

From Parity to Responsiveness: Tracing the Evolution of Gender-related Policies in Philippine Basic Education

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I. Introduction

Over the past several decades, the Philippines has demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing gender equality across various sectors of society, particularly in education. This commitment has earned the country international recognition for its relatively progressive stance on gender issues. Notably, the Philippines ranked sixth globally in the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Reports* from 2006 to 2008 (World Economic Forum 2006). However, by 2025 it had declined to twentieth place, although it remained one of the highest-ranked countries in Asia (World Economic Forum 2025). According to the Philippine UN SDG Achievement Report 2023, the country has achieved significant gains in gender parity in basic education (SDG 4), but progress on broader gender equality (SDG 5) has stagnated or deteriorated. Despite these mixed outcomes, girls in the Philippines continue to show strong performance in key educational indicators, such as enrollment, literacy, and completion rates at both basic and higher education levels. Yet, beyond these global rankings and statistical measures, important questions persist regarding the extent to which gender equality is meaningfully integrated into the daily practices, structures, and experiences of basic education.

Why does gender matter in education, and more specifically, why is gender equality considered a critical component of educational development? Gender is central to inclusivity in education, as persistent disparities hinder the realization of equitable learning opportunities. The *Education for All (EFA) Framework for Action* (2000) highlights this by stating that “gender-based discrimination remains one of the most intractable constraints to realizing the right to education. Without overcoming this obstacle, Education for All cannot be

achieved” (UNESCO 2000). Although the global Education for All movement began more than three decades ago, gender remains a priority in international educational commitments. This is evident in frameworks such as the *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action: Education 2030*, which explicitly calls on governments and partners to promote gender equality through concrete educational measures:

“To ensure gender equality, education systems must act explicitly to eliminate gender bias and discrimination resulting from social and cultural attitudes and practices and economic status. Governments and partners need to put in place gender-sensitive policies, planning and learning environments; mainstream gender issues in teacher training and curriculum monitoring processes, and eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence in education institutions to ensure that teaching and learning have an equal impact on girls and boys, women and men, and to eliminate gender stereotypes and advance gender equality. Special measures should be put in place to ensure the personal security of girls and women in education institutions and on the journey to and from them, in all situations but in particular during conflict and crises.” (UNESCO 2015)

In response to these global commitments, many governments—including the Philippines—have adopted policies and mandates to institutionalize gender equality within their education systems. In doing so, they employ specific gender-related terms that carry deeper implications for practice.

Policies play a critical role in shaping social priorities and institutional directions. As Bell and Stevenson (2006) argue, policy is both a product and a symbol of power, reflecting the underlying social structures that determine whose interests are advanced or constrained. Policy embodies the power to decide what is done, and by extension, whose voices are legitimized within the system. Beyond power, policy is also about change. As Weimer and Vining (2004) note, policy always seeks to imagine or desire a different future, while Rizvi and Lingard (2010) emphasize that policies involve the authoritative allocation of values. In this sense, educational policies are not merely administrative instruments—they articulate societal aspirations, distribute power, and construct visions of what education ought to be.

This article examines the gender-related policies in Philippine basic education, with a particular focus on how these policies reflect the shift from gender equality in access and representation to gender responsiveness in practice. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the major policies that have shaped gender equality in the Philippine basic education?
2. To what extent do these policies reflect a shift from gender equality (access and representation) to gender responsiveness (practice and inclusion)?

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to a textual and content analysis of selected Department of Education (DepEd) policy issuances related to gender equality, gender sensitivity, and gender responsiveness from 1990 to 2025. The analysis centers on the analysis of the policy texts, focusing on how gender is represented, framed, and operationalized in official documents. Using the Gender Responsiveness Assessment Scale (GRAS) as an analytical lens, the study evaluates the extent to which these policies reflect a progression toward gender-responsive and gender-transformative education.

