

Learners' Perceptions of Gender-Responsive Behavioral Modeling Practices Among Teacher Education Faculty in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT. This study explored the perceptions of higher education learners regarding gender-responsive behavioral modeling among teacher education faculty. The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design involving 20 higher education learners enrolled in teacher education programs from selected higher education institutions in the Philippines. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The findings revealed that learners perceive gender-responsive behavioral modeling through meaningful integration of Gender and Development (GAD) concepts, inclusive communication practices, equitable classroom participation, responsiveness to gender-related concerns, and reflective teaching practices. Participants emphasized that authentic and consistent gender-responsive behaviors contribute positively to inclusive learning environments, psychological safety, reflective empathy, and professional identity formation as future educators. The study concludes that teacher education faculty play a significant role in shaping learners' understanding of inclusivity, professionalism, and ethical responsibility through everyday classroom interactions and instructional practices.

Keywords: *Gender-Responsive Education, Teacher Education Faculty, Higher Education Learners, Inclusive Teaching Practices, Gender and Development (GAD)*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender and Development (GAD) has become an important component of educational reform in higher education, particularly in teacher education institutions where future educators are prepared to promote inclusive and equitable learning environments. Educational policies and institutional frameworks increasingly emphasize gender-responsive teaching practices that foster equality, respect, and inclusivity among learners (UNESCO, 2019). In the Philippines, the integration of GAD principles in higher education is supported through national mandates and institutional initiatives aimed at promoting gender sensitivity, non-discrimination, and inclusive educational practices (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2015). However, despite these initiatives, the implementation of gender-responsive practices within classrooms remains inconsistent across educational settings (Esteban, 2016; Ilagan, 2019).

Teacher education faculty play a significant role in shaping students' understanding of gender equity because learners often observe and internalize instructors' behaviors, communication styles, classroom management approaches, and interpersonal interactions. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory,

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individuals learn behaviors, values, and attitudes through observation and modeling (Bandura, 1977). In educational contexts, faculty members therefore function not only as content facilitators but also as behavioral models whose actions influence learners' perceptions, beliefs, and future professional practices. Sezgin (2024) emphasized that reflective awareness of gender-sensitive language and instruction contributes to more equitable classroom environments, while Casas et al. (2024) found that exposure to gender-responsive educational practices positively influences learners' awareness of inclusivity and equality.

Research further suggests that students are active interpreters of faculty behavior and classroom dynamics. León and Montero (2020) explained that learners critically evaluate whether instructors' teaching practices genuinely reflect gender-sensitive principles. Similarly, Roa and Morales (2023) reported that although students recognize efforts toward gender sensitivity in higher education, inconsistencies in faculty implementation often weaken the perceived authenticity of these practices. Studies have also shown that classroom interactions, inclusive language, equitable participation, and faculty responses to discriminatory behavior significantly influence students' perceptions of inclusivity and classroom safety (Leraas et al., 2018; Khokhlova et al., 2023).

Despite the growing implementation of GAD policies in higher education institutions, much of the existing literature focuses on institutional compliance, curricular integration, and faculty-centered perspectives. Limited studies have explored how higher education learners themselves perceive and interpret the gender-responsive behaviors modeled by teacher education faculty within classroom settings. In the Philippine teacher education context, this gap is particularly important because future educators' professional values and teaching practices may be influenced by the behaviors and attitudes they observe from their instructors during professional preparation.

To address this gap, the present study examined the perceptions of higher education learners regarding gender-responsive behavioral modeling among teacher education faculty. Specifically, the study explored how learners perceive the integration of gender-responsive practices in classroom instruction and how they interpret faculty behaviors related to inclusivity, equitable participation, respectful communication, and responsiveness to gender-related issues.

The study employed a qualitative research design to examine students' lived experiences and interpretations of faculty gender-responsive practices in teacher education classrooms. The findings of the study may contribute to the strengthening of gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive teaching practices, and professional development programs for teacher education faculty. Furthermore, the study may provide insights into how behavioral modeling influences learners' understanding of inclusivity, equity, and professional responsibility in educational settings.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the perceptions of higher education learners regarding gender-responsive behavioral modeling among teacher education faculty. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate for exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations within natural educational settings (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). According to Doyle et al. (2020), qualitative descriptive studies allow researchers to generate rich descriptions of social phenomena while remaining closely grounded in participants' narratives and lived experiences.

The study specifically explored how learners perceive faculty behaviors related to inclusivity, equitable participation, respectful communication, and responsiveness to gender-related concerns within teacher education classrooms.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Procedure

The participants of the study consisted of 15 higher education learners enrolled in teacher education programs from selected higher education institutions in the Philippines. Purposive sampling was utilized to identify participants who possessed relevant classroom experiences and exposure to teacher education faculty implementing gender-responsive practices. Purposive sampling is commonly employed in qualitative studies to select participants capable of providing meaningful and information-rich responses related to the objectives of the study (Campbell et al., 2020).

