
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gender Awareness: Classroom Experiences of Senior High School Students

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| ABSTRACT

The goal of education is not just the facilitation of academic knowledge but also the expansion of understanding of concepts and issues which impact classroom experiences. This study looked into students' level of awareness of gender laws, their perceptions of gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, and gender equality, and their views on gender issues as experienced in the classroom. Participants consisted of one hundred one (N=101) senior high school students from Lapu-lapu City, Cebu, Philippines. A mixed methods approach was used, which consisted of a survey protocol and a focus group discussion. Results show that there is moderate awareness of gender laws and mandates, disagreed on the presence of gender discrimination inside the classroom, and a neutral attitude towards gender tasks and perceived gender equality in the classroom. Thematic analysis revealed five themes: (1) perceived differences in behaviors between girls and boys inside the classroom; (2) perceived favorable attention given by teachers to boys than girls; (3) Science/ academic subjects go beyond gender; (4) equal right to learn regardless of gender; and (5) experiences on gender discrimination in the classroom.

| KEYWORDS

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1. Introduction

Gender awareness is the understanding that there are socially determined differences between women and men based on learned behavior, which affect the ability to access and control resources (Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2023). These socially determined differences impact students as it provides the lens to view the world from a perspective where men and women are perceived differently (Rrustemi et al., 2020). These differences in perspective, in turn, reflect gender-related challenges, which are significant inputs in the understanding of social justice at the macro-level education policy or at the micro-level- in the classroom (Halai, 2010). Classrooms are spaces where students widen their perspectives about gender concepts and related challenges such as discrimination, violence, and equality as part of the thrust towards an inclusive learning environment (UNESCO, 2017). This is embodied in the UNDP's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), specifically, SDG 4, which ensures inclusive, equitable, and good-quality education and lifelong learning for all, and SDG 5 on gender equality (The United Nations Development Programme, 2023).

In sustaining inclusivity, equitability, and gender equality, Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) calls on State Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure equal rights with men in the field of education (United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.). It specifically provides for gender equality measures to eliminate any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education, to reduce female student-drop out and enhance female access to educational information (de Guzman, 2002. p. 22). This is further affirmed by the provisions of the 1987 Philippines Constitution on gender awareness and equality (The Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, n.d.). This also serves as the basis for legislation

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and national development plans targeted at the advancement and empowerment of women. Corollary to this is Republic Act 7192 of 1992, or "Women in Development and Nation Building Act" (The Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, n.d.), which was enacted to promote the integration of women as full and equal partners of men in development and nation-building. It further guarantees that the state shall ensure fundamental equality before the law of women and men.

The Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710), on the other hand, is a comprehensive women's human rights law that seeks to eliminate discrimination against women by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling, and promoting the rights of Filipino women, especially those in the marginalized sectors. The above International and National laws trickled down in the formulation and in the issuance of the Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order No. 01, Series of 2015, which provides for the establishment of the Policies and Guidelines on Gender and Development in the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The promulgation of these laws and mandates reflects the importance placed on acknowledging the divide between reality and the perception of the problem of the gender gap - the gap between girls and boys in terms of how they benefit from education, employment, and other activities in society, particularly in educational institutions.

Educational institutions are spaces where students are taught to understand, respond to, and nourish gender diversity (Nduagbo, 2020). The past few decades have seen an improvement in the dealing of females in classroom methods and curricular materials, but the subtle and pervasive nature of gender inequality still persists in the classroom (Berekashvili, N. (2012). Gender bias and inequality can limit students' ambitions and accomplishments (Sanders, 2003). But when schools become more gender-fair, education will improve for all students— boys as well as girls—because excellence in education cannot be achieved without equity in education (Hill et al., 2010)).

Given the various gender-related challenges in the classroom, the researchers saw it fit to describe the students' level of gender awareness in the classroom. Gender awareness implies the ability of students to identify and perceive problems arising from gender inequality and discrimination, even if these are not evident on the surface (Center for Development and Population Activities, 2007). Knowing how students perceive gender issues in the classroom would serve as the students' venue to express their sentiments, thoughts, and feelings. This would also allow teachers and other stakeholders in education to acquire a more profound understanding of students' needs. This would, in some ways, give support to the Philippines' Department of Education's (DepEd) agenda for a gender-responsive basic education.

2. Literature Review

Gender is socially constructed and learned female and male roles, behaviours, and expectations (World health organization, n.d.). It is a process rather than a fixed state; it is a characteristic of society as well as individuals; and is a system that creates differences and inequalities. Sociologists often study gender using different frameworks. Some emphasize gender as a characteristic of the individual, some as a product of social interactions, and others as a characteristic of social institutions. All frameworks are "necessarily partial and selective", and none alone is sufficient for understanding gender (Wharton, 2005). Given the nature of gender as a social construct, definitions of masculine and feminine often vary from one race and culture to another (Mukhopadhyay et al., n.d.). Gender shapes one's life chances and one's role in the home, society, and the economy (World Development Report 2012).

2.1 Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation

The study is primarily anchored on Albert Bandura and Kay Bussey's (1999) Social Cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. Human differentiation on the basis of gender is a fundamental phenomenon that affects virtually every aspect of people's daily lives (Bandura & Bussey, 1999). Social cognitive theory of gender role development and functioning integrates psychological and socio-structural determinants within a unified conceptual framework (Bandura, 1986;1997). Gender conceptions and role behaviors are products of broad networks of social influences which operate both in the familial and societal systems encountered in everyday life. Social cognitive theory favors a multifaceted social transmission model rather than mainly a familial transmission model (Bandura & Bussey, 1999).

For most children, both the physical and social environments are highly gendered (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016). They internalize the traditional gender roles that they learned at a young age (Solbes-Canales et al., 2020). Gender differentiation works in the sense that the same actions are evaluated differently. Although girls benefit by receiving fewer reprimands and less frequent physical punishment, they are also at risk because their invisibility means they get little support for their learning (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). Evidently, the understanding of who and what one is is based on the wellspring of knowledge and socialization. Next to family and religion, education is a highly influential socialization process, and education should be a means of promoting social justice (de Guzman, 2008). Social justice in education can jump-start gender awareness among students in the classroom.

