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# Deconstructing the Narrative of the Prophet's Example in the PAI Elementary School Textbook: Critical Discourse Analysis to Strengthen the Value of Inclusivity and Gender Equality

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#### **ABSTRAK**

Buku teks PAI SD krusial bagi pembentukan moralitas anak, namun narasi keteladanan Nabi Muhammad SAW di dalamnya berpotensi mengandung bias. Ini dapat menghambat internalisasi nilai inklusivitas dan kesetaraan gender, esensial bagi masyarakat majemuk. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendekonstruksi narasi tersebut guna mengidentifikasi mekanisme penguatan atau penghambatan nilai-nilai fundamental ini. Menggunakan Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA) model Fairclough, studi kualitatif ini menganalisis buku teks PAI SD Kurikulum Merdeka dan Kurikulum 2013 kelas 4-6. Temuan yang diantisipasi meliputi: minimnya peran aktif perempuan, penguatan stereotip gender, representasi interaksi non-Muslim/minoritas yang kurang mendalam atau eksklusif, serta penggunaan bahasa kurang sensitif gender. Potensi narasi alternatif yang inklusif dan setara gender juga diyakini belum optimal. Penelitian ini diharapkan memberikan peta kritis untuk pengembangan kurikulum dan buku teks PAI SD yang lebih responsif, memperkuat fondasi inklusivitas dan kesetaraan gender sejak dini, selaras dengan prinsip Islam *rahmatan lil 'alamin* dan tuntutan masyarakat modern.

#### **ABSTRACT**

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) textbooks for elementary schools are crucial in shaping children's morality. However, the exemplary narratives of Prophet Muhammad SAW within these texts may contain biases. These biases can hinder the internalization of inclusivity and gender equality, values essential for Indonesia's diverse society. This research aims to deconstruct these narratives, identifying how they either reinforce or impede these fundamental values. This qualitative study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically Fairclough's threedimensional model. It analyzes PAI elementary school textbooks from the Kurikulum Merdeka and Kurikulum 2013 for grades 4-6. Anticipated findings include: minimal representation of active female roles, reinforcement of gender stereotypes, less indepth or exclusive portrayals of interactions with non-Muslims and minorities, and the use of less gender-sensitive language. The potential for alternative, more inclusive, and gender-equal narratives is also believed to be underexplored. This research is expected to provide a critical roadmap for developing more responsive PAI curricula and textbooks. The goal is to strengthen the foundations of inclusivity and gender equality from an early age, aligning with the Islamic principle of rahmatan lil 'alamin (a mercy to all worlds) and the demands of modern society.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Elementary Schools (SD) plays a fundamental role in shaping the character, morality, and basic religious understanding of children in Indonesia (Muhaimin, 2020). In this learning process, textbooks function as the main medium for the transmission of knowledge and values, including the exemplary narrative (*uswatun hasanah*) of the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Nurdin, 2021). The concept of the Prophet's example, which is sourced from QS. Al-Ahzab (33:21), affirms that the Messenger of Allah is the best example in all aspects of life. The meaning of this example is dynamic and interpretive, including spiritual, moral, social, and leadership dimensions, which are expected to guide students' behavior and attitudes (Sahlan, 2022). However, it is important to understand that textbooks are

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not a neutral medium; they are cultural products that are loaded with certain values, norms, and ideologies that they want to transmit, so the representation in them needs to be critically examined (Apple, 2019).

In the midst of the complexity of Indonesia's pluralistic society in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture, and gender, as well as a global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially the 4th (quality education) and 5th goals (gender equality), the value of inclusivity (respecting and accepting differences) and gender equality become very crucial in the context of education (UNESCO, 2020). Religious education, including PAI, is now required not only to instill belief, but also to form individuals who are inclusive, tolerant, and respect for equality (Aini, 2023; Fikriyati, 2021). The principle of inclusivity in Islam is rooted in the recognition of diversity as *sunnatullah* (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13; Ar-Rum: 22) and the teachings of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (QS. Al-Anbiya: 107), while gender equality is based on the principle of human ontological equality before Allah (Qur'an. An-Nisa': 1; Al-Hujurat: 13). However, recent studies show that religious education practices and materials still often reproduce gender bias and exclusivity (Rohmah, 2022; UIN Jakarta Research Team, 2023), which has the potential to hinder the formation of inclusive and equal attitudes from an early age.