The inclusion criteria for participant selection were: (1) currently enrolled in a teacher education program, (2) exposure to teacher education faculty for at least one academic year, (3) familiarity with gender-responsive classroom practices, and (4) willingness to participate in the study.

2.3 Research Instrument

The study utilized a semi-structured interview guide as the primary research instrument. The interview questions were designed to explore learners' perceptions, classroom experiences, and interpretations of faculty gender-responsive behaviors. The interview guide included questions related to inclusive teaching practices, equitable classroom participation, respectful communication, classroom interactions, and faculty responses to gender-related issues.

The interview instrument underwent expert validation by specialists in qualitative research, teacher education, and Gender and Development (GAD) studies to ensure content relevance, clarity, and appropriateness. Pilot testing was also conducted to refine the wording and sequencing of interview questions prior to data collection (Kallio et al., 2016).

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was secured from the respective higher education institutions. Participants were informed regarding the objectives of the study, confidentiality measures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Data were gathered through one-on-one semi-structured interviews conducted either face-to-face or through online platforms depending on participants' availability and preferences. The interviews encouraged participants to openly share their experiences and observations regarding faculty gender-responsive behaviors within classroom settings. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-

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recorded to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis. Field notes and reflective observations were also documented throughout the data collection process.

2.5 Data Analysis

The qualitative data gathered from the interviews were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis following the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative approach for identifying recurring themes, patterns, and meanings across narrative data.

The analysis involved six phases: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. An inductive approach was employed to allow themes to emerge directly from participants' responses rather than from predetermined theoretical assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

To strengthen trustworthiness and credibility, peer debriefing and member checking were conducted during the analysis process. Participants were also given opportunities to clarify and validate portions of their interview responses to ensure accurate representation of their perspectives.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles in conducting qualitative educational research. Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection. Participants' identities, institutional affiliations, and responses were treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity. All collected data were used solely for academic and research purposes, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without penalty at any stage of the research process.

3. RESULTS

Research Objective 1. To explore how higher education learners perceive the integration of Gender and Development (GAD) concepts in teacher education faculty's instructional practices.

Question 1. Can you recall instances when your instructor discussed or included gender-related topics in your lessons?

Theme 1: Substantive and Intentional Integration of GAD

Participants described instances in which GAD concepts were deliberately integrated into instructional discussions, classroom activities, and reflective learning tasks. Learners perceived these practices as meaningful when faculty members contextualized gender-related concepts within pedagogical and professional situations.

"We were studying classroom management strategies in one of our major subjects, and I'll never forget what my professor said: 'Discipline systems often unconsciously target boys more harshly and ignore the emotional needs of girls.' It made me reflect on how I viewed my own students during fieldwork."

"In our assessment class, we discussed how classroom culture affects students differently. Our professor encouraged us to think of more inclusive assessment practices, and that changed how I viewed my responsibility as a future teacher."

The findings indicate that learners perceive GAD integration as authentic when gender-related concepts are connected to real educational practices and reflective professional learning experiences.

Theme 2: Symbolic or Performative Inclusion of GAD

Some participants described experiences in which gender-related topics were presented briefly or superficially without deeper discussion or sustained integration. Learners perceived these instances as compliance-driven rather than meaningful educational engagement.

"During Women's Month, our professor showed a short video about women empowerment, but after that we immediately returned to the regular lesson. It felt rushed and disconnected."

"We had one slide about gender-sensitive teaching, but there were no examples or discussions. I wanted more guidance instead of just general statements."

The responses suggest that learners distinguish between meaningful integration and symbolic inclusion of GAD concepts. Participants emphasized the importance of contextualization, continuity, and practical application in gender-responsive instruction.

Theme 3: Dialogic and Student-Initiated Gender Engagement

Another theme that emerged from the findings was dialogic and student-initiated gender engagement. Participants appreciated instructors who created opportunities for open discussion and responded positively to student-initiated conversations regarding gender issues.

"I presented a topic about gender roles in education, and our professor turned it into a meaningful class discussion about bias and expectations in the classroom."

"A classmate mentioned a news story about a transgender student, and our instructor encouraged us to reflect on it even if it was not part of the lesson."

The findings indicate that learners value faculty openness, responsiveness, and flexibility in facilitating meaningful gender-related discussions within classroom settings.

Question 2. How would you describe your experience learning about gender issues through your courses?

