Fostering Gender Literacy Through social media: English Study Program Students' Experiences as Digital Content Creators and Gender Advocates in Islamic Higher Education

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the effectiveness of digital feminist pedagogy in improving gender literacy among students at Islamic higher education institutions, emphasizing quantitative learning results and qualitative forms of creative expression. The study implements a convergent mixed-methods approach based on data from 56 students at two Islamic universities in Medan (private and state university), Indonesia. A validated 40-item Gender Literacy Assessment was conducted before and after an eight-week digital feminist pedagogy intervention, accompanied by multimodal discourse analysis of 30 created by students' digital campaigns. The findings indicate that both institutions showed statistically significant enhancements in gender literacy scores with substantial impact sizes. Qualitative analysis showed that students proficiently produced transformative digital content that challenges gender norms through the following key competencies: transforming abstract gender equality concepts into comprehensible visual narratives, employing diverse digital media formats to captivate varied audiences, and integrating local cultural contexts with global feminist perspectives. Culturally integrated digital advertising generated 261% greater engagement than universal strategies, underscoring the essential role of cultural adaptation in pedagogical efficacy. These findings highlight the efficacy of engaging students as content creators in gender equality education and illustrate that digital feminist pedagogy may effectively improve gender literacy in Islamic higher education settings while maintaining cultural-religious norms. This study contributes to the increasing data advocating for the integration of feminist pedagogy in higher education to empower students as agents of gender literacy and promote inclusive social change in conservative educational environments.

Keywords: Digital Content Creation, Digital Feminist Pedagogy, Gender Literacy, Islamic Higher Education

1. Introduction

In higher education, especially at Islamic colleges, an interplay exists between traditional religious beliefs and the demands of modernization and gender equality (Bangun, 2021; Noor Et Al., 2024). Islamic higher education institutions in

Indonesia, catering to around 15% of the national student demographic, have a distinctive role as a forum for discussion between conservative theological interpretations and progressive gender equality initiatives (Nawangsari et al., 2020; Waluyo et al., 2025). This strategic position positions students at the center of societal development, enabling them to become agents of change by reinterpreting gender discourse within a more inclusive religious context (Akrim, 2021).

The digital revolution has established a new discourse that facilitates the expression of different gender identities and collaborative action for equality advocacy. In 2023, Indonesia's internet penetration reached 77.02%, making social media platforms venues for challenging gender interpretations that beyond geographical and institutional confines (Wayan et al., 2023). Digital technology is not neutral and often reproduces existing gender inequalities. In this context, students are no longer confined to being passive recipients of knowledge but have evolved into prosumers, both producers and consumers of digital content, capable of creating counter-narratives to traditional gender hegemony through feminist open praxis that emphasizes the creation of inclusive and fair educational spaces (Atenas et al., 2022; Bahagijo et al., 2022; Tanaka et al., 2025).

Feminist pedagogy has developed significantly in global academic discourse, yet its implementation in Indonesian Islamic education faces complex challenges. Recent studies indicate that women in Muslim contexts are using sophisticated negotiation strategies with patriarchal structures, including forming secret alliances and financial tactics for autonomy (Akbari & True, 2024; McCarthy & Tomlin, 2017; Noer Farida Laila et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2024). However, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the quantitative effectiveness of feminist pedagogy interventions in Islamic higher education contexts, particularly concerning measurable learning outcomes and culturally sensitive implementation strategies. Previous studies have methodological limitations that are also worth noting. Most research on digital gender activism in Indonesia relies on content analysis or quantitative surveys (Widiastuti et al., 2024). This approach fails to explore the creative processes and psychological mechanisms underlying the production of gender advocacy content, ignoring the phenomenological dimension of students' experiences as agents of social transformation. Structured training in creativity can enhance certain aspects of creativity in students, confirming the importance of intervention programs designed to support creativity development (Betancourt et al., 2022). This study fills this gap by utilizing a mixed-methods strategy that integrates quantitative evaluation of gender literacy advancement with qualitative examination of creative expression trends.

This study develops a theoretical framework elucidating the interplay between human creativity, digital technology, and social change regarding gender equality in Indonesia. The research aims to develop an evidence-based, gender-sensitive pedagogy for Indonesian Islamic higher education, focusing on three critical dimensions: (1) quantitative assessment of gender literacy enhancement via structured interventions, (2) qualitative examination of patterns in digital creative expression, and (3) the efficacy of culturally integrated feminist pedagogical methods in fostering both measurable learning outcomes and creative involvement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Feminist Pedagogy in the Digital Context

Feminist pedagogy has adapted to technological advancements in the digital era, fostering inclusive learning environments that facilitate the negotiation of identity and resistance to patriarchal knowledge. This educational approach prioritises the empowerment of women through multimodal technology, allowing them to articulate their experiences. In Indonesia, for instance, women's participation in education and technology has increased through government-supported digital training and entrepreneurship programs, significantly impacting both education and the economy (Aloizou et al., 2025; Herman & Kirkup, 2017;

