# Promoting Gender Equality in the Classroom: Teachers' Challenges and Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

The study determined the challenges and strategies for promoting gender equality in tertiary education. From interviewing eight participants utilising a validated researcher-made questionnaire, the study revealed that bullying, discrimination, respect for one's gender preference, and lack of gender awareness were the challenges evident in gender equality promotion. Gender inequality exists in tertiary education. Although several instructional methods, including cooperative learning, storytelling, lecture and small group discussion, debate, and film shows, were utilised to promote gender equality, such gender inequality can still be seen in students' levels of knowledge and conduct. In this aspect, there is a need for the university to have a concrete system-wide GAD framework, which will institutionalise the level of gender, thereby mainstreaming the tri-focal functions of the university. Seminars or talks on gender-related laws may be conducted. Schools should ensure that facilities like comfort rooms and classrooms are gender-sensitive.

**Keywords:** Gender and Development, teachers' challenges and strategies, promoting gender equality

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender disparities can be emphasised or minimised in schools (Morawski, 2014). The school is where students spend a large amount of their time and socialisation occurs. Teachers and classmates are sources of learning about children's gender differences, attitudes, and behaviours.

The Philippines is committed to incorporating gender equality in its educational system's principles, objectives, and processes. As one of the signatories of the international laws, including the current global action plans, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Moreover, the country also backs the 2025 ASEAN Socio-cultural Community Blueprint (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016), which envisages a functional, inclusive ASEAN that works towards achieving gender equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination. These goals underscore the influence of education as a social agency in addressing issues of inequality, which continues to exist globally despite extensive national and international measures that have been taken towards gender equality. According to Spitz and Huber, 1980 (in Tatar and Emmanuel, 2013), these disparities are brought about by gender role norms that are no longer acceptable in modern culture.

Mägi, Biin, Trasberg, and Kruus (n.d.) stated that education is one of the central institutions that should be looked into to advance gender equality and equal opportunity. It is an effective method for altering society's perceptions and empowering the following generation. UNESCO (2009) highlighted that there continues to be widespread gender bias in school textbooks and curricula using stereotypical imagery or language. In schools where formal knowledge is dispensed, stereotypical roles for both sexes are unconsciously taught and learned by the students. Moreover, an online discussion on gender sponsored by UNESCO reveals that teachers significantly impact whether harmful gender stereotypes are upheld or challenged in the classroom. Participants stated that by routinely asking for boys rather than girls or designating classroom activities along traditional lines, like having girls clean, teachers frequently unintentionally promote divides between boys and girls in school. Furthermore, the UNESCO report on Gender and Empowerment Measure (GEM) by Kate Redman indicated that less than 15% of countries include phrases like "gender empowerment" or "gender-sensitive" in their curricula. While half mention "gender equality," indicating that gender bias is still a severe issue.

Additionally, Ifegbesan's (2010) research revealed that the educational system promotes traditional ideas on gender stereotypes and traditional gender norms. Most teachers engage in gender-stigmatising behaviours in the classroom and subscribe to gender stereotypes. Teachers deny harbouring any gender preconceptions that they are not aware of or supporting them.

Memorandum No. 1, series 2015, establishing the Policies and Guidelines on Gender and Development in the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) per its Gender and

Development (GAD) directive under the 1987 Philippine Constitution; Republic Act (RA) No. 9710, also known as the Magna Carta of Women (MCW); the Philippines' adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issued CMO in response to this global concern. CHED oversees the institutionalisation of the necessary standards, guidelines, and policies to strengthen internal capabilities and those of clients and stakeholders in CHED's efforts to mainstream gender and development (GAD) in the different facets of higher education. The integration of the principles of gender and equality in the trilogy functions of higher education: (1) curriculum development, (2) gender-responsive research programs and (3) gender-responsive extension programs.

