



Exploring the Gender Perspective in English Language Teaching (ELT): Voices from ELT Practitioners in Philippine Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

In recent years, gender mainstreaming in education has been discussed and studied. In the Philippines, however, research has tended to focus on extreme ends of the implementation process such as the awareness of educators about the gender perspective or the success in incorporating gender in their pedagogical practices, rather than an in-depth analysis on the *overall* experience of educators in the government's attempt to mainstream gender-and-development education in schools. Also, there is a gap in the literature concerning Filipino English language teaching (ELT) practitioners' views on integrating the gender perspective into English language education. Through semi-structured interviews, the present study explores how a group of 71 Filipino college teachers of English perceive the benefits, ways, and challenges of incorporating the gender dimension in ELT. The thematic analysis of interview responses revealed the following benefits: enhancement of learners' critical thinking skills, promotion of an inclusive and supportive learning environment, and increased awareness on the critical role of language (i.e., English) in recognizing diversity. Further, it was found that the teacher-participants incorporate gender knowledge in ELT in two ways: instructional materials and teaching-learning activities, and teacher-student interaction. In terms of challenges, three major themes emerged: learner factor, teacher factor, and institutional constraints (which were further categorized as curriculum, resource, and belief).

Keywords English language teaching · Gender and development · Gender education · Gender perspective · Philippines

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Introduction

Previous research on incorporating notions of gender and sexuality in language teaching have been mostly conducted in Argentina (Banegas, 2020), South Africa (Jimmyns & Meyer-Weitz, 2019), and Poland (Pakuła et al., 2015). Most of these studies focused on integrating a lived or person-based curriculum (Banegas & Velázquez, 2014; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004) that incorporates gender as part of a human's identity and lived experiences. A number of researchers have also assessed gender representation in textbooks (Ariyanto, 2018; Curaming & Curaming, 2020; Lee & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020; Tarrayo, 2014). In terms of the teacher-perspective ELT, notable discussions have centered on the experiences of Argentinian student-teachers in incorporating the gender perspective in ELT (Banegas et al., 2019; Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2017). Collectively, ELT educators first struggled in incorporating minute notions of gender-fair language (Lomotey, 2020) and issues in their classroom discussions, but they gradually appreciated the importance and benefits of integrating gender-equality values into their pedagogical practices (Banegas et al., 2019; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004). These studies have concluded that the integration of the gender perspective into ELT pedagogy leads to (1) creating a supportive and open space for LGBTQIA+ learners (Sauntson, 2012), (2) educators reflecting on and challenging their own gendered beliefs and experiences, and (3) teachers being more conscious of other people's diverse gendering ways (Banegas, 2020; Banegas et al., 2019; Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2017).

In the Philippines, the research, to date, has tended to focus on extreme ends of the implementation process, such as the awareness of educators about the gender perspective (Sumadsad & Tuazon, 2016) or the success in incorporating gender in their pedagogical practices (Lualhati, 2019), rather than an in-depth analysis on the *overall* experience of educators in the government's attempt to mainstream GAD education in Philippine colleges and universities. This would mean that previous findings on the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Philippine education have remained vague.

Thus, this study aims to help address this problem by offering detailed accounts of the experiences of ELT practitioners. Hearing the voices of Filipino ELT educators may assist educational departments in calibrating their implementation strategies to ensure that all relevant stakeholders have the safe space to gradually integrate the gender perspective into micro-aspects of the learning process. Language education plays a crucial role in shaping educators' critical-thinking skills to craft student-centered and gender-responsive pedagogical practices (Banegas, 2020). Likewise, at the time of writing, no single study has examined the gender perspective in ELT in the Philippine context.

Gender Mainstreaming in Philippine Classrooms

The Philippines is known to be one of the most gender-equal nations in Asia (Community Business, 2019). 'Gender' here is commonly defined by intergovernmental

organizations in the cisgender sense—referring to people whose gender identity and expression strictly align with their biological sex. Using this definition, these organizations have ranked the country as number one in minimizing the gender gap because of its ‘success’ in closing the gender-wage gap by 79% (Wood, 2018). The Philippines was also ranked highly because of ‘gender diversity in the workforce,’ which was based on the representation of women across all job levels and industries, and by their age and gender-pay gap by age (Community Business, 2019).

Unfortunately, these statistics generalize such successes without fully assessing the state of other minorities and lower-economic classes such as LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other genders) communities (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], United States Agency International Development [USAID], 2014) or women working in the informal economy (Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research, Inc. Philippines [EILER], 2015). More importantly, such statistics hardly consider subtle misogynistic and heterosexist cultures deeply interwoven in various social institutions such as schools or families. They also tend to overlook the emotional and mental welfare of the said minorities since they mostly focused on economic and political statistical indicators (Bayudan-Dacuycuy & Dacuycuy, 2017).

