

A QUALITATIVE Inquiry on the Implementation of Gender and Development Mainstreaming Programs in Private Catholic Colleges in Davao CITY

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive study explored the implementation of Gender and Development (GAD) mainstreaming programs in private Catholic higher education institutions in Davao City. It addressed a gap in research on how faith-based academic institutions integrate gender perspectives within organizational policies and practices. Using purposive sampling, ten GAD focal persons and committee members participated in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, providing contextual insights into their experiences with GAD implementation. Key challenges identified include varying stakeholder perspectives on GAD, limited financial resources, and difficulties embedding GAD into institutional operations. Despite these obstacles, participants demonstrated resilience through strategic efforts such as gender sensitivity training, policy development, onboarding programs, and leveraging partnerships and digital tools. The findings highlight that effective GAD mainstreaming depends on inclusive leadership, consistent stakeholder engagement, and sustained capacity-building. The study emphasizes the transformative potential of GAD initiatives in promoting equity within conservative educational settings and offers practical implications for policymakers and educators aiming to institutionalize gender-responsive governance and inclusive education.

KEYWORDS: *Gender and development, higher education institutions, gender equality, catholic institutions, Phillippines*

INTRODUCTION

Gender and Development (GAD) mainstreaming is the process of integrating gender perspectives into policies, programs, and institutional

frameworks to promote gender equality and social justice. It involves recognizing and addressing systemic gender inequalities in decision-making, resource allocation, and service delivery to ensure equitable benefits for all genders (Moser, 2005). GAD mainstreaming requires gender perspectives to be integrated throughout every phase of development policy and project implementation starting from planning until evaluation. Throughout history, different societies have encountered difficulties in implementing gender programs like gender inequalities, which present themselves as educational gaps between genders, as well as workplace opportunity disparities, healthcare access problems, and political representation imbalances (Daly, 2005). Despite efforts to integrate GAD mainstreaming in ASEAN universities, several challenges persist, including institutional commitment issues, deeply rooted cultural norms, inadequate funding, and resistance to gender-responsive curricula (UNESCO, 2020).

In Indonesia, faculty resistance hinders full implementation of GAD integration (Mehra et al., 2020). Many educators also lack sufficient training in gender-sensitive teaching approaches, leading to the unintentional reinforcement of biases in classrooms (Callerstig & Lindholm, 2024).

Further, in the Philippines, despite national policies promoting GAD mainstreaming programs in higher education institutions, several challenges persist which hindered its implementation such as inconsistent implementation, cultural resistance, funding constraints, and weak monitoring systems. Some universities lack structured GAD frameworks and focal persons, making program execution dependent on individual faculty or student initiatives (Garcia & Lopez, 2021). Deep-seated traditional gender norms and biases, particularly in religious-affiliated institutions, prevent gender inclusivity despite mandates like the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710) (Reyes & Ferrer, 2015). Financial constraints further weaken GAD initiatives, as many universities fail to allocate or utilize the required 5% GAD budget fully, affecting the establishment of gender resource centers and faculty training (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW], 2019; David et al., 2021). Additionally, ineffective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms result in gaps in assessing program impact due to the lack of gender audits and sex-disaggregated data (Cruz & De Guzman, 2019). Addressing these issues requires stronger policy enforcement, increased funding, faculty training, and institutional cultural shifts to ensure meaningful gender mainstreaming in Philippine HEIs (Ilagan, 2019).

Moreover, there is limited research on the implementation, effectiveness, and impact of GAD mainstreaming in private Catholic colleges in Davao City, leaving a gap in understanding how institutional policies, cultural contexts, and resource allocation influence GAD integration in faith-based educational institutions. This study could be relevant for the higher education institutions in Davao City, particularly among the school administrators.

Research Questions

1. What are the challenges encountered among GAD implementation focal point persons as regards the implementation of GAD mainstreaming programs in the private Catholic institutions in Davao City?
2. What are the coping mechanisms of the participants as regards the implementation of GAD mainstreaming programs?
3. What insights can be shared to the academe and the society?

