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English faculty's challenges, strategies, and practices in designing gender-responsive language assessments

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Abstract

Aim: The study explored the lived experiences of English faculty in designing gender-responsive language assessments, focusing on the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and the practices they implement to promote fairness and inclusivity in the classroom. It also aimed to develop a policy brief that would transform the study findings into practical recommendations for equitable and gender-responsive assessment practices.

Methodology: An explanatory sequential mixed method was employed in the study. The quantitative phase involved 100 English faculty across Zambales, while the qualitative phase included 12 English faculty from selected campuses of President Ramon Magsaysay State University. Data were gathered using survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and qualitative responses were analyzed through thematic analysis.

Results: Results revealed that most respondents were female and belonged to the 31-40 age bracket. All identified indicators were interpreted as "Challenging," with an overall mean of 3.08, indicating persistent difficulties in designing gender-responsive language assessments. Qualitative findings further showed that English faculty actively employ inclusive and reflective strategies such as self-directed learning, reflection and feedback mechanisms, collaborative practices, gender representation in assessment materials, equal participation and role allocation, and the establishment of safe and inclusive classroom environments.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that while English faculty demonstrate commitment to fairness and inclusivity in language assessment, stronger institutional support, professional development programs, and policy-based interventions are still necessary to strengthen and sustain gender-responsive assessment practices in English language education.

Keywords: *gender-responsive language assessment, English language education, inclusivity, assessment practices, policy brief*

INTRODUCTION

In English language education, assessment serves as a key driver of instruction by promoting critical thinking, reasoning, and reflection, thereby contributing to the development of a quality learning environment. Language assessment not only measures learners' communicative competence but also reflects the values and priorities embedded within educational systems. It also plays a central role in the effective implementation of gender-responsive pedagogy to ensure that students of female and male gender, in conjunction with those with diverse gender identities, are given equal opportunities to showcase and demonstrate their language competence and classroom learning (Mukagiahana et al., 2024). In addition, gender inclusivity fosters communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and respectful discourse among learners. Thus, teachers must adapt classroom discourse and assessment tasks to include gender-neutral vocabulary, inclusive communication, and respectful interaction patterns (Dusengalieva, 2025). Teaching with a gender perspective also stimulates students' critical thinking capacity, providing them with new tools to identify social stereotypes, norms and roles related to gender (Perez et al., 2022).

Chen et al. (2025) argued that inclusive language testing practices help reduce barriers experienced by multilingual learners, underscoring the importance of fair, accessible, and learner-centered evaluation. The study

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highlights that assessment should tailor to diverse linguistic ability of students, providing for opportunities to demonstrate their language proficiency. Similarly, Syed (2022) asserted that language assessment is not merely about testing grammatical accuracy or structural knowledge, but about evaluating how students use language to construct meaning, negotiate identity, and communicate effectively in socially situated contexts. Moving through the Philippine context, Remigio and Talosa (2021) explored students' attitudes toward gender-inclusive language in Philippine higher education, and revealed notable differences in how male and female students recognized and responded to sexist or gender-biased expressions. Results revealed that most respondents were female, displaying a positive attitude towards gender-inclusive language, indicating the students' openness to gender-inclusive language use.

Efforts to create gender-responsive classrooms are now amplified in the context of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), as gender inequalities have remained unaddressed in tertiary classrooms. As engines of transformation, HEIs have a critical role in promoting gender equality in response to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5. However, evidence-based studies on creating gender-responsive classrooms are still scarce despite various gender issues that pervade colleges and universities worldwide. In light of this, the promotion of gender equality at the classroom level must be integrated by teachers into teaching and learning materials, methodologies, learning spaces, classroom setup, interactions, language, and assessment. The integration of these pedagogical practices would eventually strike out gender-related violence, biases, and barriers, making the higher education system truly inclusive and empowering (Bastida et al., 2025).

Despite the growing advocacy for gender-responsive assessment, many teachers still encounter substantial challenges in translating gender-responsive principles into actual classroom practice. According to Weng and Shen (2022), Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) is a significant component but also a challenging task for most of language teachers, especially in its implementation. Teachers' insufficient LAL may lead to poorly designed language assessments, incorrect interpretation of test results and irrational decisions, all of which may have negative consequences for students. Notwithstanding these insights, present studies have not explicitly investigated the lived experiences of President Ramon Magsaysay State University (PRMSU) English faculty in designing gender-responsive language assessments, and no study to date has analyzed how PRMSU faculty cope with the complexities, challenges, and decision-making processes crucial in designing gender-responsive language assessments.

