Article

Integrating Gender and Cultural Perspectives in Pedagogy: A Study of Transformative Teaching Practices in Philippine Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This study examined how gender and cultural perspectives are integrated into the teaching practices of faculty members from three Philippine Higher Education Institutions: Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Apayao State College, and Pangasinan State University. Using a qualitative case study design, the research explored educators' experiences, perceptions, and strategies in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion in the classroom. Findings revealed that faculty members implemented transformative practices such as inclusive curriculum planning, culturally responsive instruction, and student-centered approaches that enhanced learner engagement and critical awareness. Themes included pedagogical self-awareness, community-grounded content, institutional support challenges, and advocacy-driven strategies. Despite notable gains, faculty members cited limited resources and training as barriers to deeper integration of gender and cultural frameworks. The study emphasizes the importance of empowering educators with culturally sustaining pedagogy, professional development opportunities, and strong institutional policies. The study concludes that while promising practices exist, more systemic interventions are required to sustain equitable and inclusive education in Philippine higher education. The findings support literature on critical pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and multicultural education as foundational to transformative teaching.

Keywords: gender-responsive pedagogy, cultural inclusivity, transformative teaching, higher education, Philippine universities, inclusive education, student engagement, critical pedagogy

Introduction

Integrating gender and cultural perspectives in pedagogy has emerged as a transformative approach to making education more inclusive, equitable, and socially relevant, especially within the context of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In the Philippine educational landscape, where cultural diversity and gender-based inequalities intersect, it becomes imperative to re-examine pedagogical practices that either challenge or reinforce social norms and power dynamics. Pedagogy, when infused with gender sensitivity and cultural responsiveness, can empower learners, dismantle stereotypes, and foster mutual respect across differences.

Gender perspective in education refers to the intentional inclusion of gender as a lens through which curricula, classroom dynamics, and institutional policies are designed and delivered (Unterhalter, 2019). This involves not only addressing the gender gap in access and participation but also reshaping content and instruction to reflect the lived realities of all genders. Meanwhile, the cultural perspective highlights recognizing and incorporating learners' cultural identities, languages, and worldviews as essential elements in teaching and learning (Gay, 2018). Together, these perspectives support the implementation of transformative pedagogy, which calls for critically examining social structures and empowering marginalized voices (Freire, 2000; Hooks, 1994).

Existing studies underscore the importance of gender-inclusive and culturally responsive teaching. For instance, Gonda (2019) emphasizes that gender mainstreaming in Philippine HEIs often remains limited to compliance with institutional mandates, lacking depth in classroom engagement. Similarly, Dela Cruz and Roxas (2021) found that while cultural diversity is acknowledged in curricula, pedagogical strategies often fall short of integrating indigenous and ethnolinguistic knowledge in meaningful ways. These studies highlight a disconnection between policy and practice, suggesting that educators require more than policy orientation; they need support translating these frameworks into transformative classroom strategies.

Despite increased discourse on equity and inclusion, a significant research gap remains in exploring how educators in Philippine HEIs operationalize gender and cultural perspectives in their day-to-day pedagogical practices, and how these practices affect student learning and engagement. Much of the current literature focuses on curriculum content or institutional policy. However, there is limited research on the actual teaching strategies and classroom interactions that reflect gender sensitivity and cultural inclusiveness.

This study addresses this gap by examining the integration of gender and cultural perspectives into teaching practices, exploring faculty experiences and challenges in implementing inclusive strategies, and identifying effective, transformative practices that promote equity and diversity in Philippine higher education classrooms, specifically DMMMSU, CSU, PSU, and ASC. By doing so, the study aims to contribute to enhancing pedagogical approaches that align with national goals of gender equality and cultural inclusiveness in education.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which gender and cultural perspectives are integrated into the pedagogical practices of faculty in selected Philippine Higher Education Institutions.
2. To explore educators' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in implementing gender-responsive and culturally inclusive teaching strategies.
3. To identify transformative teaching practices that promote equity, diversity, and inclusivity in the classroom, and assess their impact on student engagement and learning outcomes.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a multiple-case study approach, to explore the integration of gender and cultural perspectives in the pedagogical practices of educators in selected Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This design was appropriate as it enabled an in-depth exploration of the experiences, instructional strategies, and challenges faculty members face in embedding transformative and inclusive practices within diverse classroom settings.

