

# Gender Disparities in Access, Participation, And Perceptions: A Study of Home Economics Education in San Fernando La Union Secondary School

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*Abstract- This study explored the gender disparities in access, participation, and perceptions on home economics education among secondary school teachers and students in the City of San Fernando La Union. The study unraveled the experiences of both teachers and students in home economics in terms of access and participation rates as well as perceptions on career opportunities and future aspirations. The study employed qualitative research design in order to explore and understand the prevailing issues on gender disparities in home economics education. In-depth interview using a researcher-made structured questionnaire was used to gather data from the eight respondents, 4 of whom were teachers of home economics and 4 were junior high school students with home economics subjects. Thematic analysis through coding and identifying recurring themes was used to analyze and interpret collected responses from the 8 key informants. It was found out that there is no gender disparity in terms of access to home economics classes and related resources while there is a big disparity in number in terms of participation rates and class engagement between male and female students while contrasting perceptions as to career opportunities and future aspirations in home economics were revealed in the study. Challenges on gender stereotype brought about by societal norms and standards are prevalent, thus causing lesser male engagement on home economics. It is further concluded that there is a need for curriculum update fostering inclusivity, raising awareness on the relevance and benefits of home economics through career counseling and promoting effective teaching strategies that targets to increase student engagement across all genders.*

*Indexed Terms- Home economics, Gender disparity, perception*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gender disparity remains a pressing societal issue even until today. This is a clear reflection of a broader social inequalities and biases. Despite the constant move in promoting gender equality across sectors in the society, disparities continue to live on – and the education sector is of no exempt. Gender disparities remain to persist in professional fields such as engineering, computer science, and business, where male dominates the student population. On the other hand, females are more denoted in the fields of education, healthcare, and social sciences.

The inequities in the perception to access to education can be ascribed to the complex interaction of cultural stereotypes, the early experiences in the education system, as well as the systemic barriers which influence the options and opportunities available to a learner based on their gender. Most often than not, the society dictates a seemingly unwritten standard of which gender can access or participate which courses or programs in education. Hence, the domination of male students to courses like engineering and criminology while female population dominates the nursing and teacher education courses.

Indeed, there are certain subjects that are still seen as being either female or male oriented in this way supporting a certain sex. One of which is Home Economics which is typically considered as a female subject while Technical structure is viewed as male subject. (Pintor, C., Mondalo, J., Encabo, E., Navor, M., Cansico, L., Carcasona, J., & Capulong, R.,

2019)

Home Economics is a subject both in the elementary and secondary levels in the Philippines. Its curriculum content contribute to decreasing gender bias within schools, since it's syllabus has been broadened enough to cater for everyone's needs. University of the Philippines College of Home Economics (UP-CHE) faculty communally defined home economics as "*the study of families and the management of resources available to them for the satisfaction of basic needs in changing environments*". It is a field of study that assimilates the ideas, philosophies, and theories for teaching the diverse concerns of home economics (Gabriel F., Bantang, J., Chua, C., Dare, E., & Malicdem, E., 2017). It was in the early days a course which prepares girls for the labelled role of the wife whose main responsibility was to maintain the house for the "man" of the house (Udonwa, 2015). Presently, Home Economics is one of the approved subjects taught in junior secondary schools as a viable course in national development. However, over time, the perception on Home Economics had relatively transitioned back to where it actually began – the subject became gendered, specifically to female students.

Gender discernment in home economics education is predisposed by several aspects. A research study on Gender-Biased Attitudes of Korean Middle School Students towards Home Economics as a Subject conducted by Kim, EJ., Lee, YJ., & Kim, JS., (2019) revealed that there is indeed a prevalent gender bias in perceiving Home Economics as a feminine subject, which leads to its disaffection and perceived lower significance, especially among those with male-controlled attitudes.

