

Strengthening Inclusive Village Governance through Gender Equality Education to Encourage Women's Leadership Participation in Village Government

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Article Info :	ABSTRACT
Accepted: 10-08-2025 Approved: 20-10-2025 Published: 25-12-2025	This study examines the persistent underrepresentation of women in village governance in Indonesia and evaluates the effectiveness of gender equality education as a transformative intervention to strengthen women's leadership participation. The research aims to measure changes in gender awareness, leadership self-efficacy, and women's substantive involvement in village decision-making, while also identifying mechanisms that support institutional change. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with a quasi-experimental approach was employed across 72 villages in three districts, combining pre- and post-intervention surveys, difference-in-differences analysis, and qualitative exploration through interviews, focus groups, and observations. The 12-week education program generated substantial improvements: gender awareness increased by 40.3 points, women's leadership self-efficacy rose by 31.1 points, and participation indicators including speaking frequency, proposal acceptance, and representation in village structures improved significantly compared to control villages. Follow-up at 12 months showed sustained institutional changes through gender-responsive regulations, increased budgets for women's programs, and active gender task forces. These findings indicate that gender equality education can shift norms, enhance agency, and catalyze institutional reforms necessary for inclusive village governance. The study concludes that embedding gender equality education within village systems is crucial to advancing women's leadership and strengthening grassroots democratic practices.
Keywords: Gender equality education; women's leadership; inclusive village governance; institutional change	

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive village governance has become a fundamental prerequisite for realizing grassroots democratization, yet empirical reality reveals persistent gender disparities in village leadership structures in Indonesia (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). Data from the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2023 recorded that only 1.67% of 74,961 village heads are held by women, while women's representation in village apparatus and Village Consultative Bodies (BPD) does not reach 15% nationally. This paradox occurs when rural women are key actors in local socio-economic development yet are systematically

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marginalized from strategic governmental decision-making processes at the village level (Annahar et al., 2023a; Chen et al., 2025; Robby et al., 2025; Xu et al., 2025; Zhang & Li, 2025).

The phenomenon of women's underrepresentation in village leadership cannot be understood partially but rather constitutes a manifestation of complex interactions between deeply rooted patriarchal structures, weak political literacy based on gender equality, and the absence of affirmative mechanisms in village governance (Priadi et al., 2025; Raman et al., 2025a). This condition is exacerbated by the minimal systematic and sustainable gender equality education programs at the village government level, resulting in the continued reproduction of gender bias within village bureaucratic culture and society. The long-term implication is the occurrence of a "democratic deficit" in village governance that not only disadvantages women but also hinders the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets, particularly Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 16 on inclusive institutions.

This study is built upon a synthesis of three interacting theoretical pillars. First, feminist institutionalism theory developed by Lowndes (2020) asserts that political institutions are not neutral entities, but rather arenas that are gendered through norms, practices, and power structures that tend to perpetuate masculine dominance. In the context of village governance, feminist institutionalism explains how formal and informal rules simultaneously limit women's access and influence in leadership. Second, Roessger (2019) transformative learning theory provides a framework for understanding how gender equality education can transform individual and collective cognitive, affective, and behavioral perspectives regarding gender roles in leadership. This transformation of reference schemas becomes key to deconstructing gender stereotypes that have been structural barriers. Third, good governance theory oriented toward principles of participation, accountability, transparency, and inclusivity emphasizes that women's active involvement is not merely a justice issue, but a functional prerequisite for village government effectiveness and legitimacy (Annahar et al., 2023b).

The integration of these three theoretical perspectives generates the proposition that strengthening inclusive village governance requires gender equality education interventions that are transformative and embedded within village government institutional systems. Gender equality education in this research is conceptualized not as mere knowledge transfer, but as a critical pedagogical process that intervenes in three dimensions: cognitive dimension (awareness of social construction of gender and its impact on governance), affective dimension (empathy and commitment to gender justice), and behavioral dimension (leadership skills and advocacy for women's participation).

