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## Research Article

### Gender – Fair Language in Teaching Basic Education

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Education aims to create equality and respect through its components. One of those components is the learning delivery of any subject matter wherein language is mainly utilized. The study aimed to determine the usage of the gender sensitive language in teaching basic education at Don Honorio Ventura State University. It specifically sought to answer on the level of familiarity of the teachers on the gender-fair language; the frequency on the teacher's usage of the gender-fair language; the common gender-fair terminologies used in motivation, discussion, performance tasks, assessments, and assignments; and the difficulties that the teachers encountered in using gender-fair language. The study used sequential explanatory type of research. It used questionnaires and interviews in gathering data. There are 65 participants who answered the survey and 11 of them participated in the focal group discussion. Based on the findings, the teachers are familiar with the gender-fair language but they sometimes use them in various areas of teaching such as in motivation, discussion, performance task, assessment, and assignment due to the topic pertinence and student ability. With those findings, the conduct of wide dissemination through capability building on the use of gender-fair language is still needed.

**Keywords:** *Gender-fair, gender-fair language, basic education*

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#### **Background**

According to Ghavifekr and Rosdy (2015), the integration of Information, Education can be an instrument in creating equality and respect in various cultures and genders. In addressing such, various aspects of it should be taken into consideration to assure a gender sensitive environment.

According to IREX (2014), integrating gender equity in educational process may lead to various advantages such as improvement on one's confidence, improvement in the standards of education, effectiveness in learning, improvement to employment opportunities, poverty reduction, healthier mothers and children, inter-generational education effects and social development.

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Based on DepEd Order 32 s. 2017, “the Department of Education commits to integrate gender equality, equity, sensitivity, non-discrimination, and human rights”. The order ensures that the aspects of education specifically the learner’s development, curriculum, learning delivery, learning environment, learning resources, and assessment are gender responsive so that equality is assured and no discrimination nor stereotyping may happen.

In the learning delivery, language is mainly utilized. Verbal and non-verbal, formal and informal communications are being used in the teaching-learning process. Since language is noted as the main instrument of communication, focus should be considered so that it may not be an instrument of inequality, bullying, discrimination, stereotyping, or disrespect.

Menegatti and Rubini (2014) emphasized that language is one of most powerful instruments through which sexism and discrimination may happen. Through the chosen words and delivery, the sender may or may not create impartiality among men and women. Without being conscious to the words that people use, they may use masculine forms that do represent both genders. Examples as such are those words ending with the suffix –or like janitor and actor. Wherein syntactically, there are words as masculine form can give a great emphasis to the male gender than of female. This act leads to gender-bias language.

The origin of gender-bias language can be rooted on social role theory that may lead to gender stereotypes. Eagly et. al. (2000) defined gender stereotypes as “a belief that dealt with women and men and the expectation confining to what they are like and should be like”. Further, men are expected to engage in task that deal with speed, strength, and work far from home, while women are respected on task in relation to home and family. Kutateladze (2015) mentioned that gender-biased terms arise when there is a stereotyping of roles. It means when certain jobs are presumed to be performed only by men or only by women.

Further, gender-bias language exists because of two (2) reasons (Cuddy, Fiske and Glich, 2004): gender stereotype and hidden but generally accepted. Cuddy, Fiske and Glich (2008) associated gender stereotypes with

captured traits in connection to ability, intelligence, skill, creativity, and efficacy. It is in this principle that gender-bias language was born. To show those gender differences, terms are categorized as masculine, feminine, neuter, or common. On the other hand, hidden yet generally accepted refers to how a word structural referring to a particular gender but accepted to be used and referring to all genders. Such principle contributes gender bias. (Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen, and Sczesny, 2007).

On the other hand, there are some, who used mostly the masculine form of the word as a general term removing the women in mental representation (Stahlberg et al., 2007) and lead to consider gender differences in favor of men as a dominant gender (Bruckmüller, Hegarty, & Abele, 2012). The danger of such is when the masculine form is used to referred to the general instead of the using the right and unbiased term. (Ng, 2007).

