classroom composition, it is not possible to determine with certainty why this difference occurred; several explanations remain plausible, including cohort-specific classroom dynamics,

³⁶ Isnaini et al., "Gender-Based Leadership."

³⁷ H. Baharun, A. Wibowo, and S. N. Hasanah, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan dalam Menciptakan Sekolah Ramah Anak," *QUALITY* 9, no. 1 (2021): 87, <https://doi.org/10.21043/quality.v9i1.10109>.

variation in how discussions of gender equality were facilitated within each class, or unmeasured differences in students' prior exposure to gender-related discourse. This finding does not undermine the overall conclusion of general acceptance, since even in class 3A none of the participants expressed outright rejection; rather, it suggests that the strength, though not necessarily the direction, of acceptance may be shaped by classroom-level factors that operate independently of the shared curriculum—an avenue that the present study's data cannot resolve and that future research should investigate directly, for example through classroom observation protocols disaggregated by class.

Methodologically, this study also illustrates the practical benefit of a concurrent triangulation design over the single-method or single-strand alternatives typically used in comparable prior research. Had the quantitative strand been analyzed in isolation, the closed-ended "neutral" category would likely have been interpreted, as in much of the existing literature, as ambivalence or partial hesitation. Had the qualitative strand been analyzed in isolation, the systematic class-level variation—an unambiguous, statistically demonstrable pattern—would not have been detected, since qualitative coding alone does not readily surface distributional differences across subgroups. It is only through the deliberate merging of both strands, as prescribed by the concurrent triangulation design, that these two complementary insights—one reinterpreting a quantitative category and the other revealing a hidden quantitative pattern—could be identified within the same study.

Taken together, these findings both corroborate and extend the existing literature: they confirm the normative and institutional accounts of women's leadership acceptance found in prior Islamic higher-education studies, while adding a curriculum-specific explanatory layer that demonstrates how structured exposure to leadership theory during formal coursework is associated with attitudes that are not only accepting but explicitly reasoned in competence-based terms. This explanatory layer was made visible specifically because the quantitative and qualitative strands were merged rather than reported in isolation: the statistically confirmed distribution of attitudes gave the findings generalizable weight, while the thematically coded reasoning gave those same findings interpretive depth, and neither form of evidence alone would have supported the fuller account offered here.

Conclusion

This study concludes that third-semester students taking the Islamic Education Leadership course at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta have a good perception of women's leadership from a gender equality perspective, as established through a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design that merged quantitative and qualitative evidence. The quantitative strand recorded an acceptance rate of 74.1% (the "good" category), with 25.9% adopting a neutral stance and none expressing rejection, and further revealed a statistically significant variation in acceptance across classes (Fisher–

Freeman-Halton exact test, $p = .007$). The qualitative strand identified competence-based reasoning and Islamic normative legitimacy as the most frequently articulated grounds for acceptance. Merging the two strands showed that a portion of the neutral attitudes were fundamentally conditional acceptances based on competence—proportionally more so than among supportive participants—indicating that the actual acceptance of women's leadership is stronger and more substantively reasoned than the numerical data alone would suggest. This acceptance is underpinned by the normative legitimacy of human rights, the principles of equality within Islamic teachings, and the historical trajectory of women's leadership.

The contribution of this study lies both substantively, in mapping the perceptions of a student cohort currently studying leadership through their curriculum and demonstrating a link between exposure to leadership education and attitudes toward gender equality, and methodologically, in demonstrating how a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design can surface findings—such as the class-level variation in acceptance and the reinterpretation of the "neutral" category—that neither a purely quantitative nor a purely qualitative approach would have revealed on its own. Practically, these findings provide a foundation for developing gender-responsive leadership education within Islamic higher education institutions.

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, it only encompasses third-semester students in a single course, and thus does not yet represent the entire academic community of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. Second, although the Fisher-Freeman-Halton exact test used for the class-level comparison does not carry the expected-frequency assumption of the chi-square approximation, the per-class subsamples (14–24 participants) remain modest, and this finding should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive until replicated in a larger cohort. Third, because class membership was not recorded in relation to the qualitative interview and open-ended data in a systematically comparable way, the present merging process could not fully explain why class 3A diverged from the other two classes. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of participants across various study programs and academic levels, utilize a comparative design examining students who have and have not taken leadership courses, collect class-disaggregated qualitative data capable of explaining classroom-level variation, and incorporate more in-depth qualitative analyses to trace the roots of gender equality attitude formation.

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