

The influence of school environment on gender equality in student participation

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Abstract: *This descriptive quantitative study aims to examine the perceptions of gender equality among students at SMA Negeri (State Senior High School) 1 Bunta. Data were obtained from 119 students who completed a 75-item questionnaire. The analysis employed descriptive statistics, yielding an average perception score of 238,99 with a score range of 63-300. The principal finding indicates that teachers' treatment of students based on gender is the most prominent factor in supporting gender equality within the school environment, reflected by the highest percentage of 81,28%. However, cultural aspects, social norms, and formal school policies still require greater attention to overcome existing barriers. The study recommends strengthening pro-gender equality school policies, providing gender-awareness training for teaching staff, and developing programs that encourage active student participation without discrimination. The implications of the findings are expected to serve as a basis for policymakers in creating an inclusive and fair educational environment for all genders.*

Keywords: *school policy; pro-gender equality; teachers' treatment; students' perceptions; SMA Negeri 1 Bunta.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif kuantitatif yang bertujuan mengkaji persepsi siswa SMA Negeri 1 Bunta terhadap kesetaraan gender. Data dikumpulkan melalui angket yang terdiri dari 75 butir soal, dengan melibatkan 119 siswa sebagai responden. Analisis data menggunakan statistik deskriptif, menghasilkan nilai rata-rata persepsi sebesar 238,99 dengan rentang nilai 63–300. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa perlakuan guru terhadap siswa berdasarkan gender merupakan faktor paling menonjol dalam mendukung kesetaraan gender di lingkungan sekolah, tercermin dari persentase tertinggi 81,28%. Namun, aspek budaya, norma sosial, dan kebijakan formal sekolah masih memerlukan perhatian lebih untuk mengatasi hambatan yang ada. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penguatan kebijakan sekolah yang pro-kesetaraan gender, pelatihan kesadaran gender bagi tenaga pendidik, serta pengembangan program yang mendorong partisipasi aktif siswa tanpa diskriminasi. Implikasi hasil penelitian diharapkan dapat menjadi dasar bagi pembuat kebijakan dalam menciptakan lingkungan pendidikan yang inklusif dan adil bagi semua gender.

Kata kunci: kebijakan sekolah; mendukung kesetaraan gender; perlakuan guru; persepsi siswa; SMA Negeri 1 Bunta.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the primary foundation for quality and competitive human resources in the globalization era. Gender equality in education is essential to ensure that both male and female students have equal opportunity to develop their academic and social competencies optimally (UNESCO, 2020). However, gender inequities still occur in many schools in Indonesia, leading to poor students' participation and achievement among female students in some regions. According to Ahmad (2021), various factors, such as classroom environment, teaching methods, students' confidence levels, class sizes, as well as psychological and physical health among students can contribute to gaps in student participation and achievement. Thus, greater attention should be given to school environment, as it plays a key role in fostering gender equality in learning.

School environment serves a strategic role in influencing students' attitudes and behaviors towards gender equality. An environment that is inclusive and free of gender discrimination can stimulate active participation in learning, increasing equal academic achievements between male and female students. School culture and policies affect students' perceptions of gender roles, which, in turn, influences their levels of participation. According to Malihah et al., (2021), social and cultural diversity without gender-responsive education can reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate inequality in the learning environment. Therefore, gender equality requires systematic implementation through an inclusive approach, gender-responsive learning, diversity-informed planning, supportive class arrangement, neutral language use, and equality-based class interactions (Chotim, 2022).

SMAN 1 Bunta is a senior high school in Banggai Regency, Central Sulawesi, with a total of 596 students, comprising 274 male and 322 female students. The students come from diverse ethnic groups, such as Saluan, Bugis, Tolaki, Banggai, Koro, Javanese, and Balinese. Thus, SMAN 1 Bunta has a wide diversity of students, not only in terms of gender, but also religions, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic status. Such rich diversity is a key factor in shaping school policies and in promoting gender-responsive and inclusive learning environments. According to Sukesu et al., (2020), social and cultural differences in

schools can influence how students are treated, such as in their opportunities to play and to develop a sense of independence, potentially creating gender gaps if not addressed with an inclusive and gender-sensitive approach. Therefore, SMAN 1 Bunta was selected as the research site to examine the influence of the school environment on gender equality in student participation during learning activities.

