

Makinig Naman Kayo: Teachers' Frustrations and Perceived Gaps in the Implementation of GAD-Related Policies in Elementary Schools

Al John U. Febrero
Dr. Gloria D. Lacson Foundation Colleges Inc.
aljohn.febrero@deped.gov.ph

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ABSTRACT

Gender and Development (GAD) policies were institutionalized in Philippine schools to promote inclusivity, equity, and protection from gender-based discrimination. This qualitative research explored the lived experiences of elementary teachers in implementing GAD policies within the school system. Using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study revealed recurring frustrations among teachers such as inadequate training on GAD principles, limited allocation and unclear utilization of GAD funds, and the lack of concrete guidelines for addressing violations involving learners, teachers, and parents. Findings further highlighted the gap between policy directives and actual school practices, where GAD activities are often reduced to compliance-

driven events rather than sustained, meaningful initiatives. Teachers also expressed challenges in gaining administrative support, encountering resistance from parents with traditional gender beliefs, and balancing the policy's goals with existing academic demands. Despite these frustrations, educators showed a strong commitment to fostering inclusivity and equity, provided that sufficient support, clear implementation mechanisms, and responsive interventions are put in place. The study underscores the importance of capacity-building programs, transparent fund utilization, active collaboration with stakeholders, and accountability measures to strengthen the implementation of GAD-related policies. Ultimately, the research calls for a more participatory, consistent, and context-sensitive approach to ensure that GAD integration in schools fulfills its intended role of promoting gender fairness, respect, and protection for all.

Keywords: *policy implementation, gender equity, inclusivity in schools, GAD gaps*

INTRODUCTION

Despite clear national mandates for Gender and Development (GAD) mainstreaming in education, multiple local studies indicate a persistent policy–practice gap at the school level. Empirical investigations in Philippine localities show that while policies and GAD structures exist, actual mainstreaming often remains at a formative or compliance stage; schools frequently treat GAD as paperwork or event-based activities rather than a sustained, system-wide transformation of practices and curriculum (Hemillan-Sacro et al., 2022). Such findings suggest the need to center teachers' lived experiences, those who enact policy on the ground, to understand why this disconnect persists and how it shapes implementation frustrations.

A recurring operational obstacle documented in local audits and school-based studies is confusion and misuse of GAD funds. Research and division-level evaluations reveal that school budgets earmarked

for GAD (e.g., the DepEd-recommended portion of MOOE) are often underutilized, redirected to general school needs, or expended on token activities because of unclear operational guidance and weak accountability mechanisms (implementation reviews of school GAD programs). This fiscal ambiguity not only undermines intended gender-responsive interventions but also generates teacher frustration when proposed, meaningful GAD projects lack funding or are deemed ineligible. Investigating teachers' perspectives on fund planning and utilization thus becomes essential to propose realistic policy fixes (Dela Cruz, 2023).

Capacity building and classroom application are further points of weakness. Local studies point to one-off orientations and seminar-type trainings that do little to change classroom practice; teachers report limited follow-up, coaching, or exemplar materials to help them integrate gender-responsive pedagogy meaningfully (Hemillan-Sacro et al., 2022). International research corroborates this: sustained, context-specific professional development markedly improves teachers' competency in gender-responsive pedagogy, whereas single-session trainings rarely produce classroom change (Mukagiahana et al., 2024). Hence, a study that foregrounds teacher narratives about training quality and support systems will illuminate what kinds of capacity-building are practicable and effective in the Philippine elementary context.

Curriculum integration and monitoring present additional bottlenecks. Studies from Indonesia and Rwanda show that even when teachers hold positive attitudes toward gender equality, the absence of curriculum exemplars, locally appropriate materials, and outcome-oriented M&E systems limit long-term impact (Wijanarko et al., 2022; UNGEI/UNESCO guidance). Locally, assessments of school-based GAD programs point to weak M&E processes—reports are produced for compliance rather than to measure learner-level outcomes—creating little incentive or guidance for teachers to modify practice. Exploring teachers' frustrations related to curriculum and M&E will therefore produce actionable evidence for policy redesign.

Finally, the socio-cultural context including community norms, religious beliefs, and prevailing gender roles shapes how teachers experience and negotiate GAD directives in classrooms. Gender Role Theory and street-level implementation research indicate that teachers' discretion, community pressures, and personal beliefs mediate policy uptake; capturing teachers' narratives about community resistance, SOGIE-related sensitivities, and negotiation strategies is critical for crafting context-sensitive, politically feasible policy adjustments. Taken together, these local and international findings justify a phenomenological study that centers teachers' voices to generate grounded, practice-oriented recommendations for strengthening GAD implementation in elementary schools.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a transcendental phenomenological research approach to investigate the lived experiences, frustrations, and perceived gaps of elementary school teachers in implementing Gender and Development (GAD)-related policies. Transcendental phenomenology, as described by Moustakas (1994), focuses on capturing the essential, shared meaning of a phenomenon through careful description of participants' experiences while the researcher practices epoché (bracketing) to set aside prior assumptions. This approach is particularly well-suited for the present study because it privileged teachers' first-person accounts and sought to arrive at the essence of their collective experience in negotiating policy mandates, resource constraints, and classroom realities.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools across various schools divisions and locations in Central Luzon, Philippines. These included the Schools Division of Nueva Ecija, Schools

Division of Science City of Muñoz, Schools Division of Gapan City, Schools Division of San Jose City, Schools Division of Cabanatuan City, Pampanga, Bulacan, Baliwag City, San Jose Del Monte City, and Aurora. These areas were chosen because they represent diverse school contexts where Gender and Development (GAD)-related policies are implemented at the elementary level.

