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Gender-Responsive Teaching Practices and Inclusive Classroom Experiences Among Junior High School Teachers in Coastal Secondary Schools of Aurora

¹ Raquel G. Benavidez

Northeastern College, Santiago City

Dibacong National High School

Correspondence: raquel.benavidez@deped.gov.ph

Abstract

Gender-responsive and inclusive education has become an essential component of equitable and learner-centered teaching in contemporary educational systems. This qualitative study explored the gender-responsive teaching practices and inclusive classroom experiences of junior high school teachers in coastal secondary schools of Aurora. Utilizing a phenomenological qualitative research design, the study investigated how teachers implement gender-responsive pedagogies, foster inclusive classroom environments, and address gender-related challenges within diverse educational contexts. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis involving fifteen purposively selected junior high school teachers from coastal public secondary schools. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework was employed in analyzing the collected data. Findings revealed five major themes: (1) Gender Sensitivity and Respect as Foundations of Inclusive Classroom Culture; (2) Learner-Centered and Equitable Pedagogical Practices; (3) Classroom Inclusion Through Participation, Representation, and Safe Learning Spaces; (4) Challenges in Addressing Gender Biases, Stereotypes, and Socio-Cultural Realities; and (5) Teacher Advocacy, Professional Reflection, and Commitment to Inclusive Education. Participants emphasized the importance of respectful communication, equitable participation, gender-fair instructional materials, and emotionally safe classrooms in promoting inclusivity and learner engagement. Teachers also highlighted the significance of recognizing learners' diverse identities, backgrounds, and social experiences in classroom instruction. However, participants encountered challenges related to entrenched gender stereotypes, limited gender-sensitivity training, socio-cultural expectations, and varying learner attitudes toward inclusivity. Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated adaptability, empathy, and professional commitment in fostering gender-responsive and inclusive educational environments. The study concludes that effective gender-responsive teaching requires sustained teacher capacity-building, inclusive school policies, culturally responsive pedagogies, and institutional support systems that promote equity and learner dignity. Findings provide implications for inclusive education policy, teacher professional development, curriculum enhancement, and gender-responsive educational practices in secondary education.

Keywords: *gender-responsive teaching, inclusive education, classroom experiences, junior high school, gender sensitivity, qualitative research, Philippines*



1. Introduction

Education plays a vital role in promoting equity, social inclusion, and respect for diversity within democratic societies. In contemporary educational systems, schools are expected not only to facilitate academic learning but also to create inclusive environments where learners feel respected, valued, safe, and empowered regardless of gender, identity, socio-economic background, or cultural affiliation. Gender-responsive teaching has therefore emerged as an important educational approach that promotes equitable learning opportunities, gender sensitivity, and inclusive classroom participation.

Gender-responsive education recognizes that learners experience schooling differently based on social, cultural, and gender-related realities. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that instructional practices, classroom interactions, learning materials, and school environments promote fairness, inclusion, and respect for diversity. Gender-responsive teaching involves the use of inclusive language, equitable participation strategies, non-discriminatory classroom management, culturally sensitive instruction, and gender-fair learning opportunities.

In the Philippine educational context, the Department of Education actively promotes Gender and Development (GAD) programs and inclusive education policies aimed at eliminating gender discrimination, strengthening learner protection, and promoting inclusive school environments. Public schools are encouraged to integrate gender-sensitive practices into curriculum implementation, classroom instruction, and learner engagement activities. However, despite these policy initiatives, teachers continue to encounter challenges in translating gender-responsive principles into actual classroom practices, particularly within socio-culturally diverse and geographically isolated communities.

Coastal secondary schools in Aurora present unique educational realities shaped by local cultural traditions, socio-economic conditions, environmental challenges, and diverse learner experiences. Teachers in these schools navigate classroom environments where traditional gender expectations, community beliefs, and varying learner backgrounds may influence classroom participation, learner interaction, and educational inclusion. Consequently, understanding teachers' lived experiences and pedagogical practices related to gender-responsive education is essential in examining how inclusivity is promoted within these contexts.

Although existing literature highlights the importance of gender-responsive pedagogy and inclusive education, limited qualitative studies have explored teachers' classroom experiences and instructional practices in coastal Philippine secondary schools. Most studies focus on policy implementation and quantitative educational outcomes rather than the lived experiences and professional reflections of teachers directly implementing inclusive and gender-sensitive pedagogies.

Thus, this study explored the gender-responsive teaching practices and inclusive classroom experiences among junior high school teachers in coastal secondary schools of Aurora. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do junior high school teachers describe their experiences in implementing gender-responsive teaching practices?

2. What pedagogical approaches and classroom strategies do teachers utilize to promote inclusivity and gender sensitivity?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter in implementing gender-responsive and inclusive classroom practices?
4. How do teachers address gender-related issues and diverse learner needs within classroom instruction?
5. What insights may be drawn regarding effective implementation of inclusive and gender-responsive education in secondary schools?