In light of this situation, it became pivotal to determine the challenges faculty encountered, the strategies they employed, and the practices they implemented in planning, designing, and implementing gender-responsive language assessments. These dimensions provided valuable insights that explicitly contributed to language assessment research, inclusive English language pedagogy, and broader language education practices beyond PRMSU, and informed the design of a policy brief as a tool to connect research findings with institutional and policy-level decision-making. A policy brief aimed to transform the study's results into practical recommendation, bridging the gap between the research and policy by summarizing the key data on faculty's experiences and turning them into evidence-based suggestions, thereby guiding institutional and policy-level decisions to promote equitable and gender-responsive assessment practices.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

Challenges in Designing Gender-responsive Language Assessments

Despite the growing advocacy for gender-responsive language assessments, many teachers still encounter substantial challenges in translating these principles into actual classroom practice. According to Weng and Shen (2022), LAL is a significant component of language teachers' expertise, but also a challenging task for most language teachers, especially in its implementation. The teachers who are language assessment literate can design and administer effective testing activities, interpret students' scores accurately, formulate appropriate teaching plans and make rational education decisions. However, teachers' insufficient LAL may lead to poorly designed language assessments, incorrect interpretation of test results and irrational educational decisions, all of which may have negative consequences for students. Therefore, gender-responsive assessment practices should measure learners' communicative competence in ways that promote inclusivity, equity, and authentic language use.

The Need for Designing Gender-responsive Language Assessments

As Walker et al. (2023) contended, since students are not inherently neutral, and that they represent intersecting identifies and preferences, assessments should be well designed to boost personal engagement and belonging in academic environments. This belief mirrored a desire to design assessments that reflect the test taker's identity and lived experience, as well as the expectation that all students have the ability to perform beyond their

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usual level. Such high expectancies among students would help negate the biases that do not mirror the diversity of the target students - this traditional approach of creating a neutral test hinders students from improving their academic performance. To further combat this barrier to authentic and gender-responsive content, assessments must be designed in a way that maximize flexibility to account for individual differences in culture, interests, and identities of all learners. Moreover, Perez et al. (2022) asserted that teaching with a gender perspective is not, therefore, teaching about women; rather, it considers sex and gender as key analytical and explanatory variables. It implies paying attention to the similarities and differences in the experiences, interests, expectations, attitudes and behavior of women and men, and identifying the causes and consequences of gender inequality, in order to fight it. Teaching with a gender perspective takes into account both people's biological characteristics and the social and cultural characteristics of women and men.

Strategies for Inclusive Task Creation

It is recognized that language instruction and assessment practices often unconsciously favor certain gendered behaviors, such as confidence in public speaking or assertiveness in discussions, which can create inequities in classroom evaluation. Rooted in the framework of the Philippine government's Gender and Development (GAD) initiatives, the study sought to identify existing practices aligned with the Harmonized Gender and Development Guidelines (HAGADAGA) and to evaluate how these strategies promote inclusivity and equity in language learning. Results revealed that collaborative learning activities, such as group work, peer discussions, role-plays, and community-based projects demonstrated the highest level of gender sensitivity. Conversely, traditional assessment methods, such as paper-and-pencil tests and timed quizzes, scored lower on the gender-sensitivity scale. These formats were found to favor more assertive or academically dominant students, often perpetuating subtle gender disparities (Moya & Borong, 2024).

Teachers' Gender Sensitive Pedagogical Practices

Instructors are responsible for delivering curriculum, and hence are in charge in choosing the appropriate teaching methods, training materials and other aspects supporting the teaching-learning process. To allow for equitable training outcomes for girls and boys, instructors are expected to adopt gender sensitive pedagogical approaches. Gender responsive pedagogy refers to teaching and learning processes that pay attention to the specific learning needs of girls and boys. Therefore, gender responsive pedagogy calls for teachers to take an all-encompassing gender approach in the processes of lesson planning, teaching, classroom management and performance evaluation (Perez et al., 2022). Hence, it is important to use inclusive language and foster classroom communication practices that promote equal participation and reduce gender bias in learning and assessment context.