2.2 Gender Awareness

Gender awareness is an understanding that there are socially determined differences between boys and girls, men and women, based on learned behavior, which affect their ability to control resources (World Health Organization, 1998). Gender awareness in the classroom is important to close gender gaps in education and achieve gender equality for boys and girls. For instance, the curriculum is considered “the central message-giving instrument of the school”, but it should not be forgotten that curricular materials have to be administered by real people whose biographies have already influenced their own more or less developed consciousness about gender relations (Abrahams & Sommerkorn, 2016). Emphasis must be placed on sensitizing people in the educational system to gender issues and on the fact that it is a long and often painful process that requires not only the learning of new perspectives but unlearning of old ones (Abrahams & Sommerkorn, 2016). Students perceive men to have a slightly better position than women in Estonian society (Mägia, 2016). The study casts light on potential reasons why students perceive the position of men and women as unequal (Vainu et al., 2010). It is interesting to note that Estonians do not consider gender inequality an important problem. However, Estonian students perceived that the awareness of gender issues is more likely necessary for their profession, and these topics should be integrated into course assignments and Bachelor or Master theses (Fine-Davis & Fass, 2014).

Comparing gender awareness in the Philippines and countries such as Estonia, most Estonian students are aware that there is a Gender Equality Act, but a quarter of them are unaware of such a law (Mägia et al., 2016). This result seems to affirm the idea that gender equality has not been an important topic in general education or teaching training (Mägia et al. 2016). In the Philippines, there is a fair awareness of the existing legal bases in providing equal opportunities for both genders (Palangdao et al., 2009). The seemingly nonchalant attitudes of an ordinary Filipino on gender issues may be due to the fact that gender inequality, while it still exists in society, is not perceived as a serious problem in the country. In this regard, the full awareness of the school community should be given more emphasis. Classroom discussions, as well as student organizations' participation in Gender and Development (GAD) activities, could facilitate an increase in the school community's gender awareness of gender-related challenges (Sumadsad & Tuazon, 2016).

In the Philippines, women studies practitioners and academicians revealed that in the case of female students in the Visayas region, teachers, by and large, have no systematic gender awareness programs (Sobritchea, 2004). They have not exerted deliberate efforts at ensuring gender-fair curricula, teaching styles, and learning assessment and evaluation (Sobritchea, 2004). However, with the government and school authorities' continuing efforts to promote gender programs, this could improve through the years. Promoting gender awareness in the classroom requires consciousness-raising at different institutional levels as well as amongst different groups of educators. Within the school institution, gender awareness needs to be promoted not only within the classroom but also across all levels- teachers, school administrators, parents, educational policymakers, and other stakeholders of education. The goal is to address gender-related challenges such as discrimination, stereotyping, and inequalities.

2.3 Gender Stereotypes

Schools, in most cases, reinforce existing gender ideology, stereotypes, norms, and expectations. As a case in point, language subjects are perceived as ‘rather female’, and Mathematics is perceived as ‘rather male’ not only by students but also by teachers (Hadjar & Aeschlimann, 2014). This stereotype not only influences female students' assessment of their own capabilities (Igbo et al. (2015) but also plays a role in the teachers' learning expectations of girl students. In fact, classroom activities and students' participation in school organizations generally follow gender tracking (i.e., women are assigned to stereotyped roles on campus, such as secretaries or being second in command as vice presidents). Such practice does not promote the achievement of women's full potential and eliminate inequalities between sexes. Hence, it is not uncommon for women to be elected to such positions as secretary or, at best, vice president of coeducational school organizations, while men are generally chosen as the head of campus associations (Sobritchea, 2004). In addition, boys judge themselves more efficacious for careers in science, technology, computer systems, and physically active pursuits (Bandura & Bussey, 1999).

In terms of classroom behaviors, boys are often more disruptive than girls or at least are perceived as such (Campbell, 2004). Research seldom addresses how gender stereotyping affects and miseducates boys as well (Frawley, 2005). The myth that “*boys should be boys*” – fulfilling the stereotype of the “dominant and macho” male – impedes many of their natural behaviors (Pollock, 2002). To this end, boys who do not fit the pattern of being outspoken, competitive, and autonomous often endure ridicule and subsequent feelings of failure and shame. Thus, in order to maximize students' achievement and growth, the teacher needs to create a learning environment that is free of gender stereotyping, gender discrimination, and other gender-related concerns in the instructional organization, interactions, materials, and activities (McCormick, 1995).

2.4 Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination is expressed in various insidious and subtle ways through differential treatment. To date, women are still perceived to be weaker and more emotional, which then leads to gender discrimination (The World Education Forum, 2000).

Discrimination based on gender is one of the primary impediments to education. Gender-based discrimination remains one of the most intractable constraints to realizing the right to education (The World Education Forum, 2000) even though the education of girls and women has a powerful trans-generational effect and is a key determinant of social development and women's empowerment (The World Education Forum, 2000).

In fact, girls are systematically discouraged from courses of study essential to their future employability and economic well-being (Hill et al., 2010). The fact that schools shortchange girls is also reflected in the proportionately higher relative drop among girls than boys in self-esteem between elementary and high school. Boys in elementary and middle school call out answers eight times more often than girls (Sadker, Zittleman, & Kochet, 2022). When boys call out, teachers listen, but when girls call out, they are told to "raise their hands if they want to speak" (Sadker, Zittleman, & Kochet, 2022). In terms of discipline methods, teachers use different methods and intensities for male and female students on similar matters in the same class (Jung & Chung, 2005). In reality, teachers need to base their different responses on the belief that students' attitudes and responses toward discipline require a gender-differentiated approach.