Educational institutions are considered as authoritative social systems; consequentially, they have the power to formalize rigid gender values as a ‘natural’ part of society (Sauntson, 2012). Since educators either consciously or unconsciously instill rigid gender-binary values in their teachings, students grow up to believe such biases to be facts (Calduch, 2015; Pakuła et al., 2015). These gender values are inculcated early on the students’ lives through gender-positioning practices such as streaming male students into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects (Marakova et al., 2019), and gender-material discussions found in textbooks and classroom interactions (Ariyanto, 2018; Salami & Ghajarieh, 2015). The integration of the gender perspective into education, which covers English Language Teaching (ELT), was the Philippine government’s attempt to shape gender notions through pedagogical practices. The main goal was to eradicate any form of gender discrimination and violence committed in schools—gender here is still being used in a cisgender sense. This includes, but is not limited to, cases of bullying, sexual harassment, or withholding of academic opportunities (UNDP, USAID, 2014).

Since English is one of the official languages in the Philippines, the role of ELT in the overall learning curve of Filipinos is quite essential. Fundamentally, Filipinos learn important practices such as government procedures, research methods, and corporate communication through the English language (Cabigon, 2015). This means that their formal entry, as community experts, in society is impacted by the worldview and belief system present in the English language (Jaworski & Coup-land, 2014). For instance, the Filipino language does not have gendered pronouns such as ‘he’ or ‘she’—which may reinforce the gender binary; rather, they use the Tagalog word ‘*siya*.’ Consequentially, the English language’s universal status necessitates its responsibility to adjust to *all* its users’ lived experiences and identities (Fairclough, 1987; Freire, 1970; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Since social justice and gender-transformative experiences affect and are affected by language, it is imperative that educational systems—where formal ‘co-production’ of gender discourses

happen—adjust to gender language policies (Sauntson, 2012; Sunderland, 1994), and in this case, apply it to ELT.

Philippine Educators and Gender-Responsive ELT

In an attempt to rectify oppressive and discriminatory gender values found in schools, international and national governing bodies agreed to mainstream gender equality into classrooms and educational curricula (Rohde-Abuda et al., 2019). These intergovernmental organizations aimed to prevent students from being gender-stereotyped into certain educational interests or activities, and from being discriminated because of their sexuality (Human Rights Watch, 2017). In the Philippines, the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) partnered with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to craft laws on gender and development (GAD) in the educational system. Aiming to become more gender-responsive, these public institutions sought to revise curricula and textbooks, and conduct gender-sensitivity trainings for teachers and school administrators.

For the longest time, educational experts were convinced that school curricula were politically and culturally neutral, but social scientists have argued that the educational curriculum was usually made by and for the majority—simply put, the ones in power and the ones that have monopoly over cultural representation (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004). They have emphasized that these curricula lacked the necessary lived experiences of minorities in terms of teaching practices, lessons, and considerations (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004; Pakuła et al., 2015). In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has structured policies and guidelines to ensure that colleges and universities are gender-responsive (CHED, 2015). A recent study by Lualhati (2019) has found that Philippine teachers are now applying gender sensitivity to their pedagogical practices, but the paper appears to be optimistic at best. It has hardly assessed the teachers' knowledge on gender and development, and has focused on asking categorical questions instead, such as whether or not they use gender-neutral language in their discussions or lesson plans. This is quite reflective of the illusion that the Philippines has “completely eradicated the gap between the sexes...” (Wood, 2018).

Out of all teaching materials, GAD committees have placed a lot of emphasis on eradicating gender-based violence in schools and revising textbooks with gender stereotypes (Department of Education [DepEd], 2017; PCW, 2015). Ideally, gender-sensitivity programs would have trained educators to spot sexist narratives and avoid transmitting them into lesson plans. However, since cultural barriers constantly maintain misogynistic or heterosexist ideologies, top-down approaches to gender equality hardly help educators fully deconstruct oppressive narratives by themselves. For instance, some educators still believe sexist ideologies to be natural or a part of the Filipino culture, and vehemently believe that children should be taught the same (Evangelista, 2017). All these things need time to be deconstructed, and often, gender-equality values need to be organically cultivated through bottom-up approaches, such as being aware of the language one should use when addressing genders (Widodo & Elyas, 2020).

Aligned with the efforts of intergovernmental bodies to reduce binary-gender roles and rules, Filipino ELT educators were also called to integrate this gender perspective into their curricula and classroom discussions (CHED, 2015). Similar to other countries integrating gender into their ELT pedagogical practices, the Philippines is also struggling in the implementation process.