The findings of the study may contribute to inclusive education initiatives, teacher professional development programs, curriculum enhancement, and policy implementation related to gender-responsive pedagogy in Philippine secondary education.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Gender-Responsive Education and Inclusive Pedagogy

Gender-responsive education refers to teaching practices and educational approaches that recognize and address learners' diverse gender-related experiences, needs, and identities while promoting fairness, inclusion, and respect. According to UNESCO (2021), gender-responsive pedagogy ensures equitable participation, eliminates discriminatory practices, and supports inclusive learning environments for all learners.

Inclusive pedagogy further emphasizes the importance of creating classroom environments where diversity is respected and all learners are given equal opportunities to participate and succeed. According to Mel Ainscow, inclusive education requires educational systems to address barriers to participation and create supportive learning environments responsive to learner diversity.

2.2 Gender Sensitivity in Classroom Instruction

Teachers play an important role in shaping classroom culture and learner interaction. Gender-sensitive teaching practices involve equitable classroom participation, inclusive communication, non-discriminatory instructional materials, and respectful teacher-learner relationships.

According to Geneva Gay, culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies recognize learners' identities, experiences, and social realities as important components of meaningful instruction. Gender-responsive teaching therefore extends beyond curriculum content and includes classroom interaction patterns, behavioral expectations, and emotional support systems.

2.3 Sociocultural Influences on Gender and Education

Sociocultural factors significantly influence learners' educational experiences and perceptions regarding gender roles. Traditional gender expectations within communities may affect classroom participation, confidence, leadership opportunities, and learner interaction.

According to Lev Vygotsky, learning and development are socially mediated processes shaped by cultural interaction and environmental experiences. Teachers therefore function as social facilitators who help create inclusive and equitable classroom cultures.

2.4 Challenges in Implementing Gender-Responsive Education

Despite policy support for gender inclusion, teachers often encounter challenges related to limited training, socio-cultural resistance, unconscious gender bias, and insufficient instructional resources. According to Unterhalter (2020), educational inclusion requires both structural and pedagogical transformation to address deeply rooted inequalities and discriminatory practices.

Teachers in geographically isolated and socio-culturally traditional communities may experience additional difficulties in addressing gender-sensitive topics and promoting inclusive educational practices.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Inclusive Pedagogy Theory proposed by Mel Ainscow, which emphasizes educational practices that promote participation, equity, and inclusion for diverse learners. The study also utilized Sociocultural Theory developed by Lev Vygotsky, highlighting the role of social interaction and cultural context in shaping learning experiences.

These theories guided the interpretation of teachers' gender-responsive instructional practices, classroom inclusion strategies, and learner interaction experiences.

4. Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences, instructional practices, and perceptions of junior high school teachers regarding gender-responsive and inclusive classroom practices. Phenomenology was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gain deeper understanding of teachers' experiences, reflections, and classroom realities within actual educational contexts.

The study was conducted in selected coastal public secondary schools in Aurora. The locale was selected because of its diverse learner populations, coastal community contexts, and implementation of inclusive educational practices within public secondary schools.

The participants consisted of fifteen junior high school teachers selected through purposive sampling. Participants met the following criteria: currently teaching in junior high school, possessing at least three years of teaching experience, actively implementing classroom management and instructional practices related to inclusion and gender sensitivity, and willing to participate in interviews and classroom observations.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans, instructional materials, and classroom management records. The interview guide focused on teachers' experiences in implementing gender-responsive practices, classroom inclusion strategies, learner participation, gender-related concerns, and professional reflections regarding inclusive education.

Ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' perspectives were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and instructional documents were coded and categorized to identify recurring patterns and themes related to gender-responsive teaching and inclusive classroom experiences. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and prolonged engagement within the research setting.

5. Results and Findings

Theme 1: Gender Sensitivity and Respect as Foundations of Inclusive Classroom Culture

Participants emphasized that respect, fairness, and gender sensitivity were essential foundations of inclusive classroom environments. Teachers described the importance of promoting equal treatment and creating emotionally safe learning spaces for all learners.

One participant shared:

"Importante na maramdaman ng lahat ng learners na pantay-pantay silang nirerespeto sa classroom."

Another participant stated:

"Tinitiyak naming walang discrimination at lahat may pagkakataong makilahok."

Teachers highlighted the use of inclusive language, respectful classroom interaction, and non-discriminatory practices in promoting positive learner relationships and participation.

These findings align with UNESCO (2021), which emphasized that gender-responsive classrooms promote learner dignity, participation, and emotional safety.

Theme 2: Learner-Centered and Equitable Pedagogical Practices

Participants described utilizing learner-centered instructional strategies that encourage equitable participation, collaboration, and inclusive engagement among learners.

One participant explained:

"Sinisigurado naming lahat may chance magsalita at magparticipate sa activities."