Gender inequities in schools may emerge due to gender-insensitive policies that restrict female students' roles and participation. Hal Trump (2025) confirms this and adds that policies that ignore biological, social, and gender realities restricts women's movement. Salim (2024) mentions the examples of gender inequities, such as differential treatments, role limitations, dismissal, and discrimination that violate women's basic rights.

Meanwhile, instances of gender inequities in schools include unfair task distributions, discriminatory teacher attention, and gender stereotypes. Thurgood Marshall Institute (2025) argues that gender-unresponsive school policies exacerbate stereotypes and inequality, discouraging female students to participate and excel academically. Brussino & McBrien (2022) highlights that gender stereotypes may inhibit academic and social competencies, especially among women, restrict roles, weaken self-confidence, and reduce motivation to learn. It is crucial to identify environmental factors that reinforce inequities in order to formulate effective strategies.

School policies that are gender-insensitive can perpetuate inequities in education. Strict gender-based rules, such as school dress codes, limit self-expression and lead students who do not conform to traditional norms to feel uncomfortable. (Cumming-Potvin, 2023). Reidy (2021) found that rigid uniform policies negatively impact non-binary students or students with different gender expressions. Similarly, a study by Women (2022) revealed that discriminative policies reinforce stereotypes and inhibit equality. In fact, Wachidah & Fathoni (2025) note that gender-unresponsive practices in schools tend to diminish female students' academic and social participation. Therefore, it is important to develop an inclusive and gender-sensitive policy to protect students' rights and create a fair, supportive, and sustainable learning environment for all students.

A school culture that does not support gender equality negatively affects social interactions between students. An environment that tolerates gender discrimination can create a non-supportive learning climate and reduce students' motivation (Nadhiroh & Ahmadi (2024). Hendayati et al., (2025) add that an inclusive school culture and respects for gender differences foster students' confidence and active participation. Thus, developing a school culture that promotes gender equality is key to fair education. Schools are instrumental in shaping character and social attitudes; providing an environment that promotes equality help create a young generation that values differences and rejects discrimination (Smith et al., 2023). Yunika et al., (2024) assert that gender-inclusive education contributes to fair and sustainable society. Pranidhi (2024) states that combining GEDSI with local wisdom enhances the effectiveness of inclusivity. Therefore, to create a fair and inclusive school culture should be a priority in making school policies.

There is currently no research that specifically examines the influence of school environment on gender equality in student participation, especially at SMAN 1 Bunta. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute significantly to the development of educational policies and practices at the school. More specifically, this study aims to investigate: (1) the influence of school policies and regulations on gender equality in student participation, (2) the influence of culture and social norms in schools on both male and female students; (3) teachers' treatment of students based on gender, and (4) explore students' perceptions of school environment and gender equality.

This study is expected to serve as a basis for the improvement of school policies and culture at SMAN 1 Bunta. In addition, the results of this study can provide school administrators and teachers with valuable insights in creating a more inclusive and gender-equitable learning environment. A clearer understanding of the school environment as a factor influencing gender equality enables schools to develop effective strategies to reduce inequities and promote the participation of all students. UNESCO (2020) asserts that the implementation of inclusive education can accelerate global gender equality. Bahri & Nuryati (2024) states that the aims of inclusive education support the eradication of

gender discrimination by creating a supportive and comfortable learning climate and providing space for the optimal cognitive development of all students.