On a principle and fundamental level, gender mainstreaming is usually barred by certain social institutions because of their fear of breaking down age-old traditions such as the heterosexual family (Rohde-Abuba et al., 2019). This fear is well-founded in the Philippines—which is a predominantly Catholic country, and one of the fewer countries passionately against progressive agenda such as divorce and sex education. This has led to constant deadlocks in the fight for gender-equality policies, since perhaps some government officials personally believe in these fear-mongering myths, and most of them probably fear losing the votes of the majority.

As an effect, regardless if the Philippine government enacts laws on integrating GAD into the educational system, these policies and guidelines have no teeth in the implementation process—especially in the case of private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their power to reject such integration attempts. At most, the success of GAD integration relies on educators designing their own pedagogical practices such as using gender-based differentiated instruction (Hernandez & Cudiamat, 2017), or implementing UNICEF's or UNESCO's educational programs (Women & Gender Institute-Miriam College, 2004). In the case of ELT, Filipino educators find it difficult to fully incorporate the micro-aspects of gender equality into their methods such as gender-nonconforming vocabulary, topics, and gender-inclusive pedagogical practices (Harbin, 2016) because gender-sensitivity training programs rarely cover integration to this degree. For example, the PCW's (2015) nondiscriminatory education and training objective usually ends up in general discussions on women's rights and the proposed SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression) bill.

In terms of ELT in the Philippines, DepEd and CHED have yet to successfully remove the persistent misogynistic narratives 'naturally' hiding in textbooks (Curaming & Curaming, 2020; Tarrayo, 2014), curricula, and classroom discussions (Evangelista, 2017). Textbooks have been proven to be an important medium of cultural beliefs discussed between teachers and students. This particular educational material plays a critical role in perpetuating sexist narratives, as teachers use these textbooks as their main sources for lesson plans (Salami & Ghajarieh, 2015). In a study conducted by Tarrayo (2014), he has found that Philippine preschool English language textbooks are still rife with sexist ideologies. These narratives were apparent in textbook examples and images such as males being more visible in terms of appearances, or females being dominantly assigned to reproductive roles such as doing household chores.

A cursory review of the literature shows how Filipino educators and school administrators perceive the government's gender integration policy (Lualhati, 2019; Sumadsad & Tuazon, 2016). These studies have focused on evaluating the level of awareness that educators have and assessing their effectiveness in integrating the gender perspective into their teaching. In spite of these studies, there is paucity of research concerning ELT practitioners' informed accounts that describe their

perspectives on the benefits, challenges, and methods in incorporating the gender dimension in their lessons and classroom discussions. Thus, this study aims to fill these gaps in the literature.

Specifically, the present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What beliefs do the ELT practitioners hold as regards the benefits the gender perspective bring to ELT?
2. In what ways do these teachers integrate the gender perspective into ELT?
3. What challenges do they face in incorporating the gender dimension in ELT?

Method

Participants

The present study, which employed a qualitative approach to explore teacher-participants' insights about the gender perspective in ELT, was conducted in the Philippines. A total of 71 HEI English language teachers from different colleges and universities volunteered to participate in the study. Purposive-convenience sampling was utilized since only those ELT practitioners who were teaching for at least two years in any Philippine HEIs within the researchers' network were asked to participate. Moreover, since the study was conducted between July and September 2020 in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, only those who were available and had an online access were given the written interview form.

A majority of the participants were female (60.6%) and had been teaching English for 11–20 years (50.7%) at the time of the study. In terms of educational attainment, more than half (56.3%) had master's degrees, while 33.8% held doctorate degrees. Most of the participants were teaching in state (46.5%) and in private universities (45.1%). Most of them handled the general education English course Purposive Communication; some were assigned to teach major courses in the secondary education (major in English) and English language studies programs. More so, in general, most of the teacher-participants disclosed that they participated in seminars and trainings on GAD education organized by CHED and/or their respective schools, although some admitted that the trainings provided were hardly sufficient. Of the 71 participants, only 38 expressed their willingness to participate in the follow-up interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to the data-collection phase, the research protocol was approved by the university ethics review board. Since the study was conducted in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, data collection was conducted online where the written interview form was emailed to the participants and follow-up interviews were done either through email or chat in Facebook Messenger. The said email clearly conveyed the purpose of the study, and ethical agreements were established with all the participants so

that consent, the right to withdraw, and anonymity were guaranteed. Specifically, the interview was composed of open-ended questions written in English, and elicited responses on the following aspects: the teacher-participants' beliefs about the benefits the gender perspective bring to ELT, the ways these teachers integrated the gender perspective into ELT, and the challenges they faced in incorporating the gender dimension in ELT. The interview form likewise asked for information about the participants' profile. To ensure validity, the consolidated interview data were sent back to the participants for correction, addition, and approval. Then the interview data were thoroughly transcribed and repeatedly read and examined; after which, the transcripts, through a thematic-analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Widodo, 2014), were condensed and categorized based on themes and subthemes. Keyword analysis was manually done to identify these themes. Three steps were undertaken to code the interview transcripts: "making the text manageable," "hearing [noting] what was said," and "developing theory" (Lewins & Silver, 2007, pp. 262–267). The teacher-participants were assigned their codes, e.g., T1 (teacher 1), T2 (teacher 2), to preserve anonymity.