Gender plays a noteworthy role in participation in home economics across various facets. Studies show that male and female students display gender-biased attitudes to Home Economics, seeing it as a feminine subject, with female students more likely to see it as less important. Additionally, in the context of culinary classes, male students often establish superior task execution skills, though female students has the tendency to outperform them in performance evaluations. These research findings underscores the multifaceted relationship of gender norms and

perceptions in shaping participation rates and cultivating attitudes towards home economics education and other related fields.

Societal perception significantly influences gender roles in home economics, as evidenced by various research findings. In the Philippines, roles are oftentimes associated with gender. For example, at home, cooking, washing of dishes, cleaning the house, decorating the house and maintaining the cleanliness of the surrounding as well as taking care of babies or little ones are chores usually done by females in the family. Whilst tasks such as watering the plants, labor work in the fields, crop growing, and other heavy works are assigned to the males. This clearly elaborates the idea of gendered role or stereotyped roles, which first started at home. This early orientation is associated to why most male students perceived Home Economics as a female subject and not really for them. Males need Home economics just as the need for females for the subject would be. A male is also a member of the family who takes the role of a husband or father, and traditionally considered as the head of the family. As such, these males also need appropriate knowledge and attitudes along with skills needed for their roles as husband, father, consumer, and self-reliant citizens. They need to know, just as females do, how to properly budget the house finances, how to prioritize the needs of the family, and how to efficiently and effectively manage available resources at home. And these can be achieved through the study of Home economics. If men should study Home Economics, there are lots of benefits accuracy from the study of Home economics for the men. (Azubuike, O., 2012).

Since Home economics is recognized to be a family-oriented discipline and that families are made up of both males and females, both sexes should be open to Home economics for its accuracy benefits. At present, many family members are now becoming more independent and affluent than they were decades back. Thus, the need for value clarification, and these could be taught through Home Economics education.

There may be no inequalities in the offering and availability for access of Home Economics in the education sector but the problem may lie on a different factor. Addressing these gaps is crucial not only for

nurturing a more equitable education structure but also for guaranteeing diverse perspectives and talents in all professional arenas. Through targeted involvements, inclusive policies, and awareness-raising efforts, it is possible to bridge the gender gap and create a more sensible representation in professional courses.

This study is anchored primarily on the different gender theories in sociology. Theories include that of Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood's Social Role Theory (also called the *social structural theory*) and that of Albert Bandura and Kay Bussey's Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Development and Differentiation.

Social role theory frames the differences between men and women as the result of the combined impact of social and biological influences. This theory posits that socialization, gender stereotypes, gender roles, and physical differences all interact to impact the behaviors of men and women. Its key principle is that differences and similarities arise primarily from the distribution of men and women into social roles within their society. Through socialization and the formation of gender roles, the behaviors of men and women generally support and sustain the division of labor.

On the other hand, Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Role Development and Functioning integrates mental and socio-structural elements within a combined theoretical framework. 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 complex social transmission model rather than mainly a familial transmission model (Generale, & Cubing, 2023).

The theories outlined above play a crucial role in guiding all throughout the research process and towards deepening the understanding of the study. These theories provide a structured foundation which helps in shaping the research question and selecting the appropriate methodologies for the study. Moreover, the theories presented offer a lens through which the data can be interpreted, ensuring that the findings are interpreted and analyzed within a coherent and academically sound content. Through anchoring the study in these established theoretical perspectives, it paves a way for the research to gain relevance and

credibility, enabling a more insightful investigation of the research topic. These theories provide a solid concept in guiding the researcher towards unraveling gender disparities on access, participation, and perceptions towards Home Economics education in the secondary schools in San Fernando City, La Union.

The researcher believes that this study can be beneficial to multi sectors in the society. Findings from this study can be used by schools and other academic institutions in coming up with initiatives that will address gender disparities in Home Economics education. Secondly, parents can use the findings of the study as their basis towards encouraging their children, especially the male ones, that Home Economics education is not a gendered subject, rather, an avenue for anyone to learn the basics of home and the society – regardless of gender. Thirdly, the results of this study can be used by any members of the society to further turn around the ill-notion on Home Economics education as a feminine-based subject, and that findings of this study can serve as a take-off point towards ungendered approach to Home Economics education. Lastly, this study can be used as basis by future researchers on the conduct of relevant studies concerning gender inequalities in the education sector and other related future researches.

#### Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to explore the gender disparity in access, participation, and perceptions on Home Economics education among selected secondary schools teachers and students in the City of San Fernando, La Union. It also addressed the following questions:

1. What are the patterns of access and participation in Home Economics education across different genders?
2. What are the challenges experienced in Home Economics education in terms of access and participation?
3. What is the perceived relevance of Home Economics education to future goals and career opportunities?
4. What strategies or programs can be proposed to address gender disparities in Home Economics education?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed the descriptive-qualitative research design to explore gender disparities in Home Economics education. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social human problem. This research design is well-fit for the objectives of the study as it aimed to explore and understand gender disparities and other relevant experiences of students and teachers in terms of access, participation, and perception in Home Economics education.

In order to fill in the required information for the study, a credible and reliable source of information and data responses are needed. As such, ten respondents were interviewed individually for this study selected through purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling technique; in particular, homogenous sampling, was used to select respondents. This sampling method was relevant for the study since the researcher wanted the key informants to have a common ground, handling Home Economics subject for the teachers while as for the students, should have a subject in Home Economics. Both category of respondents should be in the secondary schools in the City of San Fernando, La Union. Hence, using purposive sampling – homogenous method to satisfy the requirements of the research, the selection of respondents ensured that all participants meet completely the following criteria: (1) male and female secondary student with home economics subject (2) male and female secondary school teachers handling economic subject, and (3) studying/ teaching in any secondary schools in the City of San Fernando, La Union.

Data responses from these key informants are gathered through in-depth interviews scheduled in separate sessions (one session for student respondents and one session for teacher respondents). The distribution of respondents is shown on the table below.

Table 1. *Distribution of Respondents*

| Category                          | Gender | Sample Size | Total Sample |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-------------|--------------|
| Home Economics Teacher            | Male   | 2           | 4            |
|                                   | Female | 2           |              |
| Secondary Student with HE subject | Male   | 2           | 4            |
|                                   | Female | 2           |              |
| Total sample size                 |        |             | 8            |

A researcher-made structured questionnaire was used to guide the researcher in obtaining relevant responses from the identified respondents. Questions were carefully crafted in order to obtain optimum data from the target respondents. These questions were based on the objectives of the study on unraveling gender disparities in areas of access, participation and perceptions on Home Economics education.

The structured questionnaire was divided into 4 sections and were administered to the ten respondents of this research study. Part I gathered the profile of the respondents while Part II included questions pertaining to gender disparity on access and participation in the Home Economics education in the Secondary Schools in the City of San Fernando, La Union. On the other hand, Part III encapsulated questions relating to the challenges experienced in Home Economics education, whilst Part IV catered to the questions geared to collect responses on the perceived relevance of students and teacher on Home Economics education to future aspirations and career opportunities.

A communication letter was addressed to target respondents and an informed consent was obtained from them prior to the actual interview emphasizing on their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any time during the research process. Confidentiality was assured by anonymizing the data and securely storing all recordings and transcripts of the interview process. Interview sessions were audio-recorded with the consent of the respondents and were later transcribed in verbatim.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes within the data gathered from the key informants.

III. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Profile of Respondents

The profile of the respondents of this study as shown on Table 2 below revealed that two out four of the teacher respondents have been handling Home Economics subject for over a decade while the other two have respectively handled it 4 years and 7 years. Also on the table is their highest educational background where it showed that 2 of them holds a master’s degree while one has a doctorate degree and one with units in their Masteral course. On the other hand, on student respondent category, aged 14-16. All four of them are in junior high school, three of them are in Grade 9 and the other one is in Grade 10.