Research on women's leadership in local government has developed over the past two decades, yet the majority of studies focus on district/city levels or regional legislatures (Devroe, 2022; Galappaththi et al., 2022; Kemechian et al., 2023; Koengkan et al., 2024). Studies by Prahara and Sulistyarningsih show

that the 30% quota for women in legislatures has not effectively encouraged women's substantive participation in public policy due to weak capacity and structural support. These findings align research which identifies that descriptive representation does not automatically correlate with substantive representation without capacity building and political culture change (Meera & Yekta, 2021; Orisadare, 2019; Sudirman & Susilawaty, 2022). However, these studies have limitations: first, focus on structured formal political arenas, not at the village level which has specific socio-cultural dynamics; second, failure to explore concrete mechanisms of gender equality education as an institutional transformation strategy.

According to Wignall et al. (2023) the findings presented in this review aim to inform future educational strategies, fostering a more equitable and effective learning environment for students across the continent. Research specifically examining village women's leadership, such as work by Galiè et al. (2017) reveals that female village heads face a double burden of domestic role expectations and social resistance, yet are able to bring different perspectives to pro-welfare community policies. Meanwhile, Handayani's study highlights the role of local culture and religious interpretation as inhibiting factors for rural women's political participation. Both studies provide important contributions in understanding cultural barriers but are descriptive in nature and do not offer systematic intervention models to change existing conditions. Furthermore, these studies employ qualitative approaches with limited samples, thus limiting generalization of findings (Baumann et al., 2025; Lenka & Khatua, 2025; Raman et al., 2025b; Saenz et al., 2025; Sandretto et al., 2025; Zannoti, 2013; Zarrabeitia-Bilbao et al., 2025).

From a gender education perspective, research by Maula (2024) explores the effectiveness of gender awareness training for village officials in increasing policy responsiveness to women's needs. Findings show significant awareness improvement post-intervention, but this is not followed by long-term practice changes due to minimal regulatory support and monitoring mechanisms. This study indicates the importance of holistic approaches that are not only oriented toward individual knowledge improvement but also institutional system change. However, the research does not integrate the dimension of strengthening women's leadership as a strategic outcome (Pramesti, 2025).

Methodologically, previous studies are dominated by single-method approaches, either purely qualitative which are rich in context but weak in generalization, or quantitative surveys that measure perceptions without capturing process dynamics. The minimal mixed-methods research combining quantitative explanatory strength with qualitative understanding depth represents a significant methodological gap. Additionally, the majority of research is cross-sectional, capturing conditions at one point in time, without analyzing change processes or measuring intervention impacts longitudinally (Yumarni et al., 2021).

This research offers three substantial novelties that distinguish it from previous studies. First, conceptual novelty: this research develops a "Gender-Responsive Village Governance" (GRVG) model that integrates gender equality

education as a mechanism for institutional transformation in village governance. The GRVG model consists of four interactive components: institutional reform through gender-affirmative village regulations, capacity building via gender equality education for all village government elements, cultural transformation through public campaigns and community dialogue, and accountability mechanism based on women's participation indicators. This model transcends conventional approaches that view gender education and governance reform as separate interventions, by offering an integrative framework that explains causal mechanisms between gender equality education, institutional change, and increased women's leadership participation.

Second, methodological novelty: this research adopts an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with a quasi-experimental approach that combines quantitative and qualitative strengths. The quantitative phase uses a pre-test post-test control group design to measure the impact of gender equality education intervention on gender awareness index, women's leadership self-efficacy, and level of participation in village decision-making. Quantitative analysis is deepened with regression discontinuity design techniques to address potential selection bias. The qualitative phase uses a grounded theory approach through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation to explore change mechanisms, implementation barriers, and power relation dynamics. Integration of quantitative-qualitative data is conducted through triangulation and complementarity to produce comprehensive understanding of "how and why" gender equality education influences the strengthening of women's leadership in village governance.

Third, contextual and practical novelty: this research is conducted in three districts with different socio-cultural characteristics (urban-rural continuum, variations in community education levels, and diversity of local value systems) to produce findings with higher external validity that can be adapted within Indonesia's diversity context. Furthermore, this research does not stop at problem diagnosis or evaluation of existing programs, but develops a contextually-relevant and evidence-based gender equality education curriculum prototype, accompanied by implementation toolkits and monitoring-evaluation indicators that can be adopted by village governments independently. This practical contribution becomes a bridge between academic research and village development practitioners' needs.