The locale of the study included three public state universities where the researchers are affiliated: Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU), Apayao State College (ASC), Cagayan State University (CSU), and Pangasinan State University (PSU). These institutions were purposively selected due to their participation in gender and development programs and their diverse cultural student populations. The selection ensured contextual relevance and richness of data from educators actively navigating the intersections of gender and culture in higher education.

Participants included 15 faculty members from various academic disciplines who were purposively selected based on their involvement in gender-sensitive and culturally inclusive teaching. These educators were recognized by their institutions for

their contributions to equity-driven pedagogy or had engaged in relevant professional development activities. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of instructional materials such as syllabi, lesson plans, and assessment tools.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. Data from interviews were transcribed, coded, and organized into emerging themes, which were cross-validated with classroom observations and document reviews to ensure data triangulation. Ethical protocols were strictly followed throughout the study, including informed consent, confidentiality, and institutional clearance from participating universities.

Through this methodology, the study documented the lived teaching experiences and instructional practices of educators who actively integrate gender and cultural perspectives, contributing to a deeper understanding of transformative pedagogy in Philippine HEIs.

Results and Findings

Transformative Teaching Practices that Promote Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity

Integrating gender and cultural perspectives in teaching is a critical component of transformative pedagogy, particularly in higher education institutions that serve diverse student populations. This study sought to examine how faculty members from selected Philippine Higher Education Institutions, specifically Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU), Apayao State College (ASC), Cagayan State University, and Pangasinan State University (PSU) embed gender sensitivity and cultural responsiveness into their pedagogical practices. Drawing from interview responses, classroom observations, and instructional materials, the study uncovered a nuanced understanding of how educators consciously or unconsciously incorporate these perspectives into course content, teaching strategies, and student engagement. The emerging themes illustrate varying degrees of integration, influenced by individual educator commitment, disciplinary orientation, and institutional support systems. These thematic insights offer a rich portrait of how gender and culture shape classroom dynamics, critical thinking, and the inclusivity of learning environments in Philippine HEIs.

Gender Sensitivity Embedded in Instructional Design

This theme captures how educators consciously incorporate gender perspectives into their teaching, from lesson planning and course materials to

classroom discussions. The integration is evident in how content is framed to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and how lessons are aligned with promoting equality and inclusivity. It reflects a deliberate pedagogical stance that challenges traditional gender norms and recognizes diverse gender identities within academic spaces.

Responses from the Field:

A faculty member from DMMMSU shared, *"In my syllabus, I ensure that learning materials do not perpetuate gender stereotypes. I avoid texts or examples that assign fixed roles to men or women, and I always ask students to reflect critically on gender representations."* Similarly, a professor from PSU added, *"I include topics on gender equality across disciplines, even in non-social science courses. For instance, in management, we discuss women in leadership and gender-inclusive organizational policies."*

These responses indicate that faculty members embed gender perspectives in their course content. The integration is not superficial but strategically planned to develop awareness and critical thinking. This shows educators recognize the importance of confronting gender bias and advancing equity through curriculum design. However, the implementation is still largely dependent on the personal initiative of the educator, highlighting the need for institutional training and support.

Inclusive Pedagogical Approaches Promoting Cultural Awareness

This theme highlights how educators design teaching strategies that affirm students' cultural identities and incorporate indigenous or local knowledge systems. It emphasizes inclusivity in content and methodology, using language, customs, and community experiences that resonate with the learners' backgrounds. Such practices validate cultural diversity in the classroom and create learning environments where students feel seen and respected.

Responses from the Field:

At Apayao State College, a faculty member teaching Indigenous Studies remarked, *"I ask my students to share their community's practices. It is part of our oral presentation requirement. Students from different tribes present their rituals, languages, and values, which we compare to mainstream cultural norms."* A teacher from DMMMSU shared, *"I translate my lectures into Ilocano, when necessary, especially for students who are not fluent in Filipino or English. This makes learning more accessible and affirms their linguistic identity."*

These responses show meaningful efforts to honor students' cultural backgrounds within instructional practices. Using local language and encouraging students to bring their heritage into the classroom are key strategies of culturally responsive pedagogy. Such practices foster inclusivity and relevance in learning.