Gender-fair language was introduced to reduce stereotyping and discrimination in language (Fairclough, 2003; Maass et al., 2013). The study is to put equality in addressing male and female in textual and oral language. The use of –man as suffix to denote a work or a position can cause discrimination. An example of this is “policeman”. To solve such, the use of “police officer” is being suggested. The use of gender-fair language is crucial for gender equality; it helps to reduce cognitive and behavioral male biases evoked by exclusively masculine forms (Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen, & Sczesny, 2007). Gender-fair language is not simply confined to terminology and rules; it favors social equality, equal opportunity and avoids ambiguity (Kutateladze, 2015).

Menegatti and Rubini (2014) added that even though utilizing gender-fair linguistic expressions can effectively prevent these negative consequences and promote gender equality, there are still other forms of genders bias in languages that are difficult to reform. By choosing terms at different levels of generalization, people can affect the meaning that the receivers of the message received because they will connect it to their stereotypical beliefs. Linguistic abstraction, thus, is representing a particular gender in a less manner but do not intend to discriminate or even be aware that the

interpreter creates a discriminatory results. This can be a result of limited vocabulary, exposure to language, and even culture. In order to reduce gender bias, it is necessary to change people's linguistic habits by making them aware of the beneficial effects of gender-fair expressions. The study conducted by Koeser and Sczesny (2014) shows arguments promoting gender-fair language can motivate speakers to use gender-fair wording.

The use of gender-fair language is one of the instruments to create gender sensitivity, equality and respect. That is why, the researchers wanted to identify the utilized gender-fair alternatives, the frequency of the usage and how are these gender-fair words being used in the teaching and learning process.

### Objectives

The study aimed to determine the usage of the gender-fair language in teaching basic education at the Laboratory High School and Senior High School of the Don Honorio Ventura State University.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What is the level of familiarity of the teachers on the gender-fair language?
2. How often do the teachers use the gender sensitive language?
3. What are the common gender-fair terminologies used in the following areas of teaching:
  - 3.1 motivation,
  - 3.2 discussion,
  - 3.3 performance tasks,
  - 3.4 assessment, and
  - 3.5 assignment?
4. What are the difficulties encountered by the teachers in using the gender- fair language?

### Methods

The study used mixed method type of research specifically sequential explanatory design. According to Creswell (2003), sequential explanatory is described as "collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by a collection and analysis of qualitative data". This is to use qualitative results to assist in explaining and interpreting the findings of a quantitative study. The study made used of quantitative

data to identify the common gender sensitive words used by the respondents. After which, the results were tallied and computed. The results were discussed in a focus group discussion (FGD) attended by the faculty officers (to avoid disruption of classes) to further know the difficulties as well as the reasons regarding the usage of the gender sensitive language. The qualitative data were analyzed using inductive content analysis. After which, the answers were coded and formed into themes.

There are 65 participants in the study. The 65 participants of the study are the total number of the Laboratory High School and Senior High School faculty members. In the study, it did not include the researchers and those faculty members whose majority of the teaching loads are at the college level.

For the qualitative data, the faculty officers were invited as participants. 11 attended the focus group discussion (FGD). The three (3) participants were not able to attend the FGD because they were asked to be room examiners in the other schools.

The first participant is coded as T1. T1 is a licensed Pharmacist and graduate of Master of Arts in teaching Science who teaches Chemistry and Physics to the Grade 9 and Grade 10 students.

T2 is the second participant. She is a graduate of BEd English who teaches English to Grade 9 and 10.

The third participant is coded as T3. He is Shop Instructor tat teaches Furniture and Cabinet Making to Grades 7-10.

T4 is Social Science Teacher. She teaches social studies to Grade 7 and 8.

T5 is Social Science teacher. She is about to finish her Master of Public Administration and teaches Social Science to Grade 8.