The locale provided an appropriate setting for the study since public elementary schools serve as direct implementation sites of DepEd's GAD-related directives, programs, activities, and reporting mechanisms. Teachers assigned as GAD focal persons in these schools are expected to take part in the planning, implementation, documentation, and monitoring of GAD initiatives. Thus, their experiences offered meaningful insights into the actual conditions, challenges, and perceived gaps in translating GAD policies into school-based practices.

The inclusion of teachers from different divisions and locations allowed the study to capture varied perspectives shaped by differences in administrative support, school resources, community contexts, and implementation practices. This strengthened the study's intent to understand the shared and distinct lived experiences of elementary teachers in implementing GAD-related policies. Specifically, the locale enabled the researcher to explore how GAD implementation is experienced in different public elementary school settings, particularly in relation to policy clarity, fund utilization, capacity-building, curriculum integration, and monitoring and evaluation.

Overall, the selected public elementary schools in the identified divisions and locations served as suitable research sites because they provided the necessary context for examining teachers' frustrations and perceived gaps in the implementation of GAD-related policies. The locale supported the phenomenological nature of the study by situating the inquiry in real school environments where teachers directly encounter and respond to the demands of GAD implementation.

Sampling Technique

This study used purposive (criterion) sampling with maximum-variation intent to recruit elementary school teachers who can richly describe lived experiences in implementing GAD-related policies. Purposive sampling is appropriate for transcendental phenomenology because the goal is depth and the selection of participants who have directly and meaningfully experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The sampling frame included 10 public elementary teachers who are GAD focal persons, one teacher (1) from each of the following schools division: Schools Division of Nueva Ecija, Science City of Muñoz, Gapan City, San Jose City, and Cabanatuan City, Pampanga, Bulacan, Baliwag City, San Jose Del Monte City, and Aurora.

Inclusion criteria were (a) currently assigned to a public elementary school in the listed divisions/locations; (b) minimum three years experience as GAD focal person; (c) involvement (direct or delegated) in at least one GAD-related activity or reporting cycle in the past three years; (d) willingness to give consent and participate in a 45–60 minute interview.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How do teachers describe their experiences in the implementation of GAD-related policies at the school level?

Theme 1: Awareness Without Full Understanding

Teachers recognized that the Department of Education (DepEd) has long institutionalized gender mainstreaming through DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, which mandates the integration of GAD perspectives in basic education programs, and DepEd Order No. 27, s. 2019, which reinforces gender-responsive basic education at all levels. However, teachers described their experience with these policies as “top-down” and “paper-driven.”

Most respondents said that policy implementation usually begins and ends with the receipt of memoranda and directives. As one teacher shared,

“We are aware that GAD is a priority, but sometimes the policy language is too formal and technical. We need clearer, simpler examples for the classroom level.” – T07

This aligns with the findings of Flores (2021), who reported that GAD policies are often well-written but poorly contextualized for classroom realities, resulting in partial compliance rather than genuine understanding. Teachers felt that GAD activities are sometimes viewed as additional tasks instead of integral parts of their teaching practice, reflecting what DepEd Memorandum No. 21, s. 2019 sought to address ensuring that GAD becomes part of the school culture rather than a one-time initiative.

One participant candidly expressed, *“Kung tatanungin mo ang mga teacher, mas marami ang hindi nakakaalam ng essence ng GAD. Malamang pati DepEd Order hindi. Hanggang sa promotion lang na dapat ganito, dapat ganun. (“If you ask the teachers, most of them don’t really understand the essence of GAD. Probably not even the DepEd Order itself. It’s only seen as something for compliance or promotion, just about doing this or that because it’s required.)”*

This sentiment reflects a superficial awareness of GAD where teachers recognize its presence through posters, slogans, and school activities but lack a deep understanding of its core principles and objectives.

This finding echoes the observation of Salazar (2022), who noted that many educators perceive GAD as a compliance requirement rather than a transformative framework that promotes equity, inclusivity, and gender sensitivity in schools. The Department of Education, through DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, mandates the institutionalization of GAD programs aligned with national gender mainstreaming efforts. However, teachers’ limited grasp of the policy’s essence suggests that dissemination and internalization remain insufficient at the grassroots level. The emphasis has often been on fulfilling documentary or activity-based requirements instead of fostering a culture of gender awareness and critical reflection among educators.

Theme 2: Compliance-Driven Implementation

Another recurring experience among teachers involves the management of GAD funds. Under Joint Circular No. 2012-01 of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), schools are mandated to allocate at least 5% of their budget for GAD programs. Yet, most teachers in this study said they had limited involvement or awareness of how these funds were used.

