Male And Female Teachers' Perspectives on Gender Roles In Early Childhood Education

Pipin Afindra Putri[*], **Vina Adriany**[2], **Hani Yulindrasari**[3], **Tina Dahlan**[4]

Department of Early Childhood Teacher Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia[1,2,3,]
Department of Psychology. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia[4]

Jalan Dr. Setiabudi No.229, Isola, Kec. Sukasari, Kota Bandung, Jawa Barat 40154, Indonesia
E-mail: pipinafindra@upi.edu

bit.ly/jpaUNY

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore male and female teachers' perspectives on gender roles in early childhood education and care settings (ECCE). ECCE is often regarded as one of the most gendered spaces that perpetuate binaries between boys and girls. This research adopted a case study approach conducted in a kindergarten in Padang, Indonesia. The study involved two ECCE teachers as participants, one male and one female. This study's results indicate that teachers understand the importance of gender equality in children. However, they still perceive gender as something biological, limiting seeing children as girls and boys. Teachers seem to be confused about the fluidity of gender roles, and hence, it results in resistance to teaching gender-flexible pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

Gender character stereotypes have become often ignored in early-age education (Mcnaughton, 2000). However, many studies said that since the age of three, children have begun to construct their gender (Burman, 2017; Gosselin, 2007; Smith et al., 2014; Wood & Gugula, 2002). McNaughton (2000) also presents a disregard for gender issues in the ECCE as a damaging act for children. The neglect of gender issues in the ECCE can also maintain gender discrimination where girls or boys are hindered by access to various areas of activity. Moreover, the perspective of male and female teachers on gender roles in the ECCE is captivating. Genders have roles so they can easily be adequately socialized for children who still need guidance and direction. The school can perform the socialization process as the socialization agent and the most crucial facilitator in forming the child's personality (Hie et al., 2018). Children are known as proteges with many unique personality characteristics and can change their behaviour because of environmental influences. They need direction in determining their personality (Amini & Naimah, 2020).

Several studies suggest the existence of gender discrimination in the learning process and classroom interactions, such as teachers tending to differentiate the roles of boys and girls (Bastian & Novitasari, 2022; Putri, 2019; Rofiah & Efendi, 2022; Rosalita, 2020; Zaduqisti, 2009). Boys are usually given masculine roles, such as police officers, soldiers, and pilots, while girls are given feminine roles, such as gentle and kind-hearted. This continues in play media, where boys are given toys like guns, toy

cars and robots. Meanwhile, girls are given toys like cooking sets, dolls, and dollhouses. This treatment imposes restrictive boundaries on each child. In education, a teacher performs an essential role as the figure could reduce gender disparity. Teachers practice time together with children at school. Through teachers, children obtain gender information, and at that time, children reconstruct and reproduce their gender (Fagot et al., 1992). The purpose of reproducing gender is to replant the understanding of gender. The understanding of gender in memory continues to negotiate with each other in daily activities. They are supported by MacNaugton's (2005) statement, which explains that gender will be produced daily in the social environment. Since gender is structured in children's daily lives, adults should pay attention and show gender equality in children's experiences because the children will observe the characters shown in their daily lives, such as parents and teachers (Gosselin, 2007), in this case, for both male and female teachers.

The balance between male and female teachers in an institution is essential. Both male and female teachers have their respective roles, especially in early childhood education (Maulana et al., 2020; Purnama et al. 2022). A male teacher becomes set up as a traditional male for a child who has no father figure at home. A male teacher can construct a development of a boy's gender behaviour and show a positive male figure for a girl. A male teacher is flexible in giving experience rather than an introduction. So that the children do not form labels against gender (Adams et al., 1996; Tsigra, 2010). The presence of male teachers can eliminate the paradigm that male teachers do the same teaching tasks as female teachers (Sargent, 2005; Tsigra, 2010).