This study provides empirical data within the context of SMAN 1 Bunta and provides an integrative model that can be replicated by the Education District Office in Banggai Regency and -other schools. This study also offers practical guidelines for creating a more equitable and inclusive learning environment.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive approach to extensively explore how school environment influences gender equality in the participation of senior high school students. The study was conducted at SMAN 1 Bunta in Banggai Regency, Central Sulawesi and took place over approximately four months, from October 2024 to January 2025. The sample of the study was 119 students, comprising 59 male and 60 female students, selected based on their participation in completing the research questionnaires. The subjects of the study were male and female students who were actively enrolled at SMAN 1 Bunta. The object of the study was the school environment, including the policies, school culture, social norms, and interactions between teachers and students that influence gender equality in student participation.

The questionnaire was developed independently based on the indicators of school policies and regulations, school culture and social norms, teachers' treatment of students, students' perceptions of the school environment, as well as students' suggestions and input regarding important improvements the school should make. Each indicator was represented by 15 question items, resulting in a total of 75 items in the questionnaire, which had been tested for validity and reliability. All items were closed-ended and used a 5-point Likert scale, facilitating both the respondents to answer the questions and the researchers to analyze the data.

For data analysis, this study employed a descriptive analysis technique, which involved calculating frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (Sugiyono, 2021) of the respondents' responses in order to provide a general overview of their perceptions. The questionnaire data were entered into

statistical software, namely SPSS and Excel, to facilitate data processing and result visualization.

Table 1. Category Proportion

Category	Percentage Range
Very Good	81%-100%
Good	61% - 80%
Moderate	41% - 60%
Bad	21% - 40%
Very Bad	0% - 20%

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Involving 119 respondents from SMAN 1 Bunta, this study aims to explore students’ perceptions of gender equality in student participation. The results showed that

the range of the perception score was 237, with a minimum score of 63 and a maximum score of 300. The wide gap between the lowest and highest scores indicates considerable variation in students’ perceptions. The detailed results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Description of Results

Descriptive Statistics	Perceptions of Gender Equality
N	119
Range	237,00
Minimum	63,00
Maximum	300,00
Mean	238,99160
	3,00046
Std. Deviation	32,73118
Variance	32,731

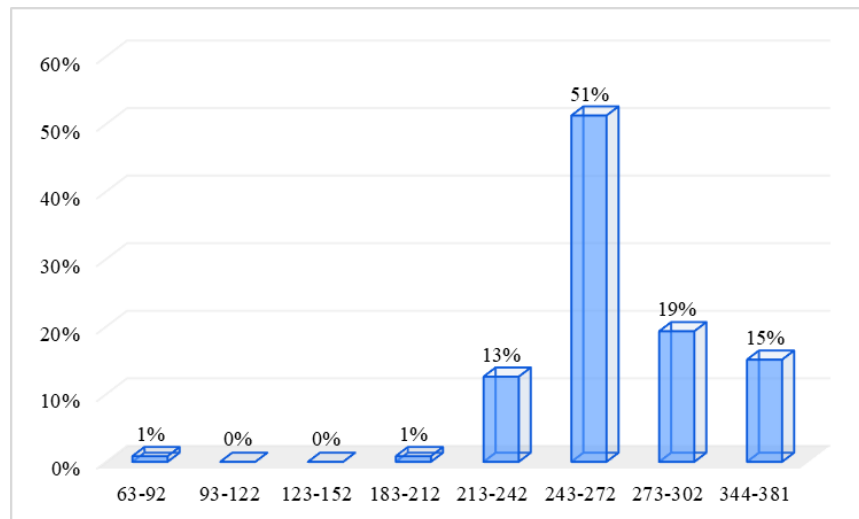
The mean perception score for gender equality was 238,99, reflecting that, in general, students perceived gender equality at a moderate to high level. The standard deviation o 32,73 indicates a moderate spread of scores around the mean, suggesting that students’ perceptions were not homogeneous, but varied between students.

The standard error of 3,00 reflects that the estimated mean perception score is fairly accurate and is considered reliable in representing the population of students at SMAN 1 Bunta. The calculated frequency distribution was classified into several score interval classes. It can be seen that the majority of students (about 51%) were in the 243-272 interval class, suggesting that most students had a fairly high participation level in gender equality. Furthermore, the interval classes of

273-302 and 344-381 had significant frequencies of 19% and 15% respectively, indicating that almost 85% students demonstrated moderate to high levels of participation.