Integration of GAD Laws in Designing Gender-responsive Language Assessments

Lomarda and Doydoy (2025) offered an insightful examination of the extent where Gender and Development (GAD) laws are practiced in Philippine schools, with a certain emphasis on teachers' awareness and the corresponding implications for gender-responsive teaching and assessment. The instrument measured three major constructs: (1) teachers' knowledge of existing GAD laws and policies, (2) actual implementation of GAD-aligned practices in classroom instruction and school governance, and (3) perceived barriers to effective implementation. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated moderate to high awareness of GAD laws, such as the Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710) and DepEd's Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy. However, the degree of actual implementation was notably uneven across institutions. The study also identified systemic barriers such as insufficient administrative support, lack of clear indicators for assessing gender responsiveness. This inconsistency often led to fragmented or superficial practices, where gender issues were acknowledged rhetorically but not meaningfully embedded in classroom assessments or performance evaluations. Hence, it is important to note that classroom language practices may influence how gender responsiveness is communicated, interpreted and enacted in assessment contexts.

Synthesis and Justification of the Study

The studies reviewed indicate that gender-responsive language assessment requires the deliberate integration of inclusive strategies across the design, piloting, and evaluation stages to ensure fairness, equity, and recognition of diverse learner identities. Although international and Philippine studies have addressed assessment literacy, assessment tools, and general inclusive practices, they show limited focus on challenges, strategies, and practices in flexible learning environments. These gaps were addressed by explicitly identifying unresolved scholarly

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problems and comparing the limitations of previous international studies, thereby positioning the present study to provide a more contextualized understanding of gender-responsive assessment practices among English faculty handling diverse learners.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Gender Schema Theory which posits that individual develop mental frameworks or "schemas" about what behaviors, traits, and roles are appropriate for males and females. These schemas are shaped by cultural norms and social experiences, and they influence how people perceive, interpret, and respond to gender-related information (Bem, 1981). In the context of this study, it explored how English faculty's personal beliefs and implicit biases can influence how they design language assessments. Building on this theory, faculty may be more aware and deliberate in designing language assessments. Furthermore, the study incorporates the theory on Communicative Competence, which emphasizes that language learning and assessment should evaluate not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic discourse and strategic competence in meaningful communication contexts (Hymes, 1972). These theories strengthen the study by providing a language and pedagogy framework that highlights the importance of communication practices, authentic language use, and equitable learner participation in gender-responsive language assessment.

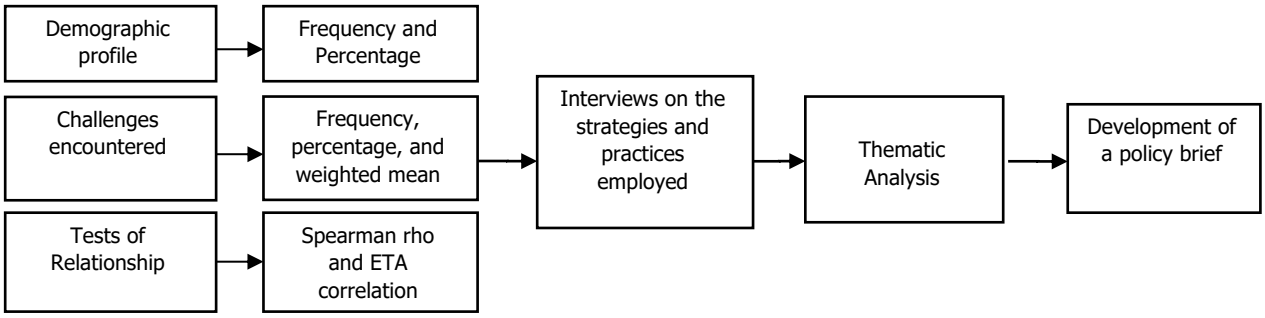
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study presents the process involved in gathering the necessary data for the study.

1. For the quantitative phase, the demographic profile, including the age and gender, the challenges encountered by English faculty across Zambales in designing gender-responsive language assessments, and the tests of relationship between the challenges and the English faculty's profile, were assessed.
2. Frequency and percentage were used to analyze the demographic profile of the English faculty, while frequency, percentage and weighted mean were applied to identify the challenges' extent and level. Lastly, spearman rho and ETA correlation were employed to determine if there was a significant relationship between the challenges and English faculty's profile.
3. As for the qualitative phase, the researcher gathered data on strategies and practices employed by the English faculty to address the most pressing challenges identified in the quantitative phase, ensuring that language assessments are gender-responsive for diverse learning backgrounds.
4. The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Thematic Analysis to capture and interpret the experiences of PRMSU English faculty in designing gender-responsive language assessments.
5. The development of a policy brief that outlined evidence-based recommendations to strengthen institutional support, promoting inclusivity, and enhancing teacher capacity in gender-responsive language assessment.