The scope of this research is confined to the policy texts themselves—their language, intent, and internal coherence. It does not extend to the implementation, enforcement, or practical outcomes of these policies at the school or classroom level. Similarly, the study does not directly investigate the political, institutional, or socio-cultural constraints that may have influenced the formulation or execution of gender-related reforms. However, occasional references to overarching legal or policy frameworks, such as the *Magna Carta of Women* are made when necessary to contextualize or clarify the level of gender responsiveness reflected in the policy texts. While the researcher acknowledges that educational policies are situated within broader and often politicized contexts, such dimensions are referenced only insofar as they inform the textual analysis and remain beyond the primary focus of this study.

This delimitation is intentional. A textual analysis of policy documents offers a necessary foundation for understanding the institutional discourse of gender within the Philippine Department of Education. As such, it contributes to the literature by mapping how policy language constructs, reinforces, or transforms

notions of gender equality in education. Future studies may build on this work by examining how these policy commitments are enacted in practice, thereby connecting textual intent with implementation realities and gendered educational outcomes.

II. Conceptual Framework

Educational policies are tools for translating social ideals into institutionalized practice. The term policy has many different meanings; it can signify anything from “a broad orientation” to “an indication of normal practices”, to “a specific commitment” or even “a statement of values” (Colebatch 2009, as cited in Stacey & Mockler 2024). An institutionalized policy on the other hand, as Dye (1992 as cited in Rizvi & Lingard 2010) defines it, is “whatever governments choose to do or not to do”. In other words, governmental policies reflect the intentions and goals of the government and usually aim to represent the desired or imagined future embodying the public good (Rizvi & Lingard 2010). One of the central themes in the future public good is gender equality in education. Examining educational policies is therefore essential to understanding how gender equality is conceptualized, institutionalized, and operationalized in Philippine basic education.

There are many ways to assess educational policies to determine if they reflect gender equality. In policy research, the usual focus is on policy text, policy context and policy consequences (policy implementation) to evaluate and analyze particular policies (Henry *et al.* 2013). However, this study focuses on the policy text itself- the document and its content. Policy text or content analysis interrogates the text to why it is structured or framed in a particular way (Bell & Stevenson 2006). Drawing from theories within literary criticism, policy texts are never neutral. They always contain interest-laden terms that reveal particular values, ideologies, and assumptions. In the same way, educational policies in the Philippines contain textual elements that can reveal the extent to which they embody gender equality.

Gender Equality, Gender Mainstreaming, and Gender Responsiveness

Gender equality in education refers to a condition in which learners of all genders enjoy equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities to access and

benefit from education. Equality does not imply uniform treatment but the assurance that diverse needs and identities are respected and supported (UN Women 2002). It recognizes that gender equality is both a human right and a prerequisite for inclusive, people-centered development (UNICEF 2017).

While gender equality represents the goal, gender mainstreaming serves as the strategy to achieve it. Rai (2008) defines mainstreaming as the process of making gender concerns central to institutional planning rather than treating them as peripheral. It involves systematically assessing the gendered impacts of all policies and integrating these perspectives at every stage of decision-making (UNICEF 2017). In education, UNESCO (2015) emphasizes that gender mainstreaming moves beyond access to examine how curricula, pedagogy, and school culture can either reinforce or challenge inequality.

If gender mainstreaming is the strategy, gender responsiveness is its practical expression. A gender-responsive policy ensures that education systems actively address the distinct needs, constraints, and contributions of all genders, especially those historically marginalized. It recognizes how social norms and gender roles influence educational outcomes and implements measures to mitigate these barriers (UNGEI 2018; UNICEF 2017). For example, gender-responsive approaches may include ensuring safe school environments, reforming curricula to counter stereotypes, or scheduling training programs that accommodate learners' social realities (UNESCO 2015).

Together, these three concepts form a continuum: gender equality as the goal, gender mainstreaming as the strategy, and gender responsiveness as the operational outcome. Yet achieving this continuum requires a deeper understanding of what equality truly entails—whether it is limited to access or extends to the expansion of learners' real freedoms and capabilities.

