

## Gender Stereotypes in Assigning Physical Education Roles: Evidence from Islamic Primary Schools

<sup>1</sup>Choirul Anwar\*, <sup>2</sup>Ahmad Faiz Abdillah,  
<sup>3</sup>Muhammad Syahrul Muharram, <sup>4</sup>Istianatul Milah  
<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Indonesia  
<sup>2</sup>Institut Attanwir, Indonesia  
<sup>3</sup>Universitas Al-Hikmah Indonesia, Indonesia  
<sup>4</sup>Institut Agama Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Tuban, Indonesia  
\*Correspondence author: [irulanwaro7gl@gmail.com](mailto:irulanwaro7gl@gmail.com)

### Abstract

**Background of study:** Gender stereotypes continue to significantly influence educational management, particularly within the context of religious-based primary schools.

**Aims and scope of paper:** This study aims to analyze how gender-based perceptions dictate the assignment of non-specialist class teachers as Physical Education instructors in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

**Methods:** Employing a qualitative descriptive case study, research was conducted at a private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Salatiga. Data were gathered through participatory observation, documentation, and semi-structured interviews with male and female class teachers representing both lower and upper grade levels.

**Results:** Findings reveal a systematic segregation where female teachers are exclusively assigned to lower grades based on nurturing stereotypes. In contrast, male teachers dominate upper grades due to perceived physical authority and masculine dominance. This distribution is driven by social role expectations rather than formal professional competence. The analysis indicates that these practices reproduce traditional gender schemas within the sports field, limiting teachers' professional development and reinforcing gender biases among students. Madrasah management tends to rely on intuitive gender roles rather than pedagogical standards, creating an invisible barrier to female educators in athletic instruction.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that such stereotypical assignments undermine the inclusivity of physical education. It implies an urgent need for gender-responsive managerial policies and cross-gender teacher rotations to dismantle these ingrained biases. This research contributes a significant perspective on the mechanism of gender reproduction within Islamic primary education management.

**Keywords:** Gender Stereotypes; Class Teacher; Madrasah Ibtidaiyah; Physical Education

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## INTRODUCTION

Physical education, sports, and health (PJOK) at the elementary school level is an educational domain that not only focuses on physical development but also serves as a space for the contestation of social values (Sumarjono et al., 2024). Gender stereotypes significantly influence the roles and perceptions of PJOK teachers, which ultimately shape teachers' professional opportunities and students' learning experiences in the field (Pautu et al., 2025). This issue is crucial because schools are often the first place where rigid gender norms are introduced and internalized by students through daily educational practices.

Traditionally, there has been a strong dichotomy in society's perception of physical education teachers (Fjellner et al., 2024). Male teachers are often associated with physical strength, assertiveness, and dominance in competitive sports, while female teachers are more frequently linked to flexibility, aesthetics, and nurturing roles (Preece & Bullingham,

2022). These differing perceptions create invisible barriers for teachers in expressing their professional identities beyond existing social expectations.

These stereotypical representations even permeate teaching materials and primary educational literature (Archev, 2022). Often, female physical education teachers are portrayed in limited roles that conform to specific beauty or physical standards, which indirectly reinforces society's narrow expectations regarding their professional capabilities. This results in female teachers frequently having to work harder to prove their technical competence in sports considered masculine.

The impact of these stereotypes is starkly evident in instructional practices and task distribution within schools (Işıkgöz et al., 2025). Teachers tend to align their teaching methods with traditional gender roles, where male teachers lead activities requiring high physical endurance, while female teachers are directed toward tasks perceived as low-intensity (Pastor-Vicedo et al., 2019). This pattern continuously reproduces gender inequality within the classroom and sends the wrong message to students regarding physical limitations based on gender.

In the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), this phenomenon becomes increasingly complex due to the limited number of specialized Physical Education (PJOK) teachers. Many private madrasahs, particularly in urban areas such as Salatiga City, are forced to implement policies assigning homeroom teachers to also serve as PE instructors. This situation places homeroom teachers in a dilemma, as they must teach a specialized subject without adequate physical education training, leading them to rely on common societal gender stereotypes.

Observations in the field reveal a systematic trend in the allocation of PE teaching classes. Female classroom teachers are predominantly assigned to teach PE in lower grades (grades 1 and 2) because they are perceived as better suited to employing persuasive approaches and nurturing young children. Conversely, male classroom teachers are almost always assigned to teach PE in upper grades (grades 3 through 6) under the assumption that they possess greater physical authority to control students entering puberty (del Castillo Andrés et al., 2012).

