Al-Musannif, Vol. 7, No. 2 (December 2025): 101–112
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65046/msn.v7i2.6

p-ISSN 2657-2362
e-ISSN 2684-7736

AL-MUSANNIF | EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
Teaching and Student Development | Research Article

https://journal.cognifera.web.id/index.php/al-musannif

Gender and Classroom Grouping Effects on Kindergarten Children's Self-Esteem

Pengaruh Jenis Kelamin dan Pengelompokan Kelas terhadap Tingkat Self-Esteem Anak di Taman Kanak-Kanak

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Article History:
Received: December 26, 2024
Revised: July 26, 2025
Accepted: September 6, 2025

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Keywords:
class group, early childhood, gender, kindergarten, self-esteem

Abstract:
This study aimed to examine the effects of gender and class group on the self-esteem of early childhood children. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design was employed. The study was conducted at a kindergarten in Makassar, involving 80 children selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected via structured observation using a Likert-scale instrument validated by three experts. Data analysis was performed using Two-Way ANOVA following normality and homogeneity tests. The results indicated that gender had a significant effect on children's self-esteem, with boys exhibiting higher self-esteem than girls. In contrast, class group and the interaction between gender and class group showed no significant effects. These findings suggest that internal factors, such as gender, play a more dominant role in shaping early childhood self-esteem than structural factors, such as class grouping, highlighting the importance of gender-sensitive learning approaches to optimally support children's self-esteem development. The study is limited by its narrow geographic scope and reliance on a single quantitative approach.

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is a fundamental aspect of children's psychological development from an early age. During the kindergarten stage, children begin to recognize themselves, form self-concepts, and respond to social and academic environments more consciously (Firdausia, Novianti, and Kurnia 2020). Healthy self-esteem encourages children to be confident, willing to try new experiences, and capable of forming positive social relationships, whereas low self-esteem may lead to insecurity, excessive dependency, or withdrawal from learning environments (Amalia and Hidayat 2023).

Previous studies indicate gender differences in self-esteem even from an early age. Boys tend to display more overt confidence and are more active in competitive situations, while girls are often more cautious, sensitive to teachers' or peers' evaluations, and base their self-worth on social acceptance (Casale 2020; Akoul, Lotfi, and Radid 2021). These differences are influenced not only by biological and psychosocial factors but also by the learning environment,

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including class grouping systems (e.g., advanced or "gifted" groups) and teachers' approaches to feedback and recognition (Fatimah and Herawati 2023).

In practice, kindergarten education often groups children based on academic ability or social behavior. Children perceived as "quick learners" or "high achievers" frequently receive more positive attention, while those deemed "slower learners" or "less prominent" tend to receive less support. Although implicit, such grouping may instill social labels that shape children's self-perception from an early age (Dika et al. 2025). This raises the question of whether current class grouping systems and instructional approaches sufficiently account for gender differences in shaping early childhood self-esteem.

This issue is critical because early childhood education lays the foundation for personality, self-worth, and future developmental trajectories. Approaches that fail to consider psychological differences between boys and girls may lead to imbalances in the holistic development of children's potential (Szkody, Steele, and McKinney 2021). Therefore, a critical evaluation of early childhood educational practices is needed to support children's self-esteem effectively.

Although many studies have examined self-esteem in primary and secondary education, most focus on family environment, parenting style, or teaching methods (Patria and Silaen 2020; Meisyah and Cahyanti 2022). For instance, Santoso and Hidayati (2021); Arafah (2023); Trimayati, Sholichah, and Alfinuha (2023); and Sari (2021) found that students in advanced classes exhibited higher self-esteem than those in regular classes due to positive reinforcement from teachers and the surrounding environment. However, this research focused on upper university, high school, and junior high school students and did not address early childhood contexts. Similarly, Booth, Zoller, and Gerard (2011) reported significant gender differences in self-esteem among middle school (adolescent) students, with boys demonstrating higher academic confidence, highlighting the influence of gender on self-esteem dynamics. Yet, studies specifically examining these factors in early childhood remain limited.

Some studies also highlight the psychological impact of class grouping. For example, Dika et al. (2021) found that tracking children based on academic ability can create disparities in self-perception and learning motivation, particularly for children in lower groups. While relevant, these studies largely focus on primary education and rarely consider the interaction between gender and class grouping.

Based on the literature review, a significant gap exists in research on self-esteem in early childhood, particularly in kindergarten settings. Studies examining the simultaneous effects of gender and class grouping—such as advanced versus regular classes—are scarce. Given that the kindergarten period is critical for forming self-concept and self-worth, this study provides a substantial and innovative contribution, offering new empirical evidence to better understand the interaction between gender and class stratification in shaping early childhood self-esteem.