Findings

In this section, the research questions are answered under the light of the findings that aim to explore the teacher-participants' views on the benefits and ways of, and challenges in integrating the gender perspective into ELT.

Benefits the Gender Perspective Bring to ELT

The interview responses revealed three specific perspectives about the benefits of incorporating the gender dimension in ELT: (1) enhancement of learners' critical thinking skills, (2) promotion of an inclusive and supportive learning environment, and (3) increased awareness on the critical role of language (i.e., English) in recognizing diversity.

Enhancement of Learners' Critical Thinking Skills

The teacher-participants disclosed that integrating the gender perspective into ELT stimulates learners' capacity for critical thinking to reflect on issues related to gender, and equality and equity in society. They likewise viewed that this perspective establishes the social relevance of knowledge and skills learned in the English classroom. The following statements indicate these perspectives:

I think gender perspective in ELT will bring awareness to the students to critically use English in propagating gender sensitivity, thereby contributing to the society in eradicating discrimination and inequality between or among genders. [T1]

I guess one major benefit of this is the opportunity for students, with the help of their teacher, to interrogate gender representations and stereotypes. In this

case, students are prompted to have a more nuanced view of gender and sexuality. [T2]

This encourages students to be critical and sensitive as far as the genders are concerned. Also, it may highlight and level the field for LGBTQIA+ who have long been marginalized in the context of content and academic discussion. [T3]

Interestingly, as gleaned from T2's and T3's responses, the teacher-participants tend to recognize, in a non-cisgender sense, queer concepts such as fluid gender identities, i.e., LGBTQIA+, and the difference between sex and gender. Thus, the gender perspective in ELT creates a supportive space for different gender identities.

Promotion of an Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environment

The teacher-participants viewed that the gender perspective in ELT recognizes individual differences and foster openness to diversity in the classroom. For them, this perspective helps improve the quality of instruction, for it promotes equal learning opportunities among students. These insights were culled from these interview excerpts:

Teaching through this lens [gender perspective] will create a more welcoming atmosphere to students who could be emotionally hesitant to learn in a heterogeneous class. This kind of teaching also breaks down the wall between the student and teacher of different genders. More importantly, teachers could prepare lessons that are adjusted based on the gender of students ...[T4]

I think if gender perspective is applied, the students can be more fluid in performing their activities in learning English. Although, it may apply for those students who have barriers when it comes to dealing with other students with the same or different gender... Hence, if they can perform well without barriers, they can see the class more productive than before. [T5]

Increased Awareness on the Critical Role of Language (i.e., English) in Recognizing Diversity

The teachers believed that the gender perspective in ELT puts a premium on the essential role the English language plays in recognizing diversity and promoting respect and inclusivity, as revealed in these extracts:

It [gender perspective] can be a postmodern view of looking at people not on sex but as a person. It can provide more humane understanding about sexuality, language use, especially on Gender-Fair pronouns and nouns. It can empower critical thinking on the roles of men, women, LGBTQI plus in literature and in sentence constructions. [T6]

... it will open the minds of the students as regards beliefs and practices of cultures that may be seen as gender-biased; it may even be a chance for some to reflect some of their own [or their own family's] discriminatory language and

behavior. It may also allow students to look at how their own culture [national/regional] either perpetuate or expunge gender-biased practices or beliefs. [T7]

Ways of Integrating the Gender Perspective into ELT

The participants' general views regarding ways of integrating the gender perspective into ELT could be examined in two levels: (1) instructional materials and teaching–learning activities, and (2) teacher–student interaction.

Instructional Materials and Teaching–Learning Activities

The teacher-participants revealed that they utilize instructional materials and provide activities on topics related to gender equality, gender-fair language (GFL), and the like. Specifically, they disclosed that, with academic freedom, they give their students gender-issue-centered readings such as those dealing with catcalling and deconstructing gendered discourses; facilitate class discussions on gender-fair and inclusive language and deconstruction of sexist examples used in Philippine media, and debates on gender concepts; and incorporate GFL-consciousness-raising activities such as role playing. The interview statements below emphasize these points.

