



## How Teacher's Gender Influence Student's Gender Identity in Early Childhood

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**ABSTRACT:** The development of gender identity in early childhood will influence how they accept their gender. Someone who confuses about their gender would be at risk to experience gender dysphoria. This study aimed to determine differences in gender identity among early childhood based on the presence of male and female teachers. The study used a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional study design. Data was collected using gender identity questionnaires from April until August 2023. The sample was 200 students (95 male; 105 female) in 23 preschool institutions (5.83 years old; SD: 0.50) in 5 regencies in East Java. Data from the two groups sample showed a difference in average scores (9.15 for children who had two gender teachers and 7.57 who only had one gender teacher). The results of statistical analysis using the Mann-Whitney U-Test showed a significance value of 0.00. The result shows significant differences in gender identity between the two groups. It shows the importance of the existence of male and female teachers in early childhood education because both have important complementary roles, especially for the children's gender identity. Researchers suggest schools, the government, or other policymakers provide regulations for the presence of male teachers in early childhood education institutions.

**Keywords:** early childhood; gender identity; teacher gender

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Confusion about gender identity in teenagers and adults could start from the early childhood stage (Bogaerts et. al. (2021). That makes the development of gender identity one of the important aspects of early childhood development. Sex and gender become different since sex is defined as the physical and biological aspects that a person carries from birth (Coxon & Seal, 2021). In other words, men have male genitals while women have female genitalia (Pujisatuti, 2014). On the other hand, gender is defined as the social role of individuals in their environment which is commonly referred to as masculine for male traits and feminine for female traits (Azizah, 2014; Gianesini, 2016).

The ability to recognize gender identity is formed when a person at three years old and is strengthened in subsequent ages up to seven years old (Cervantes, 2018). It shows that children can identify their respective genders from the level of early childhood education or playgroup and kindergarten in the Indonesian education system. When a person is not able to recognize his/her gender identity, it will have an impact on gender identity disorder or commonly called gender dysphoria (Boddington, 2016). If a person experiences difficulties or distress due to a mismatch between their gender identity and assigned sex (which is usually present at birth), this person is diagnosed with gender dysphoria or Disorder of Sex Development (DSD), but most have physical sex characteristics that all match one another (Beek et al., 2015). In clinical psychology and psychiatry, individuals who experience stress or pressure because they do not identify with their formerly assigned sex are known as 'transsexuals' (according to WHO in 1992) or individuals with 'gender identity disorder' (GID) (APA definition in 2000) (Beek et al., 2015). Recently the name of the diagnosis was changed to 'gender dysphoria' (VandenBos, 2015).

Many factors influence the process of forming and strengthening social identity, including gender identity, such as biological and social factors. In this case, the family is the most influential social factor in the formation of a person's gender identity (Qosyasih & Adriany, 2021). However, there are other social environments such as the community and school environment which also have a significant influence (Koch & Farquhar, 2015). Children often mimic the actions of their schoolteachers, whether they are male or female. Particularly for pupils attending preschool educational facilities. In other words, male students should emulate the social behaviors of their male instructors, while female students should emulate the social behaviors of their female teachers (Hayati et al., 2021). Particularly for pupils attending preschool educational facilities. In other words, male students should emulate the social behaviors of their male instructors, while female students should emulate the social behaviors of their female teachers (Farquhar, 1997; Smith, 1981). These findings provide an overview of the importance of establishing and strengthening gender identity in early childhood, namely the age of three to six years in the school environment.

Research about gender identity in early childhood shows that children aged three years and under have not been able to identify gender through tests conducted, while children aged three years and over have begun to be able to identify gender using characters that

belong to a certain gender. This research also reveals that schools play a role in shaping and strengthening children's gender identities (Cervantes, 2018). Male and female teachers in schools have their respective roles, as male teachers are more related to work that requires physical labor and as a substitute for fathers at school. While female teachers provide views related to how to behave diligently, conscientiously, and with others. So the perspective related to the teaching profession at the preschool level only for women is no longer appropriate, because students need male and female figures to be balanced (Sum et al., 2003).

Some of the research in Indonesia shows a lack of interest for men to become early childhood education teachers. This is caused by several things such as the view that men are impatient with children, the low salary they receive, and the view that early childhood teaching is a woman's profession (Maulana et al., 2020); Sum et al., (2003). Not only in Eastern countries like Indonesia but the lack of enthusiasm in males to become teachers of early childhood education also shows in Western country (Bryan & Milton Williams, 2017). It became a worldwide problem, considering that children need male and female teachers to become their role models, especially in strengthening their gender identity.