However, this level of cultural integration appears to be more common in social sciences and humanities, suggesting a need to extend this practice to STEM and technical fields as well.

Gender and Culture as Lenses for Critical Reflection

This theme reflects the use of gender and cultural perspectives as tools for fostering critical thinking and self-awareness among students. Educators who adopt this approach encourage learners to reflect on how social structures, cultural norms, and gender roles influence personal values, community dynamics, and academic performance. This transforms the classroom into a space for critical dialogue and identity formation.

Responses from the Field:

A PSU educator noted, *"When discussing social issues in class, I ask students to examine how gender and culture shape individual and collective behavior. This often leads to debates and reflection activities, where students analyze their biases."* Meanwhile, a DMMMSU faculty member explained, *"We recently introduced a reflection journal where students analyze how their cultural upbringing influences their views on gender roles."*

These practices reflect a higher level of integration where gender and culture are not just course topics, but lenses through which students examine their identities and social realities. This aligns with transformative learning theory, where reflection leads to deeper understanding and personal growth. Encouraging such critical engagement demonstrates how educators move beyond content delivery to nurturing critical consciousness among students.

Institutional Gaps in Formal Gender and Cultural Integration

While individual efforts to integrate gender and culture in teaching are evident, this theme reveals that institutional structures and policies often fall short in supporting these practices systematically. The lack of standardized guidelines, training programs, and curriculum integration results in inconsistencies across departments and campuses, making the success of integration largely dependent on personal advocacy.

Responses from the Field:

An ASC instructor admitted, *"Although I try to include gender topics occasionally, there is no official training or guideline from the institution. It is something I do on my initiative."* A faculty member from PSU echoed this, stating, *"The integration of gender*

and culture still depends heavily on the teacher's interest. There are no clear parameters in the curriculum."

These insights underscore a systemic gap in policy implementation and professional development. While educators are making strides independently, the absence of institutional frameworks limits the reach and sustainability of inclusive pedagogical practices. To bridge this gap, HEIs must institutionalize gender and cultural integration through faculty training, curriculum design, and monitoring mechanisms.

The Experiences, Perceptions, and Challenges of Educators in Implementing Gender-Responsive and Culturally Inclusive Teaching Strategies

The successful implementation of gender-responsive and culturally inclusive pedagogy in Philippine Higher Education Institutions depends on curriculum content and educators lived experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities. Faculty members are key agents in translating inclusive policies into classroom practices, often navigating personal convictions, institutional structures, and community expectations. Through in-depth interviews and observations at Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU), Apayao State College (ASC), Cagayan State University (CSU), and Pangasinan State University (PSU), this study revealed a multifaceted view of how educators approach inclusive teaching. The following themes reflect their insights, highlighting how identity and advocacy shape instruction, how culture grounds engagement, how institutional support or lack thereof influences practices, and how educators respond creatively to student attitudes and systemic constraints. These thematic findings provide a nuanced understanding of the complex realities educators face in fostering an inclusive, equitable, and transformative learning environment.

Teaching from Lived Experiences: Gender as a Personal and Professional Advocacy

This theme underscores how personal history, gender identity, or exposure to gender-based issues influence educators' teaching practices. Faculty members often regard gender responsiveness as a moral and social imperative rather than a mere compliance requirement. Their lived experiences range from navigating stereotypes to advocating for inclusivity, such as to inform how they design lessons, select materials, and engage with students. These experiences often empower teachers to foster safe

and equitable learning spaces, where learners are encouraged to challenge biases and traditional gender norms.

