

Gender Disparities of Teaching Reading in DepEd Northern Mindanao, Philippines

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Abstract

Gender disparity reflects the unequal status and opportunities between men and women, influenced by institutional, legal, and cultural factors that often favor male dominance. In the Philippines, educators struggle to address these disparities due to entrenched societal norms and frameworks like Education 2030 and the K-12 program. Textbooks often reinforce gender stereotypes, depicting males as assertive and females as passive. UNESCO promotes the use of diverse and inclusive textbooks that reflect both genders' experiences. To address gender gaps in reading, it is crucial for teachers to create inclusive classrooms and critically assess educational materials for gender biases. This research used qualitative methods and semi-structured interviews to investigate DepEd public primary teachers' awareness of gender disparities in reading in Misamis Oriental and Lanao del Norte, Region 10. The study aimed to uncover the causes of these disparities. Conducted in selected DepEd public primary schools, the research involved random sampling for school selection and purposive sampling for participant identification. It engaged 300 teachers, with 50 participating in in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and 50 parents also involved in FGDs. Semi-structured interviews and FGD questions were used as research instruments. The findings underscore the need for comprehensive interventions, including raising awareness among educators, providing targeted training, addressing socio-economic barriers, and combating gender stereotypes. Teachers need to manage classroom dynamics effectively and create supportive learning environments. Engaging stakeholders in decision-making will ensure diverse perspectives and promote equitable outcomes. A multifaceted approach is essential for effectively tackling gender disparities in reading.

Keywords: Disparity, Gender, Inclusive

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Introduction

The term "gender disparity" refers to the inequalities in status, opportunities, and outcomes between men and women, often perpetuated by institutional, legal, political, and cultural factors that disproportionately favor men. In the Philippines, this issue is especially evident in the realm of education. Despite ongoing efforts, gender differences in educational outcomes persist, underscoring a complex problem that remains unresolved. Recognizing the importance of gender equality within the Education 2030 Framework for Action and the K–12 Basic Education Program is crucial for improving educational outcomes for all students (Fontanos & Ocampo, 2019).

To tackle gender disparities at the curriculum level, educators must address gender biases inherent in educational materials, particularly textbooks. A UNESCO study highlighted how gender-exclusive textbooks frequently portray boys and men in dominant roles, while women and girls are depicted in passive or conformist roles. This perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces gender inequality (Flood, 2016). To combat this, UNESCO advocates for textbooks that are inclusive, truthful, affirmative, representative, and integrated, reflecting the experiences and interests of both genders (Perasso, 2017).

Access to quality education is pivotal in breaking the cycle of poverty and creating opportunities for healthier childhoods and better job prospects, impacting future generations (learning English.voanews, 2017). Teachers play a critical role in fostering an inclusive environment by treating all students equitably and encouraging participation. This commitment is essential for creating a learning atmosphere that promotes optimal outcomes for all students, regardless of gender.

Despite the increasing presence of women in higher education, gender-specific challenges continue in classrooms. Studies reveal that teaching approaches, classroom dynamics, and interactions often differ based on gender, even among well-intentioned educators. Both male and female instructors might inadvertently contribute to educational inequities. A pamphlet aimed at raising awareness about gender equity in the classroom provides practical suggestions for educators to enhance the learning environment. Simple yet effective practices, such as learning students' names, maintaining eye contact, and actively engaging with students, can foster inclusivity and positively impact student progress (www.as.wvu.edu/cwc/genderfair.htm).

To dismantle entrenched gender stereotypes, educators should select myths and fables that do not perpetuate hierarchical narratives. Understanding that gender is a social construct while sex is a biological fact is fundamental in challenging societal expectations imposed on boys and girls. Aparna Rayaprol emphasizes that psychological and social differences are learned through societal conditioning, urging educators to reshape narratives to foster a more equitable learning environment.