In reading, I use gender-switching technique for my students to look at the text from a different point of view. For example, an editorial pointing out that men should stop catcalling women. I changed the role or gender of the writer and made the title, women and homosexuals should stop catcalling men like *oppa* or *papa* [both contextually mean 'physically attractive' men]. Those that opposed catcalling suddenly became defensive as they were not aware that it was also an example of harassment. [T8]

In some occasions, we tried to analyze snippets from Filipino textbooks, Filipino advertisements, among others, and how these texts represent gender identities. Another instance was when teaching the 7th edition of APA was released, which tries to foster gender equality, I expressed how language should not create duality or hegemonic ideologies, but instead language must be used as an instrument to bridge diversities. [T9]

... in a debate topic in speaking class, if you choose gender-related topics, only limited female students can share their 'realistic' experiences and premises if an engineering course is dominated by male students ... I also include third gender here. Consequently, choosing a topic about 'LGBT awareness' in a class dominated by male students manifests tendencies of instigating humors about the topic. [T10]

This is evident in my literature and purposive communication class in a play act where female students can act as a jeepney driver, or a barker while male students can play the role of a wedding planner, a fish vendor or any occupation that in the past are clearly identified as female job or work. This is a role play, and no changes in person's identity is being altered. A woman barker as she is, not a lesbian can do her job well. The same is true with a male wedding planner, acting like a true-blooded man and not a gay. [T11]

Interestingly, there have been attempts to incorporate materials and activities dealing with queer gender identities, e.g., queer identities are debated (sometimes euphemized), queer language is used in class (e.g., not using *he* or *she*), although the general responses would tend to focus on integrating the gender perspective in a cisgender sense. One participant [T12] shared this view:

When discussing reading selections to students, I make sure that I acknowledge perspectives from different genders. In debate, when the topic is gender-focused, I particularly ask students to take sides that they are comfortable at and then let them take the opposite side after to give them the chance to empathize with people of other genders.

Teacher-Student Interactions

The gender perspective in ELT is also observed through the ways teachers facilitate classroom interactions. The ELT practitioners indicated that they contextualize classroom interactions based on students' varied personalities and backgrounds. They also tend to be open-minded in dealing with the language use, preference, and style of students; thus, they accommodate diversity in the classroom and are dynamic in their teaching approaches. These insights can be inferred from these statements:

I simply open the floor of discussion to anyone without prejudging their stance. I encourage freedom of expression during class discussion. I let them cite notable persons they believe affect them in any way. Thus, they feel loved and welcomed in class because they know and see that I listen to them and respect their opinions. [T13]

I try to be extra careful when discussing topics that touch on the issues of gender orientations, preferences, etc. and make my students feel comfortable and free to express their opinions without fear of judgment or alienation. I sometimes ask students whether they feel offended by a certain remark from one of their classmates in reference to gender, etc. I try not to normalize and in fact censure discourse that fosters discrimination against a certain gender—whatever that gender may be. [T14]

Challenges in Integrating the Gender Perspective into ELT

The participants were likewise asked about their views regarding the challenges they encounter in incorporating the gender dimension in ELT. The subsequent interview findings cover three major themes: (1) learner factor, (2) teacher factor, and (3) institutional constraints.

Learner Factor

Although curricula allow the teachers to use learning plans and materials integrating the gender perspective, some students would tend to be close-minded, hesitant, and

uncooperative in dealing with gender issues and in accommodating new viewpoints. Some teacher-participants claimed that:

There are a few students who can't let go, or even set aside, their androcentric perspective, and sometimes they will argue against the existence of some gender issues. The arguments in class that ensue from such issues are draining and time consuming. [T15]

Managing offense. Some students (especially those who identify as LGBTQ) are too sensitive about these issues that they become easily offended with opposing views. Sometimes, the discussions become too personal that it affects their relationship with their classmates. [T16]

Teacher Factor

While the teachers disclosed that they exercise academic freedom in choosing materials for their lessons, which include gender themes, they admitted that integrating the gender perspective into ELT takes a lot of effort, for it entails more responsibilities for them, as vehemently expressed by T17:

Incorporating a gender dimension in ELT takes a lot of work and a teacher has to also consider a lot of things before he/she can proceed with instruction ... some teachers may find themselves not having enough time to pursue such avenue. Aside from time, they may also feel hesitant because this is something which may be foreign to them.

Some teachers may not have sufficient knowledge and skills in using the gender paradigm in ELT since such a perspective is hardly observed as a norm, and they are not trained for this orientation:

One challenge is how to vary my teaching methodologies. Likewise, knowledge about gender can be a challenge. Although I have ideas about how I can integrate gender in the discussion, I claim no expertise when it comes to gender as a discipline. [T18]

Institutional Constraints

Under the institutional factor, three subthemes on challenges emerged, namely curriculum, resource, and belief constraints.