This qualitative research examined how gender stereotypes are upheld in the classroom and discovered how a group of dedicated teachers identify and dismantle conventional gender norms and stereotypes. Additionally, it looked at how students interact with one another and how teachers dispel prejudices to maintain student progress and well-being. It is helpful to look into how teachers practice gender sensitivity, specifically in the general courses/subjects in college. It is on these grounds that educational practice is examined if it is responding to the global and national campaign for gender equality, and finally, to investigate the impact of gender norms on schooling. Additionally, a school that offers courses in teacher education must develop a plan to train future educators to be responsible for their preparation in all teaching areas, including gender-sensitive methods.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW
### 2.1. Gender Stereotyping and the Teaching Practice

People are shaped by their social surroundings beginning at a young age. Children who watch television regularly substantially impact their physical and cognitive development (Gottschalk, 2019). These impacts only grow stronger when they begin attending school. As they develop peer relationships and access academic information, they also start to develop the most crucial relationship, that is, with their teachers. Grossman (2004) emphasised that while female teachers utilise a style that is more likely to meet the requirements of girls, male teachers typically manage their classes in ways that match males' learning and behaviour types.

In Ifegbesan's (2010) study on gender stereotypes in society, over half of the respondents (49%) made an affirmative decision, 27% made a negative one, and 24% indicated they were undecided. Additionally, respondents mentioned the following methods or initiatives that educators could employ to decrease gender stereotypes, to wit:

1. Teachers should always utilise gender-neutral vocabulary in the classroom. Teachers should promote constructive sex-based competition. Boys and girls should sit together in a school with mixed gender. Boys and girls should have equal opportunities to participate in school activities;
2. In the teaching-learning process, instructional materials that oppose gender equality should be avoided;
3. The government should develop policies to incorporate gender issues into school curricula; and
4. Laws should be passed banning cultural practices that promote prejudice and gender stereotypes. Teachers ought to encourage healthy sex-based competitiveness.

According to Jung and Chung's (2006) research on Korean classroom instruction, male students had more opportunities than female students to interact with teachers in all types of answers, whether they were called on by teachers or called out on their own. Additionally, they noticed that the few girls who raised their hands waited patiently for their opportunity to speak instead of shouting as the boys did.

Male students asked questions significantly more frequently than female students, and they also frequently actively reacted to queries posed by teachers. Furthermore, it took much work to find instructors that actively pushed female students to participate in class.

Furthermore, curricular materials were found to be based on patriarchal gender role stereotypes when employed by instructors, according to Jung and Chung's (2006) assessment of their use. For instance, a science video that portrayed boys constructing and flying a rubber band-powered model plane as "Players" while the girls supporting the model plane as "Assistants" reinforced conventional gender roles. Additionally, a cartoon movie implies that housework interferes with a man's ability to do his job well.

According to Aina and Cameroon (2011), teachers' inherent attitudes may perpetuate unfair stereotypes and discriminatory classroom procedures. When conventional teachers applauded girls for their looks, haircuts, neatness, and helpfulness, they typically reinforced gender-stereotyped habits. They claimed that the school environment could influence fundamental social ideas like gender and how young children view themselves and others.

In contrast, they admired boys for their stature, strength, athletic prowess, and academic accomplishments. According to Chick, Heilman-Houser & Hunter (2002), these female students were addressed as "honey" and "sweetie", whereas the male students were addressed as "you guys". An educator's ingrained prejudice may unintentionally result in biased classroom procedures and perpetuate unjust preconceptions. For instance, one

group of educators believed that since girls were passive learners, they were more "teachable" than boys (Erden & Wolfgang, 2004). They concluded that gender stereotypes influenced interactions of this nature.

### 2.2. Gender-Sensitive Classroom Environment

The Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (2007) stated that a high-quality education depends on gender equality in the classroom. Students will be inspired to attend class and enjoy their time in it if schools adopt top-notch gender-equitable curricula and teaching methods. According to Gosselin (2007), kids may suffer if instructors' activities are not intentional and do not come from an environment of equity. One strategy to challenge gender norms is allowing students of different sexes to collaborate, especially in primary school when children prefer to choose friends and playmates.

