

Research Article

Transformative Strategies for Inclusive Education to Eliminate Gender Bias and Strengthen Social Justice in Modern School Environments

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Abstract

This study explores transformative strategies for inclusive education aimed at eliminating gender bias and strengthening social justice in modern school environments. The background highlights that despite the implementation of equality-oriented policies, gender disparities persist in Indonesian education—particularly in learning materials, teaching practices, and access to digital technology. The study aims to identify forms of gender bias, analyze inclusive learning strategies, and formulate a transformative educational model rooted in social justice. Using a qualitative literature review, data were collected from books, journal articles, policy documents, and international reports by UNESCO and UNICEF. The findings show that gender inequality manifests through stereotypes in textbooks, unequal participation in STEM fields, and digital discrimination. Effective strategies include integrating gender literacy into curricula, empowering teachers through training, and promoting collaboration among schools, governments, and communities. The study concludes that inclusive education transformation must combine curriculum reform, digital ethics, and social participation to achieve gender-equal learning environments.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Gender Bias, Social Justice.

INTRODUCTION

The world of education is currently undergoing major changes that demand



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learning systems oriented not only toward academic achievement but also toward the development of human values, justice, and equality. Amid technological advancement and globalization, modern schools are expected to become spaces that are able to accept and appreciate the diversity of learners without discrimination, whether based on gender, social or economic background, or physical abilities. Therefore, inclusive education emerges as an approach that places all learners in equal positions and provides equal opportunities for them to develop optimally.

The concept of inclusive education aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 on Quality Education for All and Goal 5 on Gender Equality (UNESCO, 2022). These goals emphasize the importance of creating an open, fair, and inclusive education system that supports the potential of every individual. However, in practice, many schools still face challenges related to gender bias, both explicit and implicit. For example, the roles of male and female students are often differentiated in school activities, curricula are not yet fully gender-sensitive, and stereotypes persist that associate males with the sciences and females with the social sciences and the arts.

Data from UNICEF Indonesia indicate that disparities in access to education based on gender still exist, particularly in underdeveloped regions. In some areas, girls continue to face social and cultural barriers to pursuing secondary education, while boys in urban areas experience social pressure related to masculine role expectations that lead them to leave school early to work. These conditions demonstrate that achieving gender bias-free education remains a major challenge for the Indonesian education system (UNICEF & Indonesia, 2023).

To address these challenges, the transformation of inclusive education must be carried out comprehensively, encompassing curriculum design, teaching methods, teacher training, and the cultivation of a socially just school culture. Education should function as a space of liberation (*education as the practice of freedom*), where teachers and students actively participate in developing critical awareness of social realities and rejecting all forms of discrimination. In this context, modern schools must be able to create learning environments that promote gender equality, respect diversity, and instill values of empathy and mutual respect (Hooks, 2014).

Beyond social and cultural approaches, technological developments also offer significant opportunities to strengthen social justice within school environments. The

use of technologies such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and big data in education can help create learning systems that are more personalized, interactive, and flexible. However, as cautioned by UNESCO, technology can also generate algorithmic bias—namely, the tendency of digital systems to present unfair representations of certain genders. Therefore, the transformation of inclusive education in the digital era must be accompanied by critical awareness in managing learning content, strengthening digital literacy, and instilling ethical principles in the use of technology (UNESCO, 2023).

Furthermore, inclusive education in modern schools is not merely about accepting students from diverse backgrounds, but also about building a school culture that is committed to social justice. Schools must ensure that all learners, both male and female, have equal opportunities to participate in learning activities, leadership roles, and decision-making processes. Teachers also need continuous professional development to understand gender issues, avoid stereotypes in teaching practices, and embed values of equality through everyday classroom interactions.

Based on this background, this study aims to explore strategies for transforming inclusive education to eliminate gender bias and strengthen social justice in modern schools. The focus of the study is directed toward three main aspects: (1) identifying forms of gender bias that still emerge in educational systems and practices; (2) analyzing inclusive learning strategies and educational technologies that can support gender equality; and (3) formulating a model of educational transformation grounded in social justice and aligned with humanistic values in the era of Society 5.0.

By analyzing policies, educational practices, and school innovations, this research is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the development of an inclusive, equitable, and socially just education system. In addition to enriching theoretical discourse, the findings are also intended to serve as a practical reference for educators, policymakers, and school communities in creating learning environments that are truly free from discrimination and centered on human dignity.

