A Policy Analysis of Inclusive Leadership and LGBTQ+ Teacher Inclusion in the Philippine Context

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Abstract.
Gender equality and inclusive leadership are core priorities of global education framework. This paper examines GAD-related policies issued by the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) to evaluate how these policies institutionalize gender equality and inclusive leadership, including LGBTQ+ teacher inclusion. The study utilized qualitative document analysis guided by Gender Mainstreaming Theory, Inclusive Leadership Theory, and Queer Theory to examine major DepEd Orders, Regional Memoranda, and Division Memoranda issued from 2013 to 2024. The results show that while DepEd has very strong gender-equality mandates, policy implementation is impeded by four major gaps, namely: (1) unclear and unenforceable leadership accountability structures; (2) weak results-based monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; (3) limited representation of marginalized groups in GAD structures; and (4) insufficient capacity-building and sustainability systems. These limitations resulted in inconsistent and personality-based implementation, compliance-based reporting, and insufficient protection of LGBTQ+ teachers. The research suggests reinforcing structures of leadership accountability, institutionalizing outcome-based monitoring systems, and institutionalizing continuous, participatory, and inclusive capacity-building programs. The research seeks to contribute to a stronger understanding of how gender-equality policies can be improved to promote inclusive leadership in accordance with SDGs 4, 5, and 10.

Keywords: Gender equality; Inclusive Leadership; Policy analysis; LGBTQ+ teachers

1.0 Introduction

Gender equality and inclusive education are international imperatives embedded in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4, 5, and 10, which call for equal learning opportunities and the elimination of discrimination. UNESCO has consistently emphasized that fulfilling these commitments requires strong, inclusive leadership capable of embedding equity into school structures, policies, and culture. In the Philippines, these global goals are advanced through Gender and Development (GAD) mainstreaming and DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, which mandates gender-responsive practices across all dimensions of basic education.

Despite increasing visibility of the experiences of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) community, schools remain challenging environments marked by discrimination, policy inconsistencies, and unequal institutional support. Research both locally and internationally establishes that leadership plays a critical role in cultivating safe, equitable, and inclusive school environments (Greany and Waterhouse, 2016; Baams et al., 2020). However, Philippine studies consistently reveal gaps between national-level GAD policy expectations and the realities of implementation in schools. Alibudbud (2023) found that many school leaders possess only partial knowledge of gender policies, while Human Rights Watch (2017) documented wide variations in how schools enact gender equality directives, particularly concerning protections for LGBTQ+

teachers and learners. These studies suggest that while GAD frameworks have contributed to broader gender parity efforts, explicit policy guidance on SOGIE-related inclusion and specific protections for LGBTQ+ educators remains limited.

Efforts to localize GAD policies through gender sensitivity trainings, anti-bullying programs, and gender-responsive instructional development demonstrate promising intentions, yet research shows these efforts often occur as isolated, project-based interventions. Bautista et al. (2020) and Monterola and Roxas (2021) note that the sustainability of GAD initiatives frequently depends on leadership commitment, resource availability, and the degree to which administrators prioritize gender inclusion. Divisions with strong leadership and stable funding tend to implement gender initiatives more effectively, while those experiencing leadership turnover or resource constraints struggle to sustain such efforts (David et al., 2022). International findings echo this pattern, emphasizing that policy reforms must be accompanied by robust systems of implementation, monitoring, and leadership advocacy (Greany and Waterhouse, 2016).

A growing body of scholarship also highlights the persistent gap between gender equality frameworks and leadership practice. Lugg and Murphy (2014) argue that many education systems lack clear accountability structures to guide inclusive leadership. In the Philippines, similar issues arise where DepEd Orders such as DO 32 (2017) and DO 40 (2012) are at times reduced to performative compliance—where reporting requirements are fulfilled, yet systemic change remains limited (Human Rights Watch, 2017; Castillo, 2021). Studies on inclusive leadership further show that sustained and reflective professional learning is essential for equipping school leaders to address gender, sexuality, and broader issues of inclusion. Wilson et al. (2022) demonstrate that educator confidence in engaging with SOGIE-related concerns improves when professional development is embedded within school systems, while Ferfolja et al. (2020) and Leung et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of advocacy, institutional commitment, and inclusive curriculum integration. However, these efforts often face cultural resistance in more conservative environments.