To prevent this, teachers should build a mixed-gender group that promotes successful cross-gender teamwork. This strategy enables kids to learn new words, do desired behaviours, and contribute to co-creating non-traditional gender roles.

Securing a gender-sensitive classroom does not only revolve around the control of the classroom teacher or the members of the academic community. The Scottish Executive Social Research (2006) made clear that the involvement of parents in gender-related issues contributes to the success of gender initiatives. Schools must emphasise the importance of parental involvement since parents are an essential component of all programs and are responsible for the success of each project. Parents were frequently explicitly singled out, particularly those fathers who support their son's literacy and reading development.

Sellnow (n.d.) contends that to promote gender equality in the classroom, teachers must involve all students in all activities. By working together in groups of two to five students to achieve objectives, students may begin to respect diverse perspectives and approaches to a topic, case study, or issue. The prejudices that men dominate discussions while women speak more gently or that she is self-effacing while he is a poor listener can be stopped by including all students. If teachers want to engage every student, they must get to know them.

In order to promote a gender-equal environment, it is also crucial that students are acquainted with one another and address one another by name. For instance, if changing the language of a true-or-false question will make the question more straightforward for students to understand, this may be allowed. By putting concepts into practice, teachers may show students that they value different points of view and ways of knowing while also inspiring them to learn throughout their lives.

According to Pearson, Turner, and Todd-Mancillas (1991) in Snow (n.d.), it is critical to confront insults directed at individuals of any sex since to do otherwise is to deny both their presence and how harmful they are. Pearson's group recommended encouraging respect for all pupils, regardless of gender. They emphasised that to promote parity. Teachers must give both male and female students prompt, accurate positive or negative feedback. Teachers should offer both male and female students the same targeted feedback and motivation to overcome their challenges.

To give young girls excellent role models, teachers might also expand the curriculum to include topics about powerful women. In every academic subject, significant accomplishments have been made by both men and women. Teachers should broaden the curriculum to include lessons on the virtues of individuals of both genders.

### 2.3. Gender and Student Achievement

Gender disparity is evident in every facet of education. Much emphasis has been paid to the widening gap between the average educational achievement of men and women. The results of several kinds of research on gender inequalities in academic achievement among students have varied. While some of these studies indicated that male students fared better than their female counterparts, some indicated the opposite. Others discovered little to no difference between the genders.

According to Khwaileh and Zaza (2010), female students perform better academically than male students at the high school and college levels. Similarly, Parajuli and Thapa (2017) found that female students outperformed male pupils in academic performance. Additionally, there were notable academic achievement gaps between the sexes. However, Wangu (2014) claimed that male pupils outperform their female counterparts in academic performance.

In Social Studies, there was a significant interaction between the effects of treatment and gender on students' academic achievement (Dania, 2014). There was no discernible difference in the academic performance of Science students, according to Agbaje and Alake (2014). The student's academic performance also showed little gender differences (Goni et al., 2015). Male students fared slightly better than female students, although the difference was minor, according to Adigun et al. (2015).

Musa, Dauda, and Umar (2016) found no gender differences in math proficiency but that males significantly outperformed girls in academic performance and English language proficiency. Additionally, male students' learning goal orientation was significantly influenced by their gender, whereas female students were not.

## 2.4. Gender and the Teacher in the Classroom

The formation of societal gender standards in the classroom depends heavily on the teaching philosophies of the teachers as well as their spoken and nonverbal communication. Students may suffer if a teacher makes judgments without deliberately and from an equity-based approach. One way to combat gender stereotypes is to allow students of different genders to work together, especially in elementary school, when children are more prone to choose playmates and friends based on gender. Boys and girls can be mixed in group projects by teachers to foster successful intergender working relationships. To counteract this inclination, students might use this interaction to explore co-created novel terms, behaviours, and gender roles (Grosslin, 2007). Thus, a person's behaviour is significantly influenced by the educational philosophy of the teacher, which can either support or refute widely held gender stereotypes.