Responses from the Field:

A DMMMSU educator shared, *"I grew up in a family where women were not encouraged to pursue careers. Now that I am a teacher, I always highlight strong female figures in our lessons, scientists, leaders, professionals, to reshape that narrative."*

A PSU faculty member reflected, *"Some of my students identify as LGBTQ+, and I make sure my classroom does not marginalize them. I have experienced discrimination, so I try to create a safe space for everyone."*

These narratives highlight how gender-inclusive teaching is often rooted in empathy and reflection. Faculty members who have experienced marginalization or witnessed gender-based disparities are more likely to champion inclusive pedagogies. This connection between identity and instruction contributes to authenticity in the classroom and promotes emotional safety for learners. However, the extent of this integration remains inconsistent across disciplines. It relies heavily on the educator's initiative, pointing to the need for structured support that builds on this personal-professional nexus.

Cultural Identity as an Anchor for Inclusive Teaching

Educators' cultural roots serve as a powerful lens through which they understand diversity and inclusion. This theme highlights how teachers use their own ethnic and linguistic heritage as tools to validate students' identities and to integrate indigenous knowledge into the curriculum. It reflects a culturally sustaining pedagogy that values local traditions, languages, and worldviews as legitimate sources of academic knowledge.

Responses from the Field:

An ASC faculty member stated, *"Being an Isang myself, I know the value of preserving our traditions. I ask students to present rituals and practices from their communities, so they feel proud of their heritage."*

From CSU, an associate professor remarked, *"I code-switch between English and Ilocano, so my students feel more at ease. Language is culture, and students become more confident when they hear their mother tongue."*

These practices illustrate how educators make cultural knowledge visible and relevant in their pedagogy. The use of indigenous content and local language affirms learners' identities and breaks the dominance of colonial and urban-centric educational models. However, this integration is often informal and lacks institutional reinforcement. While teachers are taking strides to honor cultural diversity, formal

curriculum development must reflect and support these efforts to avoid their marginalization as *"enrichment"* activities rather than being central to the learning process.

Institutional Support as a Critical Enabler or Barrier

This theme emphasizes the pivotal role of institutional leadership, policies, and systems in facilitating or hindering inclusive teaching. Faculty members often find themselves navigating the disconnect between national mandates on gender and development (GAD) and their actual classroom implementation. While most institutions have GAD offices or units, the support is often policy-driven rather than practice-focused, leaving teachers without practical tools or structured training to implement gender and culture integration effectively.

Responses from the Field:

A PSU educator mentioned, *"There is no concrete framework for teaching gender inclusivity. We attend GAD seminars, but they do not translate into classroom strategies."*

At ASC, one instructor noted, *"There is no monitoring. It is assumed that if we attend training, we are already integrating gender and culture, but nobody checks how we apply them in actual teaching."*

These reflections reveal a gap between institutional rhetoric and operational reality. While HEIs often demonstrate commitment to inclusivity at the policy level, this commitment does not always extend to classroom instruction. Educators are left to rely on personal efforts or interpretations, leading to inconsistency in practice. Institutional accountability and sustained capacity-building programs are critical to ensure that inclusive education becomes a standard, not an exception.

Navigating Student Attitudes and Community Norms

This theme explores the challenges faculty encounter when students' socio-cultural or religious beliefs come into tension with gender and cultural inclusivity. Educators often negotiate between promoting progressive values and respecting students' deeply held beliefs, especially in rural or conservative regions. It underscores

the need for sensitive, adaptive pedagogy to mediate these conflicts without compromising the principles of equity and inclusion.

Responses from the Field:

A CSU professor shared, *"Some students object when we talk about LGBTQ+ topics, citing religious beliefs. I explain that we are discussing these from an academic and human rights perspective."*

An ASC faculty member added, *"I have had students say gender discussions are uncomfortable or irrelevant. It takes patience and contextual framing to help them see the importance."*

These accounts reveal the socio-cultural resistance educators face in delivering inclusive content. The challenge lies not in the material itself but in how it is perceived by students whose backgrounds may discourage open discourse on gender and identity. Educators must have intercultural communication skills and culturally sensitive strategies to bridge these divides. Without proper training and support, self-censorship or superficial engagement with these critical topics is risky.

Pedagogical Creativity and Innovation Amid Constraints

Educators often employ innovative and resourceful teaching methods to incorporate gender and cultural perspectives, especially when institutional resources or curriculum guidelines are lacking. This theme reflects a resilient and proactive stance where faculty members creatively integrate inclusivity into diverse subject areas ranging from STEM to business, through real-world examples, reflective activities, and multimodal learning strategies.