The sixth participant is T6. She is a Home Technology teacher and teaches baking and cooking to Grade 7 and 8 students. .

The seventh participant is a Drafting teacher. She teaches basic drafting and Auto-CAD to Grades 7-10. Currently, she is finishing her Master of Arts in Education major in Technology and Livelihood Education.

The eighth participant is labelled as T8. She teaches Science to Grade 11 students. She is a general science major and a graduate of Doctor

of Education major in Educational Management.

The ninth participant is T9. He is BSED-Math graduate. He teaches mathematics to Grade 11 students.

The tenth participant is coded as T10. He is a nurse by profession and a graduate of Master of Arts in Nursing. She teaches Science and Health and Work Immersion.

T11 is a teacher of Mathematics. She graduated BEd Mathematics She teaches Research to Grade 12 students.

Questionnaire and interview were the main instruments in the study. The list of words that were used in the questionnaire were based

on Kintanar’s book entitled “Gender -Fair Language: A Primer” (2014). The questionnaire was validated by five (5) experts in language, statistics, research, and members of the GAD Technical Working Group (TWG). During the validation process, only those common words used were asked to retain in the list while those words often used for tertiary education were removed. On the other hand, an expert in qualitative research validated the interview guide.

The questionnaire was personally administered by the LHS GAD Focal Person. The respondents were given a day to answer the questionnaire. After having the numerical results, a focus group discussion was scheduled to discuss the quantitative results.

## Results and Discussion

### *Familiarity on Gender- Fair Language*

Table 1. Respondents’ Familiarity Towards the Gender- Fair Language

GENDER -FAIR ALTERNATIVE	WM	DR	Rank
Actor	3.00	Very Familiar	1
business manager	3.00	Very Familiar	1
Girl	3.00	Very Familiar	1
older adults	2.94	Very Familiar	4
police officer	2.94	Very Familiar	4
Salesperson	2.94	Very Familiar	4
domestic helpers	2.94	Very Familiar	4
photographer	2.88	Very Familiar	8
Designers	2.88	Very Familiar	8
household workers	2.81	Very Familiar	10
spokesperson	2.81	Very Familiar	10
everyone	2.81	Very Familiar	10
Heroes	2.81	Very Familiar	10
Usher	2.81	Very Familiar	10
single woman	2.75	Very Familiar	15
humanity	2.75	Very Familiar	15
career woman	2.75	Very Familiar	15
hotel workers	2.75	Very Familiar	15
diplomat	2.75	Very Familiar	15
flight attendant	2.75	Very Familiar	15
fire fighter	2.75	Very Familiar	15
Waiter	2.75	Very Familiar	15
Average Weighted Mean	2.49	Very Familiar	

The table 1 conveys that 78% or 39 out of 50 of the gender-sensitive usage language are very familiar to the respondents. While 14% or seven (7) out of 50 are less familiar and 8% or

four (4) out of 50 are not familiar. All in all, the respondents are very familiar with the gender-sensitive language with a computed average mean of 2.49. According to Finkel, Norton, Reis,

et. al. (2015) familiarity is the individual's quantitative level of exposure to the target person.

The following are the gender-fair language ranked top on the respondents' familiarity: actor, business manager, girl, older adults, police officer, salesperson, domestic helpers, photographer, designers, household workers, spokesperson, everyone, heroes, and usher.

### ***Frequency in Using the Gender-Fair language***

The statistics denotes that 2% or one (1) out of 50 of the gender-fair language is always

used by the respondents. While 10% or five (5) out of 50 are often used, 78% or 39 out of 50 are sometimes used, and 10% or five (5) out 50 are never used. With that, the respondents sometimes used gender-sensitive language with a computed average mean of 2.18. The more frequently a word occurs, the more valuable it is to subject comprehension (Cihi, 2012). However, Cihi (2012) also explained the frequency of a word in text and speech has not proven a reliable indicator of how widely known a particular word is.