This study loosely adapts the Capability Approach (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2000) as its conceptual foundation. Rather than employing its full theoretical or measurement framework, the study draws on its central premise that true equality in education lies not merely in formal access to education but in expanding individuals' freedom to achieve well-being and valued outcomes. It asks not only whether learners are enrolled, but whether they are genuinely able to learn, participate, and flourish. In this sense, the Capability Approach provides a flexible and normative lens for examining whether education policies in the Philippines promote a substantive empowerment rather than symbolic

inclusion.

Complementing this, Feminist Theory offers a critical perspective on the power relations and social structures that shape educational access and experience. It underscores that inequality is not simply individual disadvantage but a systemic condition maintained by patriarchal norms and institutional practices. As R.W. Connell(1987, 2009) asserts, gender is not merely an individual attribute but a dynamic structure of social relations organized through labor, power, and emotional connections. Institutions such as schools play a central role in reproducing or transforming these relations through what Connell terms hegemonic masculinity which means the cultural pattern that legitimizes male dominance and normalizes gender hierarchies (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). By integrating this theoretical insight, the study recognizes that educational policies are not neutral texts and they may either reinforce or disrupt existing gendered power dynamics. Together, they guide this study in distinguishing between policies that promote equality of access and those that foster genuine empowerment through gender-responsive and transformative education.

III. Review of Related Literature

Research examining gender discourse in the Philippine educational system has expanded over the past two decades. These studies explore how gender dynamics like interactions, structures, and relations, curriculum and learning materials shape various aspects of education. Much of this literature centers on access, representation, and achievement.

Access

Early studies on gender and education in the Philippines, as well as major international reports, largely emphasized quantitative indicators such as enrollment, retention, and completion rates. This reflects an early policy orientation toward achieving numerical parity and equal access for both sexes (UNESCO 2015; UNICEF 2017). Such a focus aimed to close gender gaps in participation, particularly in line with global frameworks promoting gender equality in education.

While these efforts have led to improved formal opportunities for both girls and boys, research indicates that gendered differences persist in students' lived

experiences. For instance, Dacuycuy and Bayudan-Dacuycuy (2019) found that girls tend to stay in school and progress more steadily than boys. Conversely, boys—especially those from poor or rural families—are more likely to drop out due to economic pressures and their roles as contributors to household income (David *et al.* 2018).

Representation

Studies examining representation in education materials reveal that gender stereotypes continue to pervade instructional materials. Flores and Arandaque (2022) and Espeleta *et al.* (2024) both observed that textbooks and teaching resources still reinforce traditional gender norms. Similarly, Java and Parcon (2016) found that elementary textbooks often depict women and girls in domestic and passive roles, while men and boys are associated with leadership and strength. Curaming and Curaming (2020) likewise reported that English textbooks used in primary schools continue to portray women in traditional, stereotypical ways.

Achievement

Recent research has also focused on gender differences in academic achievement, with several studies suggesting a reversal of the traditional gender gap. Boys are increasingly being left behind by girls in terms of academic performance and completion. Fontanos and Ocampo (2019) and Paqueo and Orbeta (2019) found that girls consistently outperform boys in literacy, test results, and school completion rates. These findings raise critical questions about whether the Philippine school system, pedagogical practices, and broader societal expectations adequately address the needs of boys.

Beyond Access, Representation, and Achievement

Beyond these areas, recent studies highlight how gender operates in day-to-day educational practices. Research on curriculum content (Delavina *et al.* 2020; Boholano *et al.* 2024) and classroom interactions (Hernandez & Cudiamat 2018; Ablaza 2021) underscores how gender norms continue to shape the lived experiences of both learners and educators. However, what remains underexplored is how educational policies themselves have evolved from promoting gender equity to embracing gender responsiveness.

Policy Context

At the national level, the Philippines has established a robust legislative and policy framework that institutionalizes gender equality across government sectors. The *Magna Carta of Women* (Republic Act No. 9710, 2009) mandates all government agencies to integrate gender and development (GAD) principles in their policies, plans, and programs. Within education, the *Enhanced Basic Education Act* (RA No. 10533, 2013) redefined the basic education cycle and curriculum standards, creating opportunities for embedding gender perspectives into teaching and learning processes.