Responses from the Field:

A PSU faculty member shared, *"Even in a statistics class, I use data about gender wage gaps or access to education. It shows them that math is connected to real-life social issues."*

A DMMMSU professor noted, *"We do not have much funding for new materials, so I use online documentaries and invite local leaders to talk about gender roles in their communities."*

These examples show that committed educators can transcend institutional limitations through pedagogical innovation. By embedding gender and culture into core subjects through context-based examples and interactive methods, teachers create rich, engaging, and socially relevant learning experiences. However, reliance on individual creativity without systemic support can lead to burnout and inconsistency.

Institutions must recognize and reward such innovation while providing the resources and frameworks necessary for sustainability and scale.

Transformative Teaching Practices that Promote Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity in the Classroom

Learner-Centered Instruction as a Catalyst for Inclusive Engagement

This theme emphasizes the critical role of learner-centered instruction as a transformative approach that promotes equity and inclusivity. Unlike traditional lecture-driven models, learner-centered pedagogy positions students as active participants in constructing knowledge. It recognizes students' backgrounds, experiences, learning preferences, and identities as valuable contributors to the educational process. Educators nurture a sense of agency and belonging by designing tasks that connect to students' real-life contexts and giving them autonomy in learning choices, directly enhancing engagement and academic performance.

Responses from the Field:

At PSU, a faculty member shared, *"I design my lessons to start with what students know, then we build from there. They participate more actively when they see their own experiences reflected in class."*

A CSU professor added, *"I ask students to choose project topics related to their community or identity. This gives them a sense of ownership and boosts their motivation."*

These responses reflect how inclusive learning environments are cultivated when students are given voice and relevance in their education. Learner-centered strategies such as flexible assessments, community-based projects, and choice in learning tasks allow students to see the relevance of their academic work to their lives. Such approaches are fundamental in culturally diverse classrooms, where learners' backgrounds vary widely. Therefore, learner-centered teaching enhances cognitive and affective engagement, improving motivation, participation, and deeper learning outcomes.

Contextualized and Localized Content for Cultural Relevance

This theme highlights the transformative impact of using contextualized and culturally grounded teaching materials. Incorporating indigenous knowledge, local issues, regional languages, and community practices allows students to see themselves, their values, and their cultural heritage reflected in the curriculum. This affirms their identities and challenges dominant narratives that often marginalize or

exclude non-mainstream cultures. Contextualization makes lessons more relatable, meaningful, and culturally relevant, fostering inclusivity and cultural pride.

Responses from the Field:

A faculty member from ASC shared, *"I incorporate local folktales and community problems into our lessons. Students relate better and feel proud of their roots."*

Another teacher from DMMMSU mentioned, *"We conduct community mapping as part of our output, and students learn not just for grades but for service. It gives deeper meaning to the lesson."*

These responses illustrate how culturally inclusive pedagogy bridges the gap between students' experiences and academic content. Educators make learning both relevant and empowering by situating lessons within the learners' cultural and socio-political realities. Such practices build cultural competence and awareness while strengthening critical thinking, especially when students are encouraged to analyze and reflect on their communities' strengths and challenges. Furthermore, localized content fosters student engagement because it resonates with their daily lives, affirming that their knowledge and culture matter in the academic space.

Multimodal and Differentiated Instruction for Diverse Learners

This theme uses varied teaching methods to cater to students' diverse learning needs, abilities, and contexts. Multimodal instruction through visual, auditory, tactile, and digital formats ensures that students with different learning styles can access content equitably. Differentiated instruction also considers disparities in technological access, language proficiency, and academic readiness. These approaches are particularly crucial in public higher education settings where class diversity includes linguistic minorities, working students, and those from geographically isolated or underserved communities.