*Table 2. Respondents' Frequency in Using the Gender-Fair Language*

GENDER-FAIR ALTERNATIVE	WM	DR	Rank
Actor	4.00	Always	1
Girl	3.13	Often	2
spokesperson	3.00	Often	3
parenthood	2.69	Often	4
photographer	2.56	Often	5
designers	2.56	Often	5
author	2.44	Sometimes	7
chairperson	2.44	Sometimes	7
journalist	2.38	Sometimes	9
everyone	2.38	Sometimes	9
fire fighter	2.38	Sometimes	9
poet	2.31	Sometimes	12
repairers	2.31	Sometimes	12
wage earners	2.31	Sometimes	12
single woman	2.25	Sometimes	15
business manager	2.25	Sometimes	15
sewer	2.25	Sometimes	15
domestic helpers	2.25	Sometimes	15
career woman	2.19	Sometimes	19
comedian	2.19	Sometimes	19
household workers	2.19	Sometimes	19
early people	2.19	Sometimes	19
police officer	2.19	Sometimes	19
press operator	2.19	Sometimes	19
proprietor	2.19	Sometimes	19
salesperson	2.19	Sometimes	19
Average Weighted Mean	2.18	Sometimes	

Among the top ten gender-fair language determined by the respondents, the word "actor" is always used. The words "girl", "spokesperson", "Parenthood", "photographer", and

"designers" are often used. Other words such as "author", "chairperson", "journalist", "everyone", and "firefighter" are sometimes used.

**Common Gender-Fair Terminologies Used in the Areas of Teaching***Motivation**Table 3. Commonly Used Gender-Fair Terminologies in Motivation / Review*

GENDER-FAIR ALTERNATIVE	F	Rank
actor	8	1
older adults	7	2
proprietor	7	2
fire fighter	7	2
heroes	7	2
human person	7	2
author	6	7
single woman	6	7
business manager	6	7
girl	6	7
journalist	6	7
poet	6	7
repairers	6	7
sewer	6	7
hosts	6	7
usher	6	7
anchor person	5	17
single-parent family	5	17
humanity	5	17
photographer	5	17
career woman	5	17
chairperson	5	17
hotel workers	5	17
comedian	5	17
police officer	5	17
seafarer	5	17
spokesperson	5	17
everyone	5	17
waiter	5	17
wage earners	5	17

The common gender-fair terminologies used in teaching vis-a-vis motivation according to the data are as follows: actor, older adults, proprietor, firefighter, heroes, a human person, author, single woman, business manager, girl, journalist, poet, repairers, sewer, hosts, and usher.

*Discussion*

The data represents the common current terminologies used in teaching in the area of discussion, and they are as follows: humanity, author, infertile, domestic helpers, actor, older adults, photographer, huge, parenthood, wage earners.

*Table 4. Commonly Used Gender-Fair Terminologies in Discussion*

GENDER-FAIR ALTERNATIVE	F	Rank
humanity	11	1
author	9	2

GENDER-FAIR ALTERNATIVE	F	Rank
infertile	9	2
domestic helpers	9	2
actor	8	5
older adults	8	5
photographer	8	5
huge	8	5
parenthood	8	5
wage earners	8	5
career woman	7	11
girl	7	11
comedian	7	11
ranch hands	7	11
artisans	7	11
household workers	7	11
early people	7	11
domineering	7	11
journalist	7	11
poet	7	11
police officer	7	11
repairers	7	11
seafarer	7	11
sewer	7	11
spokesperson	7	11
diplomat	7	11

#### Performance Task

The common gender-fair terminologies are also determined by the data, and they are as follows: actor, repairers, everyone, firefighter,

waiter, anchor person, author, journalist, police officer, domestic helpers, spokesperson, diplomat, and flight attendant.