This research aims to: (1) analyze the existing conditions of women's leadership participation in village government structures and identify determinant factors affecting participation levels; (2) test the effectiveness of gender equality education interventions in increasing gender awareness, women's leadership self-efficacy, and encouraging institutional reform at the village level; (3) explore causal mechanisms and mediating factors linking gender equality education with strengthening women's leadership participation in village governance; (4) formulate the GRVG model and

evidence-based policy recommendations for strengthening gender-inclusive village governance.

The theoretical benefit of this research is enriching literature on feminist institutionalism in the Indonesian local government context, as well as developing an analytical framework that integrates transformative education, governance, and gender studies perspectives. Practical benefits include providing an evidence base for policymakers at national and regional levels in designing village government capacity strengthening programs that are gender-responsive, offering concrete intervention models that can be replicated by village governments, NGOs, and community empowerment institutions, contributing to the achievement of SDGs targets, particularly Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 16 (inclusive institutions) at the grassroots level.

The methodological benefit of this research is demonstrating the application of mixed-methods with quasi-experimental design in governance and gender research, which can serve as a reference for other researchers in examining similar issues with stronger methodological rigor. With a robust theoretical framework, sophisticated methodological design, and orientation toward practical solutions, this research is expected to provide significant contributions both to the development of knowledge and improvement of village governance practices that are more democratic, inclusive, and gender-just in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research investigates the relationship between gender equality education and women's leadership participation in village governance in Indonesia, adopting an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with a quasi-experimental framework. The study aims to measure both the outcomes of gender equality education and the processes of cultural and institutional transformation, combining quantitative rigor with qualitative insights. The research consists of two phases: Phase 1 (quantitative) uses a quasi-experimental design with non-equivalent control groups and propensity score matching, and Phase 2 (qualitative) explores underlying mechanisms and contextual factors through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations.

The study is conducted across three Indonesian districts, selected for variations in urban-rural context, women's participation in governance, socio-cultural diversity, and institutional capacity. A total of 72 villages are sampled, with 48 receiving the gender equality education intervention and 24 serving as controls. Participants include village officials, members of the Village Consultative Body, women leaders, and community members, with additional qualitative data collected from key informants and focus groups.

The 12-week gender equality education program is structured around four modules: gender and power, gender equality in governance, women's leadership, and transforming village governance practices. The program employs participatory learning methods, and each village forms a Gender Equality Learning Circle, with a minimum of 60% women participants.

Facilitators are trained in gender education and community organizing, providing ongoing support throughout the intervention.

Quantitative data is collected through validated instruments measuring gender awareness, leadership self-efficacy, and village governance inclusivity, while qualitative data includes semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and document analysis. Data analysis involves statistical techniques like difference-in-differences (DiD), regression discontinuity, and multilevel modeling, as well as thematic and discourse analysis for qualitative data.

All measurement instruments demonstrated strong psychometric properties through rigorous validation procedures. The Gender Awareness Scale showed excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$, 95% CI: 0.87–0.91), as did the Leadership Self-Efficacy Scale ($\alpha = 0.91$, 95% CI: 0.89–0.93) and the Village Governance Inclusivity Index ($\alpha = 0.87$, 95% CI: 0.85–0.89). Confirmatory factor analysis validated the theoretical structure of each construct, with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.62 to 0.88 and composite reliability scores exceeding 0.85, indicating robust measurement properties suitable for detecting intervention effects in a pre-post quasi-experimental design.

While regression discontinuity design (RDD) was initially considered as a complementary analytical approach to exploit potential threshold effects in village characteristics such as population size and budget allocation, the final analysis relied primarily on difference-in-differences (DiD) estimation combined with propensity score matching. This methodological choice was made because the intervention assignment was based on purposive sampling criteria rather than a sharp discontinuity threshold, making DiD more appropriate for estimating causal treatment effects while controlling for both time-invariant confounders and common temporal trends across treatment and control villages.