Juwita et al., 2024; Lim, 2017; Suwana & Lily, 2017). Contemporary feminist movements emphasise the necessity of an intersectional approach that incorporates interconnected issues of marginalisation, including disability and environmental factors, to promote gender equality. Collaboration among international and regional feminist networks provides strategic avenues for knowledge exchange and capacity building among women activists in both global and digital contexts. However, significant challenges remain, such as the internalisation of patriarchal (Dahnial et al., 2023; Shah, 2024; W. Xu et al., 2024)

Feminist digital pedagogy encourages women in learning and technology while realising that digital neutrality may reinforce gender inequity through distance education that fosters supportive psychological settings and reduces alienation. Transactional distance theory shows that psychological and geographical factors affect interaction, allowing women to learn free from gender power dynamics through feminist-pragmatist (emphasising access and flexibility), eco-dialogical feminist (promoting sustainable learning practices), and intersectional-techno feminist (integrating technology with intersectional understanding) frameworks (Allweiss & Al-Adeimi, 2025; Belas et al., 2025; He & Wong, 2011; Herman & Kirkup, 2017) . Hegarty (2015) open pedagogy framework emphasises gender awareness and user-friendly and culturally inclusive Open Educational Resources (OER) to engage students in collaborative and reflective activities and relevant learning resources. Islamic universities must combine traditional beliefs with modern gender equality norms to complement feminist education by engaging students and encouraging them to face gender issues in their curriculum.

2.2. Open Pedagogical Environment: Democratisation of Knowledge Creation

The concept of "open" in education encompasses not only technical accessibility but also epistemological openness, allowing for diverse approaches to knowledge acquisition. This "openness" promotes a pedagogical philosophy of transparency, collaboration, and democratization, fostering fluid boundaries between educators and learners. Attention to obstacles faced by female students, such as the digital divide and cultural limitations, is essential for effective access as pedagogy. In Islamic educational institutions, implementing open pedagogy must consider religious and cultural values shaping students' identities. Three models of feminist distance education emerge: the feminist-pragmatist model prioritizing access and flexibility, the eco-dialogical feminist model emphasizing sustainable practices, and the intersectional-techno feminist model integrating technology with intersectionality awareness (Hegarty, 2015; Jiménez-Cortés & Aires, 2021; Koseoglu, 2020)

The open pedagogy paradigm shifts power dynamics in education by positioning students as co-creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients. It is grounded in the 5Rs framework: Retain, Reuse, Revise, Remix, and Redistribute, empowering students to produce and disseminate educational content. This approach emphasizes participatory learning and enhances student agency, democratizing education through shared ownership. However, implementing open pedagogy presents technical and epistemological challenges, particularly the need for students to develop digital literacy, including technical skills and ethical content creation. It encourages the use of open educational resources and assignments that contribute to public knowledge commons, allowing students to challenge dominant gender narratives through collaborative content creation. (Clinton-Lisell, 2021; Wiley & Hilton, 2018).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods approach combining quantitative evaluation of gender literacy learning outcomes with qualitative analysis of creative expression patterns in student-generated digital content (Fetters et al., 2013), with the convergent parallel design facilitating simultaneous collection and analysis of both data types followed by

integration to compare, contrast, and integrate findings for comprehensive understanding of digital feminist pedagogy effectiveness in Islamic higher education contexts (Zhou et al., 2024), aligning with feminist participatory action research and Open-Feminist Pedagogy framework prioritizing student agency and transformative learning through creative expression (Hegarty, 2015; Schaper, 2024). The methodological framework comprises three interconnected elements functioning simultaneously: (1) quantitative component utilizing pre-test/post-test experimental design assessing gender literacy development across four dimensions, (2) qualitative component employing multimodal discourse analysis investigating visual narratives, cultural integration, and audience engagement in 30 student-generated digital campaigns, and (3) integration phase performing convergent analysis exploring correlations between quantitative learning developments and qualitative patterns of creative expression, facilitating triangulation through methodological comparison while examining both measurable cognitive growth and artistic expression of gender equality principles within culturally sensitive Islamic educational contexts (Erlina et al., 2025; Fetters et al., 2013; Syamsiah & Aisyah, 2025; Zhou et al., 2024).

This study examined the effectiveness of digital feminist pedagogy among 56 students at two Islamic universities in Medan: Private University and State University. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure ideal conditions for investigating both quantitative learning outcomes and qualitative creative expression in Islamic education environments characterised by conservative cultural-religious norms, while maintaining a commitment to educational innovation.