This study focuses on two main aspects: first, the participants are early childhood learners, a population rarely studied in self-esteem research, despite the importance of this developmental stage. Second, the research investigates not only the separate effects of gender and class grouping but also their interaction, aiming to identify patterns of self-esteem differences based on combinations of gender and class type. This aspect remains underexplored,

particularly in Islamic or Indonesian educational contexts. Consequently, the study is expected to contribute to the development of theory and practice in early childhood education that is more responsive to children's psychological needs based on gender and class status.

Accordingly, the study sets three objectives: (1) to analyze the effect of gender on children's self-esteem, considering inherent psychological and social differences between boys and girls; (2) to examine the impact of class grouping on self-esteem, given potential differences in attention and labeling within the learning environment; and (3) to investigate the interaction effect of gender and class grouping on self-esteem, identifying whether specific patterns emerge from the combination of these variables. The findings are expected to provide a scientific basis for developing educational strategies that are equitable, inclusive, and responsive to children's psychological needs from the earliest stages of learning.

METHODS

Type and Location of the Study

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design aimed at examining the effects of gender and class group on early childhood self-esteem. This approach was chosen to allow for a more systematic and measurable analysis of causal relationships based on numerical data and hypothesis testing. The study was conducted at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, Balang Boddong, located in Tamalate District, Makassar. The site was selected because the institution implements a class grouping system based on children's developmental levels and has a representative and heterogeneous student population in terms of gender.

Population and Sample

The population comprised all active students enrolled at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, Balang Boddong, during the current academic year, totaling 120 children across four class groups (B1–B4). The sample was drawn using stratified random sampling, ensuring proportional representation from each class group. A total of 80 children were selected, with 20 students from each class group. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure balanced representation by gender and class group.

Data Collection Techniques and Research Instruments

Data were collected through structured observation using an instrument designed to assess children's self-esteem, based on psychological indicators of early childhood self-development. The instrument utilized a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," tailored to the developmental characteristics of kindergarten-aged children. The indicators covered key dimensions of self-esteem, including self-confidence, sense of worth, courage in expressing opinions, and independence, referencing Erikson's psychosocial development theory and the child development assessment framework by the Indonesian Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education.

The instrument was validated by three experts—a child psychologist, an early childhood educator, and an assessment specialist—to ensure content validity. Empirical validity was further tested using Corrected Item-Total Correlation, and reliability was assessed with Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.873$), indicating high reliability.

Data Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The collected data were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS version 26. The analysis consisted of several stages:

Preliminary Tests

Prior to inferential analysis, normality was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test, and homogeneity of variance was assessed with Levene's Test. These tests ensured that the data met the basic assumptions of parametric analysis, namely normal distribution and homogeneity of variance across groups.

Inferential Analysis (Hypothesis Testing)

To examine the effects of the independent variables (gender and class group) and their interaction on children's self-esteem, Two-Way ANOVA was employed. This analysis enabled the identification of:

1. The effect of gender (male vs. female) on children's self-esteem.
2. The effect of class group (B1, B2, B3, B4) on children's self-esteem.
3. The interaction effect between gender and class group on self-esteem.

ANOVA results were reported with significance values (p-values), effect sizes, and post-hoc tests, when necessary, to further examine differences between groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Descriptive Analysis of Class Groups and Gender

Prior to conducting inferential analysis, a descriptive overview of the sample distribution based on the two main independent variables—class group and gender—is presented. Table 1 summarizes the profile of the participants involved in this study:

Table 1. Profil Sampel

Between-Subjects Factors			
	Label	Value	N
Class	1	B1	20
	2	B2	20
	3	B3	20
	4	B4	20
Gender	1	Male	43
	2	Female	37

Table 1 shows that the total sample comprised 80 children, proportionally distributed across four class groups, with 20 children in each group (B1–B4). This grouping reflects the class system implemented by the educational institution where the study was conducted.

Regarding gender, there were 43 boys and 37 girls. Although not perfectly balanced, this distribution remains representative and suitable for analysis using parametric statistical methods, such as Two-Way ANOVA, which can accommodate minor imbalances across subgroups.

This distribution serves as the basis for subsequent hypothesis testing to determine whether significant differences exist in children's self-esteem levels according to gender, class group, and the interaction between these two variables.