Meanwhile, both of the 63-92 and 183-212 interval classes had a insignificant frequency of 1%. In the subsequent categories, both of the 93-122 and 123-152 interval classes had no respondents. These results demonstrate that very few students showed low participation in gender equality. These distribution patterns reflect higher levels of students’ perceptions and participation in gender equality, suggesting that students at SMAN 1 Bunta demonstrate positive attitudes and good awareness of gender equality. More details can be seen in the following graph.

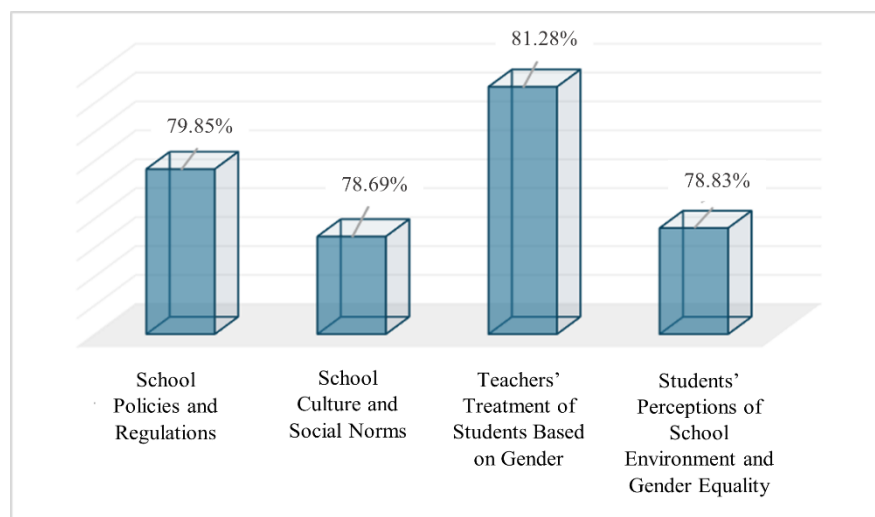
Figure 1. Percentages of interval classes



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As previously outlined, this study aimed to examine: (1) the influence of school policies and regulations on gender equality in student participation, (2) the influence of culture and social norms in schools on both male and female students; (3) teachers' treatment of students based on gender, and (4) explore students' perceptions of school environment and gender equality. Accordingly, the results of the analysis are discussed as follows.

Figure 2. Percentages of research indicators



The graph shows the percentages of four indicators related to gender equality at the school, which are the school policies and regulations, school culture and social norms, teachers' treatment of students based on gender

and students' perceptions of school environment and gender equality. Among those four indicators, teachers' treatment of students based on gender showed the highest score of 81,28%, which falls into the "very good"

category. This indicates that respondents had their most positive perceptions toward this aspect. The indicator of school policies and regulations ranked second with a score of 79,85%, which falls into the “good” category. The other two indicators, students’ perceptions of school environment and gender equality, and school culture and social norms, showed similar scores of 78,83% and 78,69% respectively, both of which also fall into the “good” category. These relatively high and closely-ranged scores demonstrate that, overall, school environment supports gender equality, despite slight variations among the assessed indicators. The mean score across these indicators was 79,66%, which was classified as “good” (61%-80%). This suggests that gender equality has been an important part of various dimensions of school life, from the policies to daily interactions between teachers and students.

The results of this study showed that students’ perceptions of gender equality at SMAN 1 Bunta varied considerably, as reflected in the score range of 237 and the mean score of 238,99. Such considerable variation reflects differences in students’ perceptions of the importance of gender equality, which aligns with the findings of a previous study that perceptions of gender are frequently influenced by social and cultural factors (Irayanti et al., 2023). A diverse understanding of gender equality serves as a crucial basis in designing more effective educational interventions.