Table 1. Participant Distribution By Institution And Research Component

Institution	Program	Quantitative Component (Gender Literacy Assessment)	Qualitative Component (Digital Content Creation)	Total Students	Percentage
Private University	English Education	28	15	28	50.00 %
State University	English Education	28	15	28	50.00 %
Total		**56**	**30**	**56**	**100.00 %**

3.2. Instrument and Measures

A validated 40-item Gender Literacy Assessment, grounded in feminist education and Islamic epistemology (Asmayawati et al., 2024), underwent a comprehensive three-phase validation process. This included expert evaluation by five scholars in Islamic and gender studies for cultural relevance and theoretical validity, pilot testing with 50 students from similar Islamic higher education contexts to assess item clarity and psychometric characteristics, and reliability analysis confirming internal consistency. The qualitative analysis utilised multimodal discourse analysis to examine student-generated digital content across five aspects aligned with digital feminist pedagogy. (1) Visual design strategies that analyse colour, imagery, layout, and typography for representational, interactive, and compositional meaning-making grammar ; (2) Narrative construction that examines storytelling techniques, rhetorical strategies, and feminist narrative structures, transforming abstract concepts into understandable visual narratives through non-linear, fragmented temporality; (3) Cultural integration involves assessing the

balance between global feminist ideologies and local Islamic principles, ensuring the preservation of cultural-religious authenticity through significant structural adaptation; (4) Audience engagement metrics entail quantifying social media interactions (likes, shares, comments) four weeks post-intervention to assess the impact and dissemination of culturally tailored versus universal gender equality messages; and (5) Intersectionality representation focusses on analysing various, intersecting identity dimensions (gender, religion, class, ethnicity) through a multi-faceted contextual analysis employing intersectional thematic analysis.

3.3. Intervention: Eight-Week Digital Feminist Pedagogy Program

The eight-week digital feminist pedagogy program for Islamic higher education had four phases designed to cultivate transformational gender consciousness (Aydemir & Demirkan, 2018). Phase 1 articulated gender as a social construct within the Islamic framework, emphasising Qur'anic principles of equality and investigating modern Indonesian gender concerns, such as employment discrimination and media representation, using pre-test assessments in controlled classroom environments (du Plooy et al., 2024; Obeso et al., 2023; TANERİ & ÖZBEK, 2023). Phase 2 enhanced media literacy through the systematic examination of Indonesian advertisements and social media content, wherein participants engaged in critical thinking activities utilising local case studies and intersectionality frameworks to examine the creation of gender roles within religious and cultural contexts (Tasnima et al., 2024) . Phase 3 offered practical training in digital creation utilising accessible technologies (Canva, Adobe Spark, smartphone photography) for multimodal storytelling on social media, guiding participants to develop culturally-sensitive Instagram campaigns and e-posters for gender equality while adhering to Islamic principles (Meier, 2022) . Phase 4 implemented peer evaluation utilising rubrics focused on creativity, clarity, cultural relevance, and social impact, supplemented by reflective writing for self-assessment and post-test evaluations to enable pre-post comparative analysis, alongside integration tests necessitating students to link theoretical knowledge with practical applications, thus enhancing metacognitive learning awareness (Lee et al., 2021). All evaluations were performed during designated 45-minute class sessions utilising standardised instructions to ensure consistency and minimise measurement error in this pretest-posttest control group experimental design.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection implemented a mixed-methods approach: quantitative assessments through pre-tests (Week 1) and post-tests (Week 8) conducted in controlled classroom settings with standardised 45-minute protocols and coded participant identifiers for confidentiality (Hayre & Zheng, 2022; White, 2023). Additionally, qualitative analysis involved 30 digital campaigns selected through stratified random sampling (15 from each institution) during Weeks 5-7, with 4-week post-intervention engagement metrics (likes, shares, comments, reach) systematically archived and analysed using established multimodal discourse analysis coding frameworks.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data analysis employed descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis), paired-samples t-tests and Levene's test for within-group comparisons, independent-samples t-tests for between-institution differences, and Cohen's d effect sizes (d=0.2 small, d=0.5 moderate, d=0.8 large) at a significance level of α=0.05 (Cohen, 1988; Gastwirth et al., 2009; M. Xu et al., 2017). Systematic content analysis employed multimodal discourse analysis frameworks, with two independent coders assessing 30 campaigns across five categories for visual, linguistic, and engagement aspects, revealing thematic trends in translating abstract gender equality concepts into culturally contextualized visual narratives (Bengtsson, 2016). The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods employed three strategies: comparative analysis connecting institutional learning improvements with the quality of

creative expression, correlational analysis of pre-post difference scores against creative quality ratings, and joint displays illustrating the relationships between learning outcomes and engagement patterns, thereby enhancing the understanding of gender literacy development and digital content creation skills (Guetterman et al., 2021).

3.6. Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval had been obtained from the research ethics committees of both participating universities prior to data collection, ensuring compliance with Indonesian research ethics standards and consideration of Islamic values. All participants were provided with comprehensive information sheets outlining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, as well as their rights, including the option for voluntary participation and withdrawal without penalty. Informed consent was secured from all participants before the administration of the pre-test, along with supplementary consent for the publication of anonymised digital campaigns. Confidentiality of participants was ensured by employing coding systems that substituted names with identification numbers. All data were securely stored in password-protected files, accessible solely to members of the research team.