Figure 1.

Research Paradigm on the English Faculty's Challenges, Strategies and Practices in Designing Gender-responsive Language Assessments.



Statement of the Problem

Designing gender-responsive language assessments has become increasingly important in English language education because assessment practices do not only measure learners' communicative competence, language

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proficiency, and classroom performance, but also reflect the values, inclusivity, and equity embedded within educational systems. In language classrooms, assessment practices may unintentionally reinforce gender biases, stereotypes, and unequal participation when inclusivity and fairness are not carefully considered in the design of assessment tasks, instructional materials, feedback mechanisms, and classroom interactions. Despite growing international and national advocacy for gender-responsive pedagogy, many English faculty members continue to encounter difficulties in designing language assessments that fairly represent diverse gender identities and learning backgrounds. Existing studies have discussed gender-responsive education and inclusive teaching practices; however, limited research has explored the lived experiences of English faculty in higher education institutions, particularly in relation to the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and the practices they implement in designing gender-responsive language assessments.

In the context of English language teaching, understanding these experiences is important because language assessments directly influence students' participation, communication confidence, classroom interaction, and opportunities for equitable learning. Thus, this study sought to examine the challenges, strategies, and practices of English faculty in designing gender-responsive language assessments and to develop a policy brief that may strengthen inclusive, fair, and gender-responsive assessment practices in higher education institutions.

Research Objectives

General Objective

To explore the lived experiences of English faculty in designing gender-responsive language assessments in higher education.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the challenges encountered by English faculty in designing gender-responsive language assessments.
2. To determine the relationship between the respondents' profile and the challenges they encounter in designing gender-responsive language assessments.
3. To identify the strategies employed by English faculty in promoting fairness and inclusivity in language assessment practices.
4. To examine the practices implemented by English faculty to ensure that language assessments are gender-responsive and inclusive of diverse learning backgrounds.
5. To develop a policy brief that provides evidence-based recommendations for strengthening gender-responsive language assessment practices in higher education institutions.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:
   1.1 age; and,
   1.2 gender?
2. What challenges are encountered by the respondents in designing the gender-responsive language assessments?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' profile and the challenges they encounter in designing gender-responsive language assessments?
4. What strategies are applied by the respondents in designing gender-responsive language assessments?
5. What practices are implemented by the respondents to ensure that their language assessments are gender-responsive and inclusive of diverse learning backgrounds?
6. What policy brief may be developed to strengthen gender-responsive language assessment practices in higher education institutions?

Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the respondents' profile and the challenges encountered in designing gender-responsive language assessments.

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METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to examine the challenges, strategies, and practices of English faculty in designing gender-responsive language assessments. The quantitative phase identified the respondents' profile, the challenges they encountered and the test of relationship between the challenges and their profile. The qualitative phase then built on these results by exploring the strategies and practices teachers used to address the identified challenges through semi-structured interviews. In this way, the qualitative findings helped explain and give deeper meaning to the quantitative results, particularly by showing how teachers respond to assessment-related challenges in real classroom contexts. Integrating both phases provided a more complete understanding of gender-responsive language assessment by linking measurable patterns with teachers' lived experiences, leading to richer insights into language assessment practices.

Population and Sampling

The study involved two groups of participants: For the quantitative phase, 100 English faculty across Zambales responded to the survey questionnaire. Criterion sampling was used as it allowed the deliberate selection of respondents who possess direct knowledge and experience in language assessment. For the qualitative phase, 12 English faculty across five PRMSU campuses were chosen based on purposive sampling, with the aim of selecting participants who can provide relevant information for the study, with approximately two to three faculty members per campus. To be included, each faculty member must currently be teaching English, possessed at least one academic semester of tertiary-level teaching experience, was actively involved in planning, designing, or implementing language assessments, and held an English-related degree such as BSEd English, AB English, MAEd English, or PhD English.

