

# **THE EFFECT OF GENDER DIFFERENCES AND SELF ESTEEM TOWARD KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

## **Abstract**

Key words: self esteem, gender differences, communicative competence

This study was designed as an ex-post facto which aimed at seeing the effect of self esteem and gender differences toward kindergarten students' communicative competence. The samples were students at the age between 3-5 which were taken from TK A of 7 kindergartens around Denpasar and Badung area. The data were collected by using questionnaire, document analysis and observation.. The data were analyzed by using Two-way ANOVA with 2x2 factorial design. The result of the analysis showed that there was no significant difference between male and female kindergarten students in their communicative competence. It was also found that there was no interaction between self esteem and gender toward kindergarten students' communicative competence. Since the result showed an absence of interaction between self esteem and gender, post-hoc multiple comparison with Tukey test was not carried out. This study concluded that there was no significant difference between male and female kindergarten students regarding their level of self esteem. There were several factors that possibly affect the finding of this study. The factors were the process of gender acquisition, early bilingualism, positive self esteem among children and teachers' questioning.

## **1. Introduction**

This study was initiated by problems of using language that were observed among kindergarten students which were indicated by the following symptoms.

1. They did not respond to a spoken stimulus e.g. "how was your weekend?"
2. They found it hard to communicate their intention, and emotions
3. They did not make any conversation with others, either friend or teacher
4. They cry if adult or teacher did not get their intended messages

It was said that children perform themselves differently, including in competence in using the language was caused by the factor of race and gender (Hansen, 2000) and the factor of self esteem, physical health, and social competence (Perry et al. , 2003). The focus in this study was only on the factor of gender differences and self esteem. It due to researches which stated that

self esteem in Asia is an issue in which, according to Leung and Wong (1997) as cited in Ho (2000), students' self esteem in Asia is issued to be lower than western students. In terms of gender, Aryana (2010) found that there was a significant difference in academic achievement between boys and girls. Girls are said to perform better at school than boys do. In terms of communication, girls are said to be better in their verbal ability than boys are. Therefore, this study focused on the aspect of gender and self esteem to see whether the issue of low self esteem also appear among Asian children especially in Indonesia and bring and impact on their communicative competence, and whether differences in gender affect their competence in communication. The result of this study was expected to be significant for kindergarten teacher and parents so that they have knowledge about factors that may affect the children different performance especially in communicative competence, by having this knowledge, parents will be able to prepare the children before school and teacher will know what they need to look at and improve to promote communicative competence.

## **2. Statements of problem**

Based on the background of the study above, there were four research questions, which were designed as follows:

1. Is there any significant difference between male and female kindergarten students in their communicative competence?
2. Is there any interaction between self esteem and gender differences toward the students' communicative competence?
3. Is there any significant difference between high self esteem female and high self esteem male on their communicative competence?
4. Is there any significant difference between low self esteem female and low self esteem male on their communicative competence?

## **3. Research Method**

This study was designed as an ex-post facto. The data were collected through questionnaire, document analysis, and observation. In this study, there were three variables involved, self esteem, gender, and students' communicative competence. Self esteem was independent variable, gender took a role as moderator variable, and communicative competence

was the dependent variable. The sampling technique was cluster stratified sampling which result in 223 kindergarten students between the ages 3-5 from 7 kindergartens. The data were analyzed by using two-way ANOVA.

#### **4. Empirical Review**

Several researches have been done regarding the effect of self esteem and gender on students' communicative competence. A study done by Glauser (1984) cited in Head (2006:12) showed that there was correlation between self esteem and communication competence, although weak, was statistically significant. He found out that low self esteem individuals are generally uncomfortable about expressing themselves and high self esteem individual may be more competence communicators than those who are has low self esteem. In a study carried out by Hayati (2008) found out that self esteem as a psychological factor had a positive relationship with students' English language listening comprehension. Listening is one of the aspects of oral language proficiency which link to communicative competence. In other words, self esteem has a positive relationship with listening comprehension which will also determine the communicative competence. Another supporting research about the contribution of self esteem on oral performance was conducted by Park and Lee (2007) who found the coefficient correlation between self esteem and oral performance was  $r = .471$  which means that there was a positive relationship between self esteem and oral performance. The latest study done by Koosha, Ketabi, and Kassain (2011) found that self esteem has a positive relationship with one of the aspects of communication skill that was fluency. Fluency, of course, will affect communicative competence as well.

A literature analysis done by Elfira and Espinosa (1998) in a story of "Alice's Adventure in Wonderland" concluded that children acquisition of communicative competence has traditionally been associated to gender identity. In other word, growing up as male or female will determine how they acquire communicative competence.