Descriptive Analysis of Children's Self-Esteem

To obtain an initial overview of the data, a descriptive analysis was conducted on the dependent variable, namely children's self-esteem. This analysis included the mean and standard deviation based on class group and gender. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Children's Self-Esteem Scores

Class	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
B1	Male	45.82	3.459	11
	Female	33.89	3.333	9
	Total	40.45	6.932	20
B2	Male	43.29	5.014	14
	Female	32.50	2.739	6
	Total	40.05	6.700	20
B3	Male	47.11	3.296	9
	Female	35.36	3.880	11
	Total	40.65	6.961	20
B4	Male	46.22	3.153	9
	Female	35.00	3.873	11
	Total	40.05	6.700	20
Total	Male	45.35	4.111	43
	Female	34.43	3.594	37
	Total	40.30	6.699	80

Based on Table 2, boys consistently exhibited higher self-esteem levels than girls across all class groups (B1–B4). For example, in class B1, the mean self-esteem score for boys was 45.82, whereas girls scored 33.89. Similar patterns were observed in B2 (boys = 43.29; girls = 32.50), B3 (boys = 47.11; girls = 35.36), and B4 (boys = 46.22; girls = 35.00).

Overall, the mean self-esteem for boys was 45.35 (SD = 4.111), while for girls it was 34.43 (SD = 3.594), showing an average difference of nearly 11 points, indicating a substantial gender-based difference in self-esteem levels.

Regarding class groups, B3 had the highest overall mean self-esteem (40.65), followed by B1 (40.45), and B2 and B4 (both 40.05). The standard deviations across classes were relatively uniform, suggesting consistent score distributions among children within each class.

These findings provide an initial indication that gender and class group may influence children's self-esteem, which will be further examined through inferential analysis using Two-Way ANOVA to test the individual and interaction effects of these variables.

Assumption Tests

1. Normality Test

Prior to inferential analysis, the normality assumption was tested to ensure that the residuals of the model followed a normal distribution, which is a prerequisite for using parametric tests such as ANOVA. The normality test was conducted on the standardized residuals of the dependent variable, self-esteem, using two methods: Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Normality Test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Standardized Residual for self_esteem	.097	80	.061	.974	80	.101

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test yielded a significance value of p = 0.061, while the Shapiro–Wilk test produced p = 0.101. Both values exceed the 0.05 significance threshold, indicating that the residuals are normally distributed. Therefore, the normality assumption is satisfied, and the data are suitable for further analysis using parametric techniques, specifically Two-Way ANOVA.

Meeting the normality assumption is essential to ensure the validity of variance analysis results and to allow statistically sound interpretation of p-values and effect sizes in subsequent hypothesis testing.

2. Homogeneity Test

The homogeneity of variance test was conducted to ensure that the variances across groups are equal, which is a critical assumption for ANOVA. The test was performed using Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances, based on four approaches: mean, median, median with adjusted degrees of freedom, and trimmed mean. The results are presented in Table 4.

Tabel 4. Uji Homogenitas

	Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a,b]			
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Self_esteem	Based on Mean	1.040	7	72	.412
	Based on Median	.671	7	72	.696
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.671	7	60.644	.695
	Based on trimmed mean	1.024	7	72	.422

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.
a. Dependent variable: self_esteem
*b. Design: Intercept + class + gender + class * gender*

As shown in Table 4, all approaches produced significance values (p-values) greater than 0.05. Specifically, the significance value based on the mean was 0.412, indicating no significant differences in error variance across groups. Therefore, the homogeneity assumption is met, and the data are suitable for further analysis using Two-Way ANOVA.

Hypothesis Testing

To examine the effects of gender, class group, and their interaction on early childhood self-esteem, a Two-Way ANOVA was conducted. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Two-Way ANOVA for Children's Self-Esteem

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: self_esteem

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	2504.928[a]	7	357.847	24.777	.000
Intercept	120691.102	1	120691.102	8356.564	.000
Class	112.690	3	37.563	2.601	.059
Gender	2472.402	1	2472.402	171.187	.000
Class * Gender	3.685	3	1.228	.085	.968
Error	1039.872	72	14.443		
Total	133472.000	80			
Corrected Total	3544.800	79			

a. R Squared = .707 (Adjusted R Squared = .678)

Based on the analysis in Table 5:

1. **Gender** had a significant effect on children's self-esteem [$F(1,72) = 171.187$, $p < 0.001$], indicating a highly significant difference in self-esteem levels between boys and girls. This finding supports the previous descriptive data, in which boys consistently exhibited higher mean self-esteem scores than girls across all class groups.
2. **Class group** showed a marginal significance ($p = 0.059$). Although this value is slightly above the conventional significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$), indicating no statistically significant effect of class group on self-esteem, it remains relevant for discussion as a potential trend, particularly in exploratory contexts or future studies with larger sample sizes.
3. **The interaction between gender and class** did not have a significant effect on self-esteem [$F(3,72) = 0.085$, $p = 0.968$], suggesting that the influence of gender on self-esteem is consistent across all class groups and does not depend on children's class grouping.
4. The R^2 value of 0.707 and Adjusted R^2 of 0.678 indicate that approximately 70.7% of the variance in children's self-esteem is explained by the model, which includes gender, class, and their interaction, reflecting a strong explanatory power for the dependent variable.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that gender has a significant effect on early childhood self-esteem, whereas class group has a marginal effect, and the interaction between the two variables is not significant. These findings suggest that differences in children's self-esteem are largely determined by biological and sociocultural factors associated with gender roles, rather than structural factors created through class grouping in educational institutions.