The problems above show that there is a gender gap in teacher fulfillment in early childhood education, namely the gap between the number of female and male teachers. Inequality that is too large can have an impact on various psychological aspects of students including the formation of their gender because early childhood education schools are an extension of parenting in the family or a substitute for parents. Thus, it is necessary to harmonize or at least reduce the gap between the number of male and female teachers. The background shows that it is important to analyze the existence of male and female teachers as social environments in strengthening gender identity in early childhood. The result of the study could become a consideration for the government to make regulations in early childhood education. Finally, the purpose of the study is to know the influence of a teacher's gender on a student's gender identity in early childhood.

## 2 THEORETICAL STUDY

Gender is an important part of development for humans in their social life. From birth, the gender of children will influence the way their parents treat them, the name they are given, and the way they dress. As children get older, adults and other peers interact differently with children depending on their gender. The education system and the media further contributed to this differentiation. From this gender experience, gender stereotypes are learned, and gender identities develop and change throughout the course of life (Bussey 2010). *American Psychological Association* in *APA dictionary of psychology* describes gender identity as a person's identity as a man or a woman. Although the dominant approach in psychology for many years has considered gender identity as vested in the individual, the important influence of societal structures, cultural expectations, and personal interactions on its development. Significant evidence supports the conceptualization of gender identity as influenced by environmental and biological factors (VandenBos, 2015).

There has been much discussion in humanistic and social science disciplines about gender identity, or masculinity and femininity as described in various kinds of literature. However, experts from the discipline have different opinions. For some, gender differences are a product of the gendered division of labor and sociostructurally practices that support differences in status and power. From the perspective of West and Zimmerman (1987) about "doing gender," gender differences are the result of what a person does. This suggests that gender differences are based on different power relations between the sexes than predetermined differences. Social arrangements that support gender differences, occupational stratification, and segregation with women especially those occupying lower status positions are seen as natural and valid explanations for these differences. This is quite a departure from earlier accounts where masculinity and femininity were seen as complementary. Rather than unequal power relations between men and women, the division of labor is believed to give rise to this complementarity, especially in the family, where the husband-father takes an instrumental role and the wife takes an expressive role (Bussey, 2010).

In Kohlberg's developmental theory, gender identity is considered a key role in the process of gender development. This approach to gender identity centers on learning children to gender label themselves and others and understanding that this aspect of self persists over time and in different situations. Kohlberg's theory argues that gender constancy, which is the understanding that gender identity is stable and does not change over time and in different situations, motivates one to engage in gender-stereotyped behavior. Since most children acquire an understanding of gender constancy between the ages of 5 and 7, Kohlberg's perspective assumes little or no variability in gender identity beyond this age. However, if this fixed gender identity is the main motivation that guides the enactment of gendered behavior, it is difficult to explain the variation in behavior adopted by older children and adults. Furthermore, evidence for the role of gender constancy in the enactment of gender behaviors and preferences in the first few years of life is lacking. Children develop preferences for and behave in ways similar to their gender long before they achieve gender constancy (Bussey, 2010).

The roles of male teachers and female teachers in early childhood education have significant differences. However, both have an important role in early childhood education. Good relationships that exist between children and adults, both men and women, will have a good impact on the psychological development of children in the future, including the stabilization of gender identity. But unfortunately, the presence of male figures in early childhood education is still very small compared to women, even though both have an equally important role (Farquhar, 1997; Maulana et al., 2020).

There are several roles for male and female teachers in early childhood education, each of which is different. For example, male teachers provide various benefits such as an example for male students to behave as a masculine gender (doing work according to the existing culture) both for children who do not have a father figure at home or who still do. Then the involvement of men in early childhood education will provide benefits for

increasing equality between men and women in the workforce, children's access to male role models, their social and physical development, social status of early childhood work, and fathers' better adaptation to childcare duties. While other studies have found that men are also considered able to do men's work, help in disciplining children, and have authority (Maulana et al., 2020). The existence of male teachers can become role models for boys, and the presence of men in preschool education will gradually reduce the view that kindergarten teachers are women's professionals (Maulana et al., 2020). In the end, this gives us an idea that the presence of male and female teachers in preschool education is very important and brings good benefits, especially for children's development.