In terms of self esteem and gender, Naderi et.al (2009) cited two research results in the article entitled "Self Esteem, Gender, and Academic Achievement of Undergraduate Students". Zareh (1994) as cited in Naderi et.al (2009) who studied the relationship between achievement of motivation, self esteem and gender among high school students found that there is a significant relationship between gender and self esteem. It has also been reported based on the study done by Tafreshi (2006) as cited in Naderi et.al (2009) that there is a significant

difference of self esteem between male and female. These empirical researches were then also proven by Naderi et.al (2009) who has come up with a research result which was in line with the previous study in the area of self esteem and gender. They found, as for gender differences, females in self esteem scored higher than males. This finding showed gender has the strongest unique effect on students' self esteem.

From those researches that have been empirically done in the area of gender, self esteem, and communicative competence, it could be shortly said that the variables of self esteem and gender showed positive relationship with communicative competence. Therefore, alternative hypotheses were formulated for this study which stated that there was significant difference in terms of kindergarten students' communicative competence regarding gender differences and self esteem level. In the previous study, the samples were mostly colleague students or adult, while the present study aimed to see the effect of gender differences and self esteem to kindergarten students.

## **5. Conclusion and Discussion**

The result of the analysis using two-way ANOVA showed that there was no significant difference between male and female kindergarten students in their communicative competence regarding their level of self esteem. This result was a kind of contradiction with the previous study in the area of gender and self esteem. This might be caused by several factors. As the sample in this study was children under five, there was a need to look at the pattern of children gender acquisition and communication. Children at the age of TK-A (3-4) is still in the process of acquiring language either at home or new places they come to, such as school. For some of them, this chance might be the first time to interact with another world other than home, parents and siblings. According to McCormack and Knighton (2007), gender differences consistently been reported in the development of verbal abilities in children. Girl has better verbal abilities than boys across a wide range of task. In contrast with the result of that research, the result of this study explained that there was no significant difference between boys and girl in their communicative competence including verbal abilities. There are several factors that might come up as the causal factors of this finding. The first factor that might affect the finding of this study was the aspects of verbal abilities that were developed by boys and girls. In the students report, one of the aspects was "*mengungkapkan*

*bahasa*” (language expression) which referred to verbal abilities. Boys and girls did not show significant difference in their verbal abilities which can be seen in the following two samples of students report which were taken from TK Anak Bali Pintar:

Boy:

*“Ananda Dek Dwi sudah mampu menjawab pertanyaan sederhana dan memberikan keterangan singkat tentang sesuatu. Namun masih perlu bimbingan dalam menceritakan kembali pengalaman secara urut”*

(Dek Dwi was able to answer simple questions and give a short explanation about something. However, he still needs support in retelling his experiences in order)

Girl:

*“Ananda Gung Rara sudah mampu menyanyi lebih dari 10 lagu anak-anak, Namun perlu bimbingan dalam memberikan keterangan atau informasi tentang sesuatu hal.”*

(Gung Rara was able to sing more than 10 songs. However she still needs support in giving information about something)

From the reports description above, it can be concluded that boys and girls developed verbal abilities but in different ways. Boys showed more verbal abilities in term of saying, stating, or answering something direct and to the point while girl tend to develop more abilities in rhyming and using adjectives in their speech. In conclusion, it cannot be said that girls are better in their verbal abilities or vice versa since they both developed verbal abilities but in different aspects.

Another supporting explanation that might come into play in the result of this study was a matter of gender acquisition which was stated by Coltrane (no year). It was stated that children were not yet into a culture and stereotype of being boys or girls. It could be said that they were in the process of identifying themselves and understand what it means by being boy or girl or gender acquisition. He also fostered about cognitive developmental theories posit that children learn gender and gender stereotypes through their mental efforts to organize their social world. Gender is also a matter of acquisition, not merely something we born with.

An additional supporting fact that was observed through the process of data collection that needed to be considered was the condition of being early bilingual among children. Most of them have grown up as bilingual children who were brought up in Indonesian and Balinese. Based on the research conducted by Genesee (2008), being early bilingual has brought benefits for children. Research done by Genesee came up with the result in which bilingual children were able to develop communication strategy to make meaning.

Although previous research found that gender and self esteem has relationship that male and female was said to perform different self esteem, the result of this study was in contrast with that result. Tracey (2006) helped to explain this result with her theory that children self-esteem develops overtime starting from birth. The self-esteem of young children is generally positive and the children may overestimate their capabilities.