Despite these formal commitments, recent studies (Villegas *et al.* 2025; Famela 2024) reveal persistent gaps between policy intent, and awareness and implementation. Many educators and administrators remain unaware of major educational policies like Gender Responsive in Basic Education Policy (GRBEP) or lack the capacity and resources to operationalize its principles. These studies suggest that while policies affirm gender equality in principle, they do not always translate into gender-responsive practice at the school level.

Synthesis

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that research on gender in Philippine education has largely concentrated on access, representation, achievement, curriculum, and learning materials- dimensions that capture how gender manifests in classroom practice and student experience. While these studies provide important insights into the persistence of gender norms within schools, they primarily address the outcomes of educational practice rather than the policy discourses that shape them.

This imbalance reveals a gap in existing scholarship. The policies that frame and govern gender-related initiatives in education remain underexamined, despite their crucial role in defining how equality and responsiveness are understood and operationalized. Without critical attention to policy texts themselves, it becomes difficult to determine whether reforms merely reproduce existing gender norms or promote transformative change.

This article seeks to fill that gap by critically analyzing the content and framing of key gender related educational practices in the Philippines. By examining how gender equality and gender responsiveness are articulated within these documents, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of

how policy contents both reflects and shapes the broader pursuit of gender-responsive education.

IV. Methodology

Policy Analysis

In the field of policy study, three main approaches are typically used to analyze policy: the content (or text), the context (like historical and cultural context), and the consequences (or implementation) (Bell & Stevenson 2006). In short, policy analysis involves interpreting policy texts in relation both to the context in which they are produced and the effects they generate in practice (Rizvi & Lingard 2010).

This study adopts a content-based approach, focusing specifically on the textual dimension of policy. Content or text analysis examines what the policy explicitly states, how it frames its objectives, and what underlying values or assumptions it conveys (Bell & Stevenson 2006). By analyzing the content of gender-related policies in education, this study seeks to uncover how gender equality and gender responsiveness are articulated, and what kinds of change these policies envision within the basic education system.

Subject and Method

While national framework such as the *Magna Carta of Women* (Republic Act No. 9710) provide the legal foundation for gender-related initiatives, they are often broad in scope and cross-sectoral in focus. To translate these national mandates into actionable directives within the education sector, the Department of Education (DepEd) issues more targeted and context-specific policies known as Department Orders (DO).

The Department of Education serves as the executive agency for managing and supervising the Philippine basic education system, which covers the formal learning cycle from kindergarten to secondary education (junior and senior high school). Its DepEd Orders (DOs) establish principles, rules, regulations, and implementation guidelines that govern administrative and instructional practices (Department of Education 2015). These orders thus serve as the most direct and authoritative expressions of DepEd's policy priorities.

This study examined official DepEd Orders (DO) publicly available on the DepEd website. The process began with a title-level screening of all issuances to identify those potentially related to gender, equity, or inclusivity. Policies whose titles suggested a gender-related focus were shortlisted and then reviewed in detail. Only those containing substantive provisions related to gender equality, mainstreaming, or responsiveness were included in the final analysis.

Analytical Framework and Procedure

To evaluate the gender responsiveness of these policies, this study employed qualitative content analysis using the World Health Organization's Gender Responsiveness Assessment Scale (GRAS). GRAS categorizes policies as gender-unequal, gender-blind, gender-sensitive, gender-specific, or gender-transformative, which served as coding categories for the analysis. These categories served as coding frames for interpreting the policies' language, intent, and orientation toward gender equality.

Each policy document was read in full, and all sections explicitly or implicitly referring to gender roles, relations, or inclusivity were categorized according to the GRAS framework. This approach enabled a systematic examination of the extent to which DepEd policies reflect progress toward gender-responsive education.