Although the importance of the Prophet's exemplary narrative in PAI elementary textbooks is undoubted, an in-depth analysis of its representation, especially through a critical lens that focuses on issues of inclusivity and gender equality, is still limited. Existing research is often descriptive or normative without using a critical approach that is able to dismantle the power relations and ideology behind the text (Misrawi, 2020). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method that is able to uncover how texts reproduce or challenge social injustices, including gender bias and exclusivity (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2016), has not been applied intensively to the corpus of PAI elementary textbooks in Indonesia, especially with a dual focus on inclusivity and gender equality in the narrative of the Prophet's example.

Based on this background, this research aims to answer several key questions. First, this study will investigate how the narrative of the example of the Prophet Muhammad SAW is represented textually, including aspects of language, narrative structure, and visualization in PAI elementary textbooks. Second, it will be examined how the representation of the narrative of the Prophet's example reflects or forms the value of inclusivity for non-Muslims, minority groups, and differences of opinion in the context of PAI elementary discourse. Third, this study will also analyze how the representation of the Prophet's exemplary narrative reflects or shapes the value of gender equality, including roles, representations, and the use of language, in the context of PAI elementary discourse. Finally, this study will review the implications of the results of this narrative deconstruction on efforts to strengthen the value of inclusivity and gender equality in the development of textbooks and PAI elementary school learning practices.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### 1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. The CDA framework used is Norman Fairclough's (1992, 2013) three-dimensional model, which includes text analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. The design of this research focuses on an in-depth analysis of the text of the book to reveal the ideology and power relations manifested in the narrative of the Prophet's example.

## 2. Data Sources

The primary data source of this research is the PAI Elementary School textbook for Grades 4, 5, and 6. The books selected include the latest edition of the Merdeka Curriculum (published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology/Ministry of Education and Culture and the main publisher that passed *the review*) and the 2013 Curriculum (the latest revised edition from the main publishers such as the Ministry of Education and Culture, Erlangga, Tiga Serangkai, and Yudhistira). The selection of the sample was based on the prevalence of book use in national primary schools, especially covering the upper grades of elementary school (4-6) where the narrative of the Prophet's example is presented more complexly. Additional selection criteria are the existence of a special chapter or section that discusses the Sirah Nabawiyah or the Example of the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

#### 3. Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process begins with the identification of the unit of analysis, which is the mapping of all segments in the sample textbook that explicitly or implicitly contain the narrative of the example of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, including his life story, nature, behavior, and social interactions. Furthermore, careful and repeated reading of the selected texts was carried out to understand the surface

meaning and potential hidden meanings. The final stage is the systematic recording and encoding of textual features relevant to the focus of the research, such as representations of the Prophet, the role of women, interactions with other groups (non-Muslims, minorities), the use of language, and visual illustrations.

## 4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out following the three dimensions of the Fairclough CDA:

- Dimension 1: Textual Analysis (Description). In this dimension, an in-depth examination of the linguistic and semiotic features of the text is carried out. This analysis includes: (1) Representation of social actors: how the Prophet, women (wives, children, companions), non-Muslims, and other groups are portrayed (e.g., through activation/passivation, inclusion/exclusion); (2) Inter-stakeholder relations: how the relationship of power, equality, or hierarchy is described; (3) Social identity: what traits and roles were constructed for the Prophet and other actors; (4) Values and beliefs: identification of expressed or assumed presuppositions, implications, and evaluations; (5) Use of gender language: analysis of potentially gender-biased pronouns, nouns, or adjectives; (6) Narrative structure: identification of the dominant story pattern; and (7) Visual elements: analysis of the illustrations that accompany the narrative to see the alignment or contradiction with the text.
- Dimension 2: Discourse Practice Analysis (Interpretation). This dimension interprets how text is produced and likely consumed. In the production aspect, the researcher will examine the background and institution of the book author, the applicable writing guidelines (such as Content Standards and SKL PAI), and the book review process. In the consumption aspect, assumptions are made about how this text is likely to be understood by teachers and elementary school students, based on the general context of PAI learning in Indonesia.
- Dimension 3: Analysis of Socio-Cultural Practices (Explanation). This dimension connects the discourse in the text with the broader power structure and ideology in society. It includes an analysis of the dominant discourse on gender and the role of women in Indonesian or Islamic society, discourse on Muslim-non-Muslim relations and minority groups, national education policies related to character strengthening, religious moderation, and gender equality, as well as socio-political dynamics that influence religious education.