As children self-esteem develops overtime, it was crucial to see the factors that might affect the development of their self esteem. According to Lingren (1991), Self-esteem is a family affair. It is in the family that we first decide who we are and how to be that way. Therefore, parents and other primary caregivers are powerful examples in the development of high self-esteem in children. Focused on a family affair that relates to children performance, the researcher found an issue that might also affect the result of this study. The issue was about parenting style among parents. The patterns fostered by parents become the most fundamental thing in the stage of growth and development of children. This behavioral pattern can be perceived by a child, in terms of negative and positive. Parents are a direct example of the seen and imitated by children. Parents who spoke with good quality will be a good example for their children. The ability to speak their potential child can be stimulated through active communication using the language properly. Because the ability to speak is a reflection of the style thought.

Another explanation for the contradictory result come from the assumption that the teacher facilitated the communication so that there was no difference found in their communicative competence regarding either gender differences or self esteem level. During the short observation before the questionnaire was given out, the researcher noticed that the teacher facilitated the students' communication by means of teacher talk in the form of questioning. Questioning is one of the most common technique used by the teacher. Asking questions encourage the students to think and focus on the lesson. Also, questioning encourage students to

be more involve in communication activities in the classroom. Lei (2009) affirmed that question facilitates communication, and encourage verbal interaction between teacher and students. It could be seen in the following quote.

At TK PGRI Denpasar

*“kamu sudah motong kan? Terus sekarang diapain?” kenapa menempelnya harus didalam kotak?” “Ini gambar tentang apa?”*

(Have you cut it? Now what do you need to do? Why do you have to stick it in the box? What is this picture about?)

Those were the questions that the teacher asked when the students did not get the set of instruction. One of variables in kindergarten students' communicative competence “understood 3-4set of instructions”. In order to make the students understand, the teacher asked them back. It meant that the teacher's questions might facilitate the communication between the teacher and students in order to get the messages of the instruction. Relate this with Brown (2005) statement, teachers' question could also be the factor that children utilize to maintain their low self esteem. Therefore, they did not show difference in their communicative competence.

In conclusion, being boys or girls with low or high self esteem did not make any significant difference in communicative competence among kindergarten students. There were some factors that were observed and might be influential to the result of this study. The factors were the existence of positive self esteem among children, the process of gender acquisition, teacher talk that facilitate students' communication in early age and also the family matter such as parenting style. The factor of family variable such as parenting style has come into light as the factor that might contribute to the finding of this study. Since the present study did not cover the stated variable, it was suggested for further research in the same area. So, the questions that remained questionable could be answered. Furthermore, it would give benefit for parents and teachers in facilitating the children to develop their communicative competence.

## **6. Implication and Recommendation**

Based on the research finding and discussion above, there were several implications could be drawn. The implications were as follows.

1. It is important for parents to pay more attention on their children self esteem. Based on the discussion above, it was stated that children self esteem were generally positive and it changed overtime. In this stage, parents' involvement is essentially needed because it will determine whether the children will increase or decrease their self esteem during the process of its development. Parental relationships play a very important role in determining the self-esteem of children.
2. Even though the result of this research showed that there was no significant difference in the students' communicative competence with high or low self esteem, it did not mean that self esteem was not a crucial psychological factor that needed to be looked at. In a circumstance, where bilingualism and teachers' questioning did not play role in students' communicative competence, self esteem was the concern that might play influential role.
3. The teachers were expected to also look at the students' psychological aspects, such as self esteem. By having knowledge on how to differentiate students with high or low self esteem, will help the teacher to choose appropriate technique and activities to assist the students to improve their performance at school, not merely communicative competence.
4. The result of this research showed that the teacher play an important role in engaging students, either male or female, with high or low self esteem, in communication. The teachers were expected to be able to develop other meaningful techniques in order to help young learner to develop their communicative competence.

For further research in the area of communicative competence, it is recommended to elaborate the variable of parents' education background. The present study did not concern on the parents education background, however, it is considered influential. From the report document, it was shown that parents' education was averagely high school and diploma. It is assumed that the variable of parents' education contributes to the children development, including their communicative competence.

Research in the same field is also recommended since the present study came up with contradictory findings which revealed other factors that affect the students' communicative competence. Further research with different finding will help and enrich literatures and references for teacher and parents in order to explain children different performance at school.

The contradictory result in this study might be caused by unobservable mistake during the process of data collection since the children filled in the questionnaire with parental guide. It was assumed that this method of answering questionnaire brought an impact on the reliability of the instruments which then affect the findings. Further research with more reliable technique of filling in questionnaire for children may reveal with different finding and help explaining any contradiction that appear

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