Responses from the Field:

A PSU faculty member said, *"Some of my students are visual learners, others prefer discussion. So I mix lectures with videos, group work, and individual tasks to reach everyone."*

At ASC, a teacher noted, *"We have limited internet access, so I prepare printed modules and pair them with video clips they can watch when online. It is challenging but necessary."*

These accounts emphasize how multimodal and differentiated teaching is essential for inclusive education. Students learn in different ways and at different paces; thus, instruction must be adaptable. Educators integrating multiple modalities help level the playing field for learners otherwise disadvantaged by one-size-fits-all instruction. Moreover, differentiated strategies promote equity by acknowledging

student diversity and reducing barriers to learning, ultimately contributing to higher academic achievement, greater confidence, and sustained engagement.

Safe and Affirming Learning Environments as Foundations for Equity

This theme underscores the need for emotional safety and respect in the learning environment. Transformative teaching begins with creating classrooms where students feel accepted, valued, and free from discrimination. Affirming environments particularly benefit marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+ students, indigenous learners, and students from religious or linguistic minorities by fostering inclusion, building trust, and encouraging open dialogue. Educators who intentionally establish norms of respect, empathy, and acceptance lay the groundwork for academic risk-taking and meaningful participation.

Responses from the Field:

A DMMMSU assistant professor stated, *"I always make it clear from day one that no discrimination is tolerated. Everyone has the right to be heard, regardless of gender or background."*

From PSU, an associate professor shared, *"I make sure to call students by their preferred names or pronouns. It makes them feel accepted and more active in class."*

These practices demonstrate that when students feel emotionally and psychologically safe, they are more willing to participate, share their thoughts, and engage in critical learning activities. Affirming learning environments contribute to a sense of belonging and reduce anxiety, which is especially vital for students navigating cultural or identity-based stigma. Inclusive classroom norms also enhance social-emotional learning and foster peer respect. Conclusively, safe spaces do not just support learning; they enable it.

Reflective and Critical Teaching Practices for Transformative Learning

This theme emphasizes the role of reflection and critical inquiry in transformative education. Educators who integrate reflective activities and critical dialogue into their pedagogy enable students to examine their assumptions, question dominant ideologies, and connect academic learning to real-world issues of inequality,

power, and justice. These practices support the development of critical consciousness, a core goal of inclusive and equity-focused pedagogy.

Responses from the Field:

An ASC instructor shared, *"I let students reflect on their experiences with discrimination or privilege. We connect these reflections to the lessons, deepening their understanding."*

A DMMMSU faculty member remarked, *"We study local issues through the lens of power and identity. It helps students become more socially aware and think about their role in change."*

Such reflective and critical pedagogies allow students to move beyond rote memorization and engage deeply with their learning. Encouraging learners to connect academic content with their social realities promotes empowerment and ethical reasoning. These teaching strategies are especially transformative in a multicultural society like the Philippines, where issues of gender, ethnicity, and class are deeply intertwined. Encouraging students to reflect critically prepares them as scholars and socially responsible citizens.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that educators in Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are making meaningful strides in integrating gender and cultural perspectives into their pedagogical practices, despite the varying levels of institutional support and structural challenges. Faculty members from Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU), Apayao State College (ASC), Cagayan State University (CSU), and Pangasinan State University (PSU) exhibited diverse approaches in creating inclusive, equity-driven learning environments, highlighting their agency in transforming teaching and learning dynamics within their respective institutions.

Regarding gender and cultural integration, the study revealed that educators employ contextually responsive practices such as revising course content to avoid gender stereotypes, incorporating local and indigenous knowledge into lessons, and using community-based examples to enhance relevance. These practices align with Banks' (2015) multicultural education framework, which emphasizes content integration and the affirmation of diverse cultural backgrounds to promote inclusive schooling. Moreover, faculty members' efforts to foster critical reflection on gender

norms and socio-cultural identity mirror Freire's (2000) concept of *"critical consciousness,"* where education challenges oppression and transforms society.

While the integration of these perspectives was present, the extent and depth of implementation varied. Some educators reported designing syllabi and activities that foreground local narratives and highlight gender-sensitive themes, while others admitted that their efforts remained informal or dependent on personal interest. This confirms Gonda's (2019) observation that gender mainstreaming in Philippine HEIs is often fragmented, with strong institutional policy frameworks but weak curricular alignment. Dela Cruz and Roxas (2021) similarly argued that cultural inclusivity in pedagogy is often tokenistic unless explicitly embedded in institutional curriculum standards and faculty development programs.