2.5 Gender Equality

Gender equality is seen as a human rights issue since women's and men's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities do not depend on whether they are born male or female (Gumba, 2013). Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men (United Nations Population Fund, 2013). Empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty (United Nations Population Fund, 2013). Over the past years, researchers from Western countries have already been concerned primarily with problems of gender equality. Studies show that there is a strong connection between gender equality and development (Primer on Gender Mainstreaming and Institutionalization in the Budgeting Process, 2002). The World Bank Report (2012) repeatedly makes note of the positive correlation between gender equality and economic prosperity.

Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. It means giving women and men, girls and boys, the same opportunities to participate fully in the development of their societies and achieve self-fulfillment (National Commission on the Role of Women, 2001). It is an essential component of human rights and a key to development which requires partnerships between women and men, girls and boys – one that is based on mutual respect, dialogue, and the sharing of public and private responsibilities. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same but that their opportunities and life chances are equal (National Commission on the Role of Women, 2001).

Studies on differential treatment between female and male students in the classroom reveal the following findings: men students occupy classroom sound space 1.6 times as often as women, they speak out without raising hands, interrupt, and engage in prolonged conversations during class, and their language is assertive, whereas women's is hesitant and apologetic (Lee & McCabe, 2021). The sad thing about these issues is that when students graduate, they will bring this skewed notion about men and women and about people not only in their workplace but also in their families and in other venues of socialization (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). In the Philippines, the level of perception of students in higher education institutions moderately agreed that women are not equal to men. This was attributed to the students' young age, experience, and immaturity (Palangdao et al., 2009). Hence, more activities are to be initiated to improve students' perception of gender equality (Palangdao et al., 2009).

From this perspective, the study aimed to determine gender awareness of senior high school students in the classroom in terms of their (1) perceived differences in behaviors between girls and boys inside the classroom; (2) perceived favorable attention given by teachers to boys than girls; (3) Science/ academic subjects go beyond gender; (4) equal right to learn regardless of gender; and (5) experiences on gender discrimination in the classroom.

3. Methodology

The study utilized a mixed methods approach given the complexity of gender awareness dynamics and attitudes towards gender issues. The rationale for mixing both quantitative and qualitative data within one study is grounded in the fact that neither approach is sufficient by themselves to capture the dynamics and nuances of a situation (Creswell, 2005; Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006), given the nature of the study. Quantitative analysis was utilized for survey data, and qualitative analysis for the vignettes and focus group discussions.

3.1 Research Environment

The study was done at a public secondary institution in Lapu Lapu City, Cebu, Philippines. This was based on the recommendation of the University of Cebu Lapu Lapu and Mandaue's sectoral partner – the Department of Education (DepEd) Lapu-Lapu City Division, Philippines. DepEd Lapu Lapu Division is composed of 10 Districts. The chosen area is part of District 3, which is composed of six schools: two in the elementary and four in the secondary levels. The school caters to the new program of the DepEd, which

is the K-12 program- Senior High School. The school offers the 4th track, which is GAS – General Academic Strand. They also offer a Technical and Vocational Track. This track has two strands; the (1) EIM- Electrical Installation and Maintenance and (2) Dressmaking.

3.2 Research Respondents

Respondents were Senior High School Students from a public secondary institution in Lapulapu City, Cebu, Philippines. They are part of the first batch of the K-12 program in the Philippine educational system implemented in 2016. One hundred one (N=101) SH students participated in the study, with most of the respondents from Grade 11 (n= 80) and the rest came from Grade 12 (n=21). In terms of age, most of the respondents came from the 17-18 age range (n=53), followed by the 15-16-year-olds (n=34). In terms of gender, there were forty-eight (n=48) male respondents, forty-four (n=44) female participants, and nine (n=9) LGBTQs. The selection of the respondents was done through convenience sampling.

3.3 Research Instruments

Three research instruments were used in the conduct of this study. These instruments are briefly described below:

Gender Awareness Scale. The researchers constructed the survey protocol. Items were constructed with the help of literature and journal readings. The purpose of the instrument is to measure the levels of awareness of the respondents on different gender concepts. The scale was divided into four parts.

Part 1 consisted of 8 items. It measured the awareness of respondents on National Mandates on Gender. They were asked to choose whether they were Highly Aware (HA), Moderately Aware (MA), Slightly Aware (SA) or Not Aware (NA). Each choice was assigned a corresponding score; for example, HA – was assigned a score of 4, then for MA- a score of 3 was assigned. A score of 2 was assigned to the SA choice, and for NA – a score of 1. Cronbach alpha reliability of the items is ($\alpha = .78$).

Part 2 consisted of 6 items. It measures the respondents' perception of Gender stereotypes. Respondents were asked to choose if the item was a masculine, feminine, or neutral task. By checking the column on masculine, the answer means that the task was more suited for males. If the chosen answer was feminine, it means that the item was considered to be more suited for females, and by neutral, it means that the task was suited for both males and females. Cronbach alpha reliability of the items is ($\alpha = .75$).

Part 3 consisted of 10 items. It measured respondents' perception of Gender discrimination. Respondents were asked to choose if they Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA) or Strongly Disagree (SDA) with the statements. Each choice was assigned a corresponding score; for example, SA – was assigned a score of 4, then for A- a score of 3 was assigned. A score of 2 was assigned to the D choice, and for SDA – a score of 1. Cronbach alpha reliability of the items is ($\alpha = .64$).

Part 4 consisted of 10 items that measured respondents' perception of Gender Equality. Respondents were asked to choose if they Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA), or Strongly Disagree (SDA) with the statements. Each choice was assigned a corresponding score; for example, SA – was assigned a score of 4, then for A- a score of 3 was assigned. A score of 2 was assigned to the D choice, and for SDA – a score of 1. Cronbach alpha reliability of the items is ($\alpha = .60$).