Critical Feminist Theory in Education

Critical Feminist Theory is an approach within educational studies that is rooted in the feminist movement and critical theory developed by thinkers such as bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and Henry Giroux. This theory views education as not neutral, but rather

as being imbued with values, ideologies, and power structures that can reproduce social inequalities, including gender bias. From a critical feminist perspective, education should function as a tool of liberation (education as liberation), rather than merely a passive process of knowledge transmission (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 2014).

In the context of modern education, this theory emphasizes the importance of creating democratic and equitable learning spaces in which learners from diverse gender, social, and cultural backgrounds can develop their potential without discrimination. Critical feminism invites educators to recognize how educational systems often subtly reinforce patriarchal norms through curricula, teacher-student interactions, and the selection of learning materials. For instance, research by Arnot and Mac an Ghaill found that in many primary and secondary school textbooks, men are still predominantly represented as leaders or scientists, while women tend to be portrayed in domestic roles such as caregivers or housewives (Mac an Ghaill, 2019).

Such phenomena are not limited to Western countries but are also prevalent in Indonesia. According to reports by the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), many teaching materials and educational practices unconsciously instill gender stereotypes from an early age. For example, male students are often perceived as more capable in science-related subjects such as mathematics and science, while female students are directed toward social and religious fields. This dynamic influences young people's interests and future career choices and further reinforces gender gaps in the workforce and the technology sector (Perempuan, 2022).

In addition, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) have reported that digital inequality between male and female students remains a significant challenge in Indonesian schools. Access to technological devices and digital training is often more readily available to male students, particularly in rural areas. This condition indicates that the transformation of inclusive education cannot rely solely on the provision of digital facilities, but must also be accompanied by a shift in social paradigms that uphold gender equality and justice (UNICEF & RI., 2023).

Within the framework of critical feminism, teachers play a key role as agents of social change. According to hooks, teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge, but also facilitators of critical consciousness who help students understand and challenge structures of injustice. Education grounded in critical feminist theory

encourages the creation of reflective, participatory, and empathetic learning spaces. Teachers are expected not only to be sensitive to gender differences, but also to actively cultivate classroom cultures that respect diverse identities, including gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic background (Hooks, 2010).

The implementation of this theory can be observed in various educational initiatives in Indonesia aimed at eliminating gender bias and strengthening social justice. For example, the “Sekolah Setara” program in Yogyakarta (2022) integrates a gender equality curriculum across all subjects. This program emphasizes not only content, but also teacher training to enable educators to identify and correct gender bias in teaching and learning processes. Similarly, the “Gender Equality Goes to School” initiative by Plan Indonesia provides training for teachers and school principals on how to build inclusive and discrimination-free learning environments (P. Indonesia, 2023).

More recent developments have also emerged in the context of post-COVID-19 educational digitalization, where gender equality has become a new challenge. Several surveys indicate that girls and women, particularly in rural areas, face obstacles in accessing online learning due to limited devices, time constraints, and lack of family support. According to UN Women Indonesia, this situation demonstrates that digital education transformation without a gender perspective may actually widen social inequalities. Therefore, critical feminist theory offers a conceptual foundation for re-evaluating how technology-based education systems can be designed to be non-biased and inclusive of marginalized groups (U. W. Indonesia, 2023).

Furthermore, the critical feminist approach emphasizes the importance of gender transformative education, which not only raises awareness of equality among learners but also encourages changes in behavior and social values. This is reflected in government efforts through Ministry of Education Regulation No. 30 of 2021 on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence in Educational Settings, which serves as an important milestone in creating safe and equitable spaces for all genders. When examined through the lens of critical feminist theory, the implementation of this policy represents a concrete step toward socially just education that is sensitive to gender-based power relations (RI., 2021).

Thus, critical feminist theory serves as a highly relevant theoretical foundation for analyzing strategies to transform inclusive education in modern schools. This theory not only provides insight into the roots of gender bias in education, but also offers