Male teachers have the same task as teachers: teaching in the classroom. Male and female teachers focus on how they teach and help the development of the child well (Skelton, 2009; Sargent, 2005). An early childhood teacher is one of the adults who participate in the child's scope, including the relationship between the child and people in their environment, such as home, school and friends of his age (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). That is why early childhood teachers have a significant role in forming future generations, partaking in developing individuals and contributing to the education system (Gürşimşek, 2008).

At the formal level, teachers, peers, school curriculum, and culture influence children's gender. Interaction and communication teachers in the stories, the written, physical, equipment and other expressions can affect the children's gender development Goncu, A. (1993). In addition, when the children accepted the teacher's response, that showed. (Maccoby, 2000; Warin, 2000). When the child determines the response received from the teacher, the teacher should be intermediate in the development process of the child's gender understanding. For example, when the teacher prepares for various games, the teacher gives all children, including boys and girls, a chance to play. It is superb that the teacher delivers boys and girls can play at their pleasure, which could be a statement. The children could play mom and dad with this game. That statement mediates child gender construction Because they tend to consider boys more interested in cars and toys and girls in role games; therefore, they can all be directed by teachers by mediating their gender construction.

Studies involving the perspective of male and female gender roles in the ECCE are still narrow. Many studies have been conducted on gender at an early age abroad, as in Indonesia. (Chapman, 2020; Filipovic, 2018; Grace & Eng, 2019; Kurnia, 2018; Utomo & Ekowati, 2019; Warin dan Adriana, 2017), However, the analysis focuses on construction gender and other variables. There was also research examining the role of teachers in children (Pitaloka et al., 2021; Rochmawati, 2018; Rozie et al., 2019), yet the analysis focused on female teachers and other aspects. There was also research examining male teachers in kindergarten (Fikria et al., 2023; Maulana et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2022; Yulindrasari, 2017); however, the analysis is limited to male teachers in terms of gender. "Among the previous studies mentioned above, none have discussed the role of gender among male and female teachers. Therefore, the researcher is examining the perspectives of male and female teachers on gender roles in early childhood education (PAUD.

METHOD

The research design used in this study is a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a type of research that produces descriptive data in the form of speech, writing, and behaviour from the subjects being observed. According to Sukmadinata (2012), qualitative research aims to analyze phenomena, events, attitudes, and thoughts of individuals or groups and describe them in words and language within

a natural context. The researcher uses a qualitative approach in this study because the researcher aims to explore in depth how male and female teachers play a role in socializing gender in early childhood education. Researchers used a case study as design research. They researched this case study specifically to uncover the contemporary in a complex manner and the whole (Yin, 2013), setting a natural state of trickling (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). The investigation process research can completely take place without disparities in pressure or inequality (Howitt & Cramer, 2011) and produce clear, detailed, and comprehensive findings that make an authentic conclusion (M.J. Creswell, 2016). This research was done on one of the kindergartens in the Padang City. The location selection of the research was deliberately conducted through purposive sampling to get data according to the research focus. Data fetching in the Padang was made from August 2022 - September 2022. The selection of responders corresponds to the research focus which is the male and female teacher. Furthermore, Researchers conducted interviews by preparing research instruments of questions. The instrument was used to see the male and female perspectives and responses to gender roles in the ECCE.

The first respondent is a 47-year-old male teacher with 25 years of teaching experience: 4 years at a mosque's TPA (Islamic study centre), 14 years at Kindergarten P, and seven years at Kindergarten A. The respondent entered the field of early childhood education due to personal desire and familiarity with children. The respondent initially thought differently from his peers, as most of his friends were religious teachers or teachers at junior and senior high schools while he taught at a kindergarten. However, this did not discourage him; instead, he felt proud because he saw kindergarten as the foundational stage for children, similar to laying the first stone in building a house. The second respondent is a 52-year-old female teacher with 32 years of teaching experience: 2 years at Kindergarten B and 30 years at Kindergarten A. The respondent entered the field of early childhood education due to observing her parents, who taught at a kindergarten and frequently interacted with children at school. Parental support was also critical in her decision to become a kindergarten teacher. The data analysis process aims to systematically search for and organize the data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documentation. This involves breaking down the data into units, synthesizing it, identifying patterns, selecting what is essential, and then drawing conclusions that both the researcher and others easily understand.