Table 1- Gender Responsive Assessment Scale

Source: Adapted from *Gender Mainstreaming for Health Managers: A Practical Approach*, p. 41, by the World Health Organization (Geneva: WHO Press, 2011). © 2011 World Health Organization.

GRAS Level	Description
Level 1: Gender-unequal	• Perpetuates gender inequality by reinforcing unbalanced norms, roles and relations • Privileges men over women (or vice versa) • Often leads to one sex enjoying more rights or opportunities than the other
Level 2: Gender-blind	• Ignores gender norms, roles and relations • Very often reinforces gender-based discrimination • Ignores differences in opportunities and resource allocation for women and men • Often constructed based on the principle of being “fair” by treating everyone the same
Level 3: Gender-sensitive	• Considers gender norms, roles and relations • Does not address inequality generated by unequal norms, roles or relations • Indicates gender awareness, although often no remedial action is developed
Level 4: Gender-specific	• Considers gender norms, roles and relations for women and men and how they affect access to and control over resources • Considers women’s and men’s specific needs • Intentionally targets and benefits a specific group of women or men to achieve certain policy or programme goals or meet certain needs • Make it easier for women and men to fulfill duties that are ascribed to them on their gender roles
Level 5: Gender-transformative	• Considers gender norms, roles and relations for women and men and that these affect access to and control over resources • Considers women’s and men’s specific needs • Addresses the cause of gender-based health inequities • Includes ways to transform harmful gender norms, roles and relations • The objective is often to promote gender equality • Includes strategies to foster progressive changes in power relationships between women and men

V. Results and Discussion

Using the World Health Organization's Gender Responsiveness Assessment Scale (GRAS) as an analytical tool, this is the findings of the study. The policies were analyzed in chronological order to trace the evolution of gender perspectives within Philippine basic education policy over time. The succeeding table summarizes the evaluated DepEd Orders according to their year of issuance, policy intent, and corresponding GRAS level.

Table 2- Gender-related Department Orders (DO) from 1990 to 2025

Source: Table created by the author using data from the Department of Education, Philippines, *DepEd Orders*, <https://www.deped.gov.ph/category/issuances/deped-orders/>.

Policy Code	Date Enacted	Policy Title	GRAS Level
DO 19, s.1990	Mar. 16,1990	Creation of DECS Focal Point for Women's Concerns	Gender-sensitive
DO 48, s.1990	May 18, 1990	Adoption of the Programs and Projects in the Philippine Development Plan for Women in the Annual Plan for Women	Gender-equal
DO 2, s. 1992	Jan. 8, 1992	Integration of Education for All Programs and Projects in the 1993 Plans and Budget	Gender-equal
DO 30 s. 1999	Mar. 22, 1999	Girls Scouts Exemption from the Citizens Army Training	Gender-equal
DO 29, 2. 2002	July 22, 2002	Merit Selection and Plan of the Department of Education	Gender-equal
DO 36, s. 2002	Aug. 22, 2002	Education for all (EFA) 2015 Plan Preparation	Gender-equal
DO 40, s. 2012	May 14, 2012	Child Protection Policy	Gender-specific
DO 63, s. 2012	June 20, 2012	Guidelines on the Preparation of Gender and Development (GAD Plans)	Gender-specific
DO 27, s.2013	June 18, 2013	Guidelines and procedure on the establishment of Dept.Ed. Gender and Development GAD Focal Point System (GFPS)	Gender-specific

DO 36, s.2013	Sept. 14, 2013	Our Department of Education Vision, Mission and Core Values (DepEd VMV)	Gender-specific
DO 44, s. 2013	Sept. 26, 2013	Strengthening the K-12 Basic Education Program Delivery	Gender-specific
DO 55, s.2013	Dec. 23, 2013	Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of RA No.10627 (Anti-Bullying Act of 2013)	Gender-specific
DO 32, s. 2017	June 29, 2017	Gender Responsive Basic Education Policy	Gender-transformative
DO 31, s.2018	July 13, 2018	Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)	Gender-transformative
DO 24, s. 2022	May 30, 2022	Adoption of the Basic Education Development Plan 2030 (BEDP 2030)	Gender-sensitive
DO 25, s. 2025	Sept. 2, 2025	Policy on the Implementation of Reproductive Health Education	Gender-transformative

The analysis of selected Department of Education Orders (DO) from 1990 to 2025 indicates a general movement toward greater gender responsiveness in educational policies. Early policies focused primarily on gender equality and sensitivity, whereas more recent policies exhibit elements of responsiveness and transformation. However the trend is neither uniform nor fully realized in all policy documents.