At the systems level, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes remain an underdeveloped component of GAD policy implementation. Greany and Waterhouse (2016) and Human Rights Watch (2017) caution that without structured M&E mechanisms, gender policies risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. In the Philippines, the mandated GAD reporting process often emphasizes compliance rather than informing leadership accountability or policy refinement (David et al., 2022). Emerging scholarship also highlights the underrecognized contributions of LGBTQ+ teachers. Lee (2020) found that many LGBTQ+ educators develop heightened resilience, empathy, and emotional intelligence—competencies that are valuable for inclusive leadership yet remain overlooked in policy frameworks.

Taken together, the literature reveals persistent challenges: uneven implementation of gender policies, limited leadership accountability, inadequate capacity-building, weak monitoring systems, and the absence of explicit policy attention to LGBTQ+ teachers as stakeholders in school development. These patterns point to a critical need for examining how DepEd's GAD-aligned issuances articulate leadership roles, institutional mechanisms, and structural commitments.

Addressing this gap, the present study systematically analyzes GAD-aligned DepEd policies to determine how they define leadership responsibility, institutionalize gender equality, and support the inclusion of LGBTQ+ teachers within the Philippine basic education system. The purpose of this research is to identify the extent to which existing policies provide clear guidance, protections, and systems-level support for inclusive leadership. The findings are significant as they will inform policy refinement, strengthen leadership accountability, and contribute to the broader goal of creating equitable, non-discriminatory, and inclusive schools.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This research used Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA) within a Policy Analysis research design, suitable for exploring the articulation of leadership expectations, institutional mechanisms, and provisions for gender equality and LGBTQ+ inclusion in Gender and Development (GAD)- aligned policies. QDA enables systematic, interpretive reading of documents, enabling the researcher to determine both manifest content (explicit policy mandates) and latent content (silences, omissions, underlying assumptions) in policy texts (Bowen, 2009). Because the main goal of this study is to identify policy gaps and develop policy recommendations, an interpretive design grounded in policy analysis proved necessary to address the complexity of DepEd Orders, Regional Memoranda, and Division Memoranda.

2.2 Data Sources

The study used 21 official DepEd policy documents as the main data. These documents consisted of DepEd Orders, Regional Memoranda, and Division Memoranda issued from 2012 to 2025, including the period of active implementation of gender-responsive governance and the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017). Documents were included in the analysis if they met several criteria: they should have been officially issued by DepEd at the national, regional or division level; explicitly referred to Gender and Development (GAD), gender equality, inclusive education, diversity, SOGIE or leadership functions; and provided guidance on school governance or professional responsibilities. Only documents issued from 2012 to 2025 were considered to ensure the analysis reflected contemporary policy directions, in line with DepEd's gender and inclusion priorities. Documents were excluded if they were non-policy in nature (e.g., announcements, press releases), unrelated to gender or inclusion, or did not contain any substantive content for coding and analysis. This process ensured only that policy-relevant, content-rich documents were used as the basis for the thematic analysis..