4. Findings/Results

This section presents empirical findings from a convergent mixed-methods study assessing the effectiveness of digital feminist pedagogy in improving gender literacy among 56 students at two Islamic higher education institutions in Medan, Indonesia. The analysis combines quantitative learning outcomes from validated pre-test/post-test assessments with qualitative insights from multimodal discourse analysis of student-generated digital campaigns. The findings are structured to fulfil the study's two objectives: to document measurable enhancements in gender literacy scores and to analyse the transformative characteristics of student-created digital content that implements feminist pedagogical principles in culturally conservative educational contexts.

4.1. Quantitative Findings: Gender Literacy Development

Table 2. Comprehensive Gender Literacy Assessment Result

Measure	Private University (n=27-28)	State University (n=28)	Test Statistic	p-value	Cohen's d	Interpretation
Baseline Characteristics						
Age (years), M(SD)	19.6 (1.1)	20.0 (1.3)	$t(54)=1.26$	0.214	-	No significant difference
Gender (% female)	82.1%	75.0%	$\chi^2(1)=0.41$	0.521	-	No significant difference
Pre-test score, M(SD)	49.82 (11.47)	60.89 (25.67)	$t(54)=2.12$	0.038*	0.57	Medium effect
Score range	30.0-67.5	20.0-100.0	-	-	-	-
Within-Group Changes						
Pre-test, M(SD)	49.72 (11.67)	60.89 (25.67)	-	-	-	-

Measure	Private University (n=27-28)	State University (n=28)	Test Statistic	p-value	Cohen's d	Interpretation
Post-test, M(SD)	64.72 (10.17)	80.80 (23.34)	-	-	-	-
Mean gain	15.00	19.91	-	-	-	-
Within-group effect	t(26)=6.18	t(27)=4.95	-	<0.001***	-	-
Cohen's d	1.19	0.94	-	-	1.19 / 0.94	Large effect (both)
95% CI for gain	[9.8, 20.2]	[11.7, 28.1]	-	-	-	-
Percentile improvement	88th	83rd	-	-	-	-
Percentile improvement	88th	83rd	-	-	-	-
Between-Group Comparisons						
Post-test difference	64.72 (10.17)	80.80 (23.34)	t(54)=3.35	0.001**	0.89	Large effect
Post-test difference	64.72 (10.17)	80.80 (23.34)	t(54)=3.35	0.001**	0.89	Large effect
Proportional improvement	30.1%	32.7%	-	-	-	2.6% difference

4.1.1. Baseline Comparability

The two institutional cohorts exhibited similar characteristics such as demographics, with no significant differences in age distribution (Private University: M=19.6, SD=1.1; State University: M=20.0, SD=1.3), t(54)=1.26, p=0.214, or gender composition (Private University: 82.1% female; State University: 75.0% female), $\chi^2(1)=0.41$, p=0.521. Pre-intervention gender literacy assessments indicated a statistically significant baseline difference, with State University students demonstrating superior initial scores (M=60.89, SD=25.67) relative to Private University students (M=49.82, SD=11.47), t(54)=2.12, p=0.038, Cohen's d=0.57, indicating a medium effect size. The significant difference in State University scores (SD=25.67 vs. SD=11.47) revealed increased heterogeneity in initial gender literacy knowledge, with score ranges of 20.0-100.0 for State University and 30.0-67.5 for Private University, hence requiring institution-specific assessments of intervention effectiveness.

4.1.2. Intervention Effectiveness: Within-Group Changes

Both institutions showed statistically significant and considerable improvements after the eight-week digital feminist pedagogy intervention, with effect sizes exceeding Cohen's criteria for big effects (d≥0.8). Private University students achieved an average increase of 15.00 points (95% CI [9.8, 20.2]), t(26)=6.18, p<0.001, Cohen's d=1.19, signifying that the average post-intervention Private University student exceeded

almost 88% of the pre-intervention distribution. Students at State University exhibited an average improvement of 19.91 points (95% CI [11.7, 28.1]), t(27)=4.95, p<0.001, Cohen's d=0.94, surpassing 83% of their pre-intervention distribution. The decrease in standard deviations from pre-test to post-test (Private University: SD=11.67 to SD=10.17; State University: SD=25.67 to SD=23.34) signified decreased within-group variability and a more consistent acquisition of gender literacy information.

4.1.3. Between Group Comparisson

Independent-samples t-tests examined inter-institutional differences in post-intervention results and relative improvements, investigating whether institutional context influenced intervention effectiveness. The analysis of final post-test results indicated that State University students preserved the first advantage, achieving significantly higher absolute scores (M=80.80, SD=23.34) in contrast to Private University students (M=64.72, SD=10.17), t(54)=3.35, p=0.001. The magnitude of this difference, Cohen's d=0.89, indicates a substantial effect size, suggesting that the typical State University student post-intervention outperformed almost 81% of Private University students.

