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Institutionalizing Gender and Development in Schools: Policy–Practice Gaps and the Invisible Labor of Gender Advocates

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examines the school-level implementation of Gender and Development (GAD) policy in a Philippine public secondary school, focusing on teachers and guidance counselors as frontline implementers. Using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study identifies uneven policy awareness, limited professional learning, event-based compliance, and weak institutional support as key constraints to gender equity in schooling. Findings reveal a persistent policy–practice gap, with gender-responsive initiatives sustained largely through the invisible labor of individual advocates rather than embedded institutional structures. The study highlights the role of educational leadership, whole-school approaches, and accountability mechanisms in institutionalizing gender equity. Although context-specific, the findings contribute to international and Australian debates on gender equity, school leadership, and policy enactment in secondary education.

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education (DepEd) in the Philippines plays a crucial role in shaping values, promoting inclusiveness, and delivering equitable education to all learners. In compliance with national policies such as the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710), DepEd has institutionalized Gender and Development (GAD) through its various issuances, notably DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, which underscores the need for gender-responsive basic education. GAD is not only a tool for promoting gender equality but also a strategy for improving the quality and effectiveness of educational programs by ensuring inclusivity.

Despite the existence of policies, a disconnect remains between what is stated in national GAD directives and what is practiced in schools. Many public secondary schools struggle with the full institutionalization of GAD due to limitations in capacity, budget, cultural resistance, and lack of technical knowledge. While some schools conduct Women's Month celebrations or anti-bullying campaigns, the deeper integration of these initiatives into the curriculum, planning, and school culture remains inconsistent.

This study examines the institutionalization of Gender and Development (GAD) not at the level of policy formulation, but through the lived experiences and practices of frontline school implementers. By focusing on teachers and guidance counselors as key actors in everyday school processes, the research captures how institutional policies are interpreted, enacted, and sustained within the operational realities of a public secondary school.

This study builds on the author's broader research agenda,

examining institutional gaps between policy and practice in educational settings. Previous studies have highlighted how frontline educators often compensate for structural limitations through discretionary professional labor, particularly in areas involving student welfare and equity. These patterns suggest that institutional reforms in education are frequently sustained not solely through formal systems but through the agency and commitment of individual actors, thereby informing the analytical focus of the present study on gender policy enactment and institutionalization.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to analyze how Gender and Development (GAD) has been institutionalized in a public secondary school under the Department of Education. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness and understanding of GAD concepts among teachers and school personnel?
2. What gender-responsive practices are currently being implemented in the school?
3. What challenges hinder the full institutionalization of GAD in the school setting?
4. What recommendations can be proposed to strengthen the institutionalization of GAD in basic education?

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the level of awareness and understanding of GAD principles among selected school personnel.
2. To identify existing GAD-aligned practices within the school.
3. To determine the institutional and socio-cultural

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challenges in implementing GAD.

4. To provide evidence-based recommendations to enhance GAD integration at the school level.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the school administration prior to the commencement of data collection. All participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of participation. Pseudonyms were used in reporting the data, and all records were securely stored. The study adhered to established ethical guidelines for qualitative research in education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is grounded in three major theories. The Gender Mainstreaming Framework (UN ECOSOC, 1997) advocates for the systematic integration of gender perspectives into all aspects of institutional functioning, including policies, programs, and organizational culture. It emphasizes the need to ensure that both women's and men's concerns are integral to the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all initiatives. The Institutional Theory (Scott, 2004) provides a lens for understanding how schools, as institutions, often conform to external pressures, rules, and norms, particularly when implementing mandates such as GAD policies. It explains how formal structures may adapt to meet expectations while actual practices may lag or resist change. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) complements this by explaining how individual behaviors such as teaching practices or leadership decisions are shaped by intentions influenced by attitudes, perceived norms, and perceived behavioral control, which directly relates to how school stakeholders implement gender-responsive policies.

An essential implication arising from the findings is that GAD implementation is as much a product of policy as it is of people. This study reveals that where GAD thrives in schools, it does so not solely because of programs, but because of the quiet leadership of individuals who champion gender fairness—without titles, compensation, or formal platforms.