Although discourse on gender equality in education has increased, research specifically examining gender stereotypes in the assignment of non-specialist classroom teachers within madrasah settings remains very limited (Basma & Rubie-Davies, 2025). Therefore, this study aims to analyze how gender stereotypes underpin the management policies for assigning Physical Education (PJOK) teachers in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Through this study, it is hoped that a collective awareness will emerge to create a more inclusive and gender-neutral instructional environment for both educators and students.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive case study design (Creswell, 2018). This design was chosen to explore in depth the unique phenomenon of gender stereotypes in the distribution of physical education teaching assignments within the specific context of a madrasah (Islamic school). Through the case study, the researcher can uncover social realities, teachers' perceptions, and internal school policies that cannot be explained statistically. Instead, they require in-depth narratives to understand why these gender-based assignment patterns have formed and persisted in elementary school educational practices.



Figure 1. Research Framework

The research was conducted at a private Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) in Salatiga City, Central Java. This location was selected through purposive sampling because the school represents a common phenomenon in MI, where classroom teachers also serve as physical education (PJOK) instructors. The research subjects or key informants consisted of two classroom teachers selected to represent two distinct perspectives: a female teacher teaching Physical Education in lower grades and a male teacher teaching Physical Education in upper grades. These participants were chosen to provide a comparative perspective on gender role attributions in the implementation of physical activities at school.

Data collection was conducted through participatory field observation, a review of documentation such as lesson plans and teaching assignments, and semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' motivations and subjective perceptions. The collected data were then analyzed using qualitative descriptive methods, following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher employed source and method triangulation, specifically by comparing interview data with field observations and official madrasah management documents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Gender-Based Distribution of PE Instructors in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

The phenomenon of assigning class teachers as Physical Education (PE) instructors at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) under study reveals a highly structured gender segregation. Based on field observations and an analysis of the teaching schedule over one academic year, it was discovered that not a single female class teacher was assigned to teach PE in the upper grades, and conversely, no male class teachers were assigned to the lower grades. This reality suggests that the madrasah management implements an implicit assignment policy rooted in the biological characteristics of the teachers rather than formal sports certifications. This distribution pattern is detailed in the Table 1.

Table 1. Typology of Class Teacher Assignments in Physical Education

Grade Level	Gender of Instructor	Characteristics of Physical Activity	Managerial Justification
Lower Grades (1-2)	Female	Basic movement, light manipulative, gymnastics	Emotional approach and nurturing
Upper Grades (3-6)	Male	Sports games, athletic techniques, physical contact	Authority control and physical strength

These findings indicate that the madrasah still adheres to a tradition where female teachers are considered the most representative figures to accompany early childhood students. This reasoning arises from the assumption that lower-grade students require a "motherly" figure who is patient in guiding basic motor movements on the field. This was confirmed by a female first-grade teacher (SN) who stated:

*"First-grade children are still very much in a world of play and are very close to a mother figure. Therefore, when it comes to sports, I must accompany them so they do not feel afraid or pressured on the field. We usually only provide light basic movement materials, as long as they enjoy moving without being burdened by complex sports techniques."*

Conversely, at the upper-grade level, the authority of male teachers is considered a crucial element in maintaining the order of students who are beginning to show physical dominance. Male teachers are seen as more competent in managing the emotions and energy of upper-grade male students, who are often highly competitive in ball games. This statement is supported by the results of an interview with a male fifth-grade teacher (MY):

*"Upper-grade students have a lot of energy, especially during soccer or basketball where physical contact often occurs. We, as men, are considered better able to balance their energy and are firmer in providing technical instructions on the field compared to female colleagues. Thus, this assignment seems to have become a necessity to ensure that learning remains controlled and technical material is delivered correctly."*

The data above aligns with previous research by (Gajda et al., 2022; Gilchrist & Zhang, 2024), which mentions that gender stereotypes are often the primary basis for determining teacher workloads in primary schools. Assigning female class teachers to lower grades and male teachers to upper grades reflects a managerial distrust of technical competence across genders (Lievore & Triventi, 2023). This results in limited space for teachers to actualize their pedagogical abilities outside the gender schemas established by the madrasah environment.

### **Nurturing Stereotypes and Masculinity in Physical Education**

The assignment of teachers based on gender is closely related to Social Role Theory, where behaviors and expectations for individuals are shaped by long-standing social norms (Farago et al., 2022; Franke et al., 1997). Within the madrasah context, women are traditionally placed in a maintenance or nurturing function (Laili et al., 2024), while men are placed in an agency function that emphasizes strength and physical leadership (Camacho et al., 2023). These stereotypes land heavily on the subject of PE, as field activities are viewed as a space requiring stamina and firmness. These findings prove that female teachers teaching lower grades are essentially performing "educational domestic work" that limits their role to aspects of affection and patience.