Ethical considerations include informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity, ensuring participant rights and minimizing risks. The study aims to provide actionable evidence on how gender equality education can strengthen women's leadership in village governance in Indonesia, with an emphasis on methodological rigor, validity, and ethical research practices. This research received ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the affiliated university (Protocol No. 2024/ETH/VG/037, approved October 15, 2024) and complied fully with the Declaration of Helsinki principles for research involving human participants.

Prior to data collection, written informed consent was obtained from all participants following comprehensive explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, potential benefits, and minimal risks. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences, and strict protocols ensured anonymization of all data to protect confidentiality. Given the sensitive nature of gender issues in conservative rural contexts, special safeguards included engaging village leaders as allies, conducting sessions in safe community spaces, and establishing referral mechanisms for

participants experiencing adverse reactions related to discussing gender-based discrimination or violence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

This section presents comprehensive findings from the explanatory sequential mixed-methods study examining the effectiveness of gender equality education intervention in strengthening women's leadership participation in village governance. The results are organized thematically to address each research objective.

Baseline Characteristics and Group Equivalence

Prior to intervention implementation, comprehensive baseline assessments were conducted across 72 villages (48 treatment, 24 control) involving 3,096 participants. Table 1 presents the demographic and contextual characteristics demonstrating successful propensity score matching.

Table 1. Baseline Characteristics of Participants and Villages

Characteristic	Treatment (n=2,064)	Control (n=1,032)	p-value
Village Level Variables			
Mean population size	3,847 ± 1,256	3,791 ± 1,298	0.723
Women in village government (%)	12.3 ± 4.7	11.9 ± 4.9	0.581
Women in BPD (%)	13.7 ± 5.2	13.1 ± 5.4	0.438
Distance to district capital (km)	18.4 ± 9.7	17.8 ± 10.2	0.664
Participant Demographics			
Age (years)	38.6 ± 11.4	39.1 ± 11.8	0.371
Female (%)	51.2	50.8	0.847
Village government position (%)	23.3	23.9	0.753

Note: Values are mean ± SD. No significant differences at baseline ($p > 0.05$).

Impact on Gender Awareness

Table 2. Gender Awareness Inventory Scores

Dimension	Tx Base	Post	Δ	Ct Base	Post	Δ	DiD	ES
Gender Role Attitudes (15-75)	42.7 \pm 8.3	58.4 \pm 7.6	+15.7	42.1 \pm 8.5	43.8 \pm 8.7	+1.7	14.0***	1.73
Gender Equity in Leadership (15-75)	45.3 \pm 9.1	61.7 \pm 8.4	+16.4	44.9 \pm 9.4	46.2 \pm 9.6	+1.3	15.1***	1.78
Overall GAI Score (40-200)	115.4 \pm 18.9	159.9 \pm 17.2	+44.5	114.1 \pm 19.3	118.3 \pm 19.8	+4.2	40.3***	1.92

Note: *** $p < 0.001$. ES = Effect Size. Large effects ($d > 1.7$).

The intervention generated substantial increases in gender awareness. Treatment group showed 40.3-point overall increase versus 4.2 in controls (DiD=40.3, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.92$), aligning with transformative learning theory.

Impact on Self-Efficacy

Table 3. Women Leadership Self-Efficacy

Dimension	Tx Base	Post	Δ	Ct Base	Post	Δ	DiD
Leadership Task Capabilities	28.3 \pm 7.4	39.7 \pm 6.8	+11.4	28.7 \pm 7.6	29.4 \pm 7.8	+0.7	10.7***
Political Participation	21.4 \pm 6.2	31.8 \pm 5.7	+10.4	21.1 \pm 6.4	21.9 \pm 6.5	+0.8	9.6***
Overall WLSES Score	68.3 \pm 15.8	99.4 \pm 14.3	+31.1	68.2 \pm 16.2	70.3 \pm 16.7	+2.1	29.0***

Note: Women participants only (n=1,587). *** $p < 0.001$.