International and Australian Perspectives on Gender Mainstreaming in Schools

While this study is situated in the Philippine public education system, its focus on the institutionalization of Gender and Development (GAD) resonates with broader international discourses on gender equity in schooling, particularly within the Australian context. In Australia, gender equity in education is advanced through national and state-based frameworks such as the Australian Curriculum's General Capability on Ethical Understanding, Respectful Relationships Education, and Gender Equity strategies implemented across state education departments. These policies emphasize

whole-school approaches, leadership accountability, and curriculum integration principles that parallel the intent of the Philippine GAD framework.

Australian research has similarly documented the gap between policy commitments and school-level enactment. Studies in Australian educational settings highlight that gender equity initiatives often depend on the advocacy of individual teachers or school leaders rather than being fully embedded in institutional systems (Blackmore, 2013; Lingard & Mills, 2007). This mirrors findings in the Philippine context, where gender-responsive education is frequently sustained through informal leadership and personal commitment rather than structural support.

Moreover, Australian scholarship on educational leadership underscores the role of school culture, professional learning, and distributed leadership in advancing equity agendas. The challenges identified in this study limited professional development, uneven leadership support, and cultural resistance—echo Australian findings that equity work becomes vulnerable when not formally recognized in workload models, leadership frameworks, or accountability mechanisms.

By situating this Philippine case alongside Australian experiences, the study contributes to a comparative study of how gender equity policies were disseminated from policy texts to school practices across different governance and cultural contexts. For Australian education researchers and practitioners, this analysis provides insights into the institutional conditions significant for sustaining gender-responsive education beyond symbolic compliance.

In the Philippine educational context, GAD implementation is mandated by the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710) and institutionalized through Department of Education policies such as DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, which provides guidelines on gender-responsive basic education. These mandates aim to promote inclusive and equitable learning environments. However, numerous studies highlight a disconnect between policy and practice. According to the Philippine Commission on Women (2020), the degree of GAD mainstreaming varies widely, with urban schools more likely to implement GAD programs compared to those in rural settings due to better access to training and resources.

Lindo and Cabansag (2019) found that while teachers generally support the concept of gender equality, many are not adequately equipped to translate these values into classroom practices. They observed a lack of continuous capacity-building efforts and insufficient teaching materials tailored to address gender issues. Similarly, Alampay and Tindowen (2020) concluded that gender awareness among teachers tends to be superficial, often relying on stereotypes or symbolic compliance rather than integrating critical gender discourse into teaching methodologies.

GAD implementation in schools faces multiple systemic and cultural barriers. Ocampo (2021) emphasized the scarcity of localized GAD instructional materials and

the tendency of some schools to delegate GAD-related responsibilities to undertrained focal persons. Cultural resistance remains a major hurdle, particularly in regions where gender norms remain deeply entrenched. Studies by Alvior (2020) and David and Dizon (2017) further indicate that a lack of funding and leadership support constraints GAD integration in curriculum and co-curricular activities.

Research on the role of guidance counselors reveals similar challenges. Tolentino (2018) reported that while guidance counselors are often aware of GAD mandates, they are rarely involved in strategic decision-making regarding gender mainstreaming in their schools. Their roles remain limited to reactive interventions rather than proactive planning. Domingo (2020) observed that in many schools, GAD is largely event-based commemorated during Women's Month or similar observances but seldom embedded in core institutional programs.

Further studies by UNESCO (2020) and the World Bank (2021) have emphasized that GAD integration is most effective when backed by institutional mechanisms such as monitoring tools, capacity-building programs, and leadership accountability frameworks. Schools with active GAD focal persons and engaged leadership demonstrate higher gender inclusivity in teaching practices and policy enactment.

Invisible and Emotional Labor in Gender and Equity Work

International studies on gender and equity work in educational institutions highlight the often-unrecognized emotional, relational, and administrative labor carried by educators tasked with inclusion and gender advocacy. Such labor, frequently undertaken without formal designation or compensation, includes counseling, mediation, advocacy, and the creation of safe spaces for marginalized learners. Research suggests that when equity work relies heavily on personal commitment rather than institutional structures, it becomes vulnerable to burnout and discontinuity. This literature provides an important lens for understanding how gender mainstreaming is sustained or undermined at the school level.