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

The data-gathering process began with a systematic search and retrieval, followed by the cataloguing of relevant DepEd policies. After collating all potential documents from DepEd's official repositories, each item was examined for relevance in accordance with the inclusion criteria. Qualified documents were then transformed into analyzable text formats and read several times in order to support familiarization with their structure and content. A policy coding sheet was created to document key information, including the document title, issuing office, date, thematic focus, and key policy language about leadership, GAD mechanisms, and the inclusion of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer community. Extracted policy provisions were organized and prepared for intensive qualitative analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was a three-phase coding process. The first phase was initial coding, in which explicit statements in the documents were tagged based on the descriptive categories of leadership roles, monitoring and evaluation structures, GFPS operations, GAD reporting, anti-discrimination provisions, capacity building, and SOGIE-related language. The second phase was axial coding, in which patterns and relationships among codes were analyzed to create broader thematic categories. Latent analysis was carried out at this point, informed by Gender Mainstreaming Theory, Inclusive Leadership Theory, Queer Theory, and the 3I Framework, to enable a more in-depth interpretation of assumptions, gaps, and institutional implications in policies. The last stage, thematic synthesis, identified four major policy gaps, which were then used to develop evidence-based policy recommendations aligned with SDGs 4, 5, and 10.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study did not involve human participants, and only publicly available policy documents were analyzed; hence, no ethical risks were expected. Ethical behavior was ensured by representing the substance of policy documents, maintaining transparency in the analytical method, and avoiding extrapolation beyond what was

substantiated by the data. No confidential or restricted materials were used. The study conforms to the ethical standards for conducting research with documentary and archival data.

To ensure methodological rigor, the study followed established qualitative trustworthiness criteria. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data from various national, regional, and division-level issuances, as well as through repeated readings of documents to ensure interpretive consistency. Transferability was ensured through the provision of clear information about the policy context, the nature of the data, and the inclusion criteria, to facilitate replication in other policy contexts. An audit trail of coding decisions ensured dependability, thematic refinements and analytic steps. Confirmability was assisted by reflexive memoing to reduce personal bias and by using only official documents as objective data sources. These measures collectively meant that the findings were based on systematic, transparent and verifiable analytic processes.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Policy Gaps Existing within the GAD-Aligned DepEd Issuances

The analysis of the GAD-aligned DepEd issuances identified several policy gaps that hinder the successful institutionalization of gender equality, leadership, and inclusive teaching and learning for diverse genders and/or sexual orientations in basic education. These gaps reflect structural, operational, and implementation weaknesses in the existing policy framework and provide a basis for identifying areas that require policy strengthening and reform.

3.1.1 *Leadership Accountability and Governance Gaps*

The analysis shows that leadership accountability for gender equality in DepEd policies is weak: GAD and GRBE provisions are often not clearly embedded in KRAs, performance appraisals, or promotion criteria of school heads and supervisors. This theme implies that the institutionalization of gender equality remains personality-driven and vulnerable to variability in local leadership commitment, rather than being anchored in a coherent governance framework. Recent studies on gender mainstreaming in education find similar patterns: gender policies are often present "on paper" but lack clear role definitions and accountability structures, resulting in partial or symbolic implementation (Miralles-Cardona, 2025; Palma, 2025; UNGEI, 2023). Comparative policy work also notes that where dedicated gender units are empowered to monitor implementation and report directly to top leadership, institutionalization of gender equality is stronger and more sustained (Bustamante-Mora et al., 2024). For DepEd, the implication is that leadership accountability must be made explicit and enforceable—by integrating GAD indicators into performance management systems, mandating regular leadership reports on gender outcomes, and clarifying lines of responsibility at the school, division, regional, and national levels.

3.1.2 *Gaps in Monitoring, Evaluation and Data-Driven Decision-Making*

Policies often require GAD plans and accomplishment reports; however, they lack robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks, outcome indicators, or structured feedback loops. This theme suggests that GAD implementation tends to be activity- and compliance-focused (counting trainings, activities, and expenditures) rather than evidence-based and impact-focused. Global studies underscore that inclusive and gender-transformative education systems rely on robust M&E systems that monitor outcomes rather than inputs and processes (UNESCO, 2019, 2021; PCW, 2019). Recent work on inclusive education and social transformation, for example, has emphasized that ongoing sampling concerns of and objects beyond the course of action, along with the use of data and the constraint of stakeholders, could be crucial to be able to move from its potential policy possibilities into equitable learning conditions on the ground (Syafii et al., 2025). Without sex disaggregated and SOGIE sensitive indicators, DepEd cannot systematically evaluate if they exist and if the safety, support, and inclusion of the teachers and other marginalized groups are improving or deteriorating over time. The implication is the need to institutionalize results-based GAD management: building clear indicators

(e.g., incidents of discrimination, perceptions of school climate), incorporating them into routine information systems, and requiring leaders to use these data in planning and decision-making.