Table 5. Commonly Used Gender-Fair Terminologies in Performance Task

GENDER-FAIR ALTERNATIVE	F	Rank
Actor	4	1
repairers	3	9
everyone	3	9
fire fighter	3	9
Waiter	2	13
anchor person	2	13
Author	2	13
journalist	2	13
police officer	2	13
domestic helpers	2	13
spokesperson	2	13
diplomat	2	13
flight attendant	2	13

*Assessment*

The data depicts the common gender-fair terminologies used in teaching in the area of assessment, and they are as follows: salesperson, sewer, everyone, single women, girl, repairers,

spokesperson, diplomat, firefighter, older adults, anchor person, humanity, career woman, chairperson, artisans, seafarer, flight attendant, human person, and usher.

*Table 6. Common Used Gender-Fair Terminologies in Assessment*

GENDER -FAIR ALTERNATIVE	F	Rank
salesperson	3	1
sewer	3	1
everyone	3	1
single woman	2	4
girl	2	4
repairers	2	4
spokesperson	2	4
diplomat	2	4
fire fighter	2	4
older adults	1	10
anchor person	1	10
humanity	1	10
career woman	1	10
chairperson	1	10
artisans	1	10
seafarer	1	10
flight attendant	1	10
human person	1	10
usher	1	10

*Assignment*

*Table 7. Common Used Gender-Fair Terminologies in Assignment*

GENDER- FAIR ALTERNATIVE	F	Rank
aviator	2	1
humanity	2	1
salesperson	2	1
fire fighter	2	1
human person	2	1
waiter	2	1
usher	2	1
older adults	1	8
author	1	8
single woman	1	8
hotel workers	1	8
girl	1	8
artisans	1	8
deliverers	1	8
staffing	1	8
huge	1	8
domineering	1	8



GENDER- FAIR ALTERNATIVE	F	Rank
parenthood	1	8
journalist	1	8
poet	1	8
repairers	1	8
Seafarer	1	8
Sewer	1	8
spokesperson	1	8
Diplomat	1	8
Everyone	1	8
wage earners	1	8
Ombud	1	8

The data determined the common gender-sensitive terminologies used in teaching in the area of assignment, and they are as follows: aviator, humanity, salesperson, firefighter, human person, waiter, usher, older adults, author, single woman, hotel workers, girl, artisans, deliverers, staffing, huge, domineering, parenthood, journalist, poet, repairers, seafarer, sewer, spokesperson, diplomat, everyone, wage earners, and Ombud.

### ***Difficulties encountered by the teachers in using the gender sensitive language***

#### *Topic Pertinence*

The difficulties encountered by the participants on using gender-fair alternatives in their subjects and lesson. They said that:

*“The words are not connected to the subject matter” (T1)*

*“The terms are not connected to the topic” (T3)*

*“Uses the words that the we are very familiar; not considering whether it is gender sensitive or bias.” (T6)*

*“Focuses on the lesson and how the lesson will be practical and easy for students. Most of the time gender sensitivity in language is not being considered.” (T7)*

*“How do you incorporate those words to Math? In as much as we want, it still depends on the lesson.” (T8)*

*“To an English Teacher, those words are easy to incorporate but not on the technical like of those shop laboratories classes.” (T9)*

As facilitators of learning, most teachers focus on how the lessons will be convenient to the students. They are using only words that are connected to the topic. Their primary concern is how the students will make easier on their part to understand the lesson. Since they are basic education students, their vocabulary level were not vast to further consider if the used words are gender -fair or not.

#### *Student’s Ability*

The second theme focused on student ability. Student’s level of comprehension should be considered utmost. This is one of the considerations to be taken in the teaching process.

As they said:

*“The words are inappropriate to the level of the students” (T2)*

*“Level of students is being considered” (T4)*

*“Focuses on the lesson and how the lesson will be practical and easy for students. Most of the time gender sensitivity in language is not being considered” (T7)*

*“We know the words. We can use them. However, will the students understand it if it will be used.” (T10)*

Williams, Hall, and Lauer (2004) found that text structure, content familiarity, and reading comprehension ability affect student performance. It further implies that exposure to the language has a great effect of understanding despite of its forms. But if the student has low vocabulary scale and is only exposed to basic sight words, it will be challenging on the part of the teacher to adopt gender-fair language and

must first focus on how to develop the vocabulary of his/her students.