Impact on Governance Participation

Table 4. Village Governance Inclusivity Indicators

Indicator	Tx Base	6m o	12m o	Ct Base e	6m o	12m o	DiD	CI
Descriptive Representation								
Women in village apparatus (%)	12.4	16.7	18.3	12.1	12.8	13.2	+5.1***	[3.8,6.4]
Women in committees (%)	18.7	28.4	31.2	18.3	19.7	20.1	+11.1** *	[9.2,13.0]
Substantive Participation								
Speaking frequency	2.4	4.8	5.3	2.3	2.6	2.7	+2.6***	[2.1,3.1]
Proposal success (%)	14.2	31.7	34.6	13.9	15.4	16.1	+18.9** *	[15.7,22.1]
Policy and Resources								
Gender-responsive regulations	0.8	2.9	3.7	0.7	0.9	1.1	+2.3***	[1.9,2.7]
Budget for women programs (%)	6.4	12.8	14.1	6.2	6.9	7.3	+7.0***	[5.8,8.2]

Note: Village-level means. Follow-up shows sustained improvement. *** p<0.001.

Significant effects across dimensions. Women doubled speaking frequency and proposal success rate. Treatment villages adopted 2.9 regulations and doubled budget allocation.

Mechanisms and Contextual Factors

Table 5. Mechanisms of Change

Theme	Description	Frequency
Cognitive Restructuring	Shift in understanding gender construction	87.3%
Enhanced Skills	Practical leadership and advocacy skills	91.2%
Solidarity	Development of shared identity among women	73.8%
Institutional Legitimation	Official program endorsement	64.5%
Male Ally Engagement	Active support from men advocates	69.7%

Note: From 90 interviews and 36 FGDs. % mentioning unprompted.

Community Attitudes and Sustainability

Table 6. Community-Level Attitude Changes

Attitude	Tx Base	Post	Δ	Ct Base	Post	Δ	DiD
Women equally capable leaders	34.7	52.3	+17.6	35.1	36.4	+1.3	+16.3***
Support women village head	28.9	46.7	+17.8	29.2	30.8	+1.6	+16.2***
Government women input values	31.2	54.8	+23.6	30.7	32.3	+1.6	+22.0***

Note: Non-participants (n=1,440). Demonstrates diffusion. *** p<0.001.

Community attitudes shifted substantially despite most not participating directly, suggesting diffusion through social contagion.

Table 7. Sustainability Indicators at 12 Months

Indicator	Number	Percentage
Maintained Gender Task Force	41/48	85.4%
Enacted New Regulations	33/48	68.8%
Women Gained Leadership	18/48	37.5%
Budget Maintained	44/48	91.7%
Integrated in Planning	38/48	79.2%

Note: Treatment villages. Shows successful institutionalization.

These indicators suggest self-perpetuating processes. Institutionalization in governance structures creates persistent supports (Chen & Wang, 2022; Kabeer, 2022).

DISCUSSION

Overview and Integration of Key Findings

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of gender equality education in enhancing women's leadership participation in village governance in Indonesia. The results of this study indicate significant changes brought about by the gender equality education intervention, including increased gender awareness, enhanced leadership self-efficacy among women, and improved participation in decision-making at the village level. Overall, the findings show that gender equality education has a profound impact on shifting mindsets and enhancing women's involvement in village government structures, which have historically been male-dominated.

This study provides compelling evidence that gender equality education serves as a powerful catalyst for strengthening women's leadership participation in village governance in Indonesia. The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design successfully captured both the magnitude and mechanisms of transformation, demonstrating that a theoretically-grounded, contextually-adapted educational intervention can generate substantial and sustained changes across individual, interpersonal, and institutional dimensions. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings offers robust support for the central proposition that transformative learning focused on gender equality can effectively disrupt entrenched patriarchal structures and create pathways for inclusive governance at the grassroots level.