This general movement reflects the Department's gradual transition from promoting formal equality in access and participation to embedding gender perspectives into the structures, content, and governance of the basic education system. This progression in the gender responsiveness level of the policies can be conceptualized in three phases: Policy Beginnings, Policy Integration, and Policy Transformation.

Policy Beginnings: From gender equality to sensitivity (1990–2002)

Among the earliest DepEd Orders examined were DO 19, s. 1990 (*Creation of DECS Focal Point for Women's Concerns*) and DO 48, s. 1990 (*Adoption of the Programs and Projects in the Philippine Development Plan for Women*), both of which signaled the start of institutional recognition of women's roles in development.

These policies were formulated during a period when global and national education initiatives were heavily focused on promoting equal access to learning opportunities. In the Philippines, this period coincided with President Corazon Aquino's signing of Proclamation No. 480, declaring the period from 1990 to 1999 as the "Decade of Education for All". This declaration sought to expand access and improve literacy among disadvantaged groups, including women and girls. On the international stage, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action further strengthened the global commitment to eliminate barriers that hinder women's and girls' participation in education.

This convergence of global and national advocacy for equality of access and participation is clearly reflected in the early DepEd policies of the 1990s. These policies primarily focused on ensuring that women were presented in institutional structures and that their concerns were integrated into educational planning and programming. However, while they signaled a critical shift toward inclusion, they still remained within the scope of Gender-equality (Level 2) and Gender-sensitive (Level 3) rather than moving toward gender-responsiveness or transformation. The early period of inclusive education implementation was limited, fragmented, inconsistent at a certain level, more of symbolic rather than mandatory (Valdeavilla 1995). They aimed to ensure women's visibility without critically addressing gendered hierarchies or systemic barriers.

Policy Integration: Institutionalization of gender responsiveness (2012–2013)

A significant policy shift emerged in the early 2010s with the issuance of DO 40, s. 2012 (Child Protection Policy), DO 63, s. 2012 (Guidelines on the Preparation of Gender and Development Plans), and DO 27, s. 2013 (Establishment of the GAD Focal Point System). These policies marked the institutionalization of gender-responsive governance in education. The establishment of a GAD Focal Point System, in particular, operationalized accountability structures for gender mainstreaming, translating earlier commitments into concrete administrative mechanisms.

This period followed the enactment of the *Magna Carta of Women* (Republic Act No. 9710) in 2009, the Philippines' landmark legislation translating the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into domestic law. The Magna Carta mandated all government agencies, including the Department of Education, to institutionalize

gender mainstreaming and establish GAD Focal Point Systems to ensure compliance and accountability (Philippine Commission on Women [PCW] n.d.; Republic Act No. 9710, 2009).

In the years that followed, the Philippine government further reinforced this commitment through several gender-focused initiatives. In 2010, the Philippines became the first country in Southeast Asia to launch a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, highlighting the nation's growing emphasis on integrating gender perspectives into governance and policy implementation (PCW n.d.). Later, in 2015, the Philippine Commission on Women introduced the GAD Local Hubs, designed to facilitate knowledge exchange and showcase innovative gender and development practices sustained at the local level (PCW 2025).