Some teachers expressed frustration that GAD funds were sometimes redirected to activities unrelated to gender advocacy, such as infrastructure projects or general supplies. One participant noted,

“We see reports about GAD spending, but we don’t really know if those activities truly support gender awareness.”

Seven participants also expressed that GAD initiatives are commonly executed merely to fulfill administrative requirements instead of being guided by a genuine commitment to gender equality and empowerment. As one teacher explained,

“For compliance naman talaga, Sir. Minsan nga hindi pa nagagastos, kailangan na iliquidate agad o kaya kasasabi ngayon, deadline ngayon kaya minsan ginagawan na lang ng paraan (It’s really just for compliance, Sir. Sometimes, the funds haven’t even been used yet, but we already have to liquidate them, or instructions come today with the deadline also today, so we just find a way to make it work).”

Another participant added, *“May fund. It’s 5%. Pero minsan kapag hindi na kaya gawin ‘yung program o kaya kapag need ng fund sa ibang program, inirere-align na lang kung saan mas need ‘yung fund (There is a fund—it’s 5%. But sometimes when the program can’t be done or when there’s a greater need for funds in another program, it just gets realigned to where it’s needed more).”*

These concerns mirror Garcia’s (2022) findings in her study on GAD fund management in public schools, which revealed that while funds are allocated, the lack of participatory planning often leads to misalignment between intended and actual spending. Teachers emphasized the need for transparency and

inclusion in decision-making processes, as required by DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2023, on the school budget management cycle, which encourages stakeholder participation.

The notion of “compliance-driven implementation” is supported by research findings in related contexts. For instance, Magtibay and Alinsunod (2022) observed that school-based GAD programs in the Philippines are often implemented to meet deadlines and reporting requirements rather than to address genuine gender issues within the school community. Similarly, Cruz and Torres (2021) found that many teachers view GAD initiatives as additional tasks rather than core components of educational equity, resulting in limited impact and sustainability. Internationally, Subrahmanian (2020) highlighted that gender mainstreaming efforts in education systems often fail when institutional accountability mechanisms emphasize documentation and expenditure compliance over outcome-based evaluation.

Theme 3: Limited Participation and Ownership

Teachers’ experiences revealed that participation in Gender and Development (GAD) initiatives often feels limited and superficial, with many feeling excluded from meaningful involvement in both planning and implementation.

One teacher shared, “*Experienced challenges in gaining administrative support. Kahit gusto mong seryosohin kung hindi iyon ang priority ng school, wala rin* (Even if you want to take it seriously, if it is not the school’s priority, it won’t be sustained.)”

This statement reflects how the lack of institutional commitment prevents teachers from fully embracing and sustaining GAD initiatives within their schools.

While the Department of Education (DepEd) has issued several directives such as DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, which institutionalizes the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy, and mandates the establishment of Gender and Development Focal Point Systems (GFPS), teachers still find that school-level engagement remains minimal. Many described being treated as passive participants rather than partners in GAD implementation.

One teacher recounted, “*There are districts that conduct GAD training nang magkakasama buong district. Nagiging RnR* (There are districts that conduct GAD training for the entire district, but it turns into a rest and recreation activity.)”

Another participant added, “*It’s more on team building than GAD training. Hoping specific topics can be tackled. Halos every year, women empowerment.*” (It’s more of a team-building activity than a GAD training. I just hope more specific topics could be discussed, since it’s almost always about women empowerment every year.)

These reflections suggest that GAD-related activities often take a generic and repetitive form, focusing narrowly on women empowerment while overlooking broader gender concerns such as inclusivity, equality, and the rights of learners with diverse gender identities. Instead of promoting critical reflection or transformative understanding, GAD training is sometimes reduced to compliance or symbolic celebration. Similar findings were reported by Magtibay and Alinsunod (2022), who observed that school-based GAD programs in the Philippines tend to be “activity-oriented rather than outcome-oriented,” often reusing the same themes without evaluating their actual impact on classroom practices.

In addition to the lack of participatory involvement, teachers cited inadequate training and limited professional development as persistent challenges. Many expressed frustration that GAD seminars are often “one-shot orientations” rather than continuous, practice-based learning programs.

One participant explained, “*The training was informative, but after that, there was no follow-up. We need examples of how to apply gender sensitivity in lessons, not just the concepts.*”

This sentiment echoes Cruz and Dela Peña (2023), who found that teachers’ limited exposure to contextualized and sustained training hinders the integration of gender responsiveness in classroom instruction.

Teachers suggested that Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions could serve as a more practical venue for sustained professional learning and collaboration. Such school-based platforms could promote reflective

sharing of teaching strategies and contextual approaches, aligning with DepEd's call for capacity building that is both continuous and embedded within the teaching-learning process (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017). However, as participants pointed out, these efforts are often overshadowed by other administrative priorities.

Cultural resistance also emerged as a major factor limiting GAD implementation.