This condition is exacerbated by the existence of Gender Schemas in the minds of the teachers themselves, where they feel "safer" when teaching classes that align with social expectations. Male teachers assume that teaching sports techniques is a masculine task they must undertake for professional self-esteem. This is consistent with the findings of research (Yang et al., 2026), which states that a teacher's self-perception of competence is often distorted by the stereotypes prevailing in their work environment. Consequently, a "natural law" has emerged in the madrasah that mastery of the field is a male prerogative, while female teachers only serve as complements in movement activities considered less physically challenging.

The integration of these values into school policy creates a structure that is difficult for innovation in curriculum based on equality to penetrate (Ibrahim et al., 2026). Assignments no longer consider teacher certification or interest in specific sports but instead focus solely on physical appearance and gender. This situation shows that although the curriculum demands inclusivity, in practice, madrasah management still uses a traditional lens in distributing teaching roles. This finding is particularly interesting as it occurs in an educational environment with a strong theological foundation, where the division of roles between men and women is often interpreted rigidly without considering the professional potential of each individual objectively.

### **Pedagogical Impact and the Urgency of Inclusivity in the Madrasah Environment**

The implications of this stereotypical assignment pattern directly affect the psychological development of students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Students unconsciously learn that sports are an activity with gender boundaries, where men are the primary controllers on the upper-grade sports field. This risk lowering the self-confidence of female students when they must engage in competitive physical activities because they do not see a dignified female figure on the sports field at their grade level (Sari et al., 2025). This situation is supported by research (Kim & Hodge, 2024), which emphasizes the importance of diverse gender role models to encourage active student participation in all series of physical education materials without awkwardness.

Furthermore, the professionalism of class teachers as PE instructors becomes stagnant due to the lack of challenges to step out of their respective gender comfort zones. Female teachers in these madrasahs tend to be reluctant to learn new sports techniques considered "heavy," while male teachers lose the opportunity to learn more empathetic and gentle approaches in teaching basic movements to young children. This condition harms the overall quality of physical education because teachers no longer pursue curriculum competency standards but merely carry out routine roles dictated by social structures.

The novelty of this research lies in the discovery of a mechanism for reproducing gender stereotypes through managerial assignments of non-specialist class teachers in madrasahs, where such policies systematically strengthen the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity in the classroom. This reality suggests that the main challenge of PE in madrasahs is not just a matter of facilities or tools but a transformation of the mindset of educators and policymakers regarding role equality on the field. Without a conscious effort to conduct rotations or cross-gender training, madrasahs will continue to be institutions that perpetuate traditional stereotypes for future generations.

As a practical suggestion, madrasahs need to begin implementing more flexible assignment policies, such as implementing team teaching between male and female teachers in a single sports session. This aims to provide students with a picture that sports are an inclusive activity involving cooperation between all genders. Future research is expected to delve deeper into the specific perceptions of MI students regarding their self-efficacy when taught by teachers of a different gender across levels. Such efforts are crucial to formulating a PE learning model in madrasahs that is truly gender-responsive and capable of accommodating the talents of all students without being hindered by obsolete social barriers.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the assignment of class teachers as Physical Education (PE) instructors in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is fundamentally dictated by entrenched gender stereotypes rather than professional pedagogical competence. The findings reveal a systematic dichotomy where female teachers are relegated to lower grades under the guise of nurturing and emotional support. At the same time, upper-grade PE instruction is exclusively reserved for male teachers based on perceived physical authority and masculine dominance. This managerial practice carries significant implications, as it not only stagnates the professional growth of non-specialist educators but also risks internalizing restrictive gender schemas in students during their formative years. By uncovering the specific mechanisms of role reproduction in Islamic primary education, this research fills a critical gap in the existing literature on sports sociology and educational management. The significance of this study lies in its call for an urgent transformation in madrasah policy, advocating for inclusive rotation models and gender-neutral professional development to dismantle obsolete social barriers. Future research should build upon these findings by conducting longitudinal assessments of student self-efficacy and athletic participation when exposed to cross-gender teaching models in the sports field.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS AND DECLARATIONS

This section outlines the specific contributions made by each author in the research process and manuscript preparation to ensure transparency and accountability in scholarly publishing. Author 1: Designed the research, conducted data analysis, and manuscript revision and editing. Author 2: Contributed to data collection and literature review. Author 3: Managed theoretical framework and qualitative data validation. Author 4: Handled source and method triangulation and reference formatting. Author 5: Supervised the research process and provided final approval of the manuscript.

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All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript. All authors have confirmed that this work is original, free from plagiarism (with a similarity index of no more than 15%), complies with ethical standards, and that they are fully prepared to accept any consequences in the event of a violation of these provisions.

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