
NEGOTIATING GENDER DISCOURSE IN COMMUNITY LEARNING SPACES: THE CASE OF SEKOLAH PEREMPUAN IN BALI

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana diskursus gender dinegosiasikan dalam ruang belajar komunitas melalui kegiatan Sekolah Perempuan Kartini di Desa Dauh Puri Kangin, Bali. Sekolah Perempuan merupakan inisiatif pemberdayaan perempuan berbasis komunitas yang dirancang untuk meningkatkan kesadaran gender, kapasitas kepemimpinan perempuan, serta partisipasi perempuan dalam kehidupan sosial masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan anggota Sekolah Perempuan Kartini, observasi partisipatif terhadap kegiatan pembelajaran komunitas, serta analisis dokumen kegiatan pemberdayaan perempuan yang dilaksanakan pada periode 2024–2026. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Sekolah Perempuan Kartini berfungsi sebagai ruang dialog sosial yang memungkinkan perempuan untuk merefleksikan pengalaman hidup mereka dan memahami berbagai bentuk ketidaksetaraan gender dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Namun demikian, proses pemberdayaan perempuan dalam komunitas tradisional masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan, terutama norma budaya patriarkal, pembagian peran domestik yang kuat, serta keterbatasan akses perempuan dalam ruang pengambilan keputusan komunitas. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pemberdayaan perempuan dalam masyarakat tradisional berlangsung melalui proses negosiasi sosial yang bertahap. Keberadaan ruang belajar komunitas seperti Sekolah Perempuan memiliki peran penting dalam memperkuat kesadaran gender serta membuka ruang partisipasi perempuan dalam kehidupan sosial masyarakat.

Abstract

This study examines how gender discourse is negotiated within community learning spaces through the activities of Sekolah Perempuan Kartini in Dauh Puri Kangin Village, Bali. Sekolah Perempuan represents a grassroots women's empowerment initiative designed to strengthen gender awareness, leadership capacity, and women's participation in community life. This research employs a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with members of Sekolah Perempuan Kartini, participatory observation of community learning sessions, and document analysis of empowerment programs conducted between 2024 and 2026. The findings indicate that Sekolah Perempuan Kartini functions as a dialogical space where women reflect on their lived experiences and discuss gender-related challenges within their community. However, the empowerment process remains constrained by patriarchal cultural norms, strong expectations regarding domestic responsibilities, and limited opportunities for women to participate in community decision-making processes. The study highlights that women's empowerment in traditional communities occurs gradually through processes of social negotiation rather than immediate structural transformation. Community-based learning initiatives such as Sekolah Perempuan play a significant role in fostering gender awareness and strengthening women's participation in local development.

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1. Introduction

Gender inequality remains a persistent social issue in many societies, particularly in communities where cultural traditions and social norms strongly shape gender relations. Studies in gender and development have shown that women often face structural barriers that limit their access to resources, leadership opportunities, and participation in decision-making processes (Cornwall & Rivas, 2021; UN Women, 2022). These inequalities are often reproduced through social narratives and cultural expectations that define appropriate roles for women and men in both domestic and public spheres.

In gender studies, the concept of discourse is essential for understanding how power relations are constructed and maintained within society. Foucault (1972) argues that discourse represents a system of knowledge that shapes how individuals interpret reality and understand social relationships. Through discourse, particular norms become normalized and accepted as social truths, while alternative perspectives remain marginalized. Within the context of gender relations, discourse contributes to shaping expectations regarding women's roles in family life, community participation, and leadership positions (Fairclough, 2021).

Feminist scholars further argue that gender inequality is often reproduced through everyday communication practices and cultural representations that position women in subordinate roles within social structures (Lazar, 2020). These discursive practices influence how individuals internalize gender roles and shape their perceptions of women's participation in social and political life.

Women's empowerment has therefore become an important concept in development and gender studies. According to Kabeer (1999), empowerment refers to the process through which women gain the ability to make strategic life choices in contexts where such ability was previously denied. Empowerment is closely related to women's access to resources, agency, and achievements in social and economic life (Kabeer, 2020).

In recent years, community-based learning initiatives have emerged as important strategies for promoting gender awareness and strengthening women's participation in social development. These initiatives create spaces where women can share experiences, develop critical awareness, and build collective capacity to address gender inequalities (Mukhopadhyay, 2022).