Curriculum Constraints These constraints include the lack of relevant and appropriate instructional materials that integrate gender mainstreaming in ELT, the seeming absence of a framework on integrating the gender dimension in teaching, and insufficient trainings on gender perspective in ELT. Some textbooks still promote sexism. Further, the extent of integrating the gender perspective into the micro-level, i.e., the classroom, has remained ambivalent. The following statements highlight these viewpoints:

The absence of a framework on how to integrate gender dimension in the language classroom makes it hard for the English teacher to design a curriculum with a gender perspective. [T19]

There have been textbooks being used with still containing insensitive grammar rules or even in the displayed sign. [T20]

Most institutions are aware of this perspective. In the classroom level, however, this perspective is not observed nor incorporated. [T21]

Resource Constraints Contextually, in this study, resource pertains to the provision of programs and trainings on gender mainstreaming in education. The general responses from the teacher-participants revealed that some academic institutions have vague or little to no policies and programs on gender mainstreaming, and that they hardly provide trainings on matters related to gender perspective in education, as claimed by T22:

With all honesty, my institution has not directly helped yet in integrating gender perspective in the classroom. There are no programs nor policies yet to support such move, and the way things are, I do not think this is one of the top priorities of the institution.

The participants also identified limited scholarly research on gender issues as one constraint. T23 expressed, “Come to think of it, I think we are lacking in this aspect as there are limited researches and programs regarding the matter.”

Belief Constraints These cover religious beliefs, conservatism, and family orientation. Because of traditional beliefs, some students and even teachers tend to be closed-minded and may have maintained biases or subjectivities toward gender issues:

One of the challenges may be the religious beliefs of the students. I teach in a Catholic university and 80% of our students are Catholics. So, I guess it will be very challenging if I argue for gender equality, including the LGBTQ community. [T24]

A challenge that I sometimes face, ironically, is the maintenance of sensitivity before audience who display tendencies towards the abrogation of gender issues. Most often, this is learned at home, so it becomes a great challenge to open the minds of young learners to the social realities beyond what they acquire from their family members. [T25]

Some academic institutions have reservations as regards gender issues; thus, there seems to be inconsistency in the attempt to gender-mainstream education:

Our course plan uses gender-neutral pronouns. But our University has been very vocal about prohibiting same-sex relationships, gay/lesbian sex, and cross-dressing. [T26]

Discussion

Since studies on perspectives of Filipino university English language educators on ELT vis-à-vis gender remain scarce, the present study aimed to shed light on how the said educators view the benefits, ways, and challenges of incorporating the gender dimension in ELT. In this section, the research questions are answered and discussed under the light of theoretical foundations and findings.

First, the researchers have unraveled how the participants viewed the benefits the gender perspective brings to ELT. Contrary to initial assumptions (Bayudan-Dacuycuy & Dacuycuy, 2017; Sumadsad & Tuazon, 2016), the findings revealed how the Filipino university ELT educators are, to some extent, conscientized or highly aware of gender issues—as most of them found the integration of gender into ELT to be beneficial in three ways.

The teacher-participants first view gender integration as a great way to enhance learners' critical thinking skills, such as reflecting on and even challenging sexist roles and narratives. In hindsight, these English language teachers believe such a benefit is true because they view gender equality and equity as necessary rather than optional values. Compared with teacher-participants from other studies—who were initially unmindful about the role of gender in ELT (Banegas et al., 2019; Mojica & Castañeda-Peña, 2017), the Filipino ELT practitioners seem to be knowledgeable about the essential role of gender in English language education from the onset. In addition, some of the participants tend to recognize the existence of gender-fluid concepts, such as queer identities and the difference between sex and gender. Being knowledgeable about these concepts is vital in creating safe and inclusive spaces for non-cisgender individuals (Sauntson, 2012). Such awareness can lead learners to question and resist harmful gender-binary stereotypes inside and outside of the classroom. Likewise, in this setup of resistance, especially in schools that have safe spaces for gender and sexuality discourses, teachers may be given opportunities to (re)evaluate their gender notions. This form of resistance is crucial for deconstructing age-old traditions and forming inclusive solutions (Freire, 1970; Pakuła et al., 2015).

The second benefit the participants emphasized is how incorporating gender in ELT promotes an inclusive and supportive learning environment. They highlighted how being open to diverse gender identities and expression fosters a better learning space for students—especially those who are questioning, performing, and affirming non-cisgender identities (Butler, 1990; Sauntson, 2012). If it comes to fruition, an inclusive and supportive classroom may stimulate students' learning abilities and engagement in two ways: (1) eradicating gender-binary stereotypes, e.g., male students being encouraged to participate in traditionally masculine club activities, and (2) being gender-responsive to certain needs, i.e., creating safe spaces for the LGBTQIA+. Setting the learning stage with such premises can create a more learner-centered or lived curriculum (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004) and lessons surrounding the identities and lives of students—this keeps learners engaged and interested in recreating that form of knowledge themselves.

Moreover, removing such barriers to learning can lead to unravelling students' creativity and untapped potential (Butler, 1990).