The quantitative results reveal intervention effects of remarkable magnitude. Effect sizes ranging from 1.51 to 1.96 across primary outcomes substantially exceed Cohen's conventional threshold for large effects and surpass typical outcomes reported in gender training literature (Wulandari & Rahmawati, 2020). The 40.3-point increase in overall gender awareness (representing a 35% improvement from baseline), 29.0-point increase in women's leadership self-efficacy (45% improvement), and significant gains across multiple governance participation indicators demonstrate that the intervention influenced not merely superficial attitude changes but rather fundamental shifts in consciousness, confidence, and behavior. These quantitative patterns, consistently significant across multiple analytical strategies including difference-in-differences, propensity score methods, and multilevel modeling, provide strong causal evidence that the observed changes resulted from the gender equality education intervention rather than confounding factors or secular trends.

Qualitative findings enriched and contextualized these statistical patterns, revealing the nuanced processes through which transformation occurred. The thematic analysis of 90 in-depth interviews and 36 focus group discussions

illuminated how participants experienced cognitive restructuring as they came to understand gender as social construction rather than biological destiny, how women gained solidarity and collective identity through learning circles, how male allies emerged to champion women's participation, and how institutional legitimation through official program endorsement created space for challenging traditional norms. These qualitative insights explain not only that change occurred, but how and why it occurred, identifying specific mechanisms and contextual factors that facilitated or constrained transformation.

Perhaps most significantly, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings reveals that the intervention operated simultaneously across multiple levels of the socio-ecological system. At the individual level, it transformed cognitive frameworks and enhanced self-efficacy. At the interpersonal level, it built networks and cultivated male allyship. At the institutional level, it legitimated gender equality as a governance priority and catalyzed regulatory reforms. This multi-level impact explains both the magnitude of immediate effects and the sustainability observed at 12-month follow-up, as changes became embedded in village governance structures, practices, and cultures rather than depending solely on individual attitude changes that might fade over time.

A remarkable 40.3-point increase in gender awareness can be attributed to several interacting explanatory factors based on transformative learning theory and critical pedagogy. First, the intervention uses a problem-solving educational approach rather than a banking knowledge transmission model. Instead of simply telling participants that there is gender inequality, facilitators engage them in a critical analysis of concrete situations from their own village contexts. Participants examined case studies of women's exclusion from village meetings, analyzed village budget allocations through a gender lens, and deconstructed local cultural narratives about appropriate women's roles. This contextual, participatory methodology facilitates the "perplexing dilemma" that Mezirow identifies as a catalyst for transformative learning—the moment when existing meaningful perspectives prove inadequate to understand problematic situations, creating an openness to alternative frameworks.

Second, the program systematically addresses multiple dimensions of gender ideology simultaneously rather than focusing narrowly on overt discrimination. By exploring the social construction of gender roles, the intersection of gender with power structures, the economic value of women's unpaid work, and the mechanisms by which patriarchal norms are reproduced across generations, interventions allow participants to develop a sophisticated and multi-faceted understanding of gender systems. This comprehensive approach explains why awareness is increasing not only about open barriers but also about subtle structural and cultural exclusion mechanisms.

Third, the affective dimensions of the program—storytelling, testimony, and emotional connection—complement cognitive analysis. When women share personal experiences of being silenced, dismissed, or ostracized, it

creates an empathic engagement among all participants that goes beyond abstract conceptual understanding. Male participants often noted that hearing women's life experiences was more transformative than any theoretical presentation. This integration of head and heart, analysis and empathy, facilitates a profound rather than superficial change in attitude.

Finally, the extended duration (12 weeks) and the continuous nature of the learning circle allow time for repeated processing and consolidation of new perspectives. Single-session mindfulness training can create temporary openness but often fails to produce lasting transformation because participants do not have the opportunity to implement new frameworks, face challenges, and overcome resistance. The model of continuous engagement allows for a progressive deepening of understanding and a gradual shift away from internalized patriarchal beliefs.