Table 2. Profile of Respondents

| Respondent Category        | Years in Handling HE subjects | Highest Attainment      | Educational |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Teacher</b>             |                               |                         |             |
| Teacher 1                  | 4                             | With units in MA course |             |
| Teacher 2                  | 10                            | Master’s Degree holder  |             |
| Teacher 3                  | 15                            | Doctorate degree holder |             |
| Teacher 4                  | 7                             | Master’s degree holder  |             |
| <b>Respondent Category</b> |                               |                         |             |
| Student                    | Gender/ Age                   | Year Level              |             |
| Student 1                  | Male/ 15                      | Grade 9                 |             |
| Student 2                  | Male/ 16                      | Grade 10                |             |
| Student 3                  | Female/ 14                    | Grade 8                 |             |
| Student 4                  | Female/ 15                    | Grade 9                 |             |

Gender Disparities in Access, Participation, and Perception on Home Economics education

After having interviewed the student and teacher respondents, the researchers had found out three themes relative to gender disparity in terms of access, participation, and the perceived relevance of Home Economics on career opportunities and future aspirations or the perceptions of male and female on Home Economics education among secondary schools in the City of San Fernando, La Union. These themes are as follows: 1. *The Equitable Educational Access*, 2. *The Silent Chorus of Gendered Engagement*, and 3. *The Divergent Perspectives on Home Economics Career*.

The Equitable Educational Access

In terms of access to Home Economics education, both teacher and student respondents stated that there is a fair access to HE classes. No gender is excluded nor discriminated to access Home Economics classes and other HE resources. One of the teacher respondents said:

*“Wala naman pong ano, gender exclusion sa pag access ng Home Economics classes and resources. It’s open to all, regardless of gender. We observe naman fair treatment to all.”*

Student respondents also have same thoughts on this aspect. All four of them discussed that they do not feel any inequality or unfair treatment just because they are male or female by gender. In fact, one student respondent said this:

*“Hindi ko po na-feel na may disparity or inequality po sa access to Home Economics class namin. Boys and girls po mga kaklase ko, and that means na hindi po sya nililimit sa specific na gender lang po.”*

Clearly, with the select random responses of the respondents, both teachers and students clarified that access to Home Economics education is open to all genders, not limited to just females so to speak. It is also quoted from one of the responses from the teacher respondents that *“Home economics is just like all other subjects, it does not choose who will and who can access it nor its relevant resources. Of course we do not want to stereotype genders – like, ay lalaki ka anak, pang babae ang Home Economics – this is not something we say as teachers. These boys should learn also the basics of the home. Anyway, pag laki ng mga yan, they’ll also have a family. and they, hopefully, appreciate the learnings they have sa Home Economics nila. Kaya we encourage all students and tailor our teaching approaches to make it more inclusive.”* Also, during the interview session with student respondents, a male student described his experience on access to Home Economics as *“I felt welcomed and I was really encouraged to join my home economics class.”* While a female student stated *“I can say po that our school promotes these courses, including HE equally sa lahat ng students.”*

These response speaks so much volume in terms of access to Home Economics. Overall, the data responses gathered from both teachers and students category share the same thoughts about neutrality and fairness on the access to Home Economics education.

The Silent Chorus of Gendered Engagement

On the question asked among the respondents on their experiences on the pattern or trend they have observed in terms of participation rates among male and female students on Home economics activities. Shown on Table 3 is the estimated participation rates on class activities on Home Economics per gender as provided by teacher respondents.

Table 3. *Participation Rates of students per gender on HE activities*

| Gender | Participation Rate |
|--------|--------------------|
| Male   | 42.5%              |
| Female | 57.5%              |

The table above revealed a significant gender disparity in participation rates among male and female students for class activities involved in Home economics classes. Only 42.5% of males actively participate in these class activities as compared to female’s participation rate of 57.5%.