When challenging gender norms, it is crucial to recognise the presence of female teachers at the elementary and junior levels and consider whether this impacts the student's academic performance. Male pupils perform worse academically than female students because there are fewer male teachers than female teachers (Bricheno & Thornton, 2002). Students need both male and female energy, according to Cushman (2010), which can reinforce gender norms rather than question them.

The wisest course of action is not to add more male teachers to the classroom to compensate for the gender imbalance, especially if those teachers are unsuitable and have the wrong hires. The assumption that a male teacher must provide male students "hands-on stuff" in the classroom to "build rapport" and the need to find a masculine teacher to appeal to a boy's sense of authority all contribute to gender stereotypes. Achievement discrepancies are more frequently brought on by socially established gender stereotypes than by a dearth of masculinity-affirming male role models.

Despite being appealing in its clean packaging, the idea that children need both masculinity and femininity has yet to be supported by scientific studies and cannot be soon. For a meaningful education, the student-teacher connection and the teaching methods matter more than the teacher.

## Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine teachers' perspectives of gender and equality in the classroom using different teaching strategies.

Specifically, this study sought to:

1. ascertain teachers' perspectives of gender and gender equality;
2. identify challenges in promoting gender equality in the classroom, and
3. ascertain different teaching strategies teachers utilise to address gender issues and promote gender equality among students.

## Conceptual Framework

The methods of this investigation were anchored on two theories: The theory of Hidden Curriculum and the Theory of Gender Schema. Moreover, the Conceptual Gender Analysis Model was employed to analyse teachers' challenges and strategies in promoting gender equality in the classroom.

Figure 1 shows that the model was formulated using the concept of "gender analysis". The Council for Global Development Research (2012) elaborated on this framework, stating that it would enable research to be conducted while taking into account gender differences, the nature of men's and women's relationships, and their various social realities, expectations for life, and economic circumstances as borrowed from the gender-based analysis. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) explained that gender analysis could be integral to understanding the gender inequalities that currently exist and possible routes to removing and reducing them. Employing gender analysis in education, specifically in classroom practices using methodological triangulation, was utilised to explore gender stereotyping in the classroom.
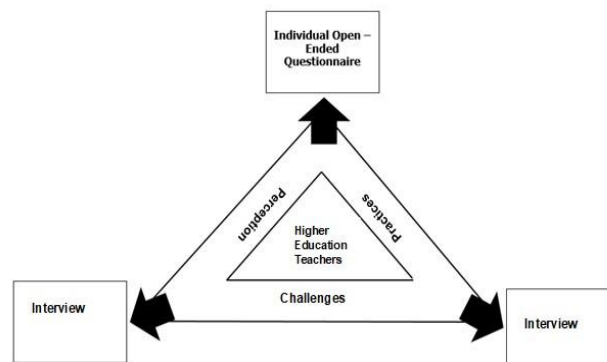
**Fig.1:Gender Analysis on Teacher Perception, Challenges, and Practices**

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research Design

The study used a narrative inquiry methodology and an exploratory qualitative method.

### 3.2. Participants of the Study

Eight (8) college professors were the study participants whose teaching experience ranged from 10 to 35 years. They handled general and professional subjects in education and significant subjects in hospitality management, information technology, and industrial technology.

### 3.3. The Instrument

The researchers interviewed the participants using a validated researcher-made interview guide. The first part of the interview guide contained questions about the demographics of the teachers (e.g. sex, length of service, area of specialisation, subjects being taught, and gender-related pieces of training). The second part elicited data about their definition of gender and gender equality, experiences on gender issues or challenges encountered in promoting gender equality, and how it affects students' learning. Moreover, it included strategies they utilised to address gender equality issues among students and support and enabling mechanisms they need to help facilitate a more gender-sensitive and safe environment.

### 3.4. Sampling Technique

Primarily, the interview is the primary method to collect data. The convenience of the participant was considered in the conduct of the interview. The participants were chosen by convenient sampling.