conceptual solutions in the form of equitable, participatory, and empathy-based learning approaches. In today's modern and digital era, integrating this theory into educational practice is essential for cultivating a generation of critically minded individuals who respect diversity and are committed to social justice.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review (library research) design, aiming to examine in depth the concepts, strategies, and practices of transforming inclusive education in efforts to eliminate gender bias and strengthen social justice within modern school environments. A literature study was selected because it allows researchers to conduct conceptual and analytical exploration of theories, previous research findings, policy documents, and relevant academic reports (Zed, 2008). The data sources in this study consist of secondary data, including scholarly books, reputable journal articles, conference proceedings, national and international education policies (such as those issued by UNESCO and UNICEF), as well as academic publications related to inclusive education, gender, and social justice. The selection of sources was based on criteria of relevance, credibility, and appropriate publication periods to ensure that the analysis remains current and contextual (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Data collection was conducted through documentation and systematic literature review procedures, including the following steps: identifying key terms (such as inclusive education, gender bias, and social justice in education), searching academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and ScienceDirect, selecting literature based on topical relevance, and organizing information thematically (Booth et al., 2021). Subsequently, the collected data were analyzed using content analysis methods, which emphasize data reduction, categorization, thematic interpretation, and conclusion drawing (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis focused on identifying patterns, trends, and relationships among concepts related to strategies for transforming inclusive education and efforts to eliminate gender bias. Through this approach, the study produces a comprehensive conceptual synthesis and provides in-depth understanding of how modern schools can develop socially just inclusive learning strategies and policies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

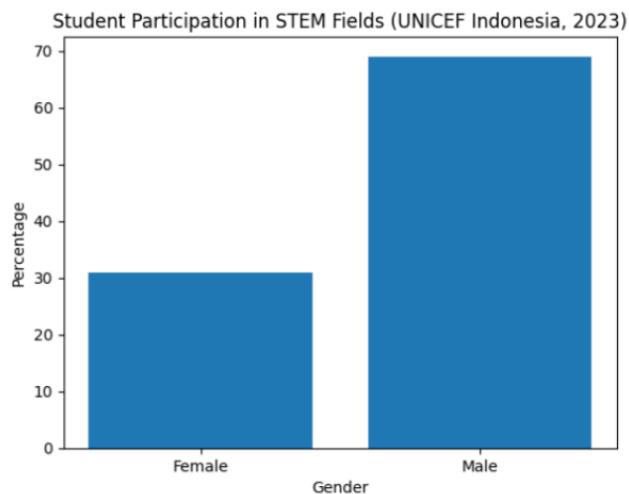
Portrait of Gender Bias and Social Inequality in Modern Indonesian Schools

In the context of contemporary Indonesian education, gender bias remains a complex structural issue, even though the principle of equality has been regulated through frameworks such as Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which guarantees educational rights and access without discrimination. Empirical realities indicate that gender disparities are still evident in various aspects of school life, including representation in learning materials, students' social experiences, and expectations regarding roles and academic achievement. Content analyses of elementary school textbooks reveal that learning materials continue to reproduce traditional gender stereotypes, in which males are more frequently depicted in productive roles, as leaders, and as main characters, while females tend to be portrayed in domestic contexts and passive behaviors. Such representations may instill normative ideas about gender roles from an early age. These findings indicate that teaching materials not only transmit knowledge but also function as agents of cultural socialization that potentially reinforce gender inequality beyond the realm of formal education (Yusri, 2025).

Similar conditions are reflected in other studies showing imbalanced gender representation in English textbooks at the junior secondary level, where male characters appear more frequently both linguistically and visually than female characters. Female characters are often associated with emotional or domestic attributes and are less visible in roles as agents of change or problem solvers. These findings are consistent with recurring patterns of gender stereotyping and suggest that, despite curriculum revisions, bias persists in the presentation of learning materials used in classrooms (Fidyaningsih & Oktavianti, 2024).

Beyond learning materials, gender bias is also evident in students' choices of academic tracks and participation in specific fields of study. Reports from international organizations such as UNICEF Indonesia (2023) indicate that female participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) remains significantly lower than that of males, with women accounting for only around 31% of students choosing these fields. This imbalance reflects self-stereotyping and social expectations that position STEM as a masculine domain, thereby significantly influencing female students' academic aspirations and career trajectories (UNICEF & Indonesia, 2023).

Moreover, the problem of gender bias has expanded in the digital era, as children's social spaces are no longer confined to physical school environments. A survey by the Katadata Insight Center (2024) found that the majority of female students have experienced online bullying (cyberbullying) or harassment on popular social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. These experiences not only affect their psychosocial well-being but also deepen existing inequalities. This pattern of digital violence demonstrates how gender bias migrates and takes new forms in virtual spaces, necessitating more comprehensive educational approaches to protect students' learning rights and participation without discrimination (Center, 2024).