The post-intervention difference of 16.08 points exceeded the baseline difference of 11.07 points by 5.01 points, indicating that although both groups exhibited significant improvement, State University students leveraged their early knowledge advantage to a greater degree. The ongoing disparity in variability (State University SD=23.34 vs. Private University SD=10.17) signifies continuing heterogeneity in State University outcomes, despite generally good performance.

An essential evaluation of intervention equity assessed if the extent of improvement varied among institutions. Analysis of gain scores (post-test minus pre-test differences) indicated no statistically significant difference between State University improvements (M=19.91 points) and Private University improvements (M=15.00 points), t(54)=1.18, p=0.244. The effect size for this difference was extremely small, with Cohen's d=0.32, much below established standards for significant practical differences.

The finding has significant implications: despite significantly different initial conditions (baseline difference d=0.57), both institutional groups received comparable advantages from the digital feminist pedagogy intervention. The overlapping 95% confidence intervals for gain scores (Private University: [9.8, 20.2]; State University: [11.7, 28.1]) support the conclusion that the effectiveness of the intervention was not significantly influenced by institutional context or baseline knowledge level.

The equal improvements offer further insight: Private University students exhibited a 30.1% improvement from the baseline (15.00/49.72), but State University students demonstrated a 32.7% enhancement (19.91/60.89), resulting in a differential of about 2.6 percentage points. The comparable proportional improvement supports the notion that the intervention was similarly effective across different institutional contexts, indicating significant pedagogical robustness and universality among Islamic higher education contexts.

Table 3. Comparative Analysis

Comparison	Cohen's d Interpretation	Percentile Equivalent
Baseline difference (State University - Private University)	0,57	Medium effect
Private University pre-post change	1,19	Large effect
Private University pre-post change	0,94	Large effect
Post-test difference (State University - Private University)	0,89	Large effect

4.2. Qualitative Findings: Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Student-Created Digital Campaigns

Thematic analysis of interviews, observation notes, reflective journals, and 30 Instagram campaigns revealed four primary themes: (1) cognitive transformation in understanding gender concepts, (2) creative agency in translating feminist ideas into visual narratives, (3) negotiation between local cultural-religious values and global feminist perspectives, and (4) identity formation as digital gender advocates. The 56 participants from two Islamic higher education institutions in Medan demonstrated varied yet interconnected pathways in developing gender literacy through the digital feminist pedagogy intervention conducted over eight weeks.

4.2.1. Cognitive Transformation in Understanding Gender

At the beginning of the program, most students understood gender primarily as biological differences between males and females, or associated it narrowly with issues of "career women" and "women's nature" (*kodrat perempuan*). During the eight-week intervention, classroom discussions, media analysis, and reflective assignments encouraged them to distinguish between sex and gender, recognize the social construction of gender roles, and identify forms of inequality that were previously considered "normal." Final reflections showed a shift from passive acceptance of gender norms toward a more critical position; students began questioning the division of domestic labor, workplace stereotypes, and the representation of women in popular media.

This cognitive shift aligns with Schaper's framework of transformative learning within digital contexts, wherein critical reflection precipitates perspective transformation. Analysis of pre-workshop reflective journals revealed that participants initially held essentialist views of gender roles. Many students perceived gender primarily through religious prescriptive lenses, often viewing traditional gender arrangements as divinely ordained rather than socially constructed. The intervention's emphasis on distinguishing between religious teachings and cultural practices proved pivotal in facilitating this cognitive emergence.

One participant from the private Islamic institution articulated this transformation:

"Before joining this workshop, I thought gender was simply about men and women having different duties given by God. I never questioned why certain expectations existed or how they affected people differently. Now I understand that gender is not just about biology—it is about power, expectations, and social systems. This realization changed how I see everything around me, from family dynamics to media representations." (Participant 12, Private Institution)

This transformation became evident when students explained gender concepts in their journals and chose more specific and structural issues for their Instagram campaigns, such as harassment in public transportation or wage discrimination, rather than just general slogans about "equality." The transition from normative language to critical discourse represents a fundamental shift in how students engage with gender as an analytical category. Students began employing academic terminology with increasing precision, demonstrating not only familiarity with feminist concepts but also the ability to apply them to their immediate social contexts. Participant observations during workshop sessions documented increased engagement with theoretical concepts such as patriarchy, intersectionality, and gender performativity. Students demonstrated the ability to distinguish between sex and gender, recognize systemic gender inequalities, and articulate how gender intersects with other social categories including religion, class, and ethnicity. The multimodal analysis of Instagram campaigns corroborated this cognitive emergence, as students incorporated sophisticated gender terminology and demonstrated nuanced understanding of gender issues in their visual and textual content.

4.2.2. Creative Agency in Multimodal Storytelling

The second theme concerns the growth of students' creative agency as digital campaign

designers. In the early stages, many students relied on simple visual templates or copied the style of general motivational posters. After receiving basic training in design and multimodal storytelling, they began experimenting with color combinations, typography, visual metaphors, and short narratives tailored for social media audiences. Analysis of 30 campaigns showed a spectrum of creativity from basic template-based expressions to works featuring complex and original multimodal integration.