### Brevity

Another common problem is on the ruling of conciseness. Students better understand if the wordings used are direct. This is the concern on gender -fair language. Most of the gender-fair terminologies are found to be general. Teachers tend to use proper nouns because the students can grasp on the topic using those.

Some of them said:

*“Often use proper nouns than of generic terms” (T5)*

*“Uses the words that are very familiar with; not considering whether it is gender sensitive or bias.” (T6)*

According to Maass et al., (2013), brevity is the idea of being short, direct, and specific. Using broad words like “children” will confuse the readers whether the children are all boys or all girls. The teacher has to have also to do his work on broadening his vocabulary to solve the use of sexist language.

### Limitations on Translations

Lastly, there are some terms that do not have translations. Such concern dealt with the lesson on Science, Mathematics and Shop Instruction.

One (1) participant said:

*“There are gender sensitive words that do not have Mother Tongue Based (MTB) translation. When the students do not get, the tendency the teacher will translate it into Filipino or Kapampangan for them to understand the concept.” (T11)*

The evidence of *mother tongue influence* on English is very obvious. This manifests in the form of incorrect understanding as well as limits on comprehension (Ng,2007).

Familiarity on the gender-fair alternatives is not an issue for the teachers. However, incorporating gender-fair alternatives tend to be not part of the priority in planning and in delivering the lessons. The teachers are restricted from using gender sensitive language because

of the nature of the topic/lesson. The terms are not connected to the subject and they prioritize the learning of students about the subject over being gender sensitive. Also, the terms are not the vocabulary of the students. If the gender-fair alternatives are used, the students may not understand it. Moreover, the use of proper nouns instead of general terms is mostly observed. And, these are terms that do not have gender sensitive alternative based on the book of Kintanar.

1. Know what the teachers use as well as what the students understand.
2. Distribute the list that Kintanar reflected in her book.
3. Include in the faculty development plan the seminar on the awareness of these gender-fair language.
4. Be cautious by applying the rules on various correspondence, signages, and even to verbal communication.
5. Allow oneself to be corrected.
6. GAD Focal person per department may audit instructional materials and examination papers if they use gender-fair language and gender-fair representations.
7. It is only once the teachers are gender sensitive in the language that students can also be trained with it

### Synthesis



Figure 1. Synthesis of the Study

In teaching, often times teachers use their speech mechanism to impart lessons to his students. But studies shows that this mechanism can also create division by becoming bias to a certain gender. It solving such, teachers have to use gender-fair language in teaching.

The use of the gender-fair language is not only on the discussion but on the entire teaching and learning process. It is not only concerns on the verbal aspect of it but also the other aspects such as on motivation, discussion, performance task of students, assessment, and assignments.

However, challenges may be pressing like of student's ability, finding the ideal translation, brevity, and pertinence.

With such, capability training and other strategies to further equipped teachers with the gender-fair language.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, the teachers of the Laboratory High School are familiar with the gender-fair language but they sometimes use them in various areas of teaching such as in motivation, discussion, performance task, assessment, and assignment due to the topic pertinence and student ability.

It is therefore recommended to conduct wide dissemination of the gender- fair language. A validated and well-crafted pamphlet may be used to further equip the faculty members on the application of this gender-fair language in various subjects and lessons as its applicability to the students' level of comprehension. Also, using of gender-fair language should not be confined with what is on the list of Kintanar. The department may form a committee to conduct audit on the language used in the textbooks and reference materials. Equal representations on texts should be assured. Various ways can be taken into consideration, aside from the delivery of the lessons like on test papers and seatworks.

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