Instruments

A researcher-made survey questionnaire was used to assess the extent and level of English faculty in encountering challenges in designing gender-responsive language assessments. It consisted of 15 closed-ended items, rated on a four-point Likert scale (4 = Highly Challenging to 1 = Not Challenging), and open-ended questions in the qualitative phase to gather participants' strategies and practices in designing gender-responsive language assessments. The instrument underwent content validation from three experts in English Language Teaching, and two Gender and Development directors. A pilot testing involving 10 faculty members from Pangasinan State University was carried out, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.94, which indicated excellent reliability. After obtaining approval from the concerned school authorities, the validated instrument administered through face-to-face surveys, and the gathered data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Data Collection

Prior to the conduct of data collection, the researcher sent formal request letters to the University Presidents, Campus Directors or Deans of the selected tertiary institutions in Zambales to secure approval for the administration of survey questionnaire and the facilitation of interviews, and to coordinate the schedule with the identified participants. The data gathering was conducted from April 25 to May 10, 2026.

For the quantitative phase, respondents were given ample time to accomplish the survey, and their participation was voluntary and confidential. All completed questionnaires were organized for analysis. Meanwhile, for the qualitative phase, each participant underwent interviews, conducted in either face-to-face or virtually through Zoom. The interview lasted for approximately less than 60 minutes. Interviews were scheduled after the survey phase to allow initial quantitative findings to guide the qualitative exploration, ensuring a sequential flow of data collection.

Data Analysis

In order to treat the data collected from the survey-questionnaire made by the researcher, the following statistical tools were used.

Frequency and Percentage. These statistical treatments were applied to analyze the respondents' demographic profile, particularly their age and gender distribution, to provide a clear overview of the sample characteristics.

Percentage, Frequency, and Weighted Mean. These were used to analyze the survey responses on the challenges experienced by the respondents in designing gender-responsive language assessments

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Spearman rho and ETA correlation. These were used to determine whether a significant relationship exists between the challenges and respondents' profile. These statistical analyses helped establish whether the demographic characteristics of English faculty are related to the challenges they experience in designing gender-responsive language assessments.

The researcher gave equivalent weights of 1 to 4 on the responses gathered, with one as the lowest and four as the highest with corresponding verbal interpretations.

Table 1

Verbal Interpretation of Responses

Weight	Range	Verbal Interpretation
4	3.26 – 4.00	Highly Challenging
3	2.51 – 3.25	Challenging
2	1.76 – 2.50	Less Challenging
1	1.00 – 1.75	Not Challenging

For the qualitative data from open-ended responses, thematic analysis was employed. The researcher followed these steps: (1) data familiarization, (2) coding of significant statements, (3) generation and refinement of themes, and (4) interpretation of findings in relation to the research objectives. This process ensured that the analysis is systematic and rigorous, ultimately providing meaningful insights into the strategies and practices of English faculty in designing gender-responsive language assessments.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical standards:

- Approval and Consent: The researcher sought permission from the respective University Presidents, Directors, or Deans of the participating institutions prior to the commencement of the data gathering.
- Informed Consent: Following the approval, English faculty were briefed on the objective of the study, procedures involved, expected duration of participation, and any risks associated with the research.
- Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal Rights: Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or negative consequences.
- Confidentiality: Personal identifiers were omitted, and data were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher.
- Academic Integrity: All instruments, references, and materials were properly cited to avoid plagiarism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the gathered data in a tabular form, analyzed and interpreted so as to give a better and clear understanding on the problems posited in Chapter 1.

Profile of the English Faculty

This section provides the demographic overview of the respondents involved in the study, which serves as a basis for understanding their characteristics and distribution.

Table 2

Profile of the English Faculty

Profile	Categories	Frequency	Percentages
Age	21–30 years old	28	28.0
	31–40 years old	41	41.0
	41–50 years old	21	21.0
	51–60 years old	8	8.0
	61 years old and above	2	2.0
Gender	Male	36	36.0
	Female	60	60.0
	LGBTQ+	4	4.0

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Age. The data reveal that majority of the respondents belong to the age bracket of 31-40 years old, reflecting the stage where individuals enter the workforce in earnest and begin building a stable career identity (Teachers Institute, 2025). On the other hand, the smallest proportion of respondents fall within the 61 and above age group. This is supported by Gough et al. (2021), emphasizing that older adults often exhibit lower levels of community participation, which is related to factors such as health limitations and mobility issues.