This pattern is further reinforced by related studies of Pelino (2026) examining the role of educators in contexts where institutional support is limited. In a qualitative investigation on school-based risk management, *Managing Risks in Education: A Qualitative Study on Risk Management Practices* highlights how teachers and school personnel often assume additional responsibilities in addressing student vulnerabilities, frequently extending beyond formal role expectations. Similarly, *Career Stagnancy: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Unpromoted Teachers* by Pelino & Protacio (2026) reveals that educators experiencing career stagnation continue to demonstrate professional commitment through discretionary efforts, despite limited institutional recognition or advancement opportunities. These

studies collectively suggest that in educational settings, institutional gaps are frequently compensated through informal, emotionally intensive, and often invisible labor. This reinforces the present study's finding that gender and equity work is sustained not only through formal policy structures but through the relational and moral commitment of individual educators.

Synthesis

The review of related literature consistently reveals a gap between policy and actual practice in GAD implementation in Philippine public schools. While Department of Education policies provide a solid framework for gender mainstreaming, implementation remains inconsistent due to structural constraints, limited capacity, lack of resources, and cultural norms that resist gender equality. Many educators demonstrate a willingness to support GAD but are hindered by inadequate training and institutional support. These insights are reflected in the coded data from the present study, which affirms existing findings while contributing fresh qualitative perspectives from a localized school setting. The literature thus underlines the need for context-specific interventions that address the realities of frontline education providers in implementing GAD effectively. In this study, these frameworks are used analytically rather than prescriptively. Institutional Theory and gender mainstreaming concepts inform the analysis of structural and policy-level constraints, while the theory of planned behavior provides insight into how individual educators' actions mediate the enactment of gender policy at the school level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive case study approach to understand how GAD is being institutionalized in a public secondary school. The approach allows the exploration of behaviors, perceptions, and institutional practices related to GAD. While the study does not claim to evaluate institutional performance in its entirety, it examines institutionalization as reflected in the practices, perceptions, and experiences of key school personnel directly involved in GAD implementation. This approach recognizes that institutional policies are enacted through individuals and that frontline implementers play a critical role in translating policy into practice.

Locale of the Study

Koronadal National Comprehensive High School (KNCHS) is the locale of the study. It is one of the biggest schools in the region with a land area of 8.3 hectares. The school is situated on Rizal corner Aurora Street, City of Koronadal, Province of South Cotabato. The school was selected due to its size, diversity of learners, and accessible GAD records.

Participants of the Study

The participants included three teachers, two guidance

counsellors, and one school head, purposively selected based on their involvement in GAD-related initiatives and school leadership roles.

Purposive sampling involves selecting information-rich cases that can provide deep insights into the phenomenon under study. The goal is not to generalize to a population, but to understand a particular issue or group more deeply. In this study on GAD implementation in a public secondary school, I have chosen guidance counselors who are involved in gender-related services, teachers who are part of the GAD focal point system, and school heads or coordinators with direct roles in GAD planning. These participants are not randomly selected but are intentionally chosen because they have relevant experience and can provide insightful information. The advantage of using purposive sampling is that it allows a deep understanding of complex issues and is efficient when time and resources are limited.

Research Instrument

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide based on DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 and the PCW (Philippine Commission on Women) GAD Checklist. Also, will document review the School GAD Plan, Activity Reports, and Minutes of the meetings, and lastly, do the field notes during observations and informal conversations.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the conceptualization of the study, the researcher asked permission to conduct the study from the School Head of Koronadal National Comprehensive High School and the Division GAD Coordinator.

Conduct the interviews individually for confidentiality. Collect and review relevant GAD documents and transcribe, organize, and analyze the responses of the participants.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring patterns and insights. Coding will be done manually and validated by a co-researcher to ensure reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic presentation of findings is organized to directly respond to the research questions outlined in Chapter I. Each theme corresponds to a specific dimension of GAD institutionalization, namely awareness, existing practices, challenges, and opportunities for strengthening implementation. This chapter presents the analysis and interpretations of the code to answer the specific questions drawn from the statement of the problem.