Textbooks must embody the principles of inclusivity, truthfulness, affirmation, representation, and integration, reflecting the diverse experiences and needs of both genders (Perasso, 2017). For example, traditional fairy tales often depict the handsome prince rescuing the princess, reinforcing gender hierarchies. Educators should be mindful in selecting stories that challenge rather than perpetuate gender roles, recognizing the social constructs of gender and the biological aspects of sex (Aparna Rayaprol, n.d.).

An observable reading disparity exists between boys and girls, with girls consistently outperforming boys in reading skills across various ages and countries (Mullis et al., 2007). This gap is exacerbated by girls' generally higher affinity for reading, which contributes to a self-perpetuating cycle of skill development (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Reese, 2013). Parental support also influences this disparity, as research shows that parents may support their daughters' reading more than their sons' (Reese, 2013). Teachers might inadvertently reinforce stereotypes by perceiving girls as more reliant than boys, leading to tokenism and excluding those who do not fit traditional gender categories (Lynch, 2016; Goldberg, 2016). To address these issues, educators should engage students in discussions to identify gender bias in texts and review teaching materials for outdated stereotypes (Yellamraju, 2020).

Global studies consistently show that girls surpass boys in reading assessments, emphasizing the widespread nature of this gender disparity (Marks, 2008). Socioeconomic factors also play a role, with evidence suggesting that boys from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may be more susceptible to reading failure than girls (Jerrim, 2013; Nuttall and Doherty, 2014). While boys may excel in spatial memory tasks, girls often perform better in verbal memory tasks (Wei et al., 2012).

Addressing the reading gap requires a multifaceted approach involving parental involvement, teacher awareness, and a thorough examination of educational materials to ensure inclusivity and eliminate gender bias. Research should focus on the specific causes of gender disparities in reading and guide the development of targeted intervention programs. For instance, a research project could analyze gender disparities in reading among students in DepEd public primary education across Misamis Oriental, Bukidnon, and Lanao del Norte in Region 10. Findings from such research could inform the design of an intervention program aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for gender equality in reading achievement.

By addressing these gender gaps, the aim is to contribute to a more equitable educational landscape, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities and outcomes.

Objectives

This research project aimed to determine and analyze the causes of gender disparities in reading among learners in the DepEd public primary basic education in Northern Mindanao. The following research objectives aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the causes of gender disparities in reading, laying the groundwork for informed policy recommendations and targeted interventions within the DepEd Public Primary Basic Education system in Northern Mindanao.

1. Explore Perceptions of Teachers:

- To investigate the perceptions of DepEd public primary basic education teachers in Northern Mindanao regarding gender disparities in reading.
- To understand how teachers perceive the reading abilities and preferences of male and female learners.

2. Examine Classroom Dynamics:

- To analyze the classroom dynamics in terms of teacher-student interactions and participation, with a specific focus on potential gender biases.
- To explore the influence of classroom environment and teacher practices on the reading performance of male and female students.

3. Investigate Socio-Economic Factors:

- To examine the impact of socio-economic factors on students' access to reading materials and resources.
- To understand how economic disparities may contribute to variations in reading proficiency between male and female learners.

4. Explore Cultural and Gender Stereotypes:

- To identify and analyze cultural and gender stereotypes that may influence the perception and encouragement of reading skills in boys and girls.
- To understand how societal expectations and stereotypes affect the reading habits and attitudes of male and female students.

5. Examine Teacher Bias:

- To investigate the presence of teacher biases, both implicit and explicit, that may contribute to gender disparities in reading.
- To explore how teacher attitudes and expectations towards male and female students impact reading performance.

6. Analyze Learning Environment:

- To analyze the learning environment, including classroom infrastructure and peer interactions, and its role in shaping reading outcomes.
- To understand how the physical and social aspects of the learning environment may contribute to or mitigate gender disparities in reading.

7. Explore Interventions and Best Practices:

- To identify existing interventions and best practices implemented within the Northern Mindanao region to address gender disparities in reading.
- To assess the effectiveness of these interventions and identify areas for improvement.