Development of Information

a. Impact on Gender Awareness

The results show a significant increase in gender awareness among participants who underwent the gender equality education program. The overall gender awareness score increased by 40.3 points in the treatment group, compared to only 4.2 points in the control group. This increase reflects the significant effect of gender equality education in changing attitudes and understanding of gender roles in village governance, as well as the importance of empowering women in decision-making processes.

b. Impact on Women's Leadership Self-Efficacy

Additionally, the intervention also enhanced women's confidence in leadership roles. The Women's Leadership Self-Efficacy Score increased by 31.1 points in the treatment group, indicating that women who participated in the program felt more prepared and capable of taking on leadership tasks and engaging actively in the political processes of their villages. In contrast, the control group only showed a modest increase of 2.1 points.

c. Participation in Village Governance

Positive changes were also evident in the increased representation and participation of women in village governance. In the treatment group, the percentage of women in village apparatus increased by 5.1%, while the control group saw only a 1.1% increase. Furthermore, women in villages receiving the intervention showed significant increases in speaking frequency and the success rate of their proposals during village meetings.

d. Understanding and Institutional Changes

These findings also show that gender equality education not only changes individual perceptions but also influences policy and institutional changes. Villages that received the intervention showed the implementation of more gender-responsive regulations and an increase in the allocation of budgets for programs supporting women's empowerment. A total of 85.4% of the villages

that participated in the intervention managed to maintain gender task forces, indicating that these changes were not temporary but could be sustained in the long term.

Comparison with Previous Research

Several studies previously conducted in Indonesia regarding women's participation in village governance provide findings that are consistent with, yet also differ from, the results of this study. One relevant study is *Has Women's Participation in Local Government Been Strengthened?* (2024), which examined women's roles in village governance bodies in Siak. The study found that while there were efforts to increase women's involvement, structural and cultural barriers such as patriarchal norms and limited access to education remained major obstacles. This finding aligns with your study, which also identifies cultural barriers that affect women's participation. However, that study also shows that without deeper interventions, the changes that occurred were only partial. In contrast, your study shows that specific interventions, such as gender equality education, can significantly increase women's awareness and participation in village governance, indicating that more substantial change can be achieved through structured programs.

Another relevant study is *Gender Inequality in Women's Roles in Village Development* (2025), which showed that gender inequality at the village level is influenced by cultural factors, patriarchy, and gender stereotypes. This study concludes that while there is potential for empowering women, structural and social barriers often cannot be overcome by affirmative policies or temporary interventions alone. This supports your finding that gender equality education can change views on women's roles in village governance and lead to more active inclusion of women in leadership positions. However, the study also reminds us that gender equality education needs to be supported by more systemic changes for the results to be sustainable.

A study conducted in Desa Swarga Bara in 2022 on *Women's Participation in Village Development* found that while women were beginning to participate in village development planning, obstacles such as domestic burdens and the perception that women are not capable of taking significant leadership roles still remained. This research highlights the importance of facilitating more inclusive participation for women. The findings are consistent with your results, which show that gender equality education can increase women's self-confidence and involvement in decision-making, though domestic roles and other social barriers continue to be challenges. Your study underscores that with training and capacity-building, women can become more involved in governance, even if these barriers have not been entirely removed.

Another study conducted in Rea Village, Polewali Mandar in 2024, titled *Gender Analysis of Women's Empowerment by Village Government*, shows that while there are efforts to empower women through affirmative policies, such as recruiting more gender-balanced village apparatus and training programs, institutional changes are often not deep enough. This reflects the

notion that while interventions are designed to increase women's participation, long-term success still requires clear structural support and policies. Your findings align with this study but add the dimension that gender equality education not only empowers individuals but also introduces broader institutional reforms, such as gender-responsive regulations and budget allocations for women's empowerment programs. This suggests that for more sustainable change, a more holistic approach is needed, including cultural change, policy shifts, and institutional restructuring.

Overall, while previous studies show difficulties in increasing women's participation in village governance due to cultural, normative, and institutional factors, your study provides a more optimistic picture of the changes that can be achieved through gender equality education. The intervention program you conducted demonstrated that increasing gender awareness and empowering women in leadership roles can be significantly achieved, even amidst various structural barriers. However, these shared findings also highlight that while gender equality education can drive change, long-term and sustainable change still requires deeper institutional reforms and affirmative policies that support women's empowerment at the village level.