Another teacher remarked:

"Ginagamit namin ang group activities para matutong makisama at magrespeto sa iba."

Teachers implemented collaborative learning, differentiated instruction, participatory classroom discussions, and flexible assessment practices to address learners' diverse needs and backgrounds.

These findings support the observations of Gay (2018), who emphasized that inclusive and culturally responsive teaching promotes equitable learner participation and meaningful engagement.

Theme 3: Classroom Inclusion Through Participation, Representation, and Safe Learning Spaces

Participants emphasized the importance of creating safe and welcoming classroom environments where learners feel comfortable expressing themselves and participating in class activities.

One participant shared:

“Kapag safe at supportive ang classroom, mas confident ang learners na mag-express ng sarili nila.”

Another participant stated:

“Importante ring makita nila ang representation at acceptance sa classroom.”

Teachers encouraged respectful communication, empathy, peer support, and collaborative interaction among learners to strengthen classroom inclusion and belongingness.

These findings align with Ainscow’s Inclusive Pedagogy Theory, which emphasizes participation, learner belongingness, and equitable educational experiences.

Theme 4: Challenges in Addressing Gender Biases, Stereotypes, and Socio-Cultural Realities

Despite positive implementation efforts, participants encountered challenges related to traditional gender stereotypes, cultural expectations, learner attitudes, and limited gender-sensitivity training.

One participant explained:

“May mga learners pa ring may traditional beliefs tungkol sa gender roles.”

Another teacher shared:

“Minsan mahirap i-address ang stereotypes dahil influenced din ng community beliefs.”

Teachers also described concerns regarding unconscious classroom biases, insensitive remarks among learners, and limited institutional resources related to gender-responsive education.

These findings support Unterhalter (2020), who emphasized that socio-cultural norms and institutional limitations continue to influence educational inclusion and gender equity efforts.

Theme 5: Teacher Advocacy, Professional Reflection, and Commitment to Inclusive Education

Participants demonstrated commitment, empathy, and advocacy in promoting inclusive and gender-responsive classroom practices despite contextual challenges.

One participant stated:

“Bilang teacher, responsibilidad naming siguraduhing inclusive ang classroom environment.”

Another participant remarked:

“Patuloy kaming natututo kung paano maging mas gender-sensitive at inclusive sa pagtuturo.”

Teachers highlighted the importance of professional reflection, continuous learning, and self-awareness in improving inclusive teaching practices and classroom relationships.

These findings demonstrate that teachers function not only as instructional facilitators but also as advocates of equity, inclusion, and learner dignity within educational environments.

6. Discussion

The findings revealed that gender-responsive and inclusive classroom practices significantly contribute to positive learner participation, emotional safety, collaborative interaction, and respectful classroom culture. Teachers implemented learner-centered and equitable pedagogical strategies that promoted inclusivity, empathy, and active engagement among junior high school learners.

The study further highlighted that inclusive education extends beyond instructional strategies and involves emotionally supportive environments, respectful communication, and recognition of learners' diverse identities and experiences. Consistent with sociocultural theory, classroom inclusion is shaped by social interaction, cultural context, and collaborative participation.

However, participants also encountered challenges related to traditional gender expectations, cultural stereotypes, limited training opportunities, and institutional constraints affecting gender-responsive teaching implementation. These realities emphasize the need for sustained teacher capacity-building and institutional support systems promoting inclusive education.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated strong professional commitment and advocacy for equitable and inclusive classroom practices. Their experiences underscore the important role of educators in promoting learner dignity, fairness, and social inclusion within secondary school education.

7. Conclusion

The study revealed that junior high school teachers in coastal secondary schools of Aurora implement gender-responsive and inclusive classroom practices through equitable participation strategies, respectful communication, collaborative learning, and emotionally supportive classroom environments.

Teachers emphasized that inclusive pedagogies strengthen learner confidence, classroom engagement, social interaction, and emotional safety. However, participants also encountered challenges related to gender stereotypes, socio-cultural expectations, limited training opportunities, and classroom diversity.

Despite these challenges, teachers demonstrated adaptability, empathy, and professional commitment in fostering inclusive educational environments that promote fairness, participation, and respect for diversity. The findings further suggest that effective gender-responsive teaching requires continuous professional development, supportive educational policies, and collaborative institutional initiatives promoting equity and inclusion.

8. Implications of the Study

The findings imply the need for strengthened teacher professional development programs focusing on gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive classroom management, culturally responsive teaching, and learner diversity.

Educational institutions and policymakers may develop inclusive educational policies, gender-sensitive instructional resources, and school-based support systems that promote equitable learning environments.

School administrators may also encourage collaborative learning communities and gender-sensitivity initiatives that strengthen inclusive educational practices among teachers and learners.

Future studies may further explore learners' perspectives, school leadership practices, and comparative inclusive education experiences across different educational and cultural contexts.

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