### 3 METHOD

The research design used by the author in this study is a comparative study. Comparative research in quantitative research is research that compares one variable with other variables. Arikunto (1983) explains that comparative research will find similarities and differences about objects, people, work processes, ideas, critiques of people, and groups, about an idea or process work. This study aimed to determine gender identity differences among preschool students in terms of the adequacy of the presence of male and female teachers in schools.

#### 3.1 *Participants*

The population of this study was early childhood education level students aged five years to six years and eleven months. The participants were living in East Java Indonesia, especially the Madiun Residency area (Madiun City, Madiun Regency, Magetan Regency, Ponorogo Regency, and Pacitan Regency). The participants were collected from 23 preschool institutions between April - August 2023.

The sampling technique used was random sampling involving 10 research assistants to collect data. The number of samples so far is 200 children (95 boys and 105 girls). The sample is divided into 2 groups, namely the group of students who have teachers with a complete gender (male and female and groups of students who only have teachers of a certain gender (female only). The first group consists of 100 children; while the second group consists of 100 children aged 5 years to 6 years 11 months with a mean age of 5.83 years (SD: 0.50).

#### 3.2 *Instruments*

The demographic information sheet in this study used a questionnaire in the form of open and closed questions and was filled in according to the state of the sample. The researcher asked some questions to the participants, such as name, age, gender, whereabouts of father and mother, number of brothers and sisters, name of school, and number of teachers. This is based on the possibilities of other psychosocial factors that can influence the development of a child's gender identity.

The Gender Identity Questionnaire in Early Childhood is an instrument adapted from A Gender Identity Interview Schedule which was previously standardized by Zucker et al., (1993). The Gender Identity Interview Schedule was then adapted by translating to English language experts, validation tests by linguists, validation tests by developmental psychologists, validation tests by educational psychologists, and validation tests by Early Childhood Education experts. The results of the validity test of linguists on the results of the Indonesian translation showed high harmony. This means that there are no significant language problems. However, there are some important inputs from psychologists and early childhood education experts.

### 3.3 *Data analysis*

To test the research hypothesis, statistical tests were used. The data obtained did not meet the parametric requirements, i.e., the data were not normal (results of significance 0.00 or less than 0.05), so non-parametric statistical analysis was used. The analysis was carried out with the help of SPSS 20.0 for Windows after undergoing the scoring process and data tabulation. Different test analysis was performed using the Mann-Whitney Test.

## 4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 *Result*

Even though both groups have scored with a high tendency, there is a different average in gender identity score between the groups that have teachers with complete gender and the other group. The group of students with an incomplete teacher gender showed an average score of 7.57, while the group with a complete teacher gender showed an average score of 9.15. These results require further analysis using an inferential statistical comparison test to find the significant difference in the gender identity score of the two groups.

The result of the Mann-Whitney U-Test shows that the sig.2-tailed value is  $0.00 > 0.05$ . Therefore, from the result of the statistical test, the difference between the groups is statistically significant. It means there is a significant difference in the value of Gender Identity in students who have teachers with complete male and female gender and children who only have male teachers or only girls at school.

### 4.2 *Discussion*

Early childhood shows very rapid development in various aspects such as fine motor, gross motor, intelligence, limitations, interests, creativity to gender identity (Santrock, 2011). The development of every aspect should be able to develop optimally so that it does not become a problem in the future, such as physical and psychological disorders. Maximum development in various aspects requires cooperation from various parties such as families and schools because maximum development is not only influenced by internal factors of children but also external factors such as the social environment (Salim & Safitri, 2020).

This study focuses on the development of gender identity in children between the ages of five and seven years since most children establish an awareness of gender constancy between the ages of five and seven years (Cervantes, 2018). Gender identification focuses on teaching kids about gender labels for both them and others, as well as how this component of who they are endures across time and in many contexts. Gender constancy, according to Kohlberg's thesis, is the idea that gender identity is constant and does not alter through time or in different contexts (Bussey, 2010).