Theoretical Lens

This study was seen through the lens of Policy Diffusion Theory (Rogers, 1962) and Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1970). Policy Diffusion Theory examines how policies spread across different contexts and organizations. In addition, Policy Diffusion Theory underscores multiple pathways for policy spread, including learning processes, competitive influences, and regulatory pressures, all of which shape how organizations integrate gender-responsive strategies. Additionally, this theoretical lens helps explain how policies are adjusted to fit specific organizational contexts by identifying the variables that drive policy modifications.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, which is commonly used to explore real-world phenomena through participants' firsthand experiences. This study used a qualitative descriptive design because it provides a clear, accurate, and data-driven understanding of the experiences of individuals working in GAD mainstreaming. The design allowed the researcher to document participants' narratives, revealing critical insights into challenges, successes, and areas for improvement in GAD implementation. By maintaining a descriptive approach, the study ensures that participants' voices remain central, offering practical recommendations for policy and program development.

Research Participants. The research participants in this study were focal

point persons or GAD Committee members in a private Catholic institution, possessing direct involvement and expertise in gender and development initiatives. A total of 10 participants were selected using purposive sampling. I designed particular inclusion and exclusion guidelines in order to choose suitable participants for this study. Participants in this study consist of GAD focal point persons who work at a private Catholic higher educational institution in Davao City with a minimum of one full school year of service. Relevant Gender and Development training and substantial experience with gender mainstreaming projects in education are required qualifications for these individuals. Specific categories of people did not qualify to participate. Individuals who do not actively participate in the Gender and Development committee, including school administrators and students, cannot qualify for eligibility. The study did not include GAD focal persons who have served for less than one year and lack training in gender and development or knowledge of gender mainstreaming strategies.

Data Sources. The participants' responses served as the data sources gathered through IDI and FGD. The researcher used the following methods such as video conferencing, face-to-face, and phone calls. These types of interviews were the most appropriate for getting ideas from research participants because they promote the freedom to express their thoughts about the questions being asked or situations given. It provided an appropriate avenue for research participants to speak out and articulate what they must share. It is also suitable for observing the privacy of the answers from the participants. A validated interview guide guided the interviews.

Data Collection. In gathering data for this research, I asked permission from the office of the Dean of the Graduate School of the University of the Immaculate Conception (UIC) regarding the conduct of the study. Then, a manuscript was submitted along with the minutes of the proposal defense to the UIC - Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC) for review and approval to secure ethical clearance. Moreover, the Informed Consent Forms (ICF) were signed by the participants to prove that they were not forced to participate in the IDI, both in virtual and face-to-face setups. For the virtual IDI, the consent forms were sent to the participants via Messenger, and their signatures were gathered before the start of the actual interview. The orientation, which lasted for five minutes, included the introduction of the facilitator, the purpose of the study, and an explanation of how the IDI would be carried out. The IDI took 30-45 minutes and utilized an interview guide with probing questions designed to provide a

deeper understanding of a few key ideas.

Data Analysis. A thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data. The process of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) requires researchers to discover patterns within the data, which they then analyze and report to produce findings that are both reliable and revealing. The analysis was translated into a coherent narrative, supported by empirical evidence, addressing the research questions and emphasizing the identified themes. This systematic approach ensures a rigorous and comprehensive exploration of the qualitative data, aligning with established thematic analysis methodologies.

Ethical Considerations. The study complied with the ethical requirements and procedures of the Research Ethics Committee (REC), including securing the necessary ethical clearance, institutional permission, and informed consent from participants. The researchers were guided by an expert adviser to ensure proper ethical and methodological procedures. Literature was accessed through university databases and RemoteXs.

RESULTS

Challenges of Participants as regards the Gender and Development Program Mainstreaming Implementation

Through interviews, the researcher discovered significant themes related to GAD focal persons executing gender and development programs at private Catholic universities in Davao City. The findings reveal three key themes generated from the narratives, which include witnessing diverse perspectives on GAD, limitation in financial resources, and experiencing difficulty in integrating GAD policies and programs in the activities and programs.