Vignettes. Two vignettes were used for this study. This instrument was adapted from Matthews, Binkley, Crisp & Gregg's (1998) excerpt on Educational Leadership. It was modified to suit the nature of the respondents. The first vignette is about a female student who raised her hand but was ignored and not called by her teacher. A male classmate shouted the answer and the female student reacted that it was unfair, but the teacher just commented: "Boys will be boys". The second vignette was about a situation in a biology class where a girl wanted to look at the microscope, and the boy commented that "science is for boys". Each vignette was followed by open-ended questions, and respondents were asked to explain their answers.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Respondents were asked questions about their experiences of gender issues in the classroom. The purpose of the group is to obtain in-depth information on the ideas of the group. This qualitative method was done to substantiate the quantitative part of the study.

3.4 Research Procedures

Permission to conduct the study was requested from the Schools Division Superintendent of Lapu-Lapu City. Research protocols were pre-tested to fine-tune the instruments.

Gathering of Data. The first step that the researchers did was to discuss with the teacher advisers and to ask for their verbal consent even though permission was also granted from higher authorities. Then the respondents were provided with an overview of the study. Respondents were given a chance to clarify points and ask questions. They were asked to sign an informed consent form to

participate in the study. They were informed that they could stop participating at any point they wished to terminate their participation and would not be penalized for it. They were also assured of full confidentiality and anonymity through the use of codes instead of names. Once done, the researchers then proceeded to discuss the instructions for answering the protocols.

On the other hand, the focus group discussion was composed of 5 groups with 5 participants each (n=25). They were asked questions and were given the freedom to answer based on how they understood the question. The same procedure as the questionnaire was provided to the respondents in terms of the ethicality of the study. The FGDs lasted from 15-20 minutes per group.

Treatment of Data. Based on the instruments administered to the respondents, data were collected, sorted, categorized, and tabulated. SPSS 22 (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*) was used to analyze the quantitative part of the study. Frequencies and percentages were generated for the Gender Awareness Scale. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded. For example, a score of 4 in a negatively worded statement will have a reverse score of 1, while a score of 3 will be reverse scored into 2 and so on. Frequency tables show the frequency of a number of outcomes in a sample. Each entry in the table contains the frequency or count of the occurrences of values within a particular group. The table reflects a summary of the distribution of values in the sample. Group means, and comparison was done to determine if there were differences in the means of the different groups.

3.4.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was used for instruments that required qualitative responses (e.g., vignettes and FGD). TA is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are six phases of thematic analysis; first (1) is familiarizing oneself with one’s data: This is where the researcher transcribes the data, engages in reading and re-reading the data, and writes initial ideas. Next is (2) to generate initial codes. The researcher does the coding in a systematic manner and collates data that is considered to be relevant to each code. The third step (3) is to search for themes. The codes are collated for possible themes. The fourth step (4) is to review the themes. The researcher needs to check if the themes are reflective of the codes and the data set and generate a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis. The fifth (5) is to define and name the themes. The analysis is refined, and clarity of the definitions is established. Lastly, (6) is to produce the report. The researcher selects sample extracts to use to capture the generated themes. In generating themes, the researchers first read and re-read the text to generate initial codes and themes. The researchers then worked together to review the set of themes. The final themes were deliberated and reviewed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

Gender awareness in the classroom is an integral part of the learning process. Students consciously and unconsciously imbibe what is taught and experienced in the classroom, regardless of whether it reflects gender sensitivity or not. This section presents the level of awareness of respondents in terms of the following (a) gender laws (national mandates); (b) gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, and gender equality. The results are supplemented with rich data generated from the vignettes and focus group discussions which are also presented here.

4.1.1 Levels of Gender Awareness

A. Gender Laws (National Mandates)

The Philippines is a signatory to many international agreements on the eradication of discrimination, abuse, and violence, especially among women. Adapting these tenets, the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) was established. The primary goal is to engage in policy-making and a coordinating body concerned with women’s empowerment and gender equality (The Official Gazette of the Republic of the Philippines, n.d). From their end, the PCW as an office has spearheaded the crafting and support of gender-related laws and mandates.

Table 2 shows that the respondents taken as a group demonstrates *moderate awareness* of the gender laws and other national mandates with a group mean of 36% (3.00 = *Moderately aware*).

Table 2
Gender Laws and other related National Mandates

| | Highly Aware (HA) | % | Moderately Aware (MA) (3) | % | Slightly Aware (SA) (2) | % | Not Aware (NA) (1) | % | Total % |
|-------------|-------------------|---|---------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|--------------------|---|---------|
| Laws | | | | | | | | | |

| (4) | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|----|--------------|----|-------|----|--------|-------------|--|--|
| Republic Act (RA) 7192 – Women Development and Nation Building Act (An Act Promoting the Integration of Women as full and Equal Partners of Men in Development and Nation Building and for Other Purposes) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 23 | 22.8 % | 46 | 45.5% | 23 | 22.8% | 9 | 8.9 % | 101 (100 %) | | |
| RA 9710 – The Magna Carta of Women (An Act Providing for the Magna Carta of Women) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | 11.9 % | 37 | 36.6 % | 31 | 30.7 | 21 | 20.8 % | 101 (100 %) | | |
| RA 7877 – Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 2003 (An Act Declaring Sexual Harassment Unlawful in the Employment, Education or Training Environment and for Other Purposes) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 39 | 38.6 % | 38 | 37.6 % | 11 | 10.9% | 13 | 12.9 % | 101 (100 %) | | |
| RA 9208 – Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 (An Act Instituting Policies to eliminate Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Establishing the Necessary Institutional Mechanisms for the Protection and Support of Trafficked Persons, Providing Penalties for its Violations, and for other Purposes) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 45 | 44.6% | 28 | 27.7 % | 21 | 20.8% | 7 | 6.9 % | 101 (100 %) | | |
| RA 8353 – Anti-Rape Law of 1997 (An Act Expanding the Definition of the Crime of Rape, Reclassifying the Same as a Crime against Persons, Amending for the Purpose Act No. 3815, as amended, otherwise known as the Revised Penal Code, and for Other Purposes. | | | | | | | | | | |
| 42 | 41.6% | 37 | 36.6 % | 14 | 13.9% | 8 | 7.9 % | 101 (100 %) | | |
| Section 14, Article II of the 1987 Constitution (Recognizing the Role of Women in Nation Building and shall ensure the Fundamental Equality before the Law of Women and Men) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13 | 12.9 % | 46 | 45.5% | 30 | 29.7% | 12 | 11.9 % | 101 (100 %) | | |
| Section 28 of the General Appropriations Act (GAA) (Directing Government Entities to formulate a GAD plan, the Cost of which shall not be less the Five Percent of their Yearly Budget, Otherwise known as the GAD Budget) | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | 8.9 % | 32 | 31.7 % | 34 | 33.7% | 26 | 25.7 % | 101 (100 %) | | |
| Executive Order (EO) 273 (Directing all Government Agencies and Local Levels to institutionalize (GAD) efforts in Government by incorporating GAD concerns in their | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | 11.9 % | 28 | 27.7 % | 37 | 36.6% | 24 | 23.8 % | 101 (100 %) | | |