## 5. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research results, several strategies are applied: Data triangulation is carried out by comparing representations of the same narrative between textbooks from different curricula or publishers. Peer debriefing is carried out through initial interpretation and coding discussions with peers who have expertise in the field of CDA, Islamic Education, or Gender Studies. Reflexivity is an important principle, where researchers critically reflect on positionality and assumptions that may influence analysis. Finally, trail audits are carried out by documenting in detail the entire process of data collection and analysis to ensure transparency and accountability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Result

### 1. Narrative Representation of the Prophet's Example: Thematic Patterns and Emphasis

The narrative of the Prophet's example in the PAI Elementary textbook shows a pattern of emphasis on certain aspects. Consistently, the moral-individual aspects of the Prophet, including honesty (Al-Amin), patience, humility, and compassion for orphans, are presented prominently, often through short stories that focus on the pre-prophetic period. Similarly, the worship aspect of the Prophet, which highlights his devotion to worship and prayers, is portrayed to strengthen his strong spiritual nature. In contrast, aspects of public and military leadership after the Hijrah, such as leadership in the battles of Badr, Uhud, and Khandaq, the diplomacy of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah, and the construction of the state of Medina, were given a large portion and were often depicted with heroic narratives.

The (domestic) aspect of the Prophet's family, which is supposed to present the example of husband and father, is often mentioned only in general and briefly, emphasizing more individual piety in the family than the dynamics of equal relationships; concrete examples of interactions that show minimal role equality. In terms of visualization, the Prophet is generally depicted symbolically (without a face) in worship activities, preaching, or leading in the public sphere. Illustrations showing domestic roles or interactions with non-female non-nuclear families are rarely shown. This narrative emphasis on individualized public/military and moral leadership reflects an exemplary understanding of heroism and spirituality. Other aspects that are crucial for inclusivity, such as complex interactions with non-Muslims and conflict

resolution, as well as aspects of gender equality such as the division of roles in the household and respect for the wife's opinion, tend to receive less in-depth attention or are presented in a very simple way (Rahman, 2021; Ali, 2023). Visual representations dominated by the public and spiritual realms of the Prophet also reinforce this pattern of emphasis.

# 2. Deconstructing Narratives Related to the Value of Inclusivity: The Establishment of "Us" and "Them" Boundaries

In the context of inclusivity, the narrative of interaction with non-Muslims in PAI elementary textbooks is indeed found, for example through the story of the agreement with the Quraysh infidels in Hudaibiyah or the Charter of Medina. However, critical analysis shows that the emphasis on deeper principles of inclusivity, such as the recognition of the rights of different groups and universal justice without discrimination, is often underemphasized. The narrative may focus more on the "victory of Islamic diplomacy" or "Islamic power" than on the principle of peaceful coexistence based on equality of civil and human rights. The use of the term "kafir" may also be found to be neutral without adequate critical contextualization of the differences in terminology and its implications.

Regarding the representation of minorities and weak groups, the Prophet's example of loving orphans, the poor, and the servants of the righteous is presented, but aspects of structural liberation or empowerment of marginalized groups from injustice may be less emphasized. The representation of minority groups such as Jews in the society of Medina, especially in the narrative of war or conflict, may be more dominant than the narrative of peaceful cooperation initiated by the Prophet. The language used in this narrative may also implicitly reinforce the "Muslim" versus "non-Muslim/Infidel" dichotomy, with an emphasis often on differences in beliefs rather than shared human values. Overall, narrative representations tend to reproduce discourses that still place "Muslims" as the center and other groups as "others," although not always explicitly hostile (Hilmy, 2020; UIN Jakarta Research Team, 2023). The great potential of the Prophet's narrative as a builder of an inclusive society that guarantees the rights and obligations of all groups (such as the Medina Charter) has not been explored optimally to instill the value of radical and comprehensive inclusivity (Zuhdi, 2022). This is in contrast to the demands of a pluralistic Indonesian society and the goal of inclusive character education.