8. Examine Stakeholder Perspectives:

- To explore the perspectives of parents, administrators, and other stakeholders on gender disparities in reading.
- To understand the roles and perceptions of various stakeholders in influencing reading outcomes for male and female learners.

Methodology

Research Design

This research project employed a descriptive research design to collect data about the study subject without direct intervention, thereby relying heavily on the validity of the sampling method. A qualitative analysis approach was utilized to address the research questions.

Research Environment

The study was conducted within DepEd public primary basic education schools in Misamis Oriental and Lanao del Norte, located in Region 10 (Northern Mindanao).

Sampling Procedure

Random sampling was used to determine the DepEd public primary basic education schools. Then, purposive sampling was employed to determine the participants involved in data gathering.

The Participants

The study involved 300 DepEd public primary basic education teachers who completed survey questionnaires. Additionally, 50 of these teachers participated in individual in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD), alongside 50 parents who also took part in the FGDs.

Research Instruments

The research instruments included questionnaires designed to gauge the awareness levels of teachers regarding gender disparities in reading and the underlying causes of these disparities among learners. Semi-structured interview questions and Focus Group Discussion questions were employed for qualitative data collection.

Validity of Research Instruments

To ensure the validity of the research instruments, face validity, content validity, and construct validity were applied to the researchers' questionnaires. Qualitative analysis methods were used to interpret data from open-ended surveys, interviews, and FGDs, with content and thematic analysis techniques employed. Meta-analysis was applied to review relevant literature and case studies. Additionally, rubrics were utilized to analyze stories and pictures in textbooks, assessing their impact on gender disparities among learners.

Results and Discussion

Based on the gathered data, the following are the significant findings of this study.

Table 1: Perceptions of Teachers on Gender Disparities in Reading

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings
Awareness and Recognition	Recognition of Disparities Understanding of Root Causes Awareness of Impact on Learning	Teachers in Northern Mindanao demonstrated varying levels of recognition of gender disparities in reading. Some recognized the existence of disparities and understood the root causes, while others showed limited awareness of the impact of gender on learning outcomes.

Implication

Teachers who recognize gender disparities in reading and understand their root causes are better equipped to address them effectively. However, limited awareness among some teachers indicates a need for targeted training and professional development to enhance understanding.

Table 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Reading Abilities and Preferences

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings
1. Reading Abilities	Variability in Skills Stereotypes and Expectations Impact of Learning Styles	Teachers recognized the variability in reading skills among male and female learners. Some discussed the impact of stereotypes and expectations on students' self-perception and performance, while others highlighted the importance of considering diverse learning styles.
2. Reading Preferences	Gender Preferences Motivational Factors Influence of Peer Interactions	The preferences of male and female learners regarding reading materials were explored. Teachers identified gender preferences, motivational factors influencing reading habits, and the role of peer interactions in shaping reading preferences.

Implication

Teachers need to adopt flexible teaching strategies that recognize and cater to the individual strengths and preferences of students, irrespective of gender. This involves moving away from one-size-fits-all approaches and embracing personalized instruction.

Table 3: Classroom dynamics in terms of teacher-student interactions and participation with a specific focus on potential gender biases and the influence of classroom environment and teacher practices of male and female students

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings
Teacher-Student Interactions	Verbal communication	Male students receive more frequent and longer responses from the teacher compared to female students. There is a tendency for the teacher to address male students by name, fostering a more personalized interaction.
	Non-Verbal Communication	The teacher tends to make more eye contact with male students during discussions, possibly indicating a subconscious bias. Female students often receive less non-verbal reinforcement, potentially impacting their engagement and confidence.

Implication

Verbal Communication: Disparities in verbal communication, where male students receive more frequent and personalized responses from the teacher, can perpetuate a sense of

favoritism or unequal treatment. This may affect female students' sense of belonging and engagement in the classroom.

Non-verbal Communication: Differential non-verbal reinforcement, such as more eye contact with male students, can affect female students' confidence and engagement. It may contribute to a sense of invisibility or marginalization among female students.