Theme 4: Transformative and Identity-Reframing Learning

Participants described their learning experiences regarding gender issues as personally transformative and reflective. Learners emphasized that classroom discussions and reflective activities challenged their assumptions and influenced how they viewed gender, inclusivity, and professional responsibility.

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"I realized that some of my beliefs about gender were influenced by stereotypes. The discussions made me reflect on how I should treat learners fairly in the future."

"Our activities helped me connect gender issues to real-life experiences and understand how they affect people around me."

The findings suggest that meaningful gender education contributes to learners' self-reflection, empathy, and professional awareness.

Theme 5: Fragmented and Surface-Level Exposure

Some learners described their experiences with gender education as limited and inconsistent. Although gender-related topics were discussed, participants felt that the discussions lacked continuity and depth.

"We discussed gender issues once, but there were no follow-up activities or deeper conversations after that."

"I wanted to explore the topic more, but the lesson quickly moved on to another discussion."

The findings indicate that fragmented exposure may reduce learners' engagement and perceived importance of gender education within teacher preparation programs.

Theme 6: Safe Spaces as Catalysts for Expression and Growth

Participants emphasized the importance of safe and respectful classroom environments in facilitating meaningful discussions about gender issues. Learners appreciated instructors who encouraged openness, respectful dialogue, and inclusive participation.

"Our professor used inclusive language and encouraged everyone to share their perspectives without fear of judgment."

"The classroom felt safe for discussing sensitive topics because our instructor respected everyone's opinions."

The findings demonstrate that psychological safety and respectful classroom climates contribute positively to learners' engagement and growth in gender-related learning experiences.

Research Objective 2. To examine how higher education learners observe and interpret the modeling of gender-responsive behavior by teacher education faculty.

Question 3. How do your instructors demonstrate gender sensitivity in class or during interactions?

Theme 7: Inclusive Language as Everyday Modeling

Participants identified inclusive and respectful language as a significant indicator of gender sensitivity among faculty members. Learners emphasized that instructors who consistently used inclusive communication practices contributed to positive and affirming classroom experiences.

"Our professor consistently used inclusive language and respected students' preferred names and pronouns."

"The way our instructor communicated made everyone feel acknowledged and respected."

The findings indicate that learners interpret inclusive communication practices as meaningful forms of gender-responsive behavioral modeling.

Theme 8: Equitable Participation and Redistribution of Voice

Another theme that emerged from the findings was equitable participation and redistribution of voice. Participants observed that faculty members intentionally encouraged balanced participation and ensured that all learners had opportunities to contribute during discussions and activities.

"Our instructor encouraged quieter students to participate and made sure that discussions were not dominated by only a few students."

"The teacher reminded us to respect everyone's opinions and allow others to finish speaking."

The findings suggest that learners perceive equitable classroom participation as an important component of gender-responsive teaching practices.

Theme 9: Active Advocacy and Inclusive Support

Participants also emphasized that faculty members demonstrated gender sensitivity through active advocacy and support for marginalized identities and inclusive practices.

"Our instructor addressed discriminatory jokes and reminded us that the classroom should remain a safe and respectful space for everyone."

"The teacher included discussions and examples that represented diverse gender identities and experiences."

The findings indicate that learners perceive faculty advocacy and responsiveness as important indicators of inclusive and gender-sensitive educational practice.

Question 4. How do these behaviors or practices affect your understanding of gender issues and your own behavior as future educators?

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Theme 10: Teacher Identity as Ethical and Social Practice

Participants explained that observing gender-responsive faculty behaviors influenced how they viewed their future roles as educators. Learners emphasized that teaching involves not only delivering content but also demonstrating fairness, inclusivity, and ethical responsibility.

"My understanding of teaching changed because I realized that students also learn from how teachers treat people."

"I want to become the kind of teacher who creates an inclusive and respectful classroom environment."

The findings suggest that gender-responsive behavioral modeling contributes to learners' professional identity formation and ethical awareness as future educators.

Theme 11: Developing Reflective Empathy

Participants further described that faculty practices encouraged them to reflect on their own assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding gender and inclusivity.

"I became more aware of my own biases and started reflecting on how I interact with other people."

"Watching our instructors respond respectfully to different identities taught me how important empathy and understanding are in teaching."

The findings indicate that gender-responsive faculty behaviors promote reflective empathy, self-awareness, and inclusive professional attitudes among higher education learners.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that higher education learners perceive gender-responsive behavioral modeling among teacher education faculty through meaningful integration of Gender and Development (GAD) concepts, inclusive communication practices, equitable classroom participation, and active responsiveness to gender-related concerns. Learners emphasized that gender-responsive practices become more meaningful when they are consistently embedded within classroom instruction, professional interactions, and reflective learning experiences. These findings support UNESCO (2024), which emphasized that gender-responsive education promotes inclusive, equitable, and respectful learning environments through intentional instructional and interpersonal practices.