The standard deviation of 32,73 demonstrates that students’ perceptions were not homogeneous, but varied moderately around the mean score. This is consistent with the results of another study showing that diversity in individuals’ perceptions toward gender is often influenced by personal experiences and social interactions (Gurieva et al., 2022). An international study also revealed that factors such as family background and media exposure can shape individuals’ perceptions toward gender significantly (Damiri., 2023).

The frequency distribution of students’ perceptions of gender equality indicates that most students were in the moderate to high interval classes, with 51% in the 243–272 interval class and nearly 85% at above-moderate levels. Low interval classes with very small frequencies showed that very few students had low levels of gender-equality participation. This finding confirms the results

of a previous study, revealing that students’ awareness of and active participation in gender-related issues have increased (Generale & Emilyn, 2023). Students’ active participation in gender-equality programs contributes to their more positive attitudes toward gender (Aini, 2024). High levels of participation serve as a positive indicator of educational efforts in gender equality. A conducive school environment is key to boosting student participation.

As the results showed, teachers’ treatment of students based on gender had the highest score, which is 81,28%. Interactions between teachers and students are instrumental in shaping perceptions of gender equality, as shown in research highlighting the important role of teachers as social agents of change (Tue et al., 2025). Teachers’ attitudes and behaviors can influence students’ perceptions of gender equality (Kandemir & Nartgün, 2022). Teachers as learning facilitators play an important role in promoting an equitable and inclusive environment. Teachers with gender-biased attitudes and behaviors can reinforce inequities and stereotypes in classrooms (Irayanti et al., 2023). Smith et al. (2023) also assert that teacher training on gender awareness is essential for reducing bias and fostering gender equality in the classroom. Teachers who are aware of gender issues can provide equal attention and opportunities to all students, enhancing active participation and academic achievement.

Teacher training and awareness of gender equality are crucial to enable teachers to manage classes fairly and provide equal opportunities to all students. According to Nurwahyuningsih et al, (2024), teachers who are well-trained in gender equality can recognize and address unconscious biases that may lead to unequal treatment of students. This is in line with the recommendations UNESCO (2020) emphasizing the importance of enhancing teachers’ competence in implementing inclusive and gender-equitable education. With well-trained teachers, school environment can become a safe and supportive space for the optimal growth of the students.

School policies and regulations had a score of 79,85, suggesting that the formal aspect of the school also supports gender equality. School policies that clearly and firmly supporting gender equality helps create a more inclusive environment (Cumming-Potvin,

2023). Policies that are proactive to gender equality contribute to the decline of discrimination in schools (Silander et al., 2024). Therefore, school policies serve as a fundamental foundation for cultivating a culture of equality.

Furthermore, with similar scores of 78,8%, both indicators, students' perceptions of school environment, and school culture and social norms, suggest the roles of social and cultural factors in shaping students' perceptions of gender equality. This study found that social norms that promote gender equality can cultivate students' positive attitudes. An inclusive school culture can raise gender awareness among students (Deutschmann et al., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to support transformations in culture and social norms in schools.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study aims to analyze the influence of school policies and regulations, culture and social norms, teachers' treatment, and students' perceptions of gender equality on student participation at SMAN 1 Bunta. Involving 119 respondents, this study yielded the gender equality perception score within the range of 63-300, which reflect fairly high levels, with the mean score of 238,99. The frequency distribution showed that 51% of students fell within the 243-272 range, while nearly 85% had above-moderate scores, indicating high participation in gender equality issues.

Regarding the assessed indicators, teachers' treatment had the highest score (81,28% – very good), followed by school policies and regulations (79,85% – good), and both students' perceptions and culture and social norms (78,8% each – good) Overall, all of the gender equality indicators reached 79,66% (good). These results emphasize the roles of school environment in supporting the principals of gender equality and teachers as the most influential social agents of change. However, the variations in perceptions are influenced by socio-cultural factors, such as family background and media exposure. It is important for schools to review and socialize gender policies, hold regular training for teachers, organize inclusive campaigns, implement peer-learning, conduct annual surveys, involve parents, and conduct comparative research with other senior high school

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