One teacher remarked, "*Encountered resistance from parents with traditional gender beliefs. Marami pa rin yung may issue sa bakla.*" (Many parents still have issues with homosexual individuals.)

This challenge underscores the tension between progressive gender policies and deeply rooted societal norms. Medina and Esteban (2021) noted that gender-sensitive education in Philippine schools continues to face resistance from parents and communities adhering to traditional gender roles, limiting the scope of GAD advocacy and classroom integration.

Another recurring issue is the difficulty of balancing GAD goals with existing workload demands.

A participant reflected, "*Mahirap ibalance yung policy's goals with existing academic demands.*" (It's difficult to balance the policy's goals with existing academic demands.)

This reflects how the already demanding workload of teachers constrains their ability to engage fully with GAD initiatives. Similar observations by Galang and Reyes (2020) and Dela Cruz and Austria (2022) show that the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming is often undermined by competing priorities and limited institutional support.

These challenges collectively illustrate a broader pattern of weak teacher ownership and limited agency in GAD implementation. Decisions about activities, fund utilization, and focus areas are often centralized at the division or district level, leaving teachers feeling disconnected from the program's purpose and direction. Espiritu (2023) emphasized that sustainable GAD programs depend on participatory planning and contextualization at the school level, ensuring that initiatives respond to teachers' real classroom experiences and socio-cultural contexts.

Theme 4: Uneven Dissemination of Information

Teachers' experiences with curriculum integration varied widely. Some teachers shared efforts to include gender-fair examples in reading materials, group activities, and discussions. However, others admitted that integrating GAD principles in subjects like Mathematics and Science remained challenging due to the lack of contextualized materials.

Despite the policy direction from DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2015, which promotes gender-fair education, teachers said that textbooks and instructional materials still lack inclusive content. One participant explained,

"We try to balance gender roles in stories, but the books themselves often portray traditional stereotypes."

This observation aligns with Santos (2020), who found that most learning materials still depict gender roles in traditional ways, making it difficult for teachers to challenge stereotypes without supplementary resources. Teachers suggested that DepEd should provide exemplars or model lesson plans demonstrating how GAD can be embedded naturally within the existing curriculum.

Theme 5: Advocacy Overshadowed by Paperwork

The teachers also discussed their experiences with how GAD initiatives are monitored in schools. While reports, photos, and attendance sheets are regularly submitted to the division office, teachers observed that monitoring focuses more on compliance rather than impact.

As one teacher remarked,

"We submit reports every year, but no one asks if our learners actually learned to respect gender differences."

This sentiment echoes Delos Reyes (2022), who found that evaluation of GAD programs in schools often emphasizes documentary evidence rather than behavioral outcomes.

DepEd has attempted to address this through DepEd Memorandum No. 152, s. 2021, which calls for evidence-based monitoring of GAD outcomes. However, teachers reported that in practice, evaluation still revolves around documentation rather than observable changes in classroom interactions or learner attitudes.

Overall, teachers' experiences in implementing GAD-related policies reveal a clear gap between national directives and local realities. While DepEd has established a solid policy framework through various orders and memoranda, the success of GAD implementation depends on how these policies are communicated, funded, supported, and monitored at the school level. Teachers' narratives suggest that GAD implementation remains uneven—driven more by compliance than by conviction.

The findings affirm the need for clearer policy communication, participatory fund management, sustained capacity building, inclusive curriculum development, and authentic evaluation systems that capture behavioral and attitudinal change, not just paperwork. As one teacher poignantly stated,

“We support GAD because it’s right—but please, make it real in our classrooms.”

What challenges or frustrations do teachers encounter in relation to the policy context, fund utilization, capacity-building, curriculum integration, and monitoring and evaluation?

Theme 6: Unclear and Bureaucratic Guidelines

Teachers consistently expressed that their main frustration stems from the lack of clear and accessible communication regarding GAD policies. Participants shared that policy dissemination rarely includes practical discussions on how to implement these in classroom settings.

One teacher commented, *“We receive memos, but they are filled with technical terms. We need clearer examples or explanations that fit our daily teaching reality.”*

This finding resonates with Flores (2021), who found that teachers' understanding of GAD policies remains limited due to abstract and bureaucratic policy communication. Another teacher expressed frustration that GAD policies “come and go like reminders” without sustained administrative guidance.

Teachers also noted that policy updates are often discussed only during year-end evaluations or meetings, leading to reactive rather than proactive implementation. This gap contradicts the intent of DepEd Memorandum No. 152, s. 2021, which encourages schools to operationalize gender mainstreaming as an ongoing process rather than a once-a-year compliance requirement.

One teacher shared, *“Puro technical yung discussion. We need speakers who can give us different scenarios, solutions to different scenarios, on how to assess each problem.”* (“The discussions are too technical. We need speakers who can present different scenarios and solutions for each situation to help us assess problems properly.”)

Another respondent added, *“Kailangan siguro, Sir, may school guidelines, or simplified version pang-schools. Yung nandoon na lahat kung ano ang gagawin kapag ganito o ganun ang nangyari.”* (“Maybe, Sir, schools need simplified guidelines that outline exactly what to do in different situations.”)