One noted response from a male student was *“I feel po na parang out of place kaming mga lalaki sa mga activities kasi karamihan po ay girls tapos pati po teacher naming babae din, kaya din po siguro most of my friends hindi nila tinetake yun seriously.”* Whereas a female respondent stated *“Nag eenjoy po kaming magbabarkada sa paggawa ng activities kasi useful po sya ang timely naman and most of my classmates are girls pa comfortable po.”*

Another notable response from the teacher respondents was that *“Boys often shy away with the activities. Though they participate, yes, pero you can see na parang hindi talaga nila interest yung ginagawa nila, compared to female students. Siguro factor na rin ung kinalakihan nila, ung orientation nila about sa subject coming from outside factors like sa family, friends or even sa community nila.”*

These students and teachers responses speaks about the disparity on the participation rates on Home Economics. As such, there is a gendered engagement when it comes to the participation of male and female students on Home Economics activities or assessments, with which the disparity indicates a lower level of engagement among male students.

The Divergent Perspectives on Home Economics Career

Home economics education offers students the skills that are essential both for personal and professional development. Understanding the opposing perspectives of male and female students on careers and future aspirations in Home Economics is pivotal in developing educational strategies which are highly inclusive. During the face to face interview conducted among secondary students, many females expressed positive views in terms of career in home economics, looking at it as viable and fulfilling options. On the question asked about the relevance of Home Economics on career opportunities and future aspirations, one female student underscored *“home economics careers align well with my interest. Especially po that I’m planning on taking up hospitality management or culinary arts in college. I see a lot of opportunities po in this field.”* Another female student stated *“Our teachers in home economics who are mostly females are great role models. They always tell us that we have a lot of opportunities in line with home economics career. True naman po kasi andami na pong successful chefs and nutritionist na mga babae these days”*

These responses actually differ to what were shared by male students. Their perspective in terms of career and future aspirations in home economics is way different from what the female students point of view. One prominent response from a male student when asked on his perspective on the relevance of home economics in his future aspirations and career opportunities was *“I think I would be judged by people if I will choose a career in this field. Hindi po kasi sya, ung parang nakakalalaki tignan (It is not masculine in nature).”* Another male student highlighted that the lack or minimal number of male teachers in the field of home economics makes it hard for him to envision a career on that field. He underscored that if there were more male role model, it might probably change how he view careers and future opportunities under home economics.

The responses practically suggest the clear opposing views of male and female towards home economics as a career. While the female students look at it positively, males have different say on it, stating otherwise that there are few career opportunities when

in the field of home economics.

Challenges experienced in Home Economics education in terms of Access, Participation and Perception.

Challenges on home economics education can be multi-faceted, impacting both the teachers and the students. This study also assessed the challenges experienced by the respondents in Home economics education.

#### Gender Stereotypes

When asked of the question as to what challenges they have experienced relative to home economics, both students and teachers respondents stated that gender stereotyping remains an issue. The persistent categorization of home economics as a feminine subject has a tendency to discourage male student from enrolling or even actively participating in such field as they may feel judged or out of place, which can eventually lead to lower engagement and participation. Teacher respondents stated that overcoming gender stereotyping is quite a big challenge for them. One stated that they have to constantly battle with the societal stereotypes that view home economics as less important or gender specific.

#### Lack of Interest

While some students view home economics as a helpful path towards career opportunities in hotel and restaurant management, culinary arts, and the like, some still do not see the relevance of home economics to their future goals, especially so when they aspire to pursue careers which are unrelated to home economics such as engineering or technology courses.

#### Classroom Management

Teacher respondents highlighted the challenge they face in home economics education which is classroom management. One teacher stated *“It’s a challenge kasi you get to manage students with different level of interest on the subject, they have different views about it. Some like it and very much inclined, while some, they seem like napipilitan lang sa mga activities. All of these, you have to manage everytime during your class in home economics. I guess we have to look into reshaping our curriculum in home economics eh. Like,*

*make it more appealing to all genders to at least manage the diversity among learners.”* This statement speaks of the impact of diverse perceptions and level of interest as well as participation rates among male and female students.