Planning, Programming and Budgeting Processes (100%)

| | | | | | |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Mean | 24 % | 36 % | 25% | 15 % | 100 % |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|

The top two specific laws with relatively higher percentages, respectively, and with a verbal interpretation of *highly aware* are RA 9208 (44.60%) – Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 and RA 8353 (41.60%) – Anti-Rape Law of 1997. The seemingly high level of awareness of the respondents in these specific laws is quite interesting to note because only one (n=1) out of the one hundred one (N=101) respondents has attended a gender awareness seminar. The gender mandates with relatively higher percentages of which the respondents are *not aware* are Section 28 of the General Appropriations Act (GAA) (25.70%) – otherwise known as the GAD Budget and Executive Order (EO) 273 (23.80%) – Directing all Government Agencies and Local Levels to institutionalize (GAD).

Table 3
Group Mean comparison (National Mandates and Gender)

| Gender | Mean | N | Std. Deviation |
|----------|--------|-----|----------------|
| 1 Female | 2.5597 | 44 | .64220 |
| 2 Male | 2.7813 | 48 | .50693 |
| 3 LGBT | 2.9028 | 9 | .64583 |
| Total | 2.6955 | 101 | .58907 |

Table 3 shows that the groups (male, female and LGBTQ) have the same levels of awareness. They are *moderately aware* of gender laws and other national mandates.

B. Gender Stereotypes

One of the objectives of this study was to determine the students’ level of awareness of gender stereotypes (arbitrary assignment of roles, tasks or characteristics which are determined by gender) reflected in how they perceive tasks in the classroom. The items in Table 4 were meant to draw out views on gender stereotypes.

Table 4
Awareness of Classroom Tasks and Activities - Gender Stereotypes

| Gender Tasks (N=101) | Feminine (only for females) | | Masculine (only for males) | | Neutral (can be performed by either male or female) | | Total (%) |
|---|--------------------------------|------|-------------------------------|------|--|------|------------|
| | | (%) | | (%) | | (%) | |
| 1. Writing down important ideas of the group. | 11 | 10.9 | 5 | 5.0 | 85 | 84.2 | 101 (100%) |
| 2. Constructing (i.e., doing a hands-on task like buying materials, assembling the project) | 8 | 7.9 | 30 | 29.7 | 63 | 62.4 | 101 (100%) |
| 3. Leading (e.g., plans the overall group work) | 9 | 8.9 | 6 | 5.9 | 86 | 85.1 | 101 (100%) |

| | | | | | | | |
|--|----|------------|---|------------|----|------------|---------------|
| 4. Thinking (i. e., gives ideas most of the time) | 19 | 18.8 | 9 | 8.9 | 73 | 72.3 | 101 (100%) |
| 5. The task of a facilitator, speaker, representative. | 13 | 12.9 | 7 | 6.9 | 81 | 80.2 | 101 (100%) |
| 6. The task of an assistant leader. | 21 | 20.8 | 7 | 6.9 | 73 | 72.3 | 101 (100%) |
| Mean | | 13% | | 11% | | 76% | (100%) |

Results of the survey scale, as shown in Table 4, reveal that seventy-six percent 76% of the total number of respondents (N=101) perceived the tasks as gender-neutral. This means that gender-neutral tasks can be performed by either males or females with no gender distinction. Item no. 3, *Leading (e.g., plans the overall group work)*, got the highest frequency of 85.1%. This suggests that respondents did not gender stereotype the tasks meaning that tasks are identified to be neutral.

Table 5 shows that there is no difference between the mean of the three groups (male, female, and LGBTQ).

Table 5
Group mean comparison (Gender stereotype and Gender)

| Gender | Mean | N | Std. Deviation |
|----------|--------|-----|----------------|
| 1 Female | 2.5947 | 44 | .56878 |
| 2 Male | 2.6215 | 48 | .37147 |
| 3 LGBTQ | 2.8148 | 9 | .40350 |
| Total | 2.6271 | 101 | .46972 |

The result suggests that regardless of gender (whether male, female, or LGBT), there is no difference in the views of the different groups about gender tasks. This is reflected in their choices of items which show that they viewed them as gender-neutral.

C. Gender discrimination

Table 6 presents how the students' perceived the statements in terms of gender discrimination. Results show that 53% of the respondents disagreed with the presence of gender discrimination in the classroom. It's quite interesting to note in Item no. 2, *"I think it is unfair that boys who shout out their answers or call out their teachers get more attention than girls who raised their hands to answer because it gives girls less chance of being heard"* which has the highest frequency of agreeableness (50.50%), which is quite close to the majority.