3.1.3 *Representation and Inclusive Participation Gaps*

The review shows that many of the governance structures (e.g., GFPS, Councils, Committees) of GAD are largely comprised of administrative officials, with no explicit call to include any of the following: teachers and persons whose sexuality is queer, disabled, indigenous people, or other marginalized groups. This limited representation implies that those most affected by gender and inclusion policies are often policy "targets" rather than co-designers, reinforcing a top-down decision-making model. Studies on inclusive governance show that deliberate and meaningful engagement of marginalized groups contributes to greater legitimacy, responsiveness, and social justice in education and public institutions (Sanchez-Soriano, 2024; Syafii et al., 2025). Reviews of social marginalization in education also warn of policies that do not structurally embed the voices of affected communities, thereby reproducing blind spots and ineffective or misaligned interventions (Brown et al., 2025; Face, 2023). For the DepEd, the implication is the formalization of mechanisms for participation: securing representation from different sectors (e.g., SPED, IPED, LGBTQ+ teachers) in GAD bodies; institutionalizing consultations and focus groups; and adopting the principle of 'nothing about us without us' in the design and review of policies.

3.1.3 *Capacity Building and Program Sustainability Gaps*

Finally, the analysis shows that capacity-building for GAD and inclusive leadership is often episodic, short-term, and inadequate for implementation and integration within DepEd's routine professional development structures. Training activities are held, but states are often not followed up with coaching, communities of practice, and sustainability plans; newly created structures, like GFPS, are not always supported with operational guidance and further development. International evidence highlights the importance of sustained, structured capacity-building (in contrast to one-off workshop events) for embedding gender equality in institutional culture and practice (EAEA, 2024; UNESCO, 2021). Studies in basic and higher education settings illustrate how teaching techniques related to gender-responsive pedagogy, when adapted to gender-mainstreamed content across teacher and leadership training, can enhance the quality of implementation, motivation, and self-efficacy to a great extent (Miralles-Cardona, 2025; Palma, 2025). The implication for DepEd is the need to make GAD competence a core and recurrent professional standard: incorporating GAD and SOGIE modules in INSET and leadership development programs, imposing action plans and follow-up after training, and devising the sustainability provisions (e.g., budget lines, knowledge resources, institutional mentoring) for each major GAD initiative.

3.2 Policy Recommendations to Strengthen Gender Equality, Inclusive Leadership, and Inclusion

The results of this research indicate areas where the DepEd's current policy framework can be improved to promote better the goals of gender equality, inclusive leadership, and LGBTQ+ teacher inclusion. Based on the gaps mentioned, a series of policy recommendations has been put forward to improve institutional coherence, strengthen implementation systems, and ensure more inclusive and equitable practices across the basic education sector.

3.2.1 *Strengthen Leadership Accountability and Institutional Coherence*

Strengthening leadership accountability requires integrating gender equality and inclusion expectations into DepEd leadership's formal performance management systems. Research consistently shows that gender mainstreaming policies are achieved only with meaningful implementation when leadership responsibility is defined, measured, and tied to incentives or consequences (Bustamante-Mora et al., 2024; UNGEI and UNICEF, 2023). Leadership accountability, therefore, needs to be institutionalized by incorporating the GAD, GRBE, and LGBTQ+ inclusion into the KRAs and IPCRF of school heads, their supervisors, regional officials, and GFPS focal persons. Doing so aligns with global findings that leaders mandated to report on the outcomes of gender equality efforts show greater commitment and coherence in implementing gender equality policies (Miralles-Cardona, 2025). DepEd also needs to strengthen vertical and horizontal coherence across levels of

governance by requiring annual policy briefs, leadership reports, and strategic reviews, with monthly or quarterly targets against which they will be measured. A coherent system - where responsibilities are clear and monitored from schools to Central Office - ensures that gender equality becomes more of a structural expectation rather than a leadership "unwanted choice". Evidence from inclusive governance reforms also shows that empowered gender focal units contribute significantly to enhanced organizational accountability and long-term policy cohesion (Sanchez-Soriano, 2024).