Table 4: Impact of Economic Factors on Students' Access to Reading Materials and Resources

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings
Financial Constraints	Many students face financial barriers, such as the cost of purchasing books and transportation to libraries or bookstores.	Students from low-income families are disproportionately affected by financial constraints, which hinder their access to reading materials and resources.

Implication

Financial barriers limit students' access to reading materials, exacerbating educational disparities. Families facing financial constraints may prioritize basic needs over purchasing books, further widening the gap in educational opportunities.

Table 5: Cultural and gender stereotypes that may influence the perception and encouragement of reading skills in boys and girls

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings
Cultural and Gender Stereotypes	Perception and Encouragement of Reading Skills	Boys and girls may face different perceptions and levels of encouragement regarding their reading skills based on cultural and gender stereotypes. These stereotypes may influence teachers' expectations and interactions with students.

Implication

Differential perceptions and levels of encouragement based on cultural and gender stereotypes can contribute to disparities in reading achievement between boys and girls. When teachers hold stereotypical beliefs about gender and reading abilities, they may inadvertently reinforce these biases through their interactions with students.

Table 6: Teacher Biases

Theme	Sub-theme	Findings
Teacher Biases	Implicit Biases	Teachers may hold implicit biases, which are unconscious beliefs or attitudes, that contribute to gender disparities in reading. These biases may influence teachers' perceptions of students' abilities and their instructional practices.
	Explicit Biases	Some teachers may exhibit explicit biases, which are conscious beliefs or attitudes, that affect their interactions with male and female students. These biases may manifest in differential treatment or expectations based on gender.

Implication

Implicit Biases: Teachers' unconscious beliefs or attitudes, known as implicit biases, can contribute to gender disparities in reading. These biases may lead to differential treatment of male and female students and influence instructional practices, potentially perpetuating inequalities in academic achievement.

Explicit Biases: Some teachers may exhibit conscious beliefs or attitudes, known as explicit biases, that result in differential treatment or expectations based on gender. These biases can manifest in classroom interactions, grading practices, and academic support, further exacerbating gender disparities in reading.

Table 7: The impact of the learning environment, including classroom infrastructure and peer interactions, on reading outcomes, while also investigating how gender disparities are influenced by the physical and social aspects of the learning environment.

Theme	Sub-themes	Findings
Learning Environment	Classroom Infrastructure	The physical layout and resources within the classroom can significantly impact reading outcomes. Factors such as access to books, comfortable seating, and adequate lighting may influence students' engagement and comprehension.
	Peer Interactions	Social interactions among peers play a crucial role in shaping reading attitudes and behaviors. Positive peer relationships can foster a supportive learning environment, while negative interactions may hinder reading motivation and progress.

Implication

The implications of the learning environment on reading outcomes and gender disparities underscore the importance of optimizing classroom infrastructure to facilitate student engagement and comprehension, while also recognizing the significant role of peer interactions in shaping reading attitudes and behaviors.

Furthermore, the investigation into how gender disparities are influenced by both physical and social aspects of the learning environment highlights the need to address disparities in access to resources and create inclusive classroom cultures that promote equitable opportunities for all students, regardless of gender. Addressing these factors can contribute to narrowing the gender gap in reading achievement and fostering a more supportive and conducive learning environment for all students.

Table 8: Interventions and Best Practices with sub-themes focusing on identifying existing interventions and assessing their effectiveness in addressing gender disparities in reading within the Northern Mindanao region.

Theme	Sub-themes	Findings
Explore Interventions and Best Practices	Existing Interventions	Identified existing interventions implemented within the Northern Mindanao region to address gender disparities in reading, including targeted programs, initiatives, and strategies aimed at improving reading outcomes for boys and girls.
	Effectiveness Assessment	Assessed the effectiveness of these interventions in mitigating gender disparities in reading and improving overall reading outcomes. Identified successful practices and areas for improvement to enhance the impact of interventions.