Table 1
Challenges of Participants as regards the Gender and Development Program Mainstreaming Implementation

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Witnessing Diverse Perspectives on GAD	Have not fully grasped the concepts about GAD
	Some conservatives have varied views on GAD program
	Schools have different manner of implementing GAD program

	Some school heads are not fully in favor in implementing GAD program
	Some school administrators implement and accommodate GAD program
Limitation in Financial Resource	Budget constraints for training sessions
	Burdensome process for budget allocation
	Submitting proposal for funding is complicated
	Lack of financial assistance
Experiencing Difficulty in Integrating GAD Policies and Programs in the Activities and Programs	School administrators have different guidelines and expectations
	Have to undergo review in all policies and programs related to GAD
	Some stakeholders lack understanding on GAD program
	Difficulty in connecting with the teachings of the Church

**Coping Mechanisms of the Participants
as regards Gender and Development
Program Mainstreaming Implementation**

Two key themes emerged from the narratives of the participants. These are ongoing efforts to build an equitable environment and foster commitment to creating a sustainable GAD platform.

Table 2
*Coping Mechanisms of the Participants as regards Gender and Development
Program Mainstreaming Implementation*

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Ongoing Effort to Build an Equitable Environment	Conduct of orientations on GAD program to newly hired staff
	Rectifying past mistakes and misconceptions on GAD program and its implementation
	Adopting a gender fair advocacy
	The areas of professional development, communication and collaboration are found most valuable for an inclusive community
Fostering Commitment in Creating a	Strengthening voice and participation for a sustaining GAD program implementation
	Pursuit of GAD program initiatives

Sustainable GAD Platform	The support of school heads enhances strong commitment and empowerment
	The presence of a highly motivating work environment surrounded by highly committed individuals who share the same aspirations
	The positive aspects which include a collaborative atmosphere among colleagues and supportive leadership which fosters commitment for a purpose

Insights Shared to the Academe and the Society

The insights on implementing GAD programs in selected private Catholic higher education institutions in Davao City were streamlined, and two essential themes were generated. These themes are a positive outlook toward advocacies and being proactive.

Table 3
Insights Shared to the Academe and the Society

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Positive Outlook toward Advocacies	Keeping doors open for sharing of ideas
	Represent diversity and inclusion without discrimination
	Embrace challenges in advocacies with a growth mindset
	Treating various genders equally and with open mindedness
Being Proactive	Implementation of well-thought policies
	Laying clear guidelines in place
	Believing in learning as a continuous process
	Properly planned strategies to be shared with partner communities and nearby barangay
	Having GAD activities embedded in the school’s program

DISCUSSION

Challenges of Participants as regards the Gender and Development Program Mainstreaming Implementation

Witnessing Diverse Perspectives on GAD. This theme emphasizes the challenges and varied experiences faced by focal persons in implementing GAD

programs within private Catholic higher education institutions in Davao City. This shows that challenges exist in implementing GAD programs that result in difficulty in creating and implementing plans and programs. A significant barrier is the lack of comprehensive understanding among stakeholders regarding the fundamental concepts of GAD, which hinders effective program implementation.

The study revealed specific difficulties and various experiences of focal persons when they executed Gender and Development (GAD) programs in Catholic higher education establishments located in Davao City. Stakeholder understanding of GAD fundamentals remains inadequate, preventing successful program implementations. The finding aligns with the study by Reyes (2020), which explored the barriers created by institutional and cultural conservatism in the Philippines, especially within Catholic educational institutions that maintain traditional values. Traditional viewpoints add complexity to the acceptance of Gender and Development programs. This finding confirms the ideas of Castro and Tan (2019) that administrative priorities and commitment levels vary between institutions, causing implementation variability.

In addition, as emphasized by Cruz (2017) documentation shortcomings lead to missed opportunities for both the evaluation and improvement of GAD programs, highlighting the need for unified institutional perspectives. Strengthening educational programs, ongoing policy development, and awareness campaigns are essential to addressing these gaps. Additionally, implementing fundamental activities fosters a cohesive environment that supports GAD principles. Likewise, documentation deficiencies hinder program assessment and growth. Similarly, Del Rosario et al. (2021) stressed that these proposed strategies must be effectively implemented to overcome resistance and promote stakeholder collaboration.