Table 1. The Interview Format

Questions	Answer
Tell me a little about your career pathway with young children and how you came to this particular setting.	
Is the style of your interactions with the children influenced by your gender, and how?	
In your opinion, are there differences and similarities in the practice of male and female early childhood teachers? Please explain and give a few examples.	
How do you and your fellow teacher allocate the work among yourselves?	
Do you sense any differences in the way the boys compared to the girls relate to you?	
Is there anything else that you would like to tell us, related to the gender of early childhood teachers?	

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data analysis, two themes emerged in this study. These are differences in instructional tone and game choice. Each theme describes how the teacher's gender role is significant in creating the lesson plan.

Differences in Instructional Tone Can Affect Children's Emotions

Early childhood educators who view gender as purely biological tend to limit children's perspectives by categorizing them as either female or male. The respondents' understanding of gender influences the teaching process and all activities children engage in at school. Teachers provide understanding and supervision based on the social constructs they have always believed in, as illustrated in the following interview.

"When I deal with the girl I should soften our voice, if too much loud, the girl will cry, but when I deal with the boy I can slightly upper our voice to make them strong." (First respondent)

""I treat children the same way, but I'm not sure if in practice it actually equals out between boys and girls. However, it seems that in practice, I tend to raise my voice more with boys." (Second Respondent)

Both respondents made the same statement that they differentiate their tone of voice with boys and girls, as illustrated in the following interview.

"During your teaching, is there any evidence that raising your voice with boys makes them stronger? (Researcher)

"Raising my voice is not something I do all the time, but when a child is not listening to me. For example, if a child is running around in the hall while we're supposed to be having class, I need to raise my voice, like saying, 'Alviinn, come into the classroom!' If the child does not respond, I raise my voice further to make them focus. It's okay to be louder to build their resilience from an early age. With girls, I just call their name, and they usually respond because they see me. So, that's why the tone of voice differs between boys and girls."(First respondent)

The first respondent's answer clarified that raising the voice with boys is not something done all the time, but only in certain situations. However, the first respondent still affirmed that raising the voice with boys can strengthen their resilience. The researcher then continued with a question to the second respondent, as illustrated in the following interview.

"Why is that, ma'am?"(Researcher)
"Yes, because the boys in my class are quite active, so it's necessary to raise the tone of my voice. For example, Alvino often bothers his friends and runs around the classroom or outside. Sometimes, my patience runs out, and I end up scolding him. Ideally, this shouldn't happen; as teachers, we should be patient and able to control our emotions."(Second respondent)

The second respondent mentioned that the boys in their class are all very active, so it is necessary to raise their voices to help the children focus. However, the respondent does not support raising the tone of voice (yelling) at children. According to (Buulolo, 2023; Cahyani et al. 2023 Sugiharti, 2022), consistently raising one's voice with early childhood children can harm their cognitive, psychological, and mental health development. Frequent shouting or a loud tone can create a stressful and intimidating environment, hindering the child's ability to concentrate, learn effectively, and develop a positive self-image. Therefore, teachers must adopt a more constructive approach. If children are particularly active, teachers should focus on designing engaging and structured activities to channel their energy positively and productively effectively. By doing so, teachers can foster a supportive learning environment that encourages healthy emotional and cognitive growth while maintaining order and promoting active participation (Hidayat et al., 2021)—continued by respondent 2, as illustrated in the following interview.

"But the teacher's voice sometimes has to be loud, you know, to make the children focus on watching and listening to the teacher. Maybe it means having a strong voice, right? Because I feel that if my voice is soft, the children will be engrossed in their own activities and chatting with their friends. A preschool teacher must be able to control the class with a loud voice, an expressive voice, and a soft voice. There are times to use a loud voice, and there are times to use a soft voice like that." (Second respondent)

The respondent added that as a preschool teacher, one must be able to control the class with various voice intonations, using loud, expressive, and soft voices. These different voice intonations are used according to the situation. Then the researcher asked the respondent about the differences in teaching styles between male and female teachers, as illustrated in the following interview.