Implication

Identification of existing interventions signifies a proactive approach towards addressing gender disparities in reading. These interventions, including targeted programs and initiatives, indicate recognition of the issue and efforts to mitigate it through tailored strategies.

Action: Building upon these existing interventions can provide a foundation for further progress. Sharing best practices among schools and educational institutions can help leverage successful strategies and promote collaboration in addressing gender disparities in reading.

Effectiveness Assessment

Implication: Assessing the effectiveness of interventions is crucial for determining their impact on mitigating gender disparities in reading. It provides valuable insights into what works and what needs improvement, guiding future efforts to enhance the effectiveness of interventions.

Action: Identifying successful practices from effective interventions can inform the refinement of existing programs and the development of new initiatives. Addressing identified areas for improvement, such as enhancing inclusivity, accessibility, and cultural relevance, can help optimize the impact of interventions on reading outcomes for both boys and girls.

In conclusion, exploring interventions and best practices in addressing gender disparities in reading within the Northern Mindanao region underscores the importance of ongoing assessment and improvement efforts. By leveraging existing successful interventions and continuously refining strategies based on effectiveness assessments, stakeholders can work towards narrowing the gender gap in reading and fostering equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Table 9: Stakeholder Perspectives

Theme	Sub-themes	Findings
Examine Stakeholder Perspectives	Perspectives of Parents, Administrators, and Other Stakeholders	Explored the viewpoints of parents, administrators, and other stakeholders regarding gender disparities in reading, highlighting their perceptions, concerns, and proposed solutions to address the issue.
	Roles and Perceptions of Stakeholders	Investigated the roles and perceptions of various stakeholders, including parents, administrators, and educators, in influencing reading outcomes for male and female learners, identifying their impact and contributions.

Implication: Understanding the perspectives of stakeholders such as parents, administrators, and other community members provides valuable insights into the complexity of gender disparities in reading. Their viewpoints, concerns, and proposed solutions offer diverse perspectives that can inform targeted interventions and policy decisions.

Action: Creating platforms for open dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders can foster a shared understanding of the issue and promote collective efforts to address gender disparities in reading. Engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes ensures that interventions are informed by the needs and priorities of the community.

Roles and Perceptions of Stakeholders

Implication: Investigating the roles and perceptions of stakeholders, including parents, administrators, and educators, highlights their influence on reading outcomes for male and female learners. Understanding their impact and contributions can inform strategies to leverage their roles effectively in promoting reading equality.

Action: Empowering stakeholders to play active roles in promoting reading equality can lead to more effective interventions and initiatives. Providing training and resources to parents, administrators, and educators equips them with the tools and knowledge to support reading

development in both boys and girls, fostering a collaborative and supportive learning environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, examining stakeholder perspectives on gender disparities in reading emphasizes the importance of inclusive decision-making processes and partnerships in addressing this issue. By valuing and incorporating diverse viewpoints and leveraging the roles of stakeholders, communities can work together to create equitable opportunities for all learners to thrive in reading.

From the findings, these are the implications drawn from the examination of various themes related to gender disparities in reading highlight the multifaceted nature of the issue and the need for comprehensive and targeted interventions. Here are some key conclusions and recommendations based on the implications discussed:

Awareness and Recognition: It is essential to raise awareness among educators about the existence of gender disparities in reading and provide targeted training to enhance their understanding and ability to address these disparities effectively. Educational authorities should invest in awareness campaigns and professional development programs to equip teachers with the knowledge and tools needed to recognize and mitigate gender biases in reading instruction.

Socio-economic Factors: Addressing socio-economic barriers to access reading materials and resources is crucial for promoting equitable reading outcomes. Policymakers should implement policies aimed at reducing economic disparities in education and provide targeted support programs for economically disadvantaged students to ensure equal access to resources.

Cultural and Gender Stereotypes: Combatting cultural and gender stereotypes is essential for creating gender-inclusive reading environments. Schools should implement initiatives to challenge stereotypes, diversify reading materials, and promote gender-inclusive teaching practices to foster a supportive learning environment for all students.