The findings further revealed that learners distinguish between substantive and performative integration of GAD concepts in classroom instruction. Participants perceived GAD integration as authentic when instructors contextualized gender issues within educational practices, classroom management, assessment, and reflective learning activities. Conversely, symbolic or compliance-driven inclusion of

gender topics weakened learners' engagement and perceived significance of gender education. These findings align with León and Montero (2020), who explained that learners critically evaluate the authenticity and consistency of gender-responsive practices demonstrated by educators. Similarly, Roa and Morales (2023) emphasized that inconsistent implementation of gender-sensitive instruction may reduce the credibility and effectiveness of Gender and Development initiatives in higher education.

The study also highlighted the importance of dialogic and student-centered engagement in promoting meaningful learning about gender issues. Participants appreciated instructors who encouraged open discussions, validated student perspectives, and created opportunities for reflective interaction regarding gender-related experiences and social issues. These findings support Sezgin (2024), who emphasized that gender-responsive pedagogy requires reflective dialogue, critical thinking, and participatory learning environments that encourage learners to examine assumptions and social realities. The findings likewise support Casas et al. (2024), who noted that learner participation and collaborative discourse strengthen students' awareness of inclusivity, equity, and diversity within educational settings.

Another important finding of the study was the influence of psychological safety and respectful classroom environments on learners' engagement with gender education. Participants described safe spaces as environments where they felt comfortable expressing perspectives, asking questions, and reflecting on personal experiences related to gender issues. These findings are consistent with Leraas et al. (2018), who explained that inclusive classroom climates positively influence students' participation, confidence, and sense of belonging. Similarly, Khokhlova et al. (2023) emphasized that respectful communication and supportive educational environments strengthen learners' emotional safety and promote inclusive academic engagement.

The findings also revealed that learners interpret gender sensitivity through faculty members' everyday communication practices, equitable participation management, and responsiveness to discriminatory behavior. Participants observed that instructors who consistently used inclusive language, corrected biased remarks, and redistributed classroom participation modeled inclusivity in meaningful and practical ways. These findings strongly support Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which explains that individuals learn values, behaviors, and attitudes through observation and modeling (Bandura, 1977). The findings indicate that teacher education faculty function not only as instructional facilitators but also as behavioral models whose actions influence learners' professional values and future teaching practices.

Furthermore, the study demonstrated that faculty gender-responsive behaviors contribute to learners' professional identity formation and ethical awareness as future educators. Participants emphasized that observing respectful, inclusive, and fair instructional practices influenced how they intend to manage their own future classrooms. Learners described becoming more aware of their assumptions, biases, and responsibilities as future teachers. These findings support Esteban (2016), who emphasized that teacher education programs significantly shape future educators' professional values, classroom ethics, and inclusive teaching practices. Likewise, Ilagan (2019) noted that exposure to gender-responsive educational practices contributes to the development of socially responsible and reflective educators.

The findings suggest that gender-responsive behavioral modeling among teacher education faculty contributes positively to inclusive education and professional preparation in higher education settings. The study highlights the importance of integrating GAD concepts not only within curriculum content but also through consistent interpersonal practices, inclusive communication, and reflective pedagogy. The findings

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further imply that higher education institutions may strengthen gender-responsive education through faculty development programs, inclusive teaching workshops, and institutional support for reflective and learner-centered pedagogical practices.

Despite the positive findings of the study, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study involved a limited number of participants from selected higher education institutions in the Philippines, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. In addition, the study focused primarily on learners' perceptions and did not include classroom observations or faculty perspectives regarding gender-responsive instructional practices. Future studies may examine the relationship between faculty gender-responsive behaviors and students' academic engagement, classroom participation, and professional identity development using mixed-methods and multi-institutional research designs.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that higher education learners perceive gender-responsive behavioral modeling among teacher education faculty through meaningful integration of Gender and Development (GAD) concepts, inclusive communication practices, equitable classroom participation, and active responsiveness to gender-related concerns. Learners viewed faculty behaviors as important influences on their understanding of inclusivity, professionalism, and ethical responsibility as future educators.

The findings further revealed that authentic and consistent gender-responsive practices contribute to reflective learning, psychological safety, and professional identity formation among higher education learners. Faculty members who demonstrated fairness, empathy, respectful communication, and inclusive teaching practices positively influenced learners' perspectives regarding gender equity and inclusive education.

The study suggests that higher education institutions may strengthen gender-responsive education by supporting faculty development programs focused on inclusive pedagogy, reflective teaching practices, and Gender and Development integration. Future studies may further examine the relationship between faculty gender-responsive behaviors and learners' academic engagement, classroom participation, and professional development across broader educational settings.

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