Table 6
Awareness of Gender Discrimination as Perceived by the Respondents

| STATEMENT | Strongly Agree (SA) (4) | % | Agree (A) (3) | % | Disagree (DA) (2) | % | Strongly Disagree (SDA) (1) | % | Total % |
|---|-------------------------|-------|---------------|-------|-------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|------------|
| 1. Boys are given greater attention in terms of providing them with more opportunities to respond and participate than girls. | 3 | 3.0% | 18 | 17.8% | 69 | 68.3% | 11 | 10.9% | 101 (100%) |
| 2. I think it is unfair that boys who shout out their answers or call out their teachers get more | 14 | 13.9% | 51 | 50.5% | 34 | 33.7% | 2 | 2.0% | 101 |

Gender awareness: Classroom experiences of senior high school students

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----|------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|---------------|
| attention than girls who raised their hands to answer because it gives girls less chance of being heard. | | | | | | | | | (100%) |
| 3. Girls are more likely to be praised for their appearance and neatness while boys on their work. | 9 | 8.9% | 40 | 39.6% | 47 | 46.5% | 5 | 5.0% | 101 (100%) |
| 4. Boys are offered or given more specific feedback on their work – including praise, criticism and remedial tasks. | 8 | 7.9% | 45 | 44.6% | 44 | 43.6% | 4 | 4.0% | 101 (100%) |
| 5. Boys are more often called up to answer or give their answers in a mathematics class because girls are poor in Math. | 4 | 4.0% | 16 | 15.8% | 67 | 66.3% | 14 | 13.9% | 101 (100%) |
| 6. When boys spontaneously call out or shout out answers to questions, they get the teacher’s immediate attention. However, when girls act similarly, they are often reprimanded or scolded to restrain themselves and told to behave. | 10 | 9.9% | 40 | 39.6% | 46 | 45.5% | 5 | 5.0% | 101 (100%) |
| 7. Girls are given fewer opportunities to join in sports and engage in physical activities, while boys are encouraged and better-supported. | 7 | 6.9% | 32 | 31.7% | 51 | 50.5% | 11 | 10.9% | 101 (100%) |
| 8. Boys receive harsher reprimands or punishments than girls, even when the misbehavior is identical or similar. | 7 | 6.9% | 44 | 43.6% | 42 | 41.6% | 8 | 7.9% | 101 (100%) |
| 9. In class, female students are most likely to lose for the position of class president because of their gender (being female). | 6 | 5.9% | 11 | 10.9% | 66 | 65.3% | 18 | 17.8% | 101 (100%) |
| 10. Male students are given more opportunities to respond and participate in class than girls. | 5 | 5.0% | 16 | 15.8% | 64 | 63.4% | 16 | 15.9% | 101 (100%) |

Mean

7%

31%

53%

9%

100%

The researchers found consistencies in the respondents' answers for items no. 1, 5, and 10, which got the top three highest frequencies of disagreeableness with regard to the presence of gender discrimination in the classroom. The following is a sample item statement: *"Boys are given greater attention in terms of providing them with more opportunities to respond and participate than girls.* In the sample statement, the respondents did not perceive that only the boys were given the opportunities to participate and respond. In general, a majority of the respondents expressed a verbal interpretation of *"disagree"*.

Table 7 shows that there is no stark difference among the three groups (male, female, and LGBT).

Table 7
Group Mean comparison (Gender discrimination and Gender)

| Gender | Mean | N | Std. Deviation |
|----------|--------|-----|----------------|
| 1 Female | 2.1614 | 44 | .35908 |
| 2 Male | 2.3458 | 48 | .31955 |
| 3 LGBTQ | 1.8556 | 9 | .45308 |
| Total | 2.2218 | 101 | .37539 |

Table 7 suggests that regardless of gender (whether male, female or LGBTQ), they all reflect a disagreement on the presence of gender discrimination in the classroom.

D. Gender Equality

Table 8 shows respondents' agreeableness toward gender equality and demonstrates their positive attitudes toward equal treatment and equal opportunities for both boys and girls in the classroom.

Table 8
Awareness of Gender Equality as Perceived by the Respondents

| Statement/s (N=101) | Strongly Agree (SA) (4) | (%) | Agree (A) (3) | (%) | Disagree (DA) (2) | (%) | Strongly Disagree (SDA) (1) | (%) | Total (%) |
|---|-------------------------|-------|---------------|-------|-------------------|-------|-----------------------------|------|-------------|
| 1. I feel that both female and male students should be given equal attention and opportunities to respond and participate in class. | 71 | 70.3% | 24 | 23.8% | 4 | 4.0% | 2 | 2.0% | 101 100% |
| 2. While boys like to shout out their answers or call out their teachers and girls raised their hands to answer, both must be given an equal chance to be called and recite in class. | 22 | 21.8% | 42 | 41.6% | 33 | 32.7% | 4 | 4.0% | 101 100% |
| 3. Girls and boys alike should be praised for their appearance, neatness, and work. | 33 | 32.7% | 52 | 51.5% | 15 | 14.9% | 1 | 1.0% | 101 100% |
| 4. I think both boys and girls should be given specific feedback on their work – including praise, criticism and remedial tasks. | 32 | 31.7% | 62 | 61.4% | 5 | 5.0% | 2 | 2.0% | 101 100% |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----|------------|----|------------|----|------------|---|-----------|-----|-------------|
| 5. I think that girls should be given lesser time/chance to answer in Math class because they are less capable in this subject. | 15 | 14.9% | 53 | 52.5% | 25 | 24.8% | 8 | 7.9% | 101 | 100% |
| 6. I feel that girls and boys should be given equal opportunities and support to join in sports and engage in physical activities. | 65 | 64.4% | 31 | 30.7% | 3 | 3.0% | 2 | 2.0% | 101 | 100% |
| 7. I think that when boys spontaneously call out or shout out answers to get the immediate attention of the teacher, girls who are behaving or acting the same should not be scolded or reprimanded. | 7 | 6.9% | 36 | 35.6% | 49 | 48.5% | 9 | 8.9% | 101 | 100% |
| 8. Girls must be equally disciplined as boys when both commit similar or identical misbehavior. | 30 | 29.7% | 50 | 49.5% | 19 | 18.8% | 2 | 2.0% | 101 | 100% |
| 9. I think both female and male students must be given equal opportunities to run and be elected as class president. | 58 | 57.4% | 38 | 37.6% | 5 | 5.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 101 | 100% |
| 10. I think female and male students must not be given equal opportunities in the classroom and other school activities. | 31 | 30.7% | 48 | 47.5% | 14 | 13.9% | 8 | 7.9% | 101 | 100% |
| Mean | | 36% | | 43% | | 17% | | 4% | | 100% |

