



# A Review of 'A Gender Flexible Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education'

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**Abstract:** Gender is an important feature that people use to analyse social stimuli, children start to form gender stereotypes as early as the preschool education. It is noteworthy that contemporary early childhood education is usually driven by child-centred values that does not address the significance of gender issues for young children. Nevertheless, Aina and Cameron discover that stereotypes might be harmful to children's physical and emotional well-being. Accordingly, it is controversial about the degree to which preschool teachers could implement teaching methods to eliminate these gender stereotypes and improve young children's understanding of gender. An article by Jo Warin and Vina Adriany, 'A gender-flexible pedagogy in early childhood education', gives a detailed investigation in this area. This review will examine the article from five perspectives, including purpose, argument, theoretical concepts, and methodology, and followed by a reflection.

**Keywords:** gender, gender stereotype, gender-flexible pedagogy, early childhood education

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Warin and Adriany's [1] article explores the possibility of early childhood educators working to challenge traditional gender behaviours by incorporating the idea of 'gender flexibility pedagogy' into their instruction. The term 'gender flexibility pedagogy' encompasses ideas about creating alternatives to masculinity and femininity, as well as particular gender-awareness strategies in the educational programme. The major claim of this article is that since teachers have a significant impact on how children perform in terms of gender, they should have explicit gender knowledge to provide practical strategies to challenge stereotypical roles of gender. Moreover, experiences in diverse political and social contexts are likely to affect teachers' views on promoting gender-conscious strategies.

The writers use Butler's theory of performativity to further the idea of gender flexible teaching. Gender is viewed as a kind of identity in the research study. A person's identity changes throughout their life as a result of impacts of social and cultural surroundings [1]. This shows that one's gender performance depends on the options available to them. Warin and Adriany [1] argue that gender is constructed by the social environment as children grow up and urge preschool teachers to give balanced choices to children so that children's views on gender are unrestricted by norms, which is consistent with Butler's idea of providing people with more options for gender expression. Moreover, children would pick up gendered attitudes that affect how they react to in school, where they learn feminine and masculine beliefs. This appears to make connections to Bourdieu's habitus conceptual framework. Habitus are thinking and behavioural patterns that are absorbed over the course of a lifetime of contacts [2]. Therefore, preschool instructors must be explicit about the significance of their own opinions on gender.

This essay is based on qualitative data gathered through two separate dialogic interview studies with five male preschool instructors in Sweden and four female teachers at an Indonesian kindergarten. The chance of early childhood educators using gender flexible pedagogy in two cultural settings was examined by asking respondents from both nations how sensitive they are to gender issues and how well-equipped they are to deal with conventional gender expectations. Teachers in Indonesia were less attentive to gender issues because of their deeply ingrained religious beliefs. Particularly, most teachers maintain a strong child-centered belief that inherent gender variation coupled with the religious belief is a fundamental aspect of children's nature. Hence, they typically refuse to incorporate gender-flexible teaching into children's learning because they do not want to purposefully change children's gender identities in their teaching. However, a preschool instructor who was questioned had a positive attitude of gender-neutral strategies and said that children's gender characteristics should not be constrained by conventional expectations. A Swedish preschool investigated two perspectives. First, it indicated that all male teachers had a thorough awareness of gender knowledge in preschool and were eager to provide pupils more options. Second, a male professor made the observation that traditional masculinity was more socially created than physiologically based.

Finally, Warin and Adriany's [1] paper draws the conclusion that implementing gender-flexible approaches in formal settings is crucial as it motivates children to be aware of the various gender traits that form different gender identities and

challenge standard performance of gender. Moreover, educators should foster greater gender self-awareness and recognise stereotypical gender patterns. In this way, educators are likely to create more reliable gender-conscious approaches to educating adolescents and to give them more options as to what kinds of roles they would like to play.

After summarising the article, I agree with the Swedish male educators and the Indonesian woman who are involved in the study, that certain gender-neutral education is important and acceptable. Children begin to recognise whether they are boys or girls at the age of three, and between the ages of three and five, they begin to build their gender identity, according to research by Martin and Ruble [3]. Teenagers attempt to identify numerous assumptions and apply them to both themselves and others after they become gender conscious [4]. Since stereotypes have a detrimental impact on academic accomplishment and self-esteem as well as future job development, the preschool years are essential for children's gender growth [4]. For example, a study by Care, Denas, and Brown [5] reveals that by the time girls were four years old, they already had an established belief that jobs for women, like teaching, are neither as enjoyable nor as rewarding as those for males.

While the study suggests the implementation of a gender-flexible strategy, the findings nevertheless indicate that there are still many practitioners, such as the staff in Indonesia who have a specific religious background, remain unsupportive. Indeed, the idea of child-centered education has a strong foundation in preschool instruction, despite differences in cultural backgrounds. Additional evidence is evident in Wingrave's [6] work on early learning and gender behaviour. Eight female early childhood educators from various backgrounds participated in the study, and the opinions and comments of the parents regarding their children's gender development were taken into account. Unsurprisingly, Wingrave [6] discovered that different social behaviours for girls and boys are considered necessary and innate by all practitioners, and this belief is shared by most of the Indonesian staff. They also discovered that all practitioners do not consider themselves to have played any influential role in the formation of children's gender. Consequently, they tended to take a child-centered approach, complimenting females on their haircut, neatness, and helpful behaviour while complimenting boys on their athletic prowess and academic success. Thus, Wingrave's [6] and Warin and Adriany's [1] studies support the necessity of enhancing early childhood educators' training and preparation by increasing their understanding of gender-related issues in preschool education prior to their entry into the profession.

There are shortcomings of the studies. First, Wingrave's [6] research indicates that parental influence is the key element in children's gender views, suggesting that recommendations to improve preschool practise may not be beneficial. Witt [7] also discovered that parents have distinct expectations for boys and girls in terms of behaviour from the moment they give birth, dressing them in gender-specific apparel, giving them toys tailored to their gender, etc. Before and after receiving early schooling, children spend most of their time with their parents, and during this period, the parents have a significant impact on the children's conceptions of gender. In this scenario, instructors' engagement with parents is also vital in stimulating thought on gender stereotypes and their consequences. Second, the study only included two preschools, which resulted in a small sample size. As a result, the results do not fairly represent other instructors' views in both nations on gender-flexible teaching. As stated in the article, a straightforward comparison of only two preschools does not imply that all Indonesian female employees were gender blind. It is possible that the Indonesian female instructors' lack of awareness of the need to challenge gender norms was due to their distinct educational experiences rather than their various religious backgrounds or gender identities. One female employee from Indonesia and two male teachers from Sweden, for instance, both had degrees in education and were engaged in academic research on gender. Hence, they may be more knowledgeable about gender concerns and more willing to use gender-flexible pedagogy than other participants.

In conclusion, Warin and Adriany's [1] study revealed culturally varied early childhood teachers' conceptions of gender-flexible teaching and discovered that, given the emergence of gender stereotypes around ages three to five, gender-flexible teaching is likely to be achieved to some extent [3]. Preschool instructors' professionalism and the staff's gender diversity in early childhood education settings are therefore vital. Nevertheless, the study may improve if it includes more participants from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, whether gender stereotypes should be challenged by implementing this gender-neutral strategy, there are more details to think about. For instance, while administrators and schools should be held responsible for employing more men, it is necessary to enhance the training of female educators in anti-bias curricula and the eradication of gender stereotypes in early childhood, as women make up most educational positions.

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