Gender. Out of 100 respondents, 60 were female, while 4 identified as LGBTQ+. The distribution indicates a gender imbalance favoring female respondents, which strongly suggests that the study findings may predominantly reflect female perspectives and experiences, potentially limiting the representation of male and LGBTQ+ viewpoints.

Challenges Encountered by the English Faculty in Designing Gender-Responsive Language Assessments

Table 3 presents the result of challenges encountered by the English faculty in designing gender-responsive language assessments. This captures the frequency and percentage of various challenges presented.

Table 3

Challenges Encountered by the English Faculty in Designing Gender-Responsive Language Assessments

Challenges	HC		C		LC		NC	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1. Difficulty identifying which types of assessment items (e.g., reading passages, essay prompts, test questions) may unintentionally favor one gender over another.	39	39.0	**52**	**52.0**	7	7.0	2	2.0
2. Limited availability of structured training sessions, workshops, or seminars specifically focused on designing gender-responsive assessments in English language education.	21	21.0	**67**	**67.0**	12	12.0	0	0.0
3. Difficulty allocating sufficient time to review and modify assessments to ensure inclusivity, considering workload, grading, and other teaching responsibilities.	29	29.0	**52**	**52.0**	18	18.0	1	1.0
4. Limited access to institutional guidelines, reference materials, or mentorship programs that provide concrete strategies for implementing gender-responsive assessments.	32	32.0	**53**	**53.0**	15	15.0	0	0.0
5. Difficulty aligning gender-responsive assessment practices with required learning outcomes, course objectives, and standardized curriculum frameworks.	30	30.0	**53**	**53.0**	16	16.0	1	1.0
6. Difficulty designing assessments that fairly reflect the abilities of learners from diverse gender backgrounds without bias or exclusion.	23	23.0	**65**	**65.0**	10	10.0	2	2.0
7. Difficulty choosing or creating assessment formats (e.g., written tests, oral exams, project-based tasks) that measure learning equitably across all genders.	29	29.0	**56**	**56.0**	11	11.0	4	4.0
8. Issues due to resistance or lack of understanding from colleagues or students regarding the importance of gender-responsive assessment practices.	28	28.0	**58**	**58.0**	13	13.0	1	1.0
9. Difficulty giving feedback that fairly evaluates student performance while avoiding language or criteria that may unintentionally favor or disadvantage a particular gender.	25	25.0	**57**	**57.0**	17	17.0	1	1.0
10. Difficulty ensuring that assessments are both academically challenging and fair to all learners, without compromising gender inclusivity.	27	27.0	**55**	**55.0**	17	17.0	1	1.0
11. Difficulty selecting instructional materials and assessment content that represent diverse gender roles and perspectives without reinforcing stereotypes.	29	29.0	**57**	**57.0**	12	12.0	2	2.0
12. Limited familiarity with gender-sensitive language and terminology when constructing assessment instructions, questions, and rubrics.	24	24.0	**60**	**60.0**	13	13.0	3	3.0
13. Difficulty balancing objectivity and fairness when evaluating subjective tasks (e.g., essays, presentations, and reflective writing) in ways that avoid unconscious gender bias.	20	20.0	**63**	**63.0**	15	15.0	2	2.0
14. Difficulty in monitoring and evaluating whether implemented	15	15.0						

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	assessments truly promote gender fairness and inclusivity in actual classroom practice.		**59**	**59.0**	23	23.0	3 3.0
15.	Limited opportunities for collaboration with other instructors to share best practices and develop gender-responsive assessment strategies.	20 20.0	**48**	**48.0**	31	31.0	1 1.0
	Overall Mean = 3.08 – Challenging						

Legend:
Modal values are in boldface
3.26 – 4.00: Highly Challenging (HC), 2.51 – 3.25: Challenging (C), 1.76 – 2.50: Less Challenging (LC), 1.00 – 1.75: Not Challenging (NC)

Although all 15 indicators yielded a varying percentage, all were interpreted as "Challenging," indicating that the level of difficulty differed across indicators but was consistently present among respondents. In indicator 2, the results show that most respondents find the lack of training on gender-responsive assessment challenging, and some even see it as highly challenging. This suggests that limited access to workshops and seminars may contribute to teachers' difficulties in implementing informed practices. It's similar to previous studies saying teachers often lack proper training in this area, so regular professional development is really needed. This result parallels the findings of Al-Akbari (2024), which reported that English language teachers have limited exposure to specialized trainings on inclusive or gender-sensitive assessment strategies, which may lead to struggle in designing test questions, reading passages that are equitable for all learners. Whereas, indicator 15, collaboration is actually the least challenging indicator, since more respondents rated it as less challenging or not challenging. This result is strengthened by Silor and Silor (2026), revealing from the study conducted in Mindanao State University, that limited collaboration hinders the effective implementation of gender-responsive pedagogies. With this, it is necessary to sustain professional collaboration, where educators would not tend to work in isolation, which eventually leads to fragmented or inconsistent application of gender-responsive approaches.