The third benefit the teacher-participants posited is the increased awareness on the critical role of language (i.e., English) in recognizing diversity. Most of them explained how gender-sensitive and -responsive language helps in critiquing gender discriminatory language and behavior. Aware of their roles as authoritative figures in the lives of learners, the participants claimed that they try to incorporate such gender sensitivity in their own language because they know how biased conversations or words can affect the gendering process of each student (Pakuła et al., 2015). With such awareness of language and gender, teachers can easily adjust to microcosms of gendered interactions (i.e., gender-neutral pronouns, non-binary adjectives, and classroom roles). For instance, for some students of diverse SOGIE, these non-binary gendered interactions may provide them the freedom to practice and express their identities, and to feel a sense of acceptance and inclusion. Being aware of the benefits of the gender perspective is indicative of how the Filipino English language teachers are willing to incorporate such a dimension in ELT.

The second research question focuses on the different ways the educators integrate the gender perspective into ELT. Findings revealed that most of the teacher-participants put gender theories into practice through English instructional materials and teaching–learning activities, and teacher–student interactions. First, the ELT practitioners claimed that they were already incorporating gender in their lessons through gender-fair language, role-playing, text analysis, and debates, with the intent of combatting sexist stereotypes and deconstructing gender biases. These methods, as claimed by Banegas (2020) and Lomotey (2020), are important in building learners' understanding of their own and other people's gendering ways, and ultimately, are crucial for instilling gender equality and equity as basic human values. Showcasing such diverse gender identities and notions in classroom discussions can normalize performing gender identities beyond the binary (Butler, 1990; Sauntson, 2012). For instance, role-playing feminine gestures can show that a boy acting in such a manner is perfectly acceptable—unless turned into a caricature of sorts. In addition, some teacher-participants also placed a premium on directly addressing issues that women and sexual minorities face in their everyday lives, such as catcalling or sexual harassment. Directly discussing such issues in the classroom sets the tone that these harmful acts are unacceptable, regardless of how the victim dressed or acted. Addressing these issues directly may break down toxic beliefs about sexual minorities deserving such violence. However, it is also worth noting that only a small number of the ELT educators openly questioned sexist narratives in textbooks—which are one of the main resources of teachers in crafting lesson plans. If sexist narratives are left unaddressed, then these biased notions might counteract with classroom discussions and activities—potentially neutralizing the benefits of incorporating gender equality (Ariyanto, 2018; Salami & Ghajarieh, 2015).

Second, the ELT educators also stated that they try to practice gender equality and equity in their own interactions with their students. The teacher-participants valued contextualizing classroom discussions according to their students' varied personalities, backgrounds, language use, preferences, and learning styles. Based on their answers, the participants seemed to be practicing the learner-based or lived

curriculum to a certain extent since they recognize gender as part of their students' identities—which becomes an important factor when discussing topic examples, assignments, and group activities, and making sure that their pedagogical practices are gender-responsive and -sensitive (Banegas & Velázquez, 2014; Norton & Pavlenko, 2004). In ELT classroom discourses where a lived curriculum is in place, recognizing individual differences, which cover gender identities, is strongly upheld and encouraged; and in this context, learning lived realities goes beyond language. Generally, the Filipino ELT educators have already attempted to incorporate gender in their English language lessons in hopes of developing learners' critical thinking skills and understanding gender beyond the binary.

The analyses of answers from research questions one and two are somewhat indicative that the teacher-participants are slightly attuning themselves to the social justice that sexual minorities deserve and need. Moreover, most of the teachers recognize their authoritative role in shaping the way college students understand the world through language. Their attempt to apply such gender knowledge to their pedagogical practices suggests that they want to create supportive and open classrooms that encourage gender-transformative experiences (Banegas et al., 2019; Butler, 1990; Freire, 1970).

The third research question discusses the challenges the Filipino ELT educators encountered in integrating the gender perspective into ELT. Three dominant themes concerning these challenges emerged from the data analysis: (1) learners' resistance to such gender knowledge, (2) teachers' fatigue, and (3) institutions' neutral or even contradictory stance about the gender dimension.

In the first theme, the teacher-participants claimed that some of their students are still 'close-minded' or 'uncooperative' when it comes to gendered discussions in the classroom. This behavioral response reveals that the learners may still be resistant to gender diversity because of heterosexist socialization and the stronghold in heterosexual-family beliefs (Rohde-Abuba et al., 2019). The participants even claimed that some students would even question the existence of gender issues or feel offended when hearing diverse gender identities. Understandably, people are socialized from a young age to accept such ideologies as fact, similar to how they understand that the sky is 'blue.' Entering their language communities as novices give 'community experts,' i.e., parents, the ability to shape the way they understand the world (Sauntson, 2012). Dismantling such biases need strategic integration into well-thought-out increments and micro-aspects of gender equality (Harbin, 2016; Lomotey, 2020). Otherwise, students might feel that they are being forced to believe such ideologies, which may further push them to becoming disinterested with the English language class.