These remarks reflect a gap between policy formulation and policy understanding, where teachers who serve as frontliners in GAD implementation struggle to interpret highly technical documents such as DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 and DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2017. While these policies provide comprehensive procedures, teachers perceive them as overly bureaucratic and difficult to translate into practical school-based actions. This misalignment often leads to delays, confusion, or inconsistencies in implementation across districts and schools.

The teachers' call for simplified, scenario-based guidelines highlights the need for practical operational manuals that translate policy language into everyday school situations. For instance, teachers wish for guidance on how to handle gender-based bullying, promote inclusivity among diverse learners, and integrate GAD principles into daily classroom management. As Dela Cruz and Ebuenga (2022) note, effective gender mainstreaming in education requires “localized, user-friendly materials that teachers can directly apply in their contexts.”

As one teacher shared, *“Lack of concrete guidelines for addressing violations involving learners, teachers, and parents.”*

In practice, this lack of operational clarity leads to inconsistent responses across schools. Some administrators handle cases through verbal reprimands or ad hoc committee discussions, while others refer them to higher offices, often causing delays or confusion. Teachers pointed out that the bureaucratic processes and absence of step-by-step procedures discourage them from reporting or addressing gender-related concerns. This mirrors the findings of Lariosa (2021), who revealed that many teachers lack procedural understanding of GAD implementation, resulting in uneven enforcement and reactive responses rather than preventive measures.

Theme 7: Limited Transparency and Inclusivity

Another major frustration among teachers involves the management of GAD funds. Under Joint Circular No. 2012-01 (PCW, DBM, and NEDA), 5% of an institution’s budget must be allocated for GAD-related activities. However, most teachers admitted that they were unaware of how GAD funds were planned, allocated, or utilized within their schools.

As one teacher expressed, *“We only hear about GAD funds during reports. We’re not part of the planning, and we don’t know where the money really goes.”*

Some even shared that funds are sometimes used for general school needs such as office supplies or minor repairs, rather than gender-related programs. This echoes Garcia’s (2022) study, which revealed that a lack of participatory planning and accountability mechanisms often leads to misalignment between GAD fund utilization and actual gender mainstreaming goals.

Many participants expressed that decision-making processes regarding GAD programs are often confined to school heads and administrative officers, leaving teachers and learners with little to no participation.

One teacher shared, *“Madalas ang nag-uusap ay si head at ADAS kung paano gagastusin yung budget.”* (“Most of the time, it’s only the principal and the administrative assistant who decide how to spend the budget.”)

Another participant remarked, *“More on teachers. Sana mayroon ding para sa learners.”* (“Most of the activities are for teachers. I hope there are also programs for learners.”)

A fourth added, *“Sana isang malakasang program ang iconduct. A program that is worth it, and effective, para hindi sayang yung fund.”* (“I hope a more impactful and worthwhile program could be conducted, something effective so the funds don’t go to waste.”)

These reflections point to a recurring disconnect between policy intentions and actual practices. According to DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2017, GAD funds—equivalent to at least 5% of the total budget—must be used for activities that promote gender equality and responsiveness among both teachers and learners. However, the teachers’ accounts suggest that fund allocation and decision-making are often centralized, with limited consultation or participatory planning at the faculty or classroom level. This lack of transparency not only weakens the inclusivity of the process but also leads to activities that fail to address the diverse needs of the school community.

The findings resonate with Llaneta and Garma’s (2021) study, which revealed that GAD fund utilization in many public schools is often “administratively driven rather than community-based,” resulting in a narrow focus on compliance rather than impact. Similarly, Dela Cruz and Ebuenga (2022) found that teachers frequently feel excluded from GAD planning and evaluation, which contributes to low motivation and minimal ownership of the program. When teachers are not part of the decision-making process, GAD activities tend to become repetitive and disconnected from classroom realities, focusing on generic seminars rather than transformative initiatives.

The respondents’ plea for a “malakasang program” (impactful program) also underscores the need for meaningful and sustained implementation, rather than short-term compliance-based events. DepEd Memorandum No. 32, s. 2017, explicitly encourages schools to integrate GAD initiatives into broader

development programs, ensuring inclusivity and measurable outcomes. However, the current implementation based on teachers' experiences remains fragmented and largely symbolic.

Theme 8: Inadequate and Unsustained Capacity-Building Programs

Teachers unanimously shared that they have attended GAD-related orientations or seminars, but most described these as “too brief,” “generalized,” and “non-continuous.” While DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 mandates capacity-building for teachers, many participants said that follow-up sessions or practical applications rarely happen.

One teacher said, *“We attended a seminar about gender sensitivity, but after that, nothing followed. There was no monitoring, no mentoring.”*

This mirrors Cruz and Dela Peña's (2023) findings that teachers often lack sustained professional development to deepen their understanding of gender-responsive teaching.

Teachers expressed that they need more contextualized workshops showing real examples of integrating gender fairness into lessons, especially in subjects not directly linked to social issues like Mathematics or Science. Without such support, GAD remains a theoretical discussion rather than a classroom reality.