A concrete case highlighting the failure of schools to function as safe spaces is the harassment incident at SMKN 7 Semarang in 2024, which went viral on social media and triggered national concern. This case revealed that despite the presence of formal disciplinary systems, gender-based violence still occurred without effective preventive responses, indicating that school policies remain inadequate in eliminating bias and creating truly inclusive learning environments for all genders. Such cases consistently underscore the urgency of inclusive education that focuses not only on formal access but also on the quality of learning experiences free from discrimination and gender-based violence.

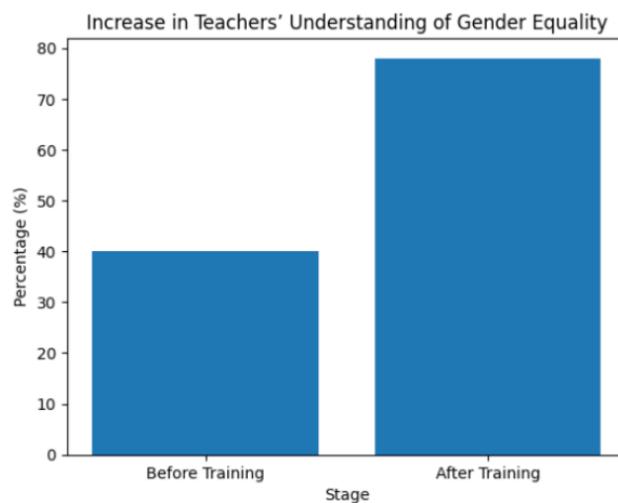
Overall, gender inequality in modern Indonesian schools is not limited to representation in learning materials, but extends to students' social experiences, academically shaped choices influenced by social constructions, and interactions in digital spaces. These realities affirm that inclusive education must become a central

agenda in educational reform to ensure that schools serve as fair and safe spaces for all students, regardless of gender.

Strategies for Transforming Inclusive Education: Curriculum Integration, Gender Literacy, and Digital Character Development

The transformation of inclusive education in Indonesia requires fundamental changes in how schools design curricula, build learning cultures, and integrate gender justice values throughout the learning process. The Merdeka Curriculum released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in 2022 provides schools with opportunities to implement flexible, student-centered learning that emphasizes the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, such as global diversity and mutual cooperation. These values form an important foundation for developing education that is more gender-sensitive and socially just. Research indicates that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum offers significant opportunities for schools to reconstruct inclusive learning, particularly through the strengthening of project-based learning that provides students with space to express gender identities and perspectives without discrimination (Nahampun et al., 2025).

Integrating gender literacy into the curriculum is not merely about adding new content, but also requires a shift toward more reflective and critical pedagogical paradigms. Teachers play a crucial role in eliminating gender bias in classroom interactions, learning materials, and expectations, as emphasized by studies showing that teachers often unconsciously reproduce gender stereotypes through their teaching practices (Setiawan et al., 2020). Therefore, gender literacy training for teachers becomes one of the most significant transformation strategies. A concrete example can be seen in the Gender Equality Goes to School program implemented by Plan Indonesia in regions such as East Nusa Tenggara and West Java. Program evaluations show a 78% increase in teachers' understanding of gender equality after training, along with positive changes toward more diversity-responsive teaching practices (Plan Indonesia, 2023).



Several Indonesian schools have also begun developing learning models that directly address gender bias through project-based approaches. SMAN 1 Sleman, for example, implemented the Sekolah Setara project, involving students in creating digital campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes on social media. This practice aligns with the concept of critical literacy, which emphasizes that students should be given opportunities to analyze and produce more egalitarian digital texts, enabling them to become agents of social change rather than mere consumers of information (Isnaeni & Prasetyono, 2025).

In addition to curriculum and pedagogical reform, the transformation of inclusive education is closely linked to digital character development. Social challenges such as cyberbullying, the spread of sexist content, and gender-based hate speech have become global phenomena affecting students' learning experiences. UNESCO emphasizes the importance of digital citizenship education that teaches not only technical skills but also digital ethics, including critical thinking, digital empathy, and moral awareness in technology use. In Indonesia, the high incidence of online bullying against adolescent girls further underscores the urgency of strengthening digital character formation, as women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence in cyberspace (UNESCO, 2023).