Theme 1: Understanding and Awareness of GAD Concepts

All participants showed basic awareness of GAD, associating it with gender equality, anti-discrimination, and fairness in educational settings. However, the depth

of understanding varied. While some connected GAD with legal mandates such as the Magna Carta of Women and DepEd policies, others saw it merely as compliance through events like Women's Month. GAD coordinator specifically stated that "I know GAD helps protect the rights of all students regardless of gender, but I think it's still mostly about activities like contests and seminars." This aligns with Domingo's (2020) findings that GAD in schools is often perceived more as event-based compliance rather than a developmental strategy integrated into institutional systems.

Theme 2: Existing GAD Practices

The participants identified the following ongoing practices: All the participants celebrate Women's Month and participate in the 18-Day Campaign to End Violence Against Women (EAW)

Most participants reported posting gender-related learning materials, and they support counseling for not just LGBTQ+ learners but all learners to foster inclusivity. Lastly, emphasize the avoidance of gender-biased language in classrooms. Guidance Counselor explains that "As a guidance counselor, I make sure our office is open and welcoming to students of all identities. We also handle bullying cases with gender sensitivity." Though efforts exist, the practices remain limited to stand-alone initiatives rather than holistic, integrated strategies. No classroom observations, lesson planning reviews, or GAD budgeting were consistently practiced.

Theme 3: Challenges in Institutionalizing GAD

The study uncovered several barriers like lack of a formal GAD focal person in the school; despite policy mandates, the school had no designated or trained GAD focal person except the Guidance Counselor. There are also limited GAD-related trainings.

Teachers reported attending only one or two orientations, often years apart. Minimal integration in the curriculum. Most GAD content was not reflected in daily instruction or planning documents. Cultural and religious sensitivities. Some teachers noted hesitancy in discussing gender diversity in class due to fears of parent backlash or cultural resistance. The School Head states that "We support GAD in principle, but sometimes there's fear, like, will the parents complain if we talk about gender roles or LGBTQ?"

This confirms previous studies (Ocampo, 2021) suggesting that the implementation of gender programs often clashes with traditional beliefs and societal norms.

Theme 4: Opportunities and Potentials for Strengthening GAD

Despite the challenges, all respondents expressed willingness to participate in enhanced GAD implementation if the following were addressed: Continuous, localized GAD training. Strong administrative support. Presence of a GAD focal person. Budget allocation based on the mandated 5% of MOOE. Inclusion of gender topics in

lesson planning and subject integration.

Emergent Finding: The Invisible Labor of GAD Advocates

Beyond the planned interview responses and expected challenges, one critical and emergent theme surfaced during the analysis: the unrecognized, informal labor carried out by school personnel who have voluntarily taken on the role of GAD advocates, even without formal mandates or incentives.

These individuals often guidance counselors, classroom advisers, or active teachers spoke of providing emotional support, designing GAD materials, handling sensitive student disclosures, or promoting inclusive values, all beyond their official job descriptions. Their commitment to gender fairness stemmed from personal conviction, not institutional directives. The Guidance Counselor states that “I attend GAD webinars even if they’re not required. No one asks me to, but I know our students need safe spaces. There is no focal person, so I just take it upon myself to talk to learners who are bullied for being different.”

This invisible emotional and administrative labor is vital in maintaining a sense of gender safety and respect within the school yet it goes largely unnoticed, unsupported, and uncompensated. The implications of these findings, the success of GAD programs in practice often hinges on the invisible work of passionate individuals rather than systemic support. These advocates are vulnerable to burnout, emotional strain, and discouragement if left unsupported.

DepEd policies and school-based management systems fail to formally acknowledge this contribution, which limits both sustainability and morale. This highlights the need to reframe GAD work not just as compliance or technical implementation but as a deeply human and relational practice that deserves structural recognition.

Relevance of Findings to the Australian Educational Context

Although grounded in a Philippine public secondary school, the findings of this study hold relevance for Australian educational contexts where gender equity remains a persistent policy and practice concern. The uneven awareness of gender frameworks, reliance on event-based initiatives, and dependence on individual advocates reflect patterns identified in Australian schools implementing gender equity and respectful relationships programs.