## IV. ANALYSIS/DISCUSSION

### Gender Disparities in Access, Participation, and Perception on Home Economics education

#### Access

The data responses of the respondents, both the teachers and students speak well about the fair treatment and equal opportunities given by the academic institution and school administrators to all learners regardless of gender. Home Economics exist as both general and vocational education. As stated on the study conducted by Mohammed (2023), Home Economics is part of the common curriculum for some school population which helps to explain life which is why it should be open to all – across all genders.

Home economics, as previously defined is deemed necessary not just for female but also for males for them to be exposed on the subject as it usually consists of broad programmes often called home-making where such subjects as food, nutrition, child development, clothing, parent-child relationship, personal grooming and hygiene are included (Mohammed, 2023)

#### Participation Rates

Data clearly presented that there is a relatively lower rate of student engagements among male as compared to the participation rate of female students. The disparity in number suggests that social dynamics and perceptions of the subject may influence male students lower engagement on home economics activities.

According to a study conducted by Syahrin, Sampurna, Wahyuni, Komaria & Abdullah (2018), female students often outperform male students on home economics practical assessments, as the girls are more invested than the boys. Similarly, the preconception about male since they are known to have masculine character, their job should be

physically hard (Pintor, et al, 2019), thus the less engagement they exhibit on activities in home economics since they view these activities as feminine in nature.

Analysis of the data on participation rates also shows that male students may complete fewer tasks compared to their gender counterpart. Gendered engagement may often be associated with the way they perceive the subject as a whole. Responses like *“I feel judged for taking home economics. My gender is also questioned at times. There’s this stereotype that it’s not for guys, and that’s really hard to get away from”* suggest that their low participation or engagement can be associated with the societal norms suggesting that the field of home economics is made for women, and for them. Perceptions

From the responses of both teachers and students, it was revealed that there is a significant gender-based differences in perceptions of home economics when it comes to career opportunities and future aspirations. Female positively viewed home economics as career relevant and offering a wide range of opportunities and future aspirations – and this is because their point of view is influenced by societal expectations, practical relevance, and many female role models in the society. Contrastingly, male students are faced with the challenge due to societal stereotyping, lack of role model they can look up to and draw inspirations from, and their perceived irrelevance of home economics to their career goals.

According to Azubuike (2012), Differential treatment by educators and parents divert boys from the study of Home economics. Gender gaps in the perceptions on the relevance of home economics is caused by societal norms. Also, as stated by male students, the lack of male teachers in their schools handling home economics make them lose interest in the subject. Similarly, the study conducted by Azubuike (2012) stated that The lack of strong male role model is believed by some experts to be yet another reason for the gender gap in the study of Home economics between males and females. Thus, if the academic institution get to hire more male teachers in home economics – then we might probably be looking into a shift of perspective of these male generation towards home economics

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

After thorough analysis on the data gathered from key informants of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

There is no gender disparity in terms of access to home economics classes as well as resources among students and teachers in the secondary schools in the City of San Fernando, La Union.

There is a big disparity in number between male and female students in terms of participation rates on home economics classes including classroom activities and assessments. The inequality in number is said to be due to society’s view on home economics as female-oriented subject.

In terms of perception on the relevance of home economics on future aspirations as well as career opportunities, there is a contrasting view between male and female. Female see positive opportunities with home economics while male find it irrelevant to their future goals.

Both teachers and students faced challenges in home economics education. Highlighted challenges were gender stereotyping, lack of interest among male students and classroom management on the part of teachers.

### Recommendations

With the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the study findings, the following are recommended:

Career counselling – providing students with the necessary information they needed relative to the wide-range of opportunities that they can benefit from home economics classes

Fostering a more inclusive curriculum – institutions must update and develop a curriculum in such manner that it includes topics that appeal to all students – across all genders, emphasizing on practical skills applicable in various future careers.

Promote Effective Engagement Strategies – teachers may look into the use of varied teaching methods, which may include interactive and project-based learning, this can lead to high level of student engagement and interest.



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