# 3. Deconstruction of Narratives Related to the Value of Gender Equality: Limited Women's Representation

In terms of gender equality, the representation of women in PAI elementary textbooks tends to be limited and follows certain patterns. The Prophet's wives, especially Khadijah and Aisyah, as well as his daughter Fatimah, were the most prominent female figures. However, their role is often reduced. Khadijah is more often described as a financial and moral "loyal supporter" of the Prophet in the early prophethood or as a role model of a faithful wife, while her role as a successful businesswoman who took the initiative to propose to the Prophet is rarely highlighted as a prime example that inspires women's independence. Aisha often appears in the context of her marriage to the Prophet or in specific events (e.g., the case of Al-Ifk or Fitnah), but her role as a prominent hadith narrator, jurisprudence, and political leader with a critical voice is rarely the focus of an exemplary narrative for elementary school students. Fatimah is often shown as a devoted and loving princess, but rarely as an independent figure with her own significant struggles or contributions outside the domestic realm. Female companions (Sahabiyah) who were strong and played an active role in the public sphere, such as Nusaybah bint Ka'ab (the warrior in Uhud), Sumayyah (the first martyr), or Um Waraqah (who was allowed by the Prophet to be the imam of congregational prayers in her home), are very rarely or even not mentioned at all in the exemplary narrative.

This narrative pattern tends to reinforce gender stereotypes, where the Prophet is predominantly shown as active in public spaces (war, da'wah, politics), while his wives are more often mentioned in the context of domestic and domestic support. The dynamics of equal and mutual respect between the Prophet and the women in his life are not highlighted. In addition, the use of masculine-centric language is often found, for example the use of the term "sahabat" which implicitly refers to men without explicitly and equally mentioning "sahabiyah". Common pronouns in activity prompts or exemplary descriptions also tend to use generic masculine forms, such as "he (man)" or "you (man)," which could potentially exclude women. The representation of women in the narrative of the Prophet's example tends to be marginal, stereotypical, and does not reflect the diversity of strong and active female roles in early Islamic history (Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 1999; Ali, 2023). Existing narratives more often reinforce traditional discourses about complementary and hierarchical gender roles than substantive equality (Nisa, 2020; Fikriyati, 2021).

This hinders the provision of diverse and equal role models for female and male students, and has the potential to reinforce gender bias at the elementary level.

#### Discussion

The results of the deconstruction of the narrative of the Prophet's example in the PAI elementary textbook show that there is a gap between the potential of inclusive and gender-fair Islamic teachings and the representation manifested in the teaching materials. The emphasis on the moral-individual aspects and public-military leadership of the Prophet, without being balanced by an in-depth exploration of the dimensions of inclusivity and gender equality, has the potential to shape a religious understanding that is limited to elementary school students. This pattern not only reflects, but also has the potential to reproduce social discourses that place differences as "others" and the role of women within a narrow framework.

Theoretically, these findings corroborate the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) argument that textbooks are not neutral entities, but rather an arena in which ideologies and power relations are fought over and reproduced (Apple, 2019; Fairclough, 2013). The lack of narratives that highlight the Prophet's inclusivity towards non-Muslims or minority groups, as well as the dominance of stereotypical roles of women, shows that patriarchal ideology and perhaps less pluralistic religious discourse still influence the curriculum design and textbook writing of PAI (Hilmy, 2020; Rohmah, 2022). The PAI elementary textbook, in this case, serves as a transmission mechanism of dominant discourse that may unwittingly hinder the cultivation of Islamic universal values such as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, justice, and the equality of human dignity that are essential in a pluralistic society.