Moreover, some teachers mentioned that resource persons often focus on policy definitions instead of teaching strategies. This leaves educators feeling inadequately prepared to translate GAD principles into action, contrary to the vision of DepEd's Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy (DepEd Order No. 27, s. 2019), which emphasizes teacher empowerment through continuous learning.

One participant shared, *“Nag-ga-GAD lang kapag may fund. Minsan kapag malaki pa, sa labas nagte-training”* (“We only conduct GAD-related activities when there are available funds. Sometimes, if the budget is big enough, the training is held outside”).

Another remarked, *“Hindi buong taon. Kapag na-download na yung fund, dun pa lang nagpa-plano paano i-spend yung fund. After that, focus na ulit sa ibang trabaho si teacher”* (“It's not conducted throughout the year. The planning only starts once the fund is downloaded, and after that, teachers return to their usual workload”).

These responses reveal a pattern of fragmented and fund-dependent implementation of GAD capacity-building initiatives. Instead of being a continuous and institutionalized effort, GAD training appears reactive as it triggered by fund availability rather than embedded within the school's professional development framework. This aligns with the findings of Agsalog and Reyes (2023), who noted that GAD programs in many public schools are treated as one-time compliance activities rather than sustained developmental processes aimed at deepening gender sensitivity among educators.

The data also highlight how administrative priorities and workload distribution influence the sustainability of GAD initiatives. Teachers' statements about “focusing again on other work” after the training season point to competing academic and administrative demands that overshadow gender mainstreaming efforts. As Fernandez (2022) observed, schools often face “initiative fatigue,” where multiple programs compete for limited time and resources, leading to the neglect of those not perceived as urgent.

Theme 9: Superficial Curriculum Integration

Teachers admitted that integrating GAD into the curriculum remains one of their biggest challenges. While they try to promote respect and equality during classroom discussions, they struggle with embedding gender sensitivity into subject content and learning materials.

A common frustration among teachers is the persistence of gender stereotypes in textbooks.

As one teacher explained, *“The stories still show mothers cooking and fathers working. It's hard to correct that when the materials themselves are outdated.”*

This observation aligns with Santos (2020), who found that elementary textbooks continue to depict traditional gender roles despite DepEd's earlier directives on gender-fair education (DepEd Order No. 12, s. 2015).

Teachers also shared that they often resort to "token activities," such as GAD bulletin boards or month-long celebrations, instead of genuine integration. They believe this happens because of the lack of model lesson plans or subject-specific examples of how to teach gender sensitivity. Despite their best intentions, many feel GAD implementation is reduced to compliance, not transformation.

One participant shared, "*Meron naman na. Instead of using gender-specific na tawag, more on general na ang ginagamit sa klase. Bukod doon wala na kasi medyo sensitive kapag women empowerment i-integrate*" ("There are some efforts already. Instead of using gender-specific terms, we use more general ones in class. Beyond that, there's not much because integrating topics like women empowerment feels a bit sensitive").

Another teacher remarked, "*Very light lang, kasi elementary. Gender-neutral na mga ginagamit ngayon. Pahapyaw na topic tungkol sa mga karapatan*" ("It's only lightly integrated since this is elementary. We just use gender-neutral language and briefly touch on topics about rights").

These responses highlight a cautious and minimal approach to GAD integration in the curriculum. Teachers tend to focus on gender-neutrality and inclusive language rather than tackling deeper discussions about gender equality, stereotypes, and empowerment. While such efforts indicate awareness of inclusivity, they also expose a lack of confidence and guidance in addressing gender-sensitive topics in age-appropriate ways. This cautious stance aligns with the findings of Tolentino and Manalo (2022), who found that many teachers in basic education avoid discussing gender issues in detail due to fear of misinterpretation, lack of training, and perceived sensitivity of the topic among parents and community members.

DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 explicitly mandates the integration of gender perspectives into curriculum development, instructional materials, and classroom processes. However, the teachers' experiences suggest that actual classroom implementation falls short of the policy's transformative intent. The policy envisions a curriculum that "challenges gender stereotypes and promotes equitable participation of learners regardless of gender," yet in practice, the integration appears limited to language modification and brief mentions of gender-related rights.

Theme 10: Weak Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Teachers identified monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as one of the weakest components of GAD implementation. Most shared that school-based monitoring focuses on documentation including photos, attendance sheets, and narrative reports rather than assessing actual behavioral or attitudinal change among learners.

As one participant put it, "*We report everything we do, but no one checks if the children actually learned to respect differences.*"

This mirrors Delos Reyes (2022), who concluded that monitoring in GAD programs remains compliance-oriented instead of outcome-based. Teachers also noted that feedback from higher offices is rarely provided, leaving them uncertain whether their initiatives are effective or aligned with policy goals.

This situation contradicts the intent of DepEd Memorandum No. 152, s. 2021, which promotes evidence-based monitoring and evaluation to ensure GAD efforts contribute to meaningful gender equity outcomes. Teachers expressed a strong desire for more participatory and formative evaluation methods that assess learning impact and provide constructive feedback for improvement.