"The teaching styles of Mr. A and me are clearly different. For example, Mr. A is very calm, unlike me, who uses a louder and softer voice. I have a lot of variations in my voice intonation, but Mr. A is more monotonous. If Mr. A is alone in the class, the class will definitely be out of control. So when Mr. A teaches, I am in the class to manage the children." (Second respondent)

"Oh, I have to admit this as well, female teachers have more patience. Female teachers are indeed more suited for classroom teaching because their level of patience is different from that of males. Female teachers also have loud and expressive voices, whereas my voice is just flat like this." (First respondent)

Both respondents provided similar answers, noting that female teachers tend to have louder and more expressive voices than their male counterparts, who generally have a more monotonous voice when teaching. Teachers need to utilize a range of voice intonations to engage and interact with children in the classroom effectively. Using varied voice intonations—such as adjusting volume, pitch, and rhythm—can significantly enhance a teacher's ability to capture and hold the children's attention. This variation not only aids in managing the classroom dynamics by signaling transitions and maintaining order but also contributes to a more engaging and stimulating learning environment. The strategic use of different vocal expressions plays a crucial role in fostering a positive and productive learning atmosphere, ultimately enriching the educational experience for all students (Zulkifli, 2019).

Game Choosing

Various studies have examined the differences between boys and girls (Adriany, 2017; Bastian & Novitasari, 2022; Putri, 2019). Gender differences are found in in-game preferences and various activities. The respondents, in this case, teachers, understand that games do not have a specific gender identity, so boys and girls should be free to choose any game. However, in practice, the choice of games is often still associated with a particular gender identity, as illustrated in the following interview.

"I usually don't distinguish the outdoor game. But when they play dolls is girls but the boys play ball or block". (Second respondent)

The respondents consciously differentiate between indoor games for boys and girls. This treatment imposes binding constraints on each child, indirectly shaping gender perceptions and social roles from an early age. The respondents stated that dolls are toys for girls and balls are for boys. These constraints can limit children's exploration and skill development, consistent with Mcnaughton's (2000) findings that gender stereotypes in play can reinforce traditional norms about the roles of men and women. The researcher asked the respondents how they would react if a boy wanted to play with dolls.

"Maybe I only watch them, but when they only play with the doll every day, I give them the understanding that a doll is for girls and order them to play with other boys". (Second respondent)
" Oh, a boy playing with dolls, how does that work? Isn't it not allowed? Dolls are for girls. If a boy plays soccer or with toy swords, those are games for boys". (First respondent)

Both respondents agreed that gender bias exists in children's play activities at early childhood education centers. However, respondent 1 appeared confused when answering the researcher's question, possibly due to a lack of knowledge or the ingrained belief that dolls are toys for girls. Several studies have highlighted the presence of gender discrimination in the learning process and classroom interactions, with teachers tending to differentiate the roles of boys and girls (Bastian & Novitasari,

2022; Putri, 2019). Boys are typically given masculine roles, such as police officers, soldiers, and pilots, while girls are assigned feminine roles characterized by gentleness and kindness. This extends to play media, with boys being given toys like guns, cars, and robots, whereas girls are provided with cooking sets, dolls, and dollhouses. Then the researcher asked more questions, as illustrated in the following interview.

> *"So it is necessary to differentiate games for children, ma'am?"*
> *"Indeed, leading them to be better"* (Second respondent)

Teachers may not realize that dominant views on gender have influenced the way they select games for boys and girls. Ideally, teachers should maintain a neutral stance on gender, as gender often functions as a dominant discourse that is adopted unconsciously. By not recognizing this bias, teachers may inadvertently perpetuate gender stereotypes in their game selections. It is essential for educators to be aware of these underlying influences and strive to offer a range of activities that are free from gender bias, ensuring that all children have equal opportunities to explore and engage with various types of play regardless of their gender. (Ramdaeni et al, 2020). The responses above show that they were involved in the selection of games based on gender stereotypes in the Indonesian community, so teachers tend to direct boys and girls to play according to the social construction that has been formed. The responders distinguished the game and worked on the children playing with their gender, as illustrated in the following interview.