Inclusive education transformation is also evident in Islamic educational institutions. Pesantren and faith-based schools have begun responding to technological developments by integrating religious values with digital literacy. Pesantren Digital Indonesia (PDI) in Bandung, for instance, offers a learning model that combines Qur'anic memorization (tahfidz) with coding training and artificial intelligence literacy.

Such innovations demonstrate that Islamic education can transform into an inclusive and future-oriented system without abandoning its moral-spiritual foundations. Research by Ma'arif (2020) shows that Islamic educational institutions have strong potential to develop inclusive education through humanistic, moderate, and adaptive approaches to societal change.

Thus, the transformation of inclusive education is not merely a curriculum reform project, but a systemic movement involving teachers, schools, educational institutions, and society. The integration of gender literacy, critical learning, and digital character development forms a crucial foundation for building school environments that are truly responsive to diversity and free from gender bias.

Synergy Between Government, Schools, and Communities in Eliminating Gender Bias

Effective transformation of inclusive education cannot be achieved by a single actor, but requires coordinated synergy among government, educational institutions, communities, and social media or civil society movements. The Indonesian government has established policies explicitly supporting the development of friendly and inclusive schools through various strategic programs. The Child-Friendly School program, for example, is designed to create safe, comfortable, and violence-free educational environments for all learners, including those experiencing gender-based discrimination or special needs. The program also emphasizes collaboration among schools, parents, and other stakeholders in teacher capacity building and the provision of adequate facilities, enabling schools to function as truly inclusive learning spaces. Empirical studies on inclusive education indicate that collaboration between schools and communities positively contributes to achieving these principles, although implementation still faces challenges such as limited facilities, teachers' understanding, and social stigma (Gustaman et al., 2025).

Government policies promoting inclusive schools are further strengthened through cross-sectoral synergy at national and local levels. Evaluations of policies under the Merdeka Curriculum era show that although implementation rates vary across regions, these policies provide strong legal foundations and guidelines while opening opportunities for school and community involvement in supporting inclusive education (Arafah & Sopiah, 2025).

Concrete examples of cross-actor collaboration can be seen in the Schools Without Violence program initiated in several provinces in 2024. This program resulted from synergy among the government (Kemendikbudristek), women's advocacy organizations such as Komnas Perempuan, and technology sectors such as Google Indonesia. Through initiatives like Digital Ethics for Educators, teachers are trained to understand the dynamics of gender-based violence, including in digital spaces, as well as proactive prevention and response strategies. Such programs demonstrate that multi-entity involvement extends beyond administrative coordination to daily pedagogical practices in schools.

Community-based social movements also play a vital role in strengthening public awareness of social justice and gender equality in educational environments. Campaigns such as #SekolahSetara and #BeraniBersuara, initiated by student organizations, university students, and education activists, reflect grassroots efforts to challenge discrimination and gender stereotypes in schools. Such community participation illustrates that inclusive education is not merely a bureaucratic concern, but part of a broader collective social consciousness developing among younger generations. Studies on collaboration in inclusive education affirm that community involvement can enhance public trust in inclusive education systems, although challenges related to stigma and knowledge gaps must still be addressed through sustained school-community partnerships (Suharyati et al., 2025).

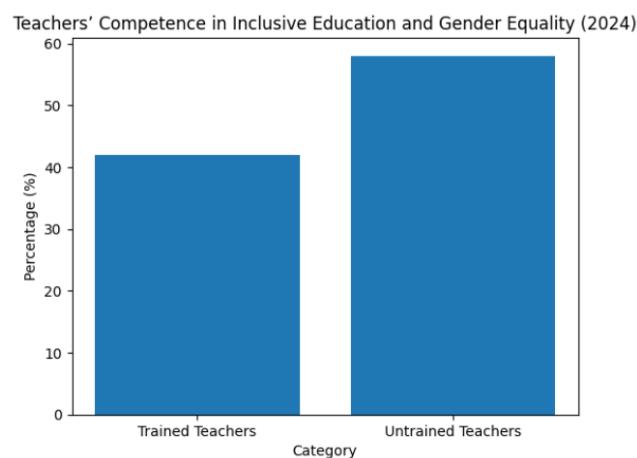
From a theoretical perspective, this multi-actor synergy aligns with the Collaborative-Participatory Theory developed by (Ansell & Gash, 2008), which emphasizes that successful public policy implementation depends on trust, shared commitment, and open communication among stakeholders. In the context of inclusive education, the government acts as a policy facilitator providing direction and regulatory support; schools serve as technical implementers adapting learning practices; and communities function as moral guardians and agents of social change that reinforce inclusive cultural understanding beyond the classroom. Such collaborative patterns reinforce the notion that education is a shared responsibility rather than a sectoral one, consistent with research findings that highlight the importance of local actors' ability to communicate, share resources, and accelerate practical implementation through active community engagement (Susanto et al., 2024).