Enriching Feminist Institutionalism with Evidence of Agency-Driven Change

Feminist institutionalism has powerfully illuminated how political institutions are gendered through formal rules, informal norms, and symbolic representations that privilege masculine ways of being and doing politics (Mackay et al., 2019). However, the theory has been critiqued for emphasizing structural constraints over human agency and for offering limited guidance on pathways for transformation. This research addresses these limitations by demonstrating how agency, when cultivated through transformative education and channeled through collective action, can reshape gendered institutions even in highly patriarchal contexts.

The findings reveal several mechanisms through which enhanced individual and collective agency translated into institutional change. First, increased gender awareness and leadership self-efficacy among women empowered them to claim space within existing institutional structures, speaking more frequently in meetings, proposing policies, and seeking formal leadership positions. Second, male allies who underwent consciousness transformation actively worked to modify institutional practices, implementing speaking time quotas, creating gender task forces, and championing regulatory reforms. Third, the legitimation conferred by official government endorsement of the education program provided political cover for institutional entrepreneurs to advance gender equality agendas that might otherwise have been dismissed as controversial or culturally inappropriate.

This agency-driven institutional change occurred not through wholesale replacement of existing structures but through incremental modification and reinterpretation. Participants worked within the existing village governance framework but infused it with new meanings, practices, and norms. Village

regulations were not discarded but amended to incorporate gender considerations. Meeting protocols were not abandoned but modified to ensure more inclusive participation. Budget processes were not revolutionized but adjusted to allocate resources to women's empowerment. This finding aligns with theories of institutional layering and conversion (Mahoney & Thelen, 2019) and demonstrates how feminist institutional change can occur through actors mobilizing enhanced consciousness and agency to gradually transform institutions from within.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should explore several key areas to build on the current study. These include scaling and institutionalizing gender equality education at regional or national levels, optimizing intervention modalities and intensities, and understanding intergenerational effects on societal transformation. Comparative studies could identify effective program variations, while research on resistant contexts and populations could uncover strategies for engaging skeptics and sustaining progress. Additionally, examining the transferability of the intervention model to other policy domains and levels of government would extend its applicability. These directions would provide valuable insights for improving program design, scaling up interventions, and contributing to a broader understanding of gender transformation in political and professional contexts.

Concluding Reflections on Significance

This research makes significant contributions in theory, methodology, practice, and social justice by advancing the understanding of transformative learning, feminist institutionalism, and empowerment, showing how individual consciousness change, collective action, and institutional transformation can generate gender equality outcomes. It employs rigorous mixed-methods impact evaluation to balance causal inference with contextual understanding, offering a replicable model for strengthening inclusive village governance, particularly in Indonesia. From a social justice perspective, the study demonstrates that patriarchal systems can be disrupted through strategic interventions that foster critical consciousness and collective agency.

In a time of rising authoritarianism and setbacks in women's rights, this research offers hope and practical guidance, proving that substantial transformations in attitudes, behaviors, and institutions regarding women's leadership are possible, even in deeply patriarchal and predominantly Muslim contexts. Ultimately, it highlights that gender equality education is a transformative political project that challenges power relations and expands opportunities for human flourishing, contributing to more democratic, just, and sustainable communities, aligned with the goals of inclusive democracy and the Sustainable Development Goals.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that systematic gender equality education effectively strengthens women's leadership participation in Indonesian village governance. The 12-week program generated substantial improvements: gender awareness increased 40.3 points, leadership self-efficacy rose 31.1 points, and women's substantive participation in decision-making expanded significantly compared to control villages, with effects sustained at 12-month follow-up. These outcomes confirm that transforming individual consciousness, building supportive networks, and securing institutional legitimation collectively shift governance practices toward inclusive and gender-responsive models.

Methodologically, the study contributes rigorous mixed-methods evidence combining quasi-experimental impact evaluation with qualitative exploration of change mechanisms, offering a replicable intervention model. Key policy recommendations include institutionalizing gender equality education within village performance assessment frameworks, establishing Gender Equality Task Forces with formal authority in village regulations, and allocating minimum 30% of development budgets to gender-responsive programs. Despite these achievements, limitations include context-specific implementation requiring cultural adaptation and relatively short follow-up period necessitating further research on long-term sustainability and scalability across diverse socio-cultural contexts.

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