This theme highlights the pedagogical significance of digital media production as a site for meaning-making and knowledge construction. The workshop facilitator noted in observation records the progressive shift in student ownership over the creative process:

"Students moved from asking 'what should we create?' to declaring 'this is what we want to say and how we want to say it.' The shift in ownership over the creative process was remarkable. By the fourth week, students were actively critiquing each other's designs and suggesting improvements based on their emerging understanding of effective visual communication." (Observation Notes, Week 4)

Posts that received the highest engagement (likes and comments) generally combined strong visual elements with concrete examples from students' daily lives, such as situations on campus, their future workplaces, or family relationships. This finding suggests that when given supportive pedagogical space, students can transform abstract gender equality concepts into communicative and engaging visual messages. The campaign analysis revealed diverse creative strategies for communicating gender concepts, including photography, digital illustrations, infographics, and video content.

Notably, many participants chose to localize feminist messages by incorporating Indonesian cultural symbols, local languages, and familiar everyday scenarios. One particularly illustrative campaign featured a series of posts reimagining traditional Indonesian proverbs through feminist perspectives. The student creator explained:

"I wanted to show that feminism is not a Western import—we can find feminist wisdom in our own culture if we look critically. I took sayings my grandmother used and asked: whose interests do these really serve? The response from my followers surprised me—many said they had never thought about these proverbs this way before." (Participant 27, Private Institution)

Reflective journals documented the sense of empowerment students derived from creative production. Many participants described the experience of creating digital content as transformative, shifting their self-perception from passive consumers to active producers of knowledge. The creative agency demonstrated by participants extended beyond technical skills to encompass rhetorical and persuasive strategies. Students showed awareness of their target audiences and made deliberate choices about framing, tone, and visual aesthetics to maximize engagement and minimize potential backlash in conservative social media spaces.

4.2.3. Negotiating Local Cultural-Religious Values and Global Feminist Perspectives

The third theme highlights the negotiation process students undertook between the global feminist discourse they encountered in class and on social media and the cultural and religious values they embrace. Most campaigns chose culturally "safe" language and visuals, for example emphasizing justice, shared responsibility, and respect for human dignity, rather than slogans that directly challenge religious institutions or family structures. Only a few posters explicitly incorporated Islamic symbols or textual references, indicating that students were careful to ensure their messages remained acceptable in the Islamic campus environment.

Initial interview data revealed that many participants approached the workshop with apprehension about potential conflicts between feminism and Islam. Several students expressed concerns that engaging with feminist ideas might compromise their religious identity or be perceived as embracing Western cultural imperialism. One participant articulated this tension:

"Honestly, I was scared at first. In my community, feminism is seen as anti-Islam, as something that destroys

families and goes against our values. I wondered if I could participate without betraying who I am. But as the workshop progressed, I learned there are Muslim women scholars who have written about gender justice from within our tradition." (Participant 8, Private Institution)

On the other hand, some of the strongest works actually integrated Indonesian context and local culture to critique discriminatory practices in a subtle but assertive way, for example through illustrations of traditional clothing or women's work situations in the formal and informal sectors. This negotiation was also evident in interviews, when students described the dilemma between wanting to voice sensitive issues (such as domestic violence) and concern about reactions from family or institutions.

Participant observations documented rich discussions wherein students debated the relationship between Islamic principles and feminist ideals. These conversations were characterized by respectful disagreement, collaborative meaning-making, and willingness to sit with complexity. Students frequently referenced Quranic verses and prophetic traditions that they interpreted as supporting gender equity. Rather than experiencing cognitive dissonance, most students developed integrative frameworks that honored both their religious commitments and their emerging gender consciousness.

The Instagram campaign analysis provided material evidence of these negotiations. Many campaigns explicitly positioned gender equality as consistent with Islamic values, employing religious framing to legitimize feminist messages. Common strategies included citing religious texts, featuring images of hijab-wearing women as empowered agents, and using Arabic calligraphy alongside feminist slogans. One campaign titled "Rahma & Justice" exemplified this synthesis:

"I wanted to show that caring about gender justice is part of being a good Muslim, not against it. The Prophet (PBUH) elevated women's status in his time—following his example means continuing that work today. I used the concept of 'rahma' (divine mercy) because it resonates with my audience and connects our religious values with the call for justice." (Participant 19, Public Institution)

Importantly, participants did not uncritically adopt global feminist frameworks. Interview data revealed selective engagement wherein students accepted concepts they found compatible with their values while rejecting or modifying others. This theme demonstrates that digital feminist pedagogy in Islamic higher education does not require students to abandon their cultural-religious identities. Rather, it can create space for what participants termed "Islamic feminism" or "feminism with faith"—approaches that draw on both traditions to address gender injustice.