#### 4.2.1 *Development of Gender Identity in Early Childhood (5 to 6 Years)*

According to social cognitive theory, gender identification involves not only coming to terms with one's gender but also that of others. It is a component of a bigger self-concept development process that takes place throughout the first two years of life. Infants have a feeling of personal agency currently thanks largely to liberal parenting techniques. Infants acquire a sense of individuality through deliberate instruction and assignment that enables them to achieve efficiency through actions and master tasks independently. Furthermore, one of the most significant determinants of how parents treat their children is the gender of the children. As a result, the process of developing one's gender identity is both an individual and a social one that involves both parents and a variety of other social influences, such as the media, friends, coworkers, and instructors. However, parental influence is quite important in the early years of life. In addition to verbally referring to their child's gender and associating activities with that gender, parents mark the names of their sons and daughters and regard them as distinct persons. Parents highlight the significance of gender in their children's life in addition to assisting their children in learning about their gender (Bussey, 2010).

Children may socialize with other people of their gender when they have a more comprehensive grasp of gender from an individual to a communal perspective. Children start to establish groups with kids of their sex during the third year. Sexist attitudes influence kids' groups more and more during their formative years, and this is a crucial time for kids to develop gender-related concepts and abilities. The sexism that takes place in peer relationships highlights how crucial gender is in most countries. Children become more gendered and expect more favorable social results from gendered actions as they spend more time socializing with their same-sex peers (Bussey, 2010).

Nearly all the attention of cognitive development researchers who investigate gender identity formation has gone to the importance of cognitive elements in young children. They discovered that gender learning begins at a young age, progresses gradually over many years, and goes through several phases. Most kids learn to categorize their own and other people's genders between the ages of 18 and 24 months. Increased gender preferences, such as those for conventional toys (boys prefer trucks, girls prefer dolls), specific play behaviors (rough play in boys, cooperative play in girls), and a steady rise in desire for playmates of the same sex are all linked to this capacity. In late childhood, there are signs of gender differences: males report having a stronger gender identity than girls, are happier with their gender, consider themselves as any gender who are more distinctive than other guys, and put greater pressure on themselves

to fit into the predetermined gender norms. For the majority of kids, gender identification and gender role behavior are essentially consistent. (Steensma et al., 2013).

According to earlier studies, children's knowledge of gender is based on their perception that people of the same gender have common characteristics and passions. appreciate them and suffer the same repercussions for similar gender-related actions as them (Fausto-Sterling, 2019). Children start to understand that they are treated the same as persons of the same sex around the age of three. Children may predict how others will respond to them by studying how others behave around persons of the same sex as them. Children quickly learn that when other people of their gender behave similarly, they might get comparable results (Cervantes, 2018). So, it can be said that the results of this study are in line with the results of previous studies which held that children aged five to six years or commonly referred to as late early childhood could identify their gender well. Although there is one child who has a score of 2 and one child who has a score of 4. These two samples can be important findings to be followed up in future studies.

#### *4.2.2 The Role of Teachers in Schools in the Formation of Early Childhood Gender Identity*

Some literature shows the importance of the presence of male and female figures in the social environment of children to provide examples of behavior for children, such as teachers in schools (Al Baqi, 2021), as well as male employees to fill activities that require greater energy (Bryan & Milton Williams, 2017). Furthermore, their presence will affect the formation of gender identity in early childhood students. The results of the study that show good identity values in all groups of students are possible because of the many factors that influence the formation of gender identity, not only the presence of teachers.

However, schools play an important role in changing the way students think, including behaviors that are seen as gender biased. Therefore, gender-oriented education must be realized. In the development of education, gender-sensitive learning inclusion plays a very strategic role and function. Children's learning about gender equality must be given from an early age. Otherwise, they may discriminate. Parents and teachers can contribute to this by teaching, guiding, and educating children, especially about gender.

#### *4.2.3 Psychosocial Factors Affecting the Formation of Children's Gender Identity*

In addition to internal factors related to a person's biological physical condition, there are external factors originating from their social environment. The first external factor is the social cognitive factor. In the cognitive developmental theory of gender, the determination of gender (gender typing) in children occurs in developing a concept of gender. Cognitive influences explain the mystery of children's gender segregation and play choices by studying the development of children's cognitive abilities even before babies can recognize them. At school age cognitive processes that occur in behavioral differences between boys and girls emerge, and children become more gender-typed in terms of toy choice, play, aggressiveness, and verbal ability.