In exploring educator experiences and challenges, the study surfaced key themes such as the influence of personal advocacy, the use of cultural identity in teaching, and the institutional gaps that hinder consistent implementation. Educators shared that their lived experiences, particularly with gender-based discrimination or cultural marginalization, motivate them to create inclusive classrooms that reflect students' realities. This finding echoes Hooks' (1994) work on engaged pedagogy, which advocates for teaching grounded in educators' personal, political, and emotional commitments to justice and inclusivity.

However, institutional challenges were also evident. Respondents noted the lack of structured training, clear guidelines for integrating GAD (Gender and Development) principles into the curriculum, and minimal monitoring mechanisms for inclusive teaching. These barriers reflect the broader systemic issues identified by UNESCO (2017), which noted that while gender equity is a stated goal in many Southeast Asian education systems, the translation into classroom practice is often constrained by limited resources, unclear pedagogical frameworks, and a lack of faculty support.

Despite these constraints, educators demonstrated transformative teaching practices that promote equity, diversity, and inclusivity. These include learner-centered instruction, localized content, differentiated teaching strategies, and the creation of safe, affirming classroom environments. Learner-centered approaches efficiently engage students, allowing flexibility in choosing relevant themes, encouraging autonomy, and linking learning to lived experiences. These practices align with Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development.

Contextualized and localized content emerged as another powerful tool for engagement and inclusion. Educators validated students' identities and cultural

heritage by integrating regional languages, indigenous knowledge, and community issues into their teaching. Gay (2018) supports this approach in her theory of culturally responsive teaching, asserting that affirming students' cultural backgrounds leads to higher academic performance and stronger classroom relationships.

Furthermore, multimodal and differentiated instruction demonstrated educators' commitment to accommodating diverse learning needs, especially in resource-constrained settings. These strategies are essential in a country like the Philippines, where educational access is shaped by geography, socio-economic status, and technological infrastructure. According to Tomlinson (2014), differentiated instruction enhances engagement and ensures equitable access to learning by meeting students where they are.

Notably, the study underscored creating safe and affirming learning environments as foundational to transformative teaching. Educators supported student participation and confidence by actively rejecting discrimination, respecting students' identities, and fostering open dialogue. These findings support the work of Nieto and Bode (2012), who argue that emotionally safe classrooms are necessary for authentic engagement, especially for students from historically marginalized groups.

Lastly, critical and reflective practices such as journaling, community analysis, and issue-based discussions enabled students to link academic content with broader social realities. This aligns with Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning, which posits that deep learning occurs when individuals critically reflect on their assumptions and act upon new understandings.

Overall, the findings suggest that while structural and institutional barriers persist, educators already engage in transformative work that uplifts marginalized voices, fosters critical consciousness, and promotes inclusive learning. Though sometimes informal or isolated, their practices offer a strong foundation for systemic reform. The study calls for sustained institutional commitment through comprehensive faculty training, curricular integration, and recognition of inclusive teaching innovations. By doing so, HEIs can fully realize their role in building equitable, just, and culturally grounded academic communities.

Conclusion

The study revealed that faculty members from Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Apayao State College, Cagayan State University, and Pangasinan State University have demonstrated increasing awareness and commitment toward integrating gender and cultural perspectives in their pedagogical practices. Educators reported adopting transformative strategies such as inclusive curriculum design,

differentiated instruction, values-driven engagement, and context-based content delivery to promote equity, diversity, and inclusivity. These practices enhanced student participation and engagement and cultivated critical thinking and cultural sensitivity among learners.

Despite these promising efforts, challenges persist, including limited institutional training, inconsistent policy support, and varying levels of faculty preparedness. Faculty members highlighted the importance of reflection, student voice, and cultural affirmation in shaping inclusive classrooms. The findings affirm the need for sustained capacity-building, institutional support, and policy coherence in fostering transformative teaching. Aligning with global frameworks such as UNESCO's inclusive education guide and Freire's critical pedagogy, this study contributes to the growing discourse on equity-based teaching in Southeast Asian higher education.

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