Tests of Relationship between the Challenges and Encountered in Designing Gender-Responsive Language Assessments and their Profile

Table 4 presents the test of relationship between the challenges encountered in designing gender-responsive language assessments and the respondents' profile.

Table 4
Correlation Analysis of the Challenges Encountered and their Profile

Profile		Challenges
Age	rs	-0.027
	sig	0.787
Gender	ETA	0.252
	sig	0.167

The result suggests that respondents' profile in terms of age and gender do not have significant relationship with the challenges encountered. Regardless of whether respondents are younger or older, male, female or LGBTQ+, it appears that they experience comparable levels of difficulty in designing gender-responsive language assessments. These findings affirm Reynales and Beloro (2026), revealing that teachers commonly experience similar challenges in implementing gender-responsive pedagogy regardless of demographic difference. Thus, it implies the need for inclusive professional development programs that equip all English faculty members with competencies in designing gender-responsive language assessments.

Strategies Applied by the English Faculty in Designing Gender Gender-Responsive Language Assessments

The following themes represent the strategies employed by teachers in designing gender-responsive language assessments.

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Self-Directed Learning and Resourcefulness

Teachers demonstrated professional agency in developing their skills despite limited formal training, which may result in varied language assessment practices and inconsistent application of communicative competence standards.

> *I actively look for online trainings, webinars, and accessible resources…" (P2), "I begin by reviewing existing literature and guidelines…" (P3), "I carefully study reliable research articles…" (P5), and "I make it a point to consult available academic resources, observe educational trends…" (P9) "I actively seek credible online resources, research articles, and case studies…" (P10).*

Instead of viewing the absence of structured workshops as a barrier, teachers frame it as an opportunity to explore knowledge independently. Similarly, Beach et al. (2022) suggested that teachers are not passive recipients of trainings but are active agents who construct their own professional pathways through informal learning spaces. Schools and training bodies may need to provide curated digital resources, access to credible databases, and structured guidance on evaluating online materials to ensure that teachers' independent learning leads to consistent and research-informed assessment practices. This support can help teachers make informed decisions when assessing students' language abilities, promote fair and effective language assessment practices, and strengthen classroom instruction. By encouraging the use of reliable resources, schools can also help teachers develop learning experiences that support communicative competence, foster inclusive classroom discourse, and contribute to the overall quality of English language education.

Reflection and Feedback Mechanisms

Personal judgment and collaboration with colleagues and students improve assessment design, indicating that assessment practices are shaped through shared perspectives that may affect consistency in language assessment, communication, and inclusive pedagogy.

> *"I usually ask for feedback from my colleagues…" (P4), "I ask ideas from colleagues and use student feedback…" (P7), "I listen to student feedback and improve my assessments…" (P8), "I listen to my students, their experiences often reveal gaps…" (P9), and "I will reflect and ask for feedback to keep improving." (P11).*

Teaching is not seen in an isolated practice but as something collaborative, where peers play a role in refining strategies. Looking deeper, feedback suggests that inclusivity is not something teachers can fully anticipate on their own. Pieper et al. (2021) also emphasized that feedback is most effective when it goes beyond simple evaluative comments and instead provides specific, actionable, and content-rich guidance. To strengthen teachers' openness to feedback and their belief that feedback supports improvement and reinforces learning, institutions may provide training opportunities that promote reflective practice, such as peer mentoring, classroom observations, and regular student feedback mechanisms. These initiatives can help teachers refine their assessment practices, make informed instructional decisions, and better support students' language development. Encouraging a culture of reflection and feedback can also enhance communicative competence, foster more inclusive classroom interactions, and contribute to the continuous improvement of English language education.

Collaborative Practices

Teachers' exchange ideas and experiences helps improve assessment practices, promoting greater inclusivity and gender responsiveness for diverse learners.