Thus, synergy among government, schools, and communities is not merely a

theoretical ideal but a practical necessity in addressing the complexity of gender bias and social inequality in modern education. Such collaboration enables more just, responsive, and sustainable educational transformation at both structural and cultural levels (Bolton, 2005).

Challenges and Future Directions of Socially Just Inclusive Education

Although national policies have provided a strong foundation for the implementation of socially just inclusive education, Indonesia still faces multidimensional challenges that are structural, cultural, and technological in nature (Nahampun et al., 2025). One fundamental issue lies in educators' capacity to understand and apply gender-responsive learning approaches. Evaluations by Kemendikbudristek show that only around 42% of teachers have received formal training related to inclusive education and gender equality (RI, 2024). This condition indicates a professional competency gap that affects the quality of classroom interactions. Research findings further suggest that low gender literacy among teachers leads to unawareness of subtle discriminatory practices, such as assigning tasks based on gender stereotypes, assuming male students are more suitable for leadership roles, or tolerating sexist remarks in classrooms.



Another major challenge stems from deeply rooted patriarchal norms within Indonesian social culture. In some regions, families and communities still perceive women's primary roles as domestic, viewing education as merely supplementary. Studies reveal that resistance to gender equality education often originates from families

and community leaders who perceive gender issues as threats to traditional values. A concrete example can be seen in the rejection of anti-gender-based violence education programs in several schools in West Nusa Tenggara in 2022, where some parents argued that gender education could “disrupt” local norms of decency and culture. Such resistance demonstrates that inclusive education cannot function optimally without broader social and cultural transformation (Munawir et al., 2025).

Another increasingly prominent challenge is the digital infrastructure gap between urban and rural areas. While contemporary inclusive education emphasizes technology as a tool for democratizing learning access, digital facilities remain unevenly distributed. Studies indicate that schools in disadvantaged, frontier, and remote (3T) areas continue to experience limited internet connectivity, inadequate learning devices, and low digital literacy among teachers, hindering efforts to integrate technology to promote gender equality (Hidayat et al., 2025). This condition is exacerbated by UNICEF findings showing that 49% of female students in rural areas face barriers to accessing digital devices, reducing their opportunities to develop 21st-century skills.

In light of these challenges, the future direction of inclusive education in Indonesia should be oriented toward a humanist-digital model, integrating technological sophistication with human values, empathy, and social justice. Within the framework of Society 5.0, schools should function not only as centers for knowledge transfer, but also as spaces for character formation that encourage dialogue, respect for differences, egalitarian relationships, and the ability to address social problems. This humanist-digital education concept aligns with perspectives emphasizing that education must serve as a means of liberating individuals from structures of social injustice through critical reflection and transformative action (Tilaar, 2002).

Achieving this future direction requires synergy among government, schools, and society. The government must strengthen teacher training in gender equality and digital literacy, ensure equitable technology infrastructure, and more explicitly integrate inclusivity principles into curricula. Schools must build institutional cultures that support anti-discrimination through projects, campaigns, and value habituation. Meanwhile, communities including parents and local groups—must be engaged as critical partners so that educational transformation extends beyond classrooms and contributes to broader social change. In this way, socially just inclusive education becomes not merely a government program, but a collective movement involving all elements of the nation toward a more humane, equal, and

civilized society.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that inclusive education transformation is essential for building schools that are equitable, safe, and responsive to gender diversity. Achieving this transformation requires structural and cultural changes supported by all stakeholders—government, educators, and communities. Schools must integrate gender-sensitive curricula, strengthen teacher competence in gender literacy, and foster a culture of empathy and respect.

Practically, educators should implement participatory learning models, utilize digital tools ethically, and encourage critical thinking about gender and equality. Policymakers should expand teacher training programs on gender awareness and ensure equitable access to digital learning infrastructure, especially in rural areas.

For future research, scholars are encouraged to conduct empirical studies on the impact of gender literacy programs, digital inclusion initiatives, and community-based collaborations in fostering inclusive education. Quantitative and longitudinal analyses can further assess how these interventions influence school culture and gender equity outcomes over time.

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