One example of such initiatives is Sekolah Perempuan (Women's School), a grassroots learning platform designed to empower women through participatory education and collective dialogue. The program provides opportunities for women to discuss social issues, reflect on gender relations, and strengthen their participation in community life.

Sekolah Perempuan Kartini in Dauh Puri Kangin Village represents a community learning initiative aimed at strengthening women's awareness and participation in social development. Through participatory learning activities, women are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and discuss gender-related issues within their community.

However, empowerment initiatives in culturally rooted societies often encounter complex challenges. Cultural traditions, patriarchal norms, and gendered divisions of labor may influence how women participate in community life (Fraser, 2020; Rai, 2021). Therefore, understanding how gender discourse is negotiated within grassroots learning spaces is crucial for analyzing the dynamics of women's empowerment in traditional communities.

This study aims to examine how gender discourse is negotiated within the activities of Sekolah Perempuan Kartini in Dauh Puri Kangin Village and how women navigate cultural norms while strengthening their participation in community life.

2. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore the dynamics of gender discourse and women's empowerment within a community learning context. Qualitative research is particularly useful for understanding social processes and interpreting participants'

experiences within specific contexts (Creswell, 2020). The study was conducted in Dauh Puri Kangin Village, Denpasar, Bali, where Sekolah Perempuan Kartini operates as a grassroots women's learning initiative. The participants of this research consisted of women who actively participate in Sekolah Perempuan learning sessions. Data collection was carried out using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to understand participants' perspectives regarding gender roles, community participation, and empowerment processes. Participatory observation was conducted during community learning sessions to observe interaction patterns and discussion dynamics among participants. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to gender discourse, empowerment processes, and challenges faced by women within the community (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3. Discussion

Women's School as a Space for Gender Discourse

The findings of this study indicate that Sekolah Perempuan Kartini functions as a community learning space where women engage in discussions about their lived experiences and social roles. Through these discussions, participants begin to recognize that many challenges they face are not purely individual problems but are related to broader social structures that shape gender relations.

This finding aligns with the concept of discourse proposed by Foucault (1972), which suggests that social norms and power relations are reproduced through everyday communication and social practices. Within Sekolah Perempuan sessions, women collectively reflect on their experiences, allowing them to reinterpret dominant gender narratives that previously shaped their understanding of social roles. As one participant explained:

"Through discussions in Sekolah Perempuan, we realized that many of the challenges we experience as women are shared by others in the community."

This process of collective reflection contributes to the development of critical gender awareness among participants. According to Mukhopadhyay (2022), participatory learning spaces can foster critical consciousness by enabling marginalized groups to analyze their social conditions collectively.

Negotiating Cultural Norms in the Empowerment Process

Despite the opportunities created by Sekolah Perempuan, the empowerment process remains influenced by the broader cultural context of Balinese society. Cultural traditions and community expectations continue to shape women's roles within families and social institutions.

Participants reported that they often need to balance their involvement in community activities with domestic responsibilities.

"We want to participate in community discussions, but we also have responsibilities at home."

This situation illustrates what Kabeer (2020) refers to as negotiated agency, where women expand their participation within the constraints of existing social structures. Rather than directly challenging cultural norms, women often negotiate their roles in ways that allow them to gradually increase their participation in social life.

The Emergence of Women's Collective Voice

Another important finding is the emergence of women's voices within community discussions. Participation in Sekolah Perempuan encourages women to express their opinions and engage in community forums.

This transformation reflects what feminist scholars describe as the development of collective agency among women. Lazar (2020) argues that discursive spaces where women share experiences can facilitate the formation of collective identities and strengthen women's capacity for social participation.



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Participants reported that they became more confident speaking during community meetings after participating in the learning sessions.

"Before joining Sekolah Perempuan, I rarely spoke during meetings. Now I feel more confident sharing my opinions."

This gradual transformation demonstrates that empowerment processes often begin with shifts in discourse and self-perception before leading to broader structural change (Cornwall & Rivas, 2021).

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Sekolah Perempuan Kartini plays an important role as a community learning space that enables women to discuss various social issues and develop an understanding of gender equality. Through processes of dialogue and collective learning, women gradually build awareness of their position within the social life of the community. However, the process of women's empowerment in traditional communities still faces several challenges, particularly those related to patriarchal cultural norms and the strong gender division of roles within society. Therefore, the presence of community learning spaces such as Sekolah Perempuan is essential for strengthening gender awareness and enhancing women's participation in community social life.

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