Limitation in Financial Resources. The financial challenges encountered in implementing Gender and Development (GAD) programs are well-documented in academic literature. Budget constraints hinder the ability of institutions to provide necessary training sessions, which are critical for educating stakeholders and ensuring effective program rollout.

Organizations cannot execute required training sessions due to restricted institutional budgets, which hinder stakeholder education and program execution. A participant reported financial constraints as the main barrier to

progress, even though administrative support exists for the initiative. The result aligns with the study by David et al. (2021), which states that restricted financial resources deter people's involvement in gender-based projects.

Likewise, the study by Santos and Espiritu (2017) demonstrates structural funding inequities, further emphasizing the existing disparities. Limited financial resources often result in fragmented and short-term gender programs, as institutions struggle to sustain initiatives due to inconsistent budget allocations and competing institutional priorities (Del Rosario & Tan, 2018). Without dedicated funding, GAD programs fail to provide comprehensive gender sensitivity training, establish monitoring mechanisms, or integrate gender-responsive policies effectively (Garcia & Lopez, 2020).

Experiencing Difficulty in Integrating GAD Policies and Programs in the Activities and Programs. The challenges in integrating GAD policies and programs for GAD programs stem from the absence of standardized guidelines and expectations among school administrators. This lack of cohesion results in inconsistencies in program design and implementation. Educational framework inconsistencies create significant challenges in developing gender-responsive policies, particularly in establishing clear learning outcomes for GAD programs. The lack of standardized guidelines causes division among school administrators, resulting in uneven program design and implementation.

The finding supports the statement of Uy et al. (2018) noted that these obstacles emphasize the need for a more cohesive strategy for GAD program development. The finding confirms that the research by Ramirez and Velasco (2020) shows how variations in institutional GAD frameworks create obstacles to effective policy deployment. Time constraints also present a significant challenge to the advancement of GAD initiatives. This finding aligns with the study by Del Rosario and Cruz (2019), which highlights how educators face difficulties in effectively engaging in gender development programs due to competing academic responsibilities. Private Catholic higher education institutions, in particular, face the distinctive challenge of aligning GAD initiatives with their religious principles. Also, Castillo and Reyes (2021) argue that resolving conflicts between religious beliefs and gender development objectives requires open communication and stakeholder education.

Coping Mechanisms of the Participants as regards Gender and Development Program Mainstreaming Implementation

Ongoing Effort to Build an Equitable Environment. Through active measures participants take to overcome hurdles in GAD program implementation, participants demonstrate their commitment to creating an equitable environment. Structured onboarding processes are essential for fostering gender awareness in educational institutions, mainly by providing newly hired personnel with orientations on GAD principles as part of broader organizational initiatives.

The finding supports the statements of Uy et al. (2018) that regular mandatory orientations ensure that stakeholders receive foundational knowledge, while the success of these activities depends on maximizing available resources. (ADD TRANSITIONS) The finding confirms the research by Lopez and Mendoza (2017) that faculty involvement is essential for sustaining gender-responsive programs. The finding conforms to the study by Ramirez and Velasco (2020), posited that systematic evaluation alongside capacity development as a method to enhance program effectiveness.

Additionally, Del Rosario and Santos (2019) argue that ongoing gender sensitivity training and mentorship programs further reinforce an equitable academic environment by empowering faculty and students to become active gender advocates. Institutions that integrate collaborative engagement strategies, such as peer education and student-led initiatives, tend to foster a more inclusive learning atmosphere. Furthermore, research by Huang and Le (2020) emphasizes that embedding GAD concepts in curriculum design enhances long-term institutional change by normalizing gender-sensitive education across various disciplines. Also, Liu and Chua (2022) stated that consistent reinforcement of GAD principles, not only through faculty training but also through integration in academic coursework and institutional policies, is key to sustaining gender equity initiatives.

Studies by Reyes and Ferrer (2018) highlight that organizations with dedicated GAD committees experience higher levels of policy compliance and stakeholder engagement, leading to greater institutional commitment to gender equity. Likewise, Javinar (2021) posited that establishing safe spaces for gender dialogue and platforms for reporting gender-based concerns also contribute to fostering an equitable environment in schools and universities.