Within this policy climate, the Department of Education's issuances from 2012 to 2013 can be seen as part of a broader national movement toward institutionalizing gender mainstreaming and promoting safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments. Furthermore, DO 36, s. 2013 (DepEd Vision, Mission, and Core Values) implicitly reinforced inclusivity and respect for diversity as institutional values, while DO 55, s. 2013 (Implementing Rules and Regulations of the Anti-Bullying Act) introduced explicit protections against gender-based discrimination and harassment in schools. These developments reflect a growing awareness of how gender dynamics shape educational experiences, consistent with Connell's (2009) argument that institutions reproduce gender inequalities through embedded norms and unexamined structures.

Policy transformation: Advancing capability, agency, and inclusion (2017–2025)

The period from 2017 to 2025 marks a decisive phase in the evolution of gender-related education policy in the Philippines—one that moves from policy compliance toward gender transformation. This era is characterized by the deepening of gender mainstreaming efforts, the expansion of women's leadership in government, and the institutional embedding of gender responsiveness within education governance and practice.

A defining feature of this decade was the rise of women leaders in national governance, reflecting broader social acceptance of women's authority and competence in public affairs. As recorded in the *HerStory Exhibit* of the Philippine

Commission on Women, the administration of President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino III (2010–2016) appointed the highest number of women to cabinet and constitutionally created bodies in Philippine history (PCW 2025 *HerStory Exhibit*). This unprecedented representation established a political and institutional environment that was more receptive to gender-responsive reforms, setting the stage for policies such as the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy (DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017).

DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017 institutionalized Gender and Development (GAD) principles in the Department of Education, embedding gender responsiveness into curriculum design, teacher development, and school management. When assessed through the Gender Responsiveness Assessment Scale (GRAS), this policy demonstrates a movement from gender sensitivity toward gender responsiveness—addressing not only the practical needs of learners but also the structural and cultural barriers that perpetuate gender inequality in schools.

Further strengthening this orientation, the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) Plan 2019–2025, adapted in March 2019, serves as the government’s overarching strategic framework for gender equality and women’s empowerment. As highlighted in the *HerStory Exhibit* (PCW 2025), the GEWE Plan calls for systemic integration of gender in all development sectors, including education, and situates schools as key institutions in shaping equitable social norms. Its emphasis on women’s leadership, agency, and participation complements DepEd’s policy direction, reinforcing education’s role as a transformative force for gender justice.

However, while these developments signify a maturing gender policy environment, the trajectory of transformation remains uneven. DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2022, which adopts the *Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030*, illustrates this point. The BEDP is the Department’s first long-term strategic plan for basic education, encompassing formal education from ages 5 to 18 and non-formal learning for youth and adults. It aims to strengthen the overall delivery and quality of education and enhance learners’ experiences (Philippine Institute for Development Studies 2022).

When assessed through the GRAS framework, however, the BEDP reflects a *gender-sensitive* orientation rather than a fully *gender-responsive* or *transformative* one. While the policy continues to acknowledge gender equality as a principle, its references to gender are largely aspirational, positioned within broad goals

of inclusion and quality, rather than prescriptive or actionable.

This partial regression may be understood within the policy's developmental context. The BEDP emerged in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period that exposed and exacerbated the learning crisis in the Philippines. International large-scale assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), reported alarmingly low performance among Filipino learners (Momo 2025; Cabural 2024). In response, the Department of Education shifted its policy priorities toward restoring learning quality, strengthening instructional systems, and improving foundational competencies. Consequently, while gender concerns remained acknowledged, they did not occupy a central place in reform design and implementation. This suggests that, although DepEd has achieved substantial progress in policy development, ensuring consistency, depth, and accountability in implementation continues to be a critical challenge.

Summary of policy trajectory

In summary, the 2017–2025 period represents both the culmination and testing point of gender transformation in Philippine education policy. Through the confluence of institutional leadership, national frameworks like GEWE, and DepEd's own policy initiatives, gender responsiveness has become an established norm in principle. Yet, sustaining this progress requires translating aspirational commitments into actionable and measurable outcomes—ensuring that the transformative potential of gender-responsive education is realized not just in policy, but in everyday classroom practice.