### 3.5. Data Gathering Procedure

The study began with identifying the participants and obtaining their consent. After obtaining the participants' consent, the researcher personally explained the study objectives and assured the participants of the confidentiality of disclosed information. The researchers interviewed the participants using a validated researcher-made interview guide. The first part of the interview guide contained questions regarding teachers' demographic characteristics (e.g. sex, years of service, area of specialisation and subjects being taught, and gender-related pieces of training). The second part elicited data about their definition of gender and gender equality, experiences on gender issues or challenges encountered in promoting gender equality, and how it affects students' learning. Moreover, it included strategies they utilised to address gender equality issues among students and support and enabling mechanisms they need to help facilitate a more gender-sensitive and safe environment.

The researchers interviewed the participants individually. The individual interview was digitally recorded on a cell phone. The interview was also noted down to document any unspoken signal perceived as relevant to this study. Since the study was conducted during the pandemic, health protocols were observed during the interview. After the data transcription, each participant was met individually to discuss and validate the interview results.

The data collected were analysed through categorisation strategies. All responses were coded to guide the researchers in categorising the data. The process entails focusing on the participants' common responses and the repetition of dialogues expressed by the latter. Following the coding, the pattern was categorised based on the ordinary meanings of the codes. Formulate meanings as developed in gender equality's promotion in the classroom as experienced by the participants in each of the study's objectives, and a theme was created.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Despite equal educational opportunities for men and women, issues of gender disparity still exist in the educational setting. Teachers are said to be vital in promoting gender equality in education. This part discusses themes from the collective responses: teachers' perspective and understanding of gender and gender equality, gender issues, and challenges.

### 4.1. Teachers' perspective of gender and gender equality

Gender equality refers to providing men and women with the same opportunities, rights, advantages, and services regardless of sexual preference. It encompasses all the social characteristics, behaviours, attributes, and roles of men and women in society. Since most of the participants have attended several gender-related training pieces, they know that gender is beyond being male or female. The findings in the study show the following gender issues and challenges that faculty members encounter in promoting gender equality in class.

### 4.2. Gender Issues and Challenges

It is evident in the results that transgender commonly experiences bullying and discrimination inside the classroom. Participants mentioned that transgender people are frequently bullied by their classmates. Some students are still stereotyped and not so open with them. They discriminate against them because of different

views regarding sexual orientation. They tease their classmates, which frequently results in bullying arguments. Some cannot tolerate the behaviour of their gay or lesbian classmates.

Moreover, another issue is mentioned regarding work requirements like height and physical attributes required by industries, specifically in the hospitality management area. It affects students' morale, disappoints them, and lowers their self-esteem. Another participant shared that male students in his class are pretty aggressive in a way that it affects classroom discipline. Female students are quite noisy but can be handled easily compared to males. For those with other sexual orientations, "males behaving like a "female" usually can promote classroom discussion compared to their other counterparts ", and females behaving like a male", which are usually reserved.

### 4.3. Respect for one's gender preference
Respect for one's gender preference is a common problem encountered by teachers. It is manifested in students' attitudes and behaviours. Some students lack acceptance of each other's differences. They become hostile towards others which makes transgender withdraw and refuse to join group activities. In addition, disrespectful views and intolerant behaviours with the opposite and other sexual orientations. As cited by one of the participants, "Frequently transgender people are lacking in attention (Kulang Sa Pansin), and they tend to act differently just to be recognised or seen either by the teacher or their classmates. Such act sometimes disrupts the class, and teacher patience is tested."

### 4.4. Level of gender awareness
Lack of knowledge, low level of gender awareness, and acceptance of the realities and positions of both men and women and their different needs, and competencies, lead to more significant issues of sex, gender stereotyping, and other hidden forms of discrimination. This situation is very much evident among students in the lower years. Further, although some students have embraced gender equality, they still have issues with their gay classmates.

### 4.5. Strategies to promote gender equality
Since gender issues and concerns are comprehensive and cut across various disciplines, the study's findings show that faculty members employed various strategies in gender equality promotion and addressing gender issues in the classroom.