Fostering Commitment in Creating a Sustainable GAD Platform The ongoing execution of GAD programs shows a deep commitment to advancing gender-related goals. Existing institutional commitments were backed by provincial mandates that required universities to create minority protection policies leading to the recognition of LGBT+ individuals as a main minority group. The results demonstrate that institutions sustain their GAD initiatives through synergies of strong leadership and cooperative environments backed by aligned policies. A sustainable GAD platform depends on collaborative efforts and collective empowerment through a shared vision. Educational institutions advance gender equality and inclusivity through sustained progress supported by leadership, formal policies, and inclusive practices.

This finding supports the ideas of Murray and Dingwall (2020), that organizations need effective leadership to create inclusive environments and support their diversity initiatives. The collaborative foundation becomes more robust when work environments inspire their staff members. Likewise, the finding corroborates with the research conducted by Del Rosario et al. (2019) which shows that combining effective collaboration with professional development produces outstanding results in GAD programs.

As noted by Santos and Castillo (2020), participatory leadership leads to better program implementation together with shared responsibility development. According to Datu and Cruz (2018), an institutional alignment demonstrates its commitment to breaking down past barriers and building inclusivity. The findings of Fernandez and Reyes (2021) stated that establishing formal policies that safeguard vulnerable populations is relevant to building sustainable, inclusive practices and ensuring continuous participation.

Insights Shared to the Academe and the Society

Positive Outlook toward Advocacies. This theme is reflected in maintaining open channels for idea-sharing, promoting diversity and inclusion without discrimination, and approaching advocacy challenges with a growth mindset. All genders should be treated equally and stressed the importance of openness. Proactive measures require teams to establish detailed policies alongside clear guidelines while building an organizational culture that supports ongoing education. Through strategic designs, GAD programs can engage partner communities and neighboring barangays, generating broader social impacts. By integrating GAD activities into their programs, schools demonstrated a more substantial institutional commitment to gender equity

advancement. Through comprehensive strategies, GAD programs can be effectively promoted and maintained within educational and social settings. This theme reflects the optimistic and progressive approach toward implementing GAD programs. By keeping doors open for the sharing of ideas, they foster a culture of inclusivity and collaboration that encourages diverse perspectives.

Being Proactive. This theme underlines how strategic planning, inclusivity, and continuous learning drive successful GAD program implementation at private Catholic colleges in Davao City. Thoroughly developed policies and clear guidelines establish a strong foundation for institutional gender mainstreaming.

This finding confirms the study by De Guzman et al. (2021) that embedding gender equity within institutional frameworks ensures that GAD principles become part of daily operations and institutional culture rather than remaining separate projects. The commitment of these institutions to inclusivity is evident through their integration of GAD activities within their programs. The finding aligns with the research conducted by Santos and Reyes (2020), which highlights the importance of leadership support and faculty engagement in the successful implementation of GAD programs. Their study found that institutions with strong administrative backing and continuous faculty training demonstrated higher levels of gender policy integration and stakeholder participation.

Similarly, Liu and Chua (2022) emphasize that sustained institutional commitment and structured professional development programs foster a gender-sensitive academic culture that extends beyond compliance into transformational change. These findings reinforce the idea that private Catholic colleges in Davao City can achieve long-term gender mainstreaming success by embedding GAD initiatives within their core institutional policies, academic programs, and community outreach efforts. This ensures that gender equality becomes an inherent part of their identity and operations. Effective GAD implementation requires continuous educational development. Regular training sessions and staff orientations help new employees assist institutional stakeholders in executing gender-sensitive programs more effectively.

The study highlights that maintaining a positive outlook requires openness of mind together with support for idea-sharing and gender-equal treatment. Likewise, the study stresses how educators and students need to adopt a growth mindset, which allows them to face challenges and modify their

approaches based on changing circumstances. When educational institutions apply GAD principles to their policies and operational practices, they develop educational environments characterized by inclusive and accepting spaces for every member. A proactive approach implementation requires establishing clear policies, training, and continuous development of GAD programs.

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