Specifically, boys consistently exhibited higher self-esteem than girls across all class groups. This aligns with previous studies by Kling et al. (1999) and Zuckerman et al. (2016), which found that gender differences in self-esteem emerge during childhood and tend to strengthen during adolescence, with boys showing higher scores. In the Indonesian context, Marcic and Grum (2011) and Skaalvik (1990) also reported that boys tend to be more confident in competitive situations, while girls are more sensitive to social evaluation, which subsequently affects the development of their self-esteem.

Theoretically, these findings can be explained through Bandura's Self-Efficacy theory (1997) and Bem's Gender Schema theory (1981). Bandura emphasized that self-belief is shaped through direct experiences, observation of models, and social reinforcement. In this context, social environments such as family and school tend to provide more positive reinforcement for active and competitive behaviors in boys compared to girls. Meanwhile, gender schema theory posits that from an early age, children internalize societal norms and expectations regarding masculinity and femininity, which influence their behaviors, aspirations, and self-perceptions (Barzoki et al. 2025).

The finding that class grouping (e.g., advanced vs. regular classes) does not significantly affect self-esteem provides important insight into internal classification systems within educational institutions. Previous studies, such as Ireson and Hallam (2009), indicated that academic ability grouping could negatively impact self-perception and motivation for students in lower-labeled classes. However, in the context of early childhood education, the present study suggests that class grouping does not substantially influence self-esteem development. This may be due to the preoperational developmental stage of kindergarten children (Piaget, 1972), where understanding of social status and academic classification is still limited.

Furthermore, the absence of a significant interaction between gender and class group confirms that the effect of gender on self-esteem is consistent and independent of class grouping. This supports the hypothesis that internal factors, such as gender perception, play a more dominant role than external factors, such as class classification systems, in shaping self-esteem in early childhood. Accordingly, educational policies and confidence-building strategies should focus on gender-sensitive interventions, particularly aimed at creating environments that empower girls to develop their self-confidence.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that: (1) Gender has a significant effect on early childhood self-esteem at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, Balang Boddong, with boys exhibiting higher self-esteem levels than girls. (2) Class grouping (B1, B2, B3, B4) does not significantly influence children's self-esteem, although there is a tendency for some classes to have slightly higher mean scores. (3) There is no significant interaction between gender and class group in affecting self-esteem, indicating that the influence of gender on self-esteem is consistent across all class groups.

These findings have several important implications for early childhood education practitioners and policymakers. First, a gender-sensitive approach is needed to enhance children's self-esteem, particularly for girls, who tend to show lower levels. Teachers and educators should develop inclusive and balanced confidence-building strategies, ensuring both genders receive proportional support in the learning process. Second, class grouping should not be the sole determinant in shaping children's self-esteem. It should be complemented with socio-emotional interventions designed to strengthen all children's self-esteem without creating discrimination based on class or labels. Third, it is essential for kindergarten teachers to receive adequate training to understand the psychosocial development of young children, particularly

regarding self-concept and self-esteem, enabling them to create supportive and empowering learning environments that facilitate optimal psychological growth.

This study has several limitations, including a sample drawn from only one kindergarten in Makassar, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the research design did not involve a specific intervention, restricting causal inferences about changes in self-esteem. Self-esteem measurements relied on a Likert scale, which is susceptible to subjective bias. Future research is recommended to use a larger sample, experimental designs with interventions, mixed-methods approaches combining quantitative and qualitative data, and to consider additional variables such as family support and social environment to enrich understanding of early childhood self-esteem.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

Funding

This research was fully funded independently by the authors without any external sponsorship.

Authors' Contribution

Author 1 served as the corresponding author and led the overall coordination of the study. Author 2 was responsible for converting the research report into a journal article. All authors collaboratively contributed to formulating the research title, developing the research proposal, collecting field data, and ensuring that the manuscript was written and revised in accordance with the comments and recommendations provided by the editor and reviewers.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in this study.

Data Availability Statement

The research data are fully available and can be accessed through the corresponding author.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all parties who have supported the implementation of this study. Special thanks are extended to the management and staff of Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, Balang Boddong, for their permission and cooperation during the data collection process. Appreciation is also conveyed to the teachers, parents, and children who participated as informants in this study, whose patience and enthusiasm contributed significantly to the smooth execution and successful outcomes of the research. It is hoped that the support and contributions provided will benefit the advancement of early childhood education in Indonesia.

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