The next factor is the child's learning process from the environment. Of course, the closest environment for children is the family environment. So, it is important for parents, both father,

and mother, to set a good example in behaving according to their gender role. An environment full of messages, both direct and indirect, about how a boy or girl should act or behave. Behavioral and cognitive scientists study how the process of gender socialization instills good messages in children. The process of gender socialization begins when a child is born. Parents tend to describe baby girls as being more feminine and gentle than baby boys, and baby boys are described as more athletic and strong than baby girls although it's hard to tell if a newborn boy looks athletic and all newborns gentle (Salim & Safitri, 2020).

In addition, there are social factors that are quite strong. This is because children have a social scope that begins to expand when they can interact socially well outside the family and school environment. Parents are only one of many sources through which individuals learn about gender roles. It is therefore important not to stray too far from this direction because especially in the developmental year parents are an important influence on gender development. Also supported by culture, schools, media peers and other family members are other sources. For example, in our culture, adults differentiate between the sexes after the baby is born. The use of pink and blue colors is used by parents when a boy and girl are born and before leaving the hospital. Likewise, the differences in toys, hairstyles, and clothes. This happens if the development of the people around him sees this difference.

The social factor that is quite strong is also peers. Children display a desire to be with and like their same-sex peers, and this tendency usually becomes stronger during the middle and late early childhood years. Those who engage in activities with friends of the opposite sex tend to be criticized by their peers or left to play alone. Children who engage in activities with same-sex peers tend to be valued by their peers (Patacchini, 2019). The role of parents is important so that gender role discrimination can occur early in development, but later, peers participate in a social process of responding to and imitating masculine and feminine behavior.

Social learning theory predicts that children who watch a lot of television will imitate the models they see on the screen. Natural experiments, in which several Canadian cities were granted access to television broadcasts for the first time, have revealed some very dramatic corroborating evidence. Children with relatively conventional attitudes showed an increase in more traditional attitudes after 2 years. Another study found that children who watched non-traditional television series such as episodes where father and son cook together were less stereotypical than children who did not watch the series (Martin, 2017). On the other hand, although the results of statistical analysis showed no significant difference between all groups of students, there was a slight difference in the average score. Students who have teachers with a full gender show a higher value of gender identity than students who only have teachers with one gender, namely women.

Green's research found that girls who behaved masculine and boys who voluntarily behaved feminine were more likely to be affected by family urges for their children to behave outside the text and be retained for a relatively long period and nagging by family members, this condition fosters anguish to gain satisfaction from gender-incongruent behavior. People with sexual disorders have higher levels of testosterone and estrogen than normal people. Green's research found that girls who behaved masculinely and boys who voluntarily behaved femininely were

more likely to be affected by family urges for their children to behave outside the text and be retained for a relatively long period. and nagging by family members, this condition fosters anguish to gain satisfaction from gender-incongruent behavior. People with sexual disorders have higher levels of testosterone and estrogen than normal people (Sovitriana, 2020).

The forms of gender identity disorder include; Transvestic Fetishism, namely sexual stimulation with references to the opposite sex to get sexual satisfaction by wearing clothes of the opposite sex; Male to Female, that is, physically as a man and having a feminine gender identity and having sexual attraction as a woman; Female to Male, namely physically female gender, but has masculine gender traits and has an attraction to sexual stimulation as a male; Intersexed Individual (hermaphrodite) is a person born with unclear or double genitals. The causative factor is hormonal abnormalities and physical form (Sovitriana, 2020). This shows the importance of strengthening gender identity in early childhood because it will affect children's lives in the future. If at an early age, the child's gender identity is mature or strong, then he has an unwavering belief in his gender identity even though he carries out activities that have an activity label that is identical to the gender opposite to his own.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The result of this study shows that teachers' gender influence student's gender identity in early childhood. The result indicates a high score in the group which has male and female teachers which means they have good gender identity recognition. Furthermore, the results of the inferential statistical test using a comparative test show that there is a significant difference in the value of gender identity in early childhood education students who have teachers with a complete gender of male and female with children who only have male or female teachers at school. With the significance value of the Mann-Whitney U-Test test of 0.00. This research supports the previous research about the importance of the social environment for gender identity in childhood, especially in the education environment. The existence of male and female teachers in early childhood education is important because both have different roles, the male teacher strengthens masculinity for male student and the female teacher strengthen femineity for female student. Researchers suggest schools, the government, or other policymakers provide regulations for the presence of male teachers in early childhood education institutions.

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