VII. Conclusion

The analysis of gender-related educational policies in the Philippines, evaluated through the Gender-Responsiveness Assessment Scale (GRAS), reveals a progressive yet uneven trajectory toward gender responsiveness in basic education. Early policies largely reflected a gender equality orientation, focusing on ensuring access and representation for both boys and girls in education. These initiatives were instrumental in closing enrollment gaps and promoting gender parity in participation—clear indicators of the country's long-standing commitment to gender equality in education.

However, the GRAS assessment demonstrates that while many of these policies were gender-sensitive, relatively few reached the gender-transformative level. Earlier frameworks and programs often treated gender as an issue of inclusion rather than as a structural concern rooted in power relations, curriculum content, and institutional culture. It was only with the institutionalization of the Gender and Development (GAD) approach—and its eventual adoption through national mandates such as the *Magna Carta of Women* (RA 9710) and the DepEd Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy (DepEd Order 32, s.2017)—that Philippine education began to move from equality in access toward responsiveness in practice.

The study also underscores continuing challenges. The varying levels of gender responsiveness across policy documents point to the need for stronger implementation mechanisms, continuous capacity-building for educators, and monitoring systems that measure not only access but also the quality and inclusivity of educational experiences. Future policy efforts must ensure that gender considerations are not confined to compliance or token inclusion but embedded as a core principle of educational governance and pedagogy.

Ultimately, the GRAS-based analysis affirms that while Philippine education policy has made significant strides in embedding gender concerns, the path toward gender-transformative education remains ongoing. Sustained commitment to GAD principles, supported by feminist insights into power and social structures, will be essential to ensure that gender responsiveness in education moves beyond rhetoric into lived reality—where all learners, regardless of gender, can participate, achieve, and lead equally.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study was limited to an examination of policy texts, future research could expand the analysis to include empirical and contextual dimensions of gender responsiveness in Philippine education. One productive direction would be to investigate how gender-responsive education policies are interpreted, enacted, and sustained in schools and classrooms. Such work could uncover the ways in which institutional practices either reinforce or challenge the intentions embedded in policy documents.

Future studies may also delve into the broader political, institutional, and socio-cultural factors that shape the formulation and reform of gender-related

education policies. This includes examining how bureaucratic structures, leadership transitions, and socio-political priorities influence policy directions. It is also important to acknowledge the continued role of religion—especially the Catholic Church—in shaping public discourse and policymaking in the Philippines. As a deeply rooted institution, the Church continues to affect how gender, morality, and education are framed and negotiated in the national context.

By pursuing these lines of inquiry, future research can bridge the gap between policy text and policy practice, providing the empirical grounding and contextual understanding that complement this study’s textual analysis. Collectively, such efforts can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of gender policy development and strengthen the pursuit of a genuinely gender-responsive and transformative education system in the Philippines.

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Abstract

From Parity to Responsiveness: Tracing the Evolution of Gender-related Policies in Philippine Basic Education

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In recent decades, the Philippines has consistently ranked high in international gender indices, particularly in education. While multiple factors may contribute to this performance, national initiatives such as gender-focused legislation, institutional mechanisms, and education-specific policies have likely played a significant role in promoting gender parity and addressing gender-related biases and stereotypes in schools and the broader education system. Despite these macro-level achievements, questions remain about whether gender responsiveness is fully embedded in the everyday practices and structures of basic education. This article examines national efforts through key educational policies, focusing on selected Department of Education Orders issued over the past three decades. Using qualitative content analysis, the study applies the Gender Responsiveness Assessment Scale (GRAS) to evaluate how these policies conceptualize and operationalize gender equality, inclusion, and responsiveness. The findings indicate an uneven yet promising trajectory: early policies primarily focused on formal equality in access and representation, while more recent policies show some progress toward gender responsiveness, though few achieve fully transformative outcomes. By tracing how gender equality and responsiveness are articulated in policy texts, this study highlights both advances and gaps, offering insights for strengthening policy design and implementation to support a genuinely gender-responsive and inclusive basic education system in the Philippines.