Classroom Dynamics: Teachers play a critical role in shaping classroom dynamics and should be mindful of potential biases in their interactions with students. Professional development programs should help teachers develop strategies to address gender bias in classroom interactions and create inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued and supported.

Learning Environment: Schools must create supportive learning environments that promote reading engagement and provide equal opportunities for all students to thrive. This involves investing in classroom infrastructure, promoting positive peer interactions, and integrating reading-related activities into the curriculum to foster literacy development across all subjects.

Interventions and Support: Existing interventions should be assessed for effectiveness, and areas for improvement should be identified to enhance their impact. Collaboration among educational stakeholders is essential for evaluating interventions, sharing best practices, and continuously improving strategies to address gender disparities in reading.

Stakeholder Perspectives: Engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes and fostering collaboration among parents, administrators, educators, and community members is critical for addressing gender disparities in reading effectively. Creating platforms for open dialogue and incorporating diverse viewpoints can lead to more informed and equitable interventions.

Furthermore, addressing gender disparities in reading requires a multifaceted approach that involves raising awareness, challenging stereotypes, creating inclusive learning environments, and providing targeted support for students from diverse backgrounds. By considering the implications of each theme and taking strategic actions, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can work together to promote equitable reading outcomes for all students, regardless of gender.

Based on the findings discussed, several grounded theories were formulated:

1. Awareness and Recognition Theory

Theory: Increased awareness and recognition of gender disparities in reading among educators lead to more effective interventions and improved reading outcomes for all students.

Proposition: When educators are equipped with knowledge and tools to recognize and address gender biases in reading instruction, they are more likely to implement inclusive teaching practices and create supportive learning environments, ultimately narrowing the gender gap in reading achievement.

2. Socio-Economic Factors Theory

Theory: Addressing socio-economic barriers to accessing reading materials and resources is essential for promoting equitable reading outcomes.

Proposition: When policymakers implement policies aimed at reducing economic disparities in education and providing targeted support programs for economically disadvantaged students, they create equal opportunities for all students to access resources and succeed in reading.

3. Cultural and Gender Stereotypes Theory

Theory: Combatting cultural and gender stereotypes is crucial for creating gender-inclusive reading environments.

Proposition: When schools implement initiatives to challenge stereotypes, diversify reading materials, and promote gender-inclusive teaching practices, they foster a supportive learning environment where all students feel valued and empowered to succeed in reading, irrespective of gender.

4. Classroom Dynamics Theory

Theory: Teachers play a critical role in shaping classroom dynamics and should address potential biases in their interactions with students.

Proposition: When teachers undergo professional development to develop strategies for addressing gender bias in classroom interactions and create inclusive learning environments, they promote equitable participation and engagement among all students, leading to improved reading outcomes.

5. Learning Environment Theory

Theory: Supportive learning environments that promote reading engagement and provide equal opportunities for all students lead to improved reading outcomes.

Proposition: When schools invest in classroom infrastructure, promote positive peer interactions, and integrate reading-related activities into the curriculum, they create a conducive environment for literacy development across all subjects, ultimately narrowing the gender gap in reading achievement.

6. Interventions and Support Theory

Theory: Continuous assessment and improvement of interventions, coupled with collaboration among stakeholders, are essential for addressing gender disparities in reading effectively.

Proposition: When existing interventions are assessed for effectiveness, and areas for improvement are identified through collaboration among educational stakeholders, targeted interventions can be developed and implemented to address gender disparities in reading, leading to improved reading outcomes for all students.

7. Stakeholder Perspectives Theory

Theory: Engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes and incorporating diverse viewpoints leads to more informed and equitable interventions.

Proposition: When stakeholders are actively involved in decision-making processes and their diverse perspectives are considered, interventions are more likely to be effective and responsive to the needs of all students, resulting in improved reading outcomes and a narrowing of the gender gap in reading achievement.

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