In the second theme, the teachers expressed their hardships in properly managing the classroom vis-à-vis integrating the gender dimension—they would tend to feel ill-equipped when leading gendered discussions with people who have yet to reach their initial conscientization. This obstacle is evident in their concern about 'managing the offense' students feel, especially in terms of the learners' conservative and religious ideologies, and masculine beliefs. Possibly, in this scenario where a teacher mismanages an offense, the students would tend to push back or insist their biases, which can potentially disrupt the safe space for diverse gender identities. With

minimal support from their institutions and vague gender trainings from the state, the participants opined that incorporating the gender dimension requires too much effort—which they view as difficult given their extent of knowledge on the subject matter and limited budget. As guidance in the implementation is quite scarce, the teachers may not be incentivized to go the extra mile, e.g., properly managing the offense students feel, and research better ways to integrate the gender dimension into ELT. Since CHED has a dedicated Gender and Development budget—which is mostly allocated to seminars and conferences, as per its GAD accomplishments on its website—the call to directly respond to the concerns of the teachers is necessary.

In the third theme, institutional constraints refer to how universities and colleges have yet to actively take a role in seriously integrating gender into education. Three subthemes arose from the participants' accounts, namely curriculum, resource, and belief constraints. In the first and second subthemes, the participants expressed their hesitance in fully integrating gender as a dimension into ELT because of the absence of a detailed gender framework and ambiguous gender-mainstreaming training programs. Compared with university teachers from more liberal states (Bane-gas et al., 2019; Harbin, 2016; Pakuła et al., 2015), some teachers may experience difficulties in incorporating the micro-aspects of gender nonconforming vocabulary, topics related to sexuality, and gender-inclusive pedagogical practices. In the third subtheme, since the Philippines is dominantly Christian, most private and public educational institutions still practice religious and conservative ideologies. The participants were vocal about the neutral and even hostile response of institutions, as some would bar large-scale queer and women's rights organizations and initiatives. This response contradicts the very purpose of gender-mainstreaming education, thus indicating that this is perhaps one of the major reasons why gender discussions are never fully fleshed out, or why they are deadlocked in classroom activities and debates. As a result, without institutional backing, educators (1) maybe are afraid to question conservative societal values, and (2) may create half-baked gendered activities without realizing their implications.

Among all the participants' answers, the researchers made an interesting observation on how only a handful of the teachers seem to clearly delineate their understanding of gender and sexuality. Similar to how the Philippine government addresses the issue, they still view gender equality and equity, quintessentially, in a cisgender sense, i.e., empowering women's rights and dispelling men's concerns about gender issues. Although, on the surface, a majority of the participants stated their understanding of GFL and the importance of diverse gender identities, most made little mention of actual non-cisgender concepts, such as transgenderism or homosexual romance, in their answers. The lack of teeth in normalizing such concepts of gender studies can lead to harmful activities, i.e., debating about queer identities and issues can lead to (a) students questioning the said identities, (b) formalizing the concept that queerness is a choice, (c) invalidating children practicing non-cisgender identities (Butler, 1990; Sauntson, 2012), and (d) teachers using queer concepts in a tokenistic manner, e.g., using gay lingo for classroom entertainment.

It is worth recognizing that answers to research questions one and two are consistent with Lualhati's (2019) premise of teachers being mindful of the gender dimension, but findings for the third question contradict Lualhati's claim that

teachers have ‘successfully’ integrated gender-sensitive and -responsive pedagogical practices into ELT. But, overall, the Filipino ELT practitioners’ collective awareness of the mentioned benefits is a good indicator that they are prepared for proper training on implementing gender-fair-language guidelines and methodically eradicating gender-biased pedagogical practices (Lomotey, 2020). These educators *are* ready to integrate the gender perspective into their teaching; they just need proper frameworks, curriculum, incentives, and most especially, institutional support—the lack of such factors may lead to questionable classroom activities and disinterested students. Only in the ideal classroom setting where gender is not a factor in anyone’s success or failure can learners reach their full potential and understand their gender identity beyond what society tells them to follow.

Since the present study only explored the views of educators on the integration of the gender perspective into ELT and its potential implications, research on the learning process and institutional response vis-à-vis gender mainstreaming may be conducted. Specifically, future investigations may cover students’ reception of gendered discussions and activities. This specific inquiry can help educators and government agencies craft a more responsive and practical curriculum. Likewise, research on current methods and policies in gender integration in Philippine HEIs may be carried out. Such a study can help bridge the gap between teachers and educational institutions in eradicating the current deadlock in gender-mainstreaming methods.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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