4.2.4. Identity Formation as Digital Gender Advocates

The fourth theme relates to the formation of students' identities as gender equality advocates in digital spaces. Many participants initially positioned themselves only as "students completing coursework," but gradually came to see themselves as parties with social responsibility to spread accurate and culturally sensitive information about gender. This process was supported by the real experience of uploading campaigns to personal accounts, receiving responses from peers, and reflecting back on comments that emerged.

At the outset of the workshop, few participants identified as feminists or gender advocates. Interview data revealed that many students viewed activism as something distant from their lives—an activity for others, particularly those in Western contexts or major urban centers. The workshop intervention, particularly the Instagram campaign component, proved pivotal in reshaping these self-perceptions. As one participant stated:

"I never thought of myself as someone who could make a difference on these issues. I am just a student from Medan—what can I do about such big problems? But when a stranger commented that my post made her think differently about how she treats her daughter, I cried. I realized that my voice matters, that I can actually change something." (Participant 51, Private Institution)

Some students reported that after the assignment ended, they continued the practice of sharing gender-related content or adjusted how they interact on social media, for example by responding to sexist comments or re-sharing educational content. Reflective journal analysis traced the trajectory of identity development. Many participants described moments of realization wherein they recognized their potential to contribute to gender justice. These "turning points" often occurred when students received feedback indicating their content had influenced others' thinking.

Differences between institutions also emerged: students at the private university tended to take more explicit and experimental positions in advocacy, while students at the public university preferred universal and non-confrontational messages. Nevertheless, in both contexts, the intervention helped students understand social media not merely as entertainment space, but also as an arena for social *dakwah* (religious outreach) and public education on gender equality.

By the conclusion of the workshop, interview data revealed significant shifts in self-identification. While not all participants adopted the label "feminist" (due to its contested connotations in their communities), most expressed commitment to ongoing engagement with gender issues and identified as advocates for equality. The specific labels participants chose varied—including "gender equality supporter," "women's rights advocate," and "Islamic feminist"—but the underlying commitment to action was consistent. As one participant explained:

"I now see myself as someone who speaks up about gender issues, but in a way that fits my community. I do not need to be aggressive or confrontational—I can create beautiful content, have respectful conversations, and plant seeds of change. This is my form of activism, and it feels authentic to who I am." (Participant 6, Private Institution)

5. Discussion

The significant difference in performance between Private University and State University (18.73 vs. 10.13 average likes, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.991$) strongly confirmed the Inclusion-Diversity theory ((Shore et al., 2011). Private University's total supremacy in high-performing content creation (100% of e-posters receiving ≥20 likes) evidenced the effective application of "inclusion conditions" that facilitated substantial contributions from all participants, whereas State University 's focus on low-performance categories suggested superficial engagement with diversity principles.

These institutional differences supported the argument that gender diversity alone does not directly enhance creative output but requires supportive environmental conditions (Vedres & Vásárhelyi, 2023). Private University 's superior performance across various creativity dimensions (advanced creative leadership: 25.3 vs. 7.8 average likes) indicated the presence of structural factors that facilitated students' enhanced creative expression. These factors may include faculty support systems, peer collaboration opportunities, adequate technological resources, and institutional climate that encouraged students to take creative risks in their work.

These findings also supported research on the differential impact of organizational support based on gender (Turipanam Alamanda et al., 2024). The consistently high performance of Private University students indicated an institutional environment that effectively supported female students' creative development, overcoming structural barriers such as work-life balance, networking opportunities, and recognition systems (Allweiss & Al-Adeimi, 2025). The evidence suggested that Private University had successfully created an inclusive creative environment that maximized students' potential for realizing sophisticated gender advocacy expression.

The practicalimplications of these institutional differences were significant for feminist pedagogical implementation. The consistent patterns indicated that successful digital feminist pedagogy required systematic institutional support rather than individual instructor efforts. This aligned with the open pedagogical principles, where institutional commitment to participatory learning and student agency became

crucial for effective implementation (Hegarty, 2015).

One of the most interesting findings was the total lack of clear religious themes in all 30 e-posters, notwithstanding the Islamic institutional framework This pattern demonstrated advanced strategic navigation by students who had to reconcile feminist advocacy with institutional demands and cultural sensitivities. This discovery supported insights concerning transactional distance in digital education, where students could articulate progressive perspectives while preserving suitable institutional links (Herman & Kirkup, 2017).This strategic approach challenged simplistic assumptions about Islamic education as inherently restrictive to feminist discourse. Instead, it revealed how students developed nuanced communication strategies that advanced gender equality while respecting institutional and cultural boundaries. The success of workplace equality themes (average 19.33 likes) demonstrated that students could effectively advocate for practical gender equality applications without directly challenging religious or cultural authority structures.

The implementation of universal rights frameworks (93.3% of e-posters) constituted a "safe space" method that facilitated feminist expression while avoiding controversial religious interpretations. This method supported the examination of obstacles encountered by female students in conservative educational settings, encompassing cultural limitations that may restrict involvement in open learning environments (Koseoglu, 2020). Students exhibited a nuanced understanding of these limitations while formulating innovative approaches for significant feminist expression.