In particular, the emergent finding on the invisible labor of GAD advocates aligns with Australian research documenting the emotional and professional burden carried by teachers and guidance staff engaged in equity and wellbeing work. In Australian schools, gender and inclusion initiatives are often sustained by educators whose contributions remain undervalued within formal performance and leadership structures. This raises comparable concerns regarding burnout, sustainability,

and institutional responsibility.

The study’s emphasis on leadership commitment, formal recognition of gender work, and integration into planning and accountability systems parallels Australian debates on strengthening equity governance in schools. For Australian Education Journal (AJE) readers, this case underscores the importance of moving beyond compliance-driven gender initiatives toward institutionalized, leadership-supported, and professionally recognized practices.

By highlighting shared challenges across national contexts, this study contributes to international conversations on gender-responsive schooling and offers evidence-based insights relevant to policymakers, school leaders, and researchers seeking to embed equity within everyday educational practice.

This emergent finding reinforces the study’s central argument that GAD institutionalization is sustained less by formal structures and more by the discretionary labor of committed individuals. It bridges the gap between policy-level intentions and ground-level realities, illustrating how institutional weakness is often compensated for by personal advocacy.

Summary, Conclusion, And Recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

Summary

This study explored the institutionalization of Gender and Development (GAD) in a public secondary school under the Department of Education. Using qualitative methods, insights were gathered from five teachers and one guidance counselor. The study revealed that while awareness of GAD is present, its implementation remains partial and fragmented. Key challenges include limited training, lack of a GAD focal person, weak integration in school planning, and sociocultural constraints. Nonetheless, respondents showed openness to strengthening GAD integration with proper support.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions drawn in this study are based on the perspectives and experiences of selected school personnel and reflect how GAD policies are operationalized at the school level. While the findings are not intended to generalize across all public schools, they offer analytical insights into recurring implementation challenges relevant to similar educational contexts. Based on the findings, the study concludes the following:

1. GAD is acknowledged but not fully internalized – Awareness exists, but most efforts are perceived as external compliance rather than systemic change.
2. Institutional GAD practices are underdeveloped – Schools lack strategic integration of GAD in curriculum, budget, and operations.
3. Cultural barriers and lack of support hinder implementation – Teachers are cautious due to societal

and parental sensitivity around gender issues.

4. There is readiness among personnel to improve GAD implementation – The school staff is willing to embrace GAD more fully if empowered through training, leadership, and policy alignment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are framed as analytical implications rather than prescriptive policy directives and are grounded in the experiences of the study participants.

For the School Level, they should designate and capacitate a GAD Focal Person as part of the school leadership team. They should conduct regular and localized GAD training sessions for all school personnel, integrate GAD indicators in lesson plans, classroom management, and school-based management systems (SBM). Establish clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for GAD implementation. Encourage open, respectful discussions on gender issues to normalize inclusivity and reduce stigma.

For the DepEd Division Office, they should ensure the 5% GAD fund from MOOE is utilized strategically at the school level. Provide sample lesson plans, GAD-aligned teaching guides, and IEC materials. Conduct division-wide GAD impact assessments and use results for planning.

For Future Researchers, they should explore the experiences of learners and parents in relation to GAD practices. Conduct comparative studies among schools with strong and weak GAD implementation to identify best practices. Use mixed-method research to quantify GAD awareness and measure policy outcomes.

1. Establish a “GAD Champion Program” at the division and school levels to formally acknowledge personnel who exhibit exemplary gender advocacy.

2. Include GAD roles in RPMS or IPCRF indicators, ensuring that GAD-related work is documented, assessed, and rewarded.

3. Create a psychosocial support framework for guidance counselors and teachers handling gender-sensitive concerns, especially in LGBTQ+ or abuse-related cases.

4. Institutionalize peer-support or learning circles for teachers and counselors engaged in gender work, promoting shared learning and emotional resilience.

5. Frame GAD implementation as a whole-school responsibility, rather than relying on individual volunteers.

The institutionalization of GAD is a journey from

awareness to transformation. Schools, as vital social institutions, must model gender equality and inclusiveness in both policy and practice. With responsive leadership, engaged teachers, and empowered stakeholders, GAD can move from being an occasional program to a permanent value embedded in the culture of basic education.

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