3.2.2 *Strengthen Leadership Accountability and Institutional Coherence*
Dealing with compliance-based reporting requires a results-based monitoring and evaluation (RBME) approach, based on outcome indicators, not activity counts, as recommended by DepEd. International research highlights the importance of effective gender equality strategies, including measurable indicators, auditing systems, and iterative feedback mechanisms, to enable organizations to guide their interventions in line with data (UNESCO, 2021; PCW, 2019). A stronger M&E system would entail the formulation of indicators to measure school climate, incidents of discrimination, teacher and learner perceptions of inclusion, and leadership responsiveness to SOGIE-related issues. Recent studies reveal that education systems with robust monitoring, evaluation, and planning (M&E) structures have achieved significantly better gender parity outcomes, because data from M&E frameworks can be actionable and used to reform policies (Syafii et al., 2025). DepEd must therefore institutionalize post-training action plans, post-intervention evaluations, and structured feedback loops, and ensure regular synthesis of findings and strategy adjustment at the division and regional levels. Research in the context of inclusive education shows that without such systems, inclusion initiatives on gender, amid gender diversity among peer groups, and learning under the banner of gender and sexual orientation risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative (Brown et al., 2025). By enhancing data-driven decision-making, DepEd can better inform itself about progress and emerging risks and ensure that GAD initiatives lead to measurable advancements in line with SDGs 4, 5, and 10.

3.2.3 *Strengthen Leadership Accountability and Institutional Coherence*
Creating sustainable and inclusive systems requires making institutional capacity-building, stakeholder representation, and stakeholder participation integral components of DepEd's GAD governance. One-off gender sensitivity training is not enough. Evidence shows that regular, structured professional development enhances educators' confidence, competence, and responsiveness to gender and SOGIE issues and concerns (Wilson et al., 2022; Ferfolja et al., 2020). DepEd needs to make gender equality, inclusive leadership, and LGBTQ+ inclusion part of INSET and leadership development, as well as ongoing training for GFPS. Sustainability also entails the need for operational manuals, toolkits and communities of practice to ensure institutional memory and to support long-term initialization. Moreover, representation is necessary for gender policies to become more relevant and effective. Research keys the idea that inclusive decision-making - the inclusion of the marginalized in the representation of countries - leads to more legitimate, equitable and context-responsive policies (Sanchez-Soriano, 2024; Face, 2023). DepEd should therefore require representation from the sectors (e.g., LGB+ teachers, IPED, SPED, PWD groups) in GFPS structures and policy review bodies. By linking the participatory governance mechanism, DepEd operationalizes the principle of "nothing about us without us," enabling those affected by gender and inclusion policies to shape them. Sustaining such systems will help DepEd ensure they foster a lasting institutional culture conducive to inclusive leadership, minimize the number of individual champions, and strengthen the implementation of gender equality at all levels of basic education.

4.0 Conclusion
The analysis reveals that the DepEd has policies that promote gender equity, but major structural gaps limit their effectiveness. Leadership accountability is low, monitoring and evaluation systems focus on compliance rather than outcomes, and SOGIE-sensitive data is absent. Participatory governance is minimal, with little representation of marginalized groups, and capacity-building is short-term and unsustainable. Overall, DepEd's GAD policy framework provides a basis and guidelines. However, it must strengthen accountability provisions,

intensify data-driven systems, promote more inclusive participation, and strengthen long-term capacity building to further gender equality and LGBTQ+ inclusion.

5.0 References

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