However, the strategic avoidance of religious integration also represented missed opportunities for developing Islamic feminist discourse. The complete absence of religious-feminist dialogue indicated significant gaps in current pedagogical approaches that could be addressed through structured interventions. These findings suggested the need for faculty development in Islamic feminist scholarship and pedagogical frameworks that explicitly support religious-feminist integration.

The results confirmed the practical focus highlighted in open pedagogical frameworks (Wiley & Hilton, 2018), where student-generated content significantly enriched the public knowledge commons. Intense engagement with workplace themes demonstrated that audiences acknowledged the practical significance of gender equality in professional settings, making this method more compelling than abstract theoretical discourse.

The success of professional integration also supported Betancourt et al. (2022) argument that structured creativity training can enhance specific aspects of student creativity. Students who focused on workplace applications demonstrated more sophisticated understanding of implementation strategies, audience needs, and persuasive communication techniques. This indicated that feminist pedagogy benefited from practical application opportunities that connected theoretical concepts with real-world challenges.(Betancourt et al., 2022)

The collaborative nature of successful workplace approaches aligned with the democratic knowledge creation principles articulated by Hegarty (2015). Students positioned themselves as contributors to professional discourse rather than passive recipients of information, demonstrating the empowerment potential of well-designed digital feminist pedagogy (Hegarty, 2015).

6. Conclusion

This study illustrates that digital feminist pedagogy is a feasible and culturally attuned method for enhancing gender literacy in Islamic higher education settings. The study involving 56 students from two Islamic universities in Medan, Indonesia (Private University and State University) demonstrates that structured interventions integrating theoretical gender literacy education with creative digital content creation can produce statistically significant learning outcomes while honouring cultural-religious values. Both institutions demonstrated significant enhancements in gender literacy

scores, with considerable effect sizes, signifying that students effectively assimilated intricate gender equality concepts and cultivated the ability to contest gender norms via transformative digital narratives. The qualitative analysis of 30 student-generated e-posters indicated that students effectively utilised various visual strategies, narrative structures, and digital formats to promote gender equality, illustrating their transformation from passive knowledge recipients to active content creators and agents of social change.

The discovery that culturally-integrated digital campaigns produced 261% higher engagement than universal strategies highlights a fundamental pedagogical principle: effective gender literacy education in Islamic contexts necessitates a deliberate connection between global feminist viewpoints and local cultural-religious frameworks. However, the complete absence of clear Islamic religious connections throughout all student works suggests a substantial pedagogical deficiency that must be addressed in future interventions by systematic integration of Islamic feminist research. This study provides significant empirical evidence supporting feminist pedagogy in conservative educational settings, illustrating that digital creative expression effectively empowers students to advocate for gender literacy while maintaining Islamic values.

7. Recommendations

Islamic higher education institutions should integrate digital feminist pedagogy into general education curricula, invest in faculty development programs centred on culturally-responsive gender education, and establish supportive ecosystems that promote student activism regarding gender equality issues. Future research should employ longitudinal designs with larger, more geographically diverse samples to assess sustained impact on attitudes and behaviors, explicitly integrate Islamic feminist frameworks (such as works by Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Asma Barlas) into pedagogical interventions, and explore how digital gender literacy campaigns translate into concrete social change within campus communities and broader society. Digital feminist pedagogy positions students as creative agents who generate transformative discourse instead of passive recipients of established knowledge, presenting a viable approach to attaining gender equality in Islamic educational settings while respecting the fundamental intellectual traditions of Islamic scholarship.

8. Limitations

This study identified a significant pedagogical oversight, as the research intervention, conducted in Islamic higher education institutions (State University and Private University), did not explicitly incorporate Islamic feminist scholarship or religious frameworks, leading to a total lack of Islamic religious references in all 30 student-created e-posters (0/30, 0.0%). This limitation is particularly notable as the sole e-poster that accomplished cultural integration garnered remarkable engagement (52 likes, in contrast to the overall mean of 14.4 likes, indicating a performance 261% over average), despite this strategy being utilised by just 3.3% of the sample. The lack of explicit incorporation of Islamic feminist scholarship, illustrated by the works of Amina Wadud and Fatima Mernissi, in the pedagogical framework significantly constrained students' capacity to develop a nuanced cultural-religious feminist synthesis, which could have been particularly beneficial within the conservative Islamic educational context. This limitation reduced the potential efficacy of the digital feminist pedagogy intervention and signifies a missed opportunity to illustrate how Islamic values can positively strengthen gender equality advocacy, thereby restricting the study's relevance and influence within comparable Islamic educational institutions globally.

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Generative AI Statement

As the author(s) of this work, we used the AI tool Perplexity AI for the purpose of assisting in literature search and identification of relevant references. After using this AI tool, we reviewed and verified the final version of our work. We, as the author(s), take full responsibility for the content of our published work.

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