The challenges and frustrations shared by teachers point to systemic gaps that hinder genuine implementation of GAD-related policies. While DepEd has established a strong policy foundation through DepEd Orders Nos. 12 (2015), 27 (2019), and 32 (2017), these policies often fail to reach the classroom in a meaningful way. Teachers' experiences reveal that poor communication, limited transparency, inadequate training, outdated materials, and weak evaluation systems collectively undermine GAD's goals.

Despite these frustrations, teachers remain committed to promoting equality and inclusivity. Their insights serve as a critical reminder that successful GAD implementation depends not only on policy directives but also on empowering teachers as active agents of change who can make gender sensitivity a living practice in every classroom.

What recommendations do teachers propose to make GAD policy implementation more effective, inclusive, and responsive to school realities?

Theme 11. Policy Clarification and Localization

Teachers consistently recommended that GAD policies be simplified and contextualized for easier implementation at the school level. Many expressed that while DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 (Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy) provides a strong legal and conceptual foundation, its language remains too technical for classroom-level application. Teachers suggested that DepEd produce localized versions or “teacher-friendly guides” that break down gender concepts into concrete examples relevant to their learners’ developmental levels.

This call aligns with findings by Hemillan-Sacro et al. (2022), who reported that teachers in Davao City struggled to internalize national GAD frameworks without contextual illustrations or school-based adaptations. Similarly, UNESCO (2023) emphasized that localized policy interpretation is critical for achieving genuine inclusivity in education systems. Teachers thus proposed a “policy translation mechanism” where divisions or clusters can adapt GAD guidelines to fit local culture and context, without compromising core gender principles.

Theme 12. Participatory and Transparent Fund Utilization

Teachers raised concerns about the lack of transparency and inclusivity in managing the Gender and Development (GAD) budget. Although DepEd Order No. 63, s. 2012 requires that at least 5% of the school budget be allocated for GAD programs, many teachers reported that they were rarely consulted in planning or utilization. They recommended participatory budgeting that includes teacher and parent representatives and the public posting of GAD-funded activities to promote transparency and accountability. This aligns with Villaflor and Castro (2021), who emphasized that inclusive planning enhances teachers’ ownership and compliance with gender programs.

Teachers also noted that GAD planning tends to be confined to school heads and coordinators, leaving out the voices of those most directly involved with learners.

One participant remarked, “*Sana lahat ng teachers makapagbigay ng suggestion kung paano gamitin ang GAD... baka may fresh ideas sila*” (“Hopefully, all teachers can give suggestions on how to use the GAD funds... they might have fresh ideas”).

This reflects a desire for broader participation consistent with DepEd Memorandum No. 114, s. 2022, which mandates participatory gender analysis to ensure that fund utilization responds to the real needs of learners and personnel.

This call for inclusion resonates with findings by Lopez and Salazar (2023) and Cabrera (2021), who both observed that participatory GAD planning strengthens transparency, accountability, and practical outcomes. Inviting diverse voices especially new and younger teachers can bring innovative, learner-centered perspectives. Such recommendations support the participatory governance principles under DepEd Order No. 43, s. 2016, encouraging collaborative decision-making in school improvement and implementation plans where GAD initiatives are integrated.

Theme 13. Sustained and Practice-Based Capacity Building

Teachers emphasized the need to move beyond one-time GAD orientations toward continuous, practice-based professional development. Many described previous seminars as overly theoretical and lacking practical classroom applications. They recommended sustained capacity-building initiatives anchored in DepEd Memorandum No. 144, s. 2019, which promotes gender-responsive teaching through

ongoing training, peer mentoring, and school-based Learning Action Cells (LACs) focused on gender issues.

As one teacher noted, *“We need follow-through coaching, not just a one-day PowerPoint session.”*

This highlights the demand for participatory, reflective, and classroom-embedded learning, consistent with Mukagiahana et al. (2024) who found that such training significantly improves teachers’ gender sensitivity and pedagogy.

Despite frustrations, teachers expressed continued dedication to inclusivity and equity. One participant shared, *“Pero committed pa rin kami to foster inclusivity and equity”* (“But we remain committed to fostering inclusivity and equity”), reflecting a strong sense of commitment despite systemic barriers. Another added, *“We hope that sufficient support, clear implementation mechanisms, and responsive interventions are put in place so that we can finally say that GAD is progressing and moving forward.”* Their comments reveal a desire for coherent implementation mechanisms and clear accountability systems within the Gender and Development Focal Point System (GFPS) which is a concern echoed by Dela Cruz (2022), who emphasized that effective GAD mainstreaming requires both structured accountability and participatory planning.

Overall, teachers viewed capacity building as a continuous growth process, not a compliance task. They advocated for contextualized and practice-based approaches—integrating gender sensitivity into teaching, learner interactions, and classroom management. As Villanueva and Ramos (2022) observed, classroom simulations, mentoring, and community partnerships foster deeper and more sustainable gender-responsive practices. Teachers’ recommendations therefore call for a shift from compliance-driven GAD seminars to transformative, sustained, and practice-oriented programs that embed inclusivity into everyday school culture.