The implication of this deconstruction is that there is an urgent need for the reinterpretation and enrichment of the narrative of the Prophet's example. This enrichment is not to deny the authority of the Prophet, but to rediscover and *reaffirm* the dimensions of exemplary that are in line with universal Islamic values and the needs of contemporary society (Engineer, 2004; Rahman, 2021). This can be done by expanding the scope of example, for example by integrating more dimensions of the Prophet relevant to inclusivity, such as nonviolent conflict resolution, respect for treaties with non-Muslims, and the defense of the rights of structurally weak groups. For gender equality, it is important to explore the way the Prophet communicated and valued the opinions of his wives, as well as his appreciation for women's contributions in various fields, not just domestic.

Concretely, it is necessary to introduce more exemplary sahabiyah figures, including short but meaningful stories about female friends who played an active role in the public sphere (war, science, economics, politics) as an integral part of the narrative of early Islamic glory. The use of inclusive and gender-sensitive language is also crucial, replacing generic masculine pronouns with gender-neutral pronouns or explicitly including both genders, as well as choosing words that avoid stereotypes. In addition, the narrative needs to be presented critically and contextually, where potentially biased stories (e.g. the Prophet's polygamy) are given a socio-historical context in a simple manner and emphasize the principles of justice and equality that are relevant to the present context. Finally, the illustration should be enriched by showing the Prophet in harmonious domestic interactions or sahabiyah in an active and diverse role.

Strategic recommendations are directed to stakeholders. Textbook authors and review teams (under the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religion) need to actively develop guidelines for writing PAI elementary textbooks that explicitly contain the principles of inclusivity and gender sensitivity. This process should involve gender, inclusivity, and progressive Islamic thinkers, as well as provide basic CDA training for writers. PAI teachers also need to be encouraged to not only teach texts literally, but also guide students in critical reading, identify universal values (justice, compassion, equality), and connect them to contemporary contexts through open discussions. Teacher training on inclusive perspectives and gender equality in Islam is indispensable (Aini, 2023). Policymakers (Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Religion) are expected to strengthen religious moderation policies and strengthen the profile of Pancasila students by explicitly including indicators of understanding inclusivity and gender equality in the learning outcomes of PAI Elementary School, as well as supporting research and development of alternative teaching material models. This critical deconstruction, in the end, is not to deny the authority of the Prophet's example, but to rediscover and *reaffirm* the dimensions of exemplary that are in line with universal Islamic values (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*, justice, equality of human dignity) and the needs of

contemporary society (Engineer, 2004; Rahman, 2021). This reinterpretation and enrichment of narratives is expected to strengthen the foundation of the values of inclusivity and gender equality from an early age, forming a generation of Indonesian Muslims who are confident, respectful of differences, and fair.

#### CONCLUSIONS

This study deconstructs the narrative of the example of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in the PAI Elementary School textbook using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Early findings suggest that existing narratives tend to focus on the Prophet's individual public/military and moral leadership, often ignoring aspects of social inclusivity. Women's representation was also found to be marginal and stereotypical, reinforcing gender bias and the use of less sensitive language. This narrative has the potential to create an "us-them" dichotomy and reproduce social practices that lack the value of inclusivity and gender equality in primary education. Therefore, this deconstruction emphasizes the urgency of reinterpreting the narrative of the Prophet's example to be more in line with the Islamic principle *of rahmatan lil 'alamin* and the demands of a pluralistic society.

Practically, we recommend a revision of the PAI elementary textbook by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religion to integrate a more inclusive and gender-equal narrative, including the use of gender-sensitive language and diverse illustrations. Intensive training for PAI elementary school teachers on the perspective of inclusivity and gender equality in Islam, as well as critical learning methodologies, is urgently needed. The development of supporting materials such as teacher modules containing examples of alternative narratives is also recommended.

Scientifically, advanced research using CDA or blended methods is necessary to analyze not only the text, but also how the text is understood and taught. A comparative study of PAI elementary textbooks in various Muslim countries is also important to expand horizons. Finally, it is necessary to continue to develop theories and models of integrating the values of inclusivity and gender equality in Islamic religious education.

This research is predictive and based on critical literature analysis, not empirical, with a limited focus on book texts. Therefore, advanced empirical research is strongly recommended to validate these findings and recommendations.

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