### 4.6. Encouragement and Giving Equal Opportunity
Students are encouraged and given equal opportunity to perform well whatever is asked of them regardless of their gender preference. They are treated fairly and are given the same tasks, activities, and responsibilities regardless of gender. As mentioned by a participant, "I do it by not minding much or overemphasising both sex and gender roles. I also ensure that both males and females receive the same treatment." Furthermore, each one is given a chance to be heard as they express their views/opinions and feelings regarding the topic being discussed. One participant said, "I do not discriminate against anyone, especially transgender people. I avoid biased or discriminating words. I am careful with dealing with my students, such that I will not be able to touch the sensitivities of those whose experiences are not wholesome."

### 4.7. Engaging strategies and activities
Cooperative learning, storytelling, lecture discussion, small-group talks, debate, and film shows are among the techniques used by professors. In cooperative learning, boys and girls are mixed during group performances, like general education subjects and laboratory classes. Students are encouraged to participate in activities, and everyone is given a chance to become a leader, recognising their capabilities. By giving equal opportunities, it promotes harmonious relationships among them. Another is storytelling, wherein faculty members discussed stories and pinpointed the need for equality in terms of roles and work assignments and to empower women in vulnerable situations. Others employed lecture discussions and small group discussions. Letting students understand and share their views on the changing roles in this modern time (mothers working to earn a living while the father stays at home to cook or take care of the kids) in a Social Dimension of Education subject. Debate, as another strategy used in a social science class, was done through labour and employment topics, like discrimination of women and subordination of women in the labour sector.

Finally, to create a fairer view of gender stereotypes and socialisation of boys and girls, faculty allow students to view selected films (film showing), which provide concrete evidence in understanding the difference between men and women and the differing roles performed by them.

### 4.8. Ignoring one's behaviour

One participant from the Technology department verbalised that he never remembered doing gender equality promotion with great consciousness. He only sees to it that respect is observed. There are instances that gay students are subjects of laughter because they are fond of creating something that will entertain their classmates. In this case, instead of considering that as an issue of discipline, he ignored the behaviour. Meaning he neither supports nor is against the displayed behaviour. He just used his knowledge in psychology that behaviour can be weakened when ignored rather than supporting it. This approach has contributed to ensuring that males and females can receive a gender-equitable education. Thus, it builds a culture of respect and fairness and promotes harmonious relationships among students.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Education encompasses more than just knowledge acquisition. It plays a significant part in the process of socialisation and the dissemination of standards and ideals like gender equality. As such, education can considerably impact attitudes about gender equality, either positively or negatively. Although most faculty members have participated in gender pieces of training, they still have observed gender inequality issues in their classes or among their students. Gender inequality exists in tertiary education. While a variety of teaching strategies are used in gender equality promotion, ranging from cooperative learning, storytelling, lecture, small group discussion, debate, and film showing, such inequality in gender can be traced to the level of knowledge and behaviour of students.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for the university to provide a concrete system-wide GAD framework. This framework will institutionalise the level of gender mainstreaming in the tri-focal functions of the university. This platform will trickle down to reviewing how gender is mainstreamed in the curriculum, like using gender-fair language in the syllabi and incorporating gender topics in general, professional subjects, and major courses. More so is the development of gender-sensitive learning materials. It articulates that men and women must be provided with equal opportunities and they can receive a gender-equitable Furthermore, incorporating gender in research and extension activities. From there, it will increase the awareness of faculty and, most importantly, the students. Seminars or talks on gender-related laws such as the Magna Carta of Women, Anti-Violence against Women and their Children Act, Anti-Sexual Harassment, and the newly approved law on Safe Spaces Act or RA 11313 may be conducted. Also, the school should ensure that facilities like comfort rooms and classrooms are gender-sensitive.

Combining the strong support of teachers, the home, and the community is a solid ground to create a gender-sensitive and safe environment. Moreover, raising gender awareness among the stakeholders is equally important. The study reinforced the mandate of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum No.1 series of 2015, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Beijing Platform for Action, for gender mainstreaming in education.

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