> *"The boys play with boys and the girls play only with girls."* (First respondent)
> *"I always give understanding that the girls play with girls, boys only with boys. Because I am afraid when the boys usually play with girls when they grow up will become soft as girls"* (Second respondent)

Respondents 1 and 2 agree that boys should play with boys and girls should play with girls. Respondent 2 further emphasized that boys should not be gentle, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. They believe boys should exhibit masculine traits such as bravery and toughness, while girls are expected to embody qualities like friendliness and gentleness. This perspective reflects deeply rooted social norms that unconsciously influence how parents and teachers guide children's behaviour and toy choices. For instance, toys and activities are often gendered, with boys being given action figures and sports equipment while girls receive dolls and kitchen sets.

All traits can be exhibited by both boys and girls depending on the time and circumstances (Nurhasanah & Zuriatin, 2023). This narrow perspective restricts children's social interactions and impedes their emotional development and social skills. By confining behaviour to gender-specific roles, we limit children's ability to explore various activities and interests. Consequently, children are deprived of the opportunity to grow into flexible and adaptive individuals who can demonstrate various traits as the situation demands. Such limitations can impact their future choices and opportunities, reinforcing outdated stereotypes rather than fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for all.

It is evident from the discussion above that teachers significantly differentiate their interactions with boys and girls in terms of voice intonation and game selection. Teachers use a firmer and stronger voice intonation when communicating with boys, hoping to foster masculine traits such as bravery and independence. Conversely, when interacting with girls, teachers often use a soft and soothing voice intonation, emphasizing feminine traits such as gentleness and friendliness. Additionally, game selection is also heavily influenced by traditional views on gender roles. Boys are more frequently given masculine games, such as physical games, sports, and constructive games like Lego or building blocks. These games are designed to develop gross motor skills, bravery, and logical thinking. On the other hand, girls are more often given domestic or aesthetic games, such as playing with dolls, cooking sets, or crafts. These games foster nurturing traits, fine motor skills, and social interaction abilities.

The differences in voice intonation and game selection reflect deeply ingrained gender stereotypes in teaching practices. Although these approaches may be well-intentioned, they can limit children's development. Boys might feel that they should not show emotion or gentleness, while girls might feel that they should not be brave or independent. Teachers must learn how to implement gender

equity principles in schools (Irayanti et al., 2023). Understanding the concept of gender equity helps teachers recognize and address unconscious biases in their teaching. By studying gender equity, teachers can identify practices that reinforce gender stereotypes and replace them with more inclusive approaches. An inclusive learning environment is where all students have the same opportunity to explore various traits and interests without being limited by traditional gender roles (Bastian & Novitasari, 2022). This means providing equal access to all games and activities, using gender-neutral language, and ensuring that all students are treated fairly and equally. Teachers can create activities encouraging cooperation and collaboration between genders and show appreciation for each student as a unique individual with potential. By taking these steps, teachers help students develop to their fullest potential and contribute to creating a more just and equitable society. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's perceptions of themselves and the world around them. Therefore, efforts to implement gender equity in education are essential steps in creating a more open, tolerant, and inclusive generation in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study's findings indicate that teachers' role in constructing gender has a significant impact on early childhood activities in schools. At TK A in Padang, there is a social construction influence on school activities, evident from the respondents' views that differentiate instruction for boys and girls. Additionally, how respondents observe the play activities of girls and boys shows specific limitations, particularly for boys, in engaging in the same activities as girls. This discursive practice in schools contributes to the construction of gender in children, as carried out by the teachers. The teachers perceive gender as something biological, which limits children's perspectives on their roles as boys and girls. This indicates that patriarchal structures remain firmly in place, even though, in practice, gender roles can be performed by both boys and girls in Early Childhood Education. We recommend that teachers receive training on gender understanding that emphasizes equitable and fair education to reduce gender bias and support more inclusive development for children.

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