Theme 14. Curriculum and Instructional Integration

Teachers emphasized the need for stronger integration of Gender and Development (GAD) principles in both the formal and hidden curriculum. They recommended revising instructional materials to eliminate gender stereotypes and embedding gender-responsive lessons across all subjects not just in Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao (EsP) as supported by DepEd Memorandum No. 273, s. 2019 on inclusive and bias-free curriculum content. Many teachers lamented that current materials still reinforce traditional gender roles and urged DepEd to develop exemplar lesson plans that model gender-fair pedagogy, echoing Tarrayo’s (2021) findings that Philippine textbooks continue to depict gendered representations.

Participants called for more child-friendly and contextualized materials suited to elementary learners.

One teacher shared, *“Sana maglabas ang DepEd ng mga topics na pwedeng iintegrate sa lesson, with specific activities. Yung pambata lang.”* (“Hopefully, DepEd can release suggested topics with specific child-appropriate activities.”)

Another added that gender discussions should be “light but educational,” suggesting storybooks and simple, activity-based lessons. These responses reflect teachers’ difficulty in translating policy into practice despite DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, which mandates gender integration in teaching and learning materials. Studies by Dela Cruz (2021) and Santiago and Villanueva (2023) similarly note that lack of contextualized resources and developmental alignment hinders meaningful GAD integration.

Teachers believe that integrating GAD principles into everyday lessons through storytelling, role-playing, and values-based activities would make gender equality relatable and natural for young learners. This approach aligns with the MATATAG Curriculum’s vision of inclusive, values-driven education. To achieve this, teachers recommend the national development of ready-made lesson exemplars, localized materials, and learner-centered approaches. As Alavanza and Ramos (2022) assert, structured and contextualized support enables teachers to apply GAD principles more effectively, transforming gender education from a compliance task into a lived classroom practice that fosters respect, fairness, and empathy among learners.

Theme 15. Results-Focused Monitoring and Evaluation

Finally, teachers recommended shifting GAD monitoring away from mere compliance documentation toward meaningful impact assessment. Many noted that monitoring currently focuses on “attendance sheets and photo ops,” with little reflection on whether learners’ gender awareness or behaviors improved. They proposed using qualitative indicators such as learner attitudes, classroom interactions, and feedback from parents.

This perspective is consistent with the findings of Hemillan-Sacro et al. (2022), who emphasized the need to measure the quality rather than the quantity of GAD activities. Likewise, DepEd Order No. 13, s. 2023 encourages schools to adopt evidence-based reporting aligned with gender equity outcomes. Teachers suggested regular division-level evaluations that include classroom observations and reflective sharing, promoting accountability and learning rather than fear of compliance.

Overall, teachers’ recommendations reveal a deep understanding of both the intent and the limitations of current GAD implementation. Their suggestions—clarifying policies, ensuring fund transparency, strengthening training, integrating gender into curricula, and reforming monitoring systems—reflect a desire for authenticity, not just compliance. These findings support UNESCO’s (2023) call for “transformative gender mainstreaming,” where teachers become empowered agents of equity, not mere executors of mandates.

In essence, teachers in this study envision a GAD implementation model that listens to their voices, values their professional insights, and aligns institutional structures with classroom realities—an approach truly reflective of the study’s title, “Makinig Naman Kayo.”

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that while teachers recognize the importance of Gender and Development (GAD) policies in promoting inclusivity and equity in education, their implementation at the school level remains limited, fragmented, and often symbolic. Teachers’ frustrations stem from unclear guidelines, lack of participatory decision-making, and inadequate institutional support. Despite DepEd’s strong policy framework—such as DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 and DepEd Memorandum No. 273, s. 2019—many teachers experience difficulty translating gender-related directives into classroom practices due to insufficient training, rigid bureaucratic procedures, and competing academic demands. Nevertheless, teachers continue to demonstrate a genuine commitment to fostering inclusive learning environments, emphasizing the need for clearer, more practical, and context-responsive mechanisms that empower them to implement GAD effectively.

To address these challenges, the study recommends that the Department of Education strengthen participatory and transparent GAD fund utilization by involving teachers, parents, and learners in the planning and monitoring process. GAD planning should move beyond administrative compliance and adopt a collaborative model that values teachers’ insights and contextual knowledge. Furthermore, DepEd should prioritize sustained, practice-based capacity building rather than one-off seminars. Continuous professional development through Learning Action Cells (LACs), peer mentoring, and partnerships with gender advocacy groups can enhance teachers’ confidence and competence in handling gender-related topics.

The study also recommends that DepEd develop age-appropriate, contextualized instructional materials and exemplar lesson plans to support the integration of GAD principles into all learning areas. These materials should reflect real-life scenarios that promote respect, fairness, and empathy among learners. Finally, clear accountability systems and monitoring mechanisms should be instituted to ensure that GAD initiatives are not merely reported but genuinely practiced. Through participatory governance, continuous support, and curriculum-based integration, GAD implementation can evolve from a

compliance-driven program into a sustained and transformative movement for gender equality within the basic education system.

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