As shown in Table 8, item no. 1, "I feel that both female and male students should be given equal attention and opportunities to respond and participate in class", has the highest frequency (70.3%). The majority of the respondents seem to agree that such a statement reflects gender equality. With these results, the respondents seem to be saying that when all are given equal opportunities, attention, and chance, equality is perceived.

Table 9 shows that there are no stark differences between the mean of the three groups (male, female, and LGBT). All groups have mean scores of 3.0 with a corresponding verbal interpretation of "agree."

Table 9
Group Mean comparison (Gender equality and Gender)

| Gender | Mean | N | Std. Deviation |
|----------|--------|-----|----------------|
| 1 Female | 3.2182 | 44 | .30824 |
| 2 Male | 3.0146 | 48 | .34702 |
| 3 LGBT | 3.1444 | 9 | .32059 |
| Total | 3.1149 | 101 | .33953 |

Table 9 seems to suggest that regardless of gender (whether male, female, or LGBT), they all seem to agree that the statements reflect gender equality. This gives us a glimpse that the desire for gender equality goes beyond gender.

E. Themes on gender issues as experienced in the classroom

The two vignettes presented generated five major themes. These themes focused on the perceived experiences of respondents inside the classroom: (1) perceived differences in behaviors between girls and boys inside the classroom; (2) perceived favorable attention given by teachers to boys than girls; (3) science/ classroom subjects goes beyond gender; (4) equal right to learn regardless of gender; and (5) experiences on gender discrimination in the classroom.

(1) Perceived behavioral differences between girls and boys inside the classroom. Respondents' responses reflect on the differences in behaviors between boys and girls inside the classroom.

As one respondent said:

"Yes, because as far as I can observe, boys do not cooperate while there are activities. I'm not saying all boys, but I think the majority, while girls are very active in doing school activities."(R88-F).

Another respondent added saying:

"Yes, because girls are patiently raising their hands to express their answer while boys are like wild animals. They shout out loud to express their answers." (R26-M).

These statements seem to suggest that girls are more involved in class activities and behave more appropriately in the classroom. On the other hand, boys are relatively aggressive and not in sync with the activities.

(2) Perceived favorable attention given by teachers to boys than girls. Respondents perceived gender bias among teachers in their treatment of students. They viewed teachers as giving more attention to boys than to girls.

One respondent expressed:

"No. because it's unfair to girls who would like to express their ideas or answers in class. Because only the boys get the attention of their teachers." (R16-F).

Another shared saying:

"No. because it is unfair to accept the boy's shouted answer while Jenny raised her hand." (R40-M).

Such statements seem to suggest that respondents viewed the actions of the teacher as unfair. The boy, who shouts out his answers, gets more of the attention of the teacher than the girl, who observed appropriate classroom behavior by raising her hand.

(3) Science/math subjects go beyond gender. The respondents clearly expressed that there are no distinctions on who should learn science or math in the classroom. For example, science as a subject is mandated to be taught to everyone. Classroom activities and materials are designed for everyone to take part in.

As one respondent said:

"No. because boys and girls are equal because they have the brain to think." (R49-M)

Another respondent added:

"I disagree because Science is not only for boys because the girls have also eyes, hands, and minds." (R13-M)

These statements reflect respondents' understanding that gender is not an issue in who should learn science or math in the classroom. Girls also possess the senses and faculties just like boys, which would allow them to learn the subjects.

(4) Equal right to learn regardless of gender. Equality is a universal right. Everyone has the right to learn. Respondents share their views:

"No because we are equal for any subject in our class ug dili basehan ang gender nato para lang mo angkon nato ang usa ka butang na dapat unta sa tanan."(R32-M)

("No. because we are equal. Gender is not the basis to claim something which is for everyone.")

Another added that:

"A man and a woman must be equal in so many ways. Why would somebody say that Science is just for boys? I just don't get the point." (R82-F)

As pointed out by the respondents, learning Science or other subjects is for everyone, regardless of gender. Everybody should be given an equal chance to learn and maximize their potential regardless of gender.

F. Experiences with gender discrimination in the classroom

Girls seem to have the least experience of gender discrimination, bias, or inequality in the classroom. Surprisingly, a few male respondents and a majority of the members of the LGBT expressed sentiments of discrimination, bias, and harassment in the classroom. One male respondent narrated that he felt hurt because he frequently got scolded verbally by their teacher because he is perceived as “*bogoy*” and “*kiat*” (mischievous, unruly, misbehaves), while he observed that those girls who similarly misbehaves didn’t get the same degree of punishment from their teacher.

Almost all LGBT respondents who were part of the FGD expressed their share of experiences with discrimination, verbal abuse, and harassment not only from their classmates but also from a few of their teachers. One respondent narrated that he felt verbally abused by one of his former male teachers, who said that he is sinful and would go to hell because he is gay. However, all said that although they felt hurt because of some negative treatments they experienced in the classroom, they used these experiences as a motivation to strive more and study harder for them to succeed in life.

4.2 Discussion

The results provide new insights in a way that it unfolds students’ level of gender awareness and their perspectives on gender issues as experienced in the classroom. Where do students acquire relevant information related to gender? Awareness of some specific gender mandates may not necessarily be learned from school. Students may have heard or accessed the information from other sources like social media. Certain societal issues are discussed and shared on a daily basis on Facebook, Twitter, and other media outlets. This may also be attributed to the status of Lapu-Lapu City as one of the hotspots for sex trafficking crimes in Cebu, Philippines (Macasero, 2019); hence students may have heard of news or press releases about it. This supports the social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation of Albert Bandura and Kay Bussey (1999), which states that gender conceptions and role behavior are the products of a broad network of social influences. However, students may only have peripheral ideas and may not necessarily possess an in-depth understanding of gender laws and issues. In terms of gender-related challenges, such as gender stereotypes, classroom tasks are identified as neutral. This seems to run contrary to the claims of previous studies that classroom activities and students’ participation in school organizations generally follow gender tracking. This change in attitudes among the young can be a rich source for further research.

The contradictory results from the quantitative and qualitative responses of students are quite interesting in that teachers seem to favor male students. This echoes the findings of Jung and Chung (2005) that male students tend to have more teacher-student interaction opportunities in both elementary and junior high schools. The scenario in which boys receive more positive and negative attention is indicative of the complexity of gendered power dynamics as teachers strive to maintain an environment for learning in their classrooms. However, this may lead to the invisibility of some girls, especially those low achieving, very quiet, and lacking in confidence. These girls are the “invisible low achievers”, adopting behavior patterns that do not attract attention, almost hiding their work from teachers’ scrutiny and going unnoticed and untroubled by teachers (Younger & Cobbett, 2014).

What could possibly contribute to the seemingly discrepant results between the quantitative and the qualitative responses? These empirical findings can be explained in a couple of ways. *First*, students’ understanding of gender laws, concepts, and issues are shaky and tentative. This is because, among the one hundred-one respondents, only one claimed to have attended a Gender Awareness or Gender-fair seminar. *Second*, the discrepancy can be explained by social desirability. Social desirability is the tendency of some respondents to report an answer in a way they deem to be more socially acceptable than would be their “true” answer. They do this to project a favorable image of themselves and the organization they represent and to avoid receiving negative evaluations (Lavrakas, 2008). Students provide researchers with favorable answers to put them in a favorable light missing the point of the research, which is to draw out answers regardless of whether it is negative or not. In the quantitative statements, choices are simply provided to the students. Whereas when using vignettes and conducting FGDs, the students are allowed to freely express their feelings, thoughts, views, and sentiments. What is clear, however, is when personally asked about their own experiences, students seem to be more open and free about their answers. But when placed in the context of situations and examples and not necessarily their own experiences, they tended to display “social desirability.” This is an interesting point to pick up, especially for researchers, as it provides insight into the strengths of the methods used in the conduct of research.

For the longest time, the Philippines has been a patriarchal society where male dominance is experienced. Actions, behaviors, and thoughts which are male-centric have permeated society and are accepted without question. Heightening gender awareness among students, especially in the classroom, will enable students to be more inclusive in their behaviors, actions, and speech. Students need to undergo training to concretize their understanding of gender issues. They need to be consciously aware of situations inside and outside of the classroom, which reflects gender concerns. Recent changes have opened up the idea that females and males should enjoy equal opportunities. This means giving women and men, girls and boys, the same opportunities to participate fully in the development of their societies and to achieve self-fulfillment. It requires a new partnership between women and men, girls and boys – one that is based on mutual respect, dialogue, and the sharing of public and private responsibilities (NCRW, 2001).

In sum, it can be said that regardless of their levels of gender awareness, all students have this desire to eliminate gender discrimination and inequality and foster gender equality. This desire goes beyond gender – may it be girls, boys, and members of the LGBT community. Raising the students' level of gender awareness in the classroom can breed respect, confidence, and productivity among students.

5. Conclusion

Awareness and understanding of existing legal bases are important in the practice and action of providing equal opportunities for both boys and girls. For this study, the aim was to determine gender awareness of senior high school students in the classroom in terms of their (a) levels of awareness of gender laws; (b) perceptions of gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, and gender equality; (c) views on gender issues as experienced in the classroom. Findings reveal that students are moderately cognizant of the existing legal bases and are aware of gender concepts in providing equal opportunities for both boys and girls. However, it is a kind of awareness that is peripheral and ambivalent that needs to be solidified and concretized. These boys and girls somehow have their share of having experienced situations of gender stereotypes, gender bias, gender inequality, and other gender issues in the classroom. In addition, gender is not an issue in terms of learning subjects in the classroom. On the other hand, girls seem to have the least experience of gender discrimination, bias, or inequality in the classroom, while a few male respondents and a majority of the members of the LGBT expressed sentiments of discrimination, bias, and harassment in the classroom. Students may already have heard about gender issues which they have acquired from various sources outside the school, like social media, but there is a need to contextualize and deepen their understanding of gender concepts. They must be allowed to have a suffused understanding and a full grasp of how gender awareness can open opportunities and uplift their lives, not only as students but as human beings.

The study acknowledges some limitations in terms of the sample size and sampling method. It consisted only of senior high school students from one public school. The results of the study are not meant to generalize to the wider population of senior high school students as the study was conducted during the pilot year when the K-12 program in the Philippine educational system was implemented in 2016 when there was yet a low enrolment turnout in the public schools. However, it does not diminish the important results in surfacing the different concerns of the respondents, which point to the idea that even in classrooms, which are supposedly the space for acceptance and tolerance, gender-related challenges are still prevalent.

Future research can advance the understanding of senior high school students' gender awareness through comparisons between groups, such as students from public and private schools. It should employ stratified random sampling to enhance the scale's external validity. Another possible area for exploration may involve differences in gender awareness between students from all levels of formal education.

This study serves as a venue for students to reveal and make known gender-related challenges experienced in the classroom. Moreover, the study, in some ways, supports the Department of Education's (DepEd) agenda for a gender-responsive basic education, as well as a response to the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) need for gender-responsive research programs.

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