> *"Collaboration with colleagues to share insights and review assessments through a gender-responsive lens helps me refine my approach" (P10), "I always collaborate with my co-teachers during break time…" (P12), and "I ask ideas from colleagues to improvement my assessments" (P7).*

Peer input is important in strengthening assessment quality and fairness. It also underscores the importance of collegiality in sustaining gender-responsive assessment, showing that equity is best achieved through shared effort. Zhu and Ergulec, (2023) also highlight that peer feedback and collaborative assessment processes promote reflective practice among teachers and support the development of more inclusive and unbiased assessment decisions Thus, inclusivity is not solely an individual cognitive process but is strengthened through collective reflection and dialogue. This highlights the need for institutions to promote collaborative assessment practices and peer-review mechanisms that help teachers identify and address potential biases in assessment tasks. Such efforts can support more inclusive classroom discourse, ensure fairer evaluation of learners' communicative competence, and improve the quality of English language assessment and instruction.

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Practices Implemented by the English Faculty to Ensure that their Language Assessments are Gender-Responsive for Diverse Learning Background.

The following themes represent the practices that participants employed to ensure that their language assessments are gender-responsive for diverse learning background.

Gender Representation in Materials and Assessment Content

Assessment practices go beyond scoring criteria, but also involve critical attention to content. It indicates that inclusivity is shaped not only by rubrics and language but also by how gender is represented in learning materials, which can influence learners' perceptions of roles and participation.

> *"In reading passages and dialogues, I include different genders in varied roles…" (P4), "I design activities and test items that present balanced and inclusive representations of different genders." (P2), "I ensure that my classroom materials and assessment prompts reflect diversity…" (P9), and "I am mindful to use examples, topics, and materials that reflect gender diversity…" (P10)*

It is crucial to move beyond simple inclusion toward meaningful variation in representation. It is not only about showing different genders, but also about avoiding stereotypical or predictable roles in assessment content. In addition, Tandler et al. (2025) asserted that standardized assessments may include gendered narratives and role assignments which can reinforce stereotypes in formal testing contexts. This implies that representation matters in test materials such as reading passages and scenarios, because these shape learners' perceptions of who is visible, capable, and socially valued. From a language assessment perspective, this calls for more careful test design to ensure fairness and reduce bias in how communicative competence is measured. It also supports inclusive classroom discourse by preventing reinforcement of limiting social roles, while strengthening English language education through more equitable and realistic learning contexts.

Equal Participation and Role Allocation

Making inclusivity visible in everyday classroom practice involves intentionally ensuring that all learners have equal opportunities to participate, lead, and be heard.

> *"I rotate classroom roles, such as group leaders, reporters to give equal opportunities for participation regardless of gender." (P3), "I include different genders in varied roles…" (P4) "I give equal opportunities for all students to participate and express their ideas." (P7), and "I give equal opportunities for participation, making sure no group is left out or overlooked" (P8).*

Participants ensured that each student has a voice, not just a presence in the classroom. Also, Røsseland and Tvedt (2026) found that structured role assignment improves participation equity and reduces dominance in group work. Without roles, participation is imbalanced. Therefore, learning should be structured in a way that ensures all students, regardless of gender, are given equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities, helping to increase engagement and reduce inequities. In language assessment practices, this supports fairer evaluation by allowing learners to demonstrate communicative competence through varied participation. It also promotes inclusive classroom discourse by ensuring balanced interaction, and strengthens English language education by fostering equitable learning environments where all students can meaningfully contribute.

Establishing a Safe and Inclusive Classroom Environment

Classrooms are viewed as a socially and emotionally constructed space, where effective learning is influenced by students' sense of safety, respect, and value, rather than purely academic interactions.

> *"I strive to create a respectful and inclusive classroom environment where every student feels valued…" (P1), "I establish a respectful learning environment where all perspectives are acknowledged." (P9), and I prioritize creating a safe and inclusive space where students feel comfortable expressing themselves (P10).*

In language assessment practices, this implies that learners perform better and demonstrate more authentic communicative competence when assessments are administered in supportive and low-anxiety environments. It also highlights the importance of inclusive classroom discourse, where respectful interaction encourages participation from all learners, and reinforces English language education that attends to both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. Fair assessment may fail to achieve their purpose if students, particularly those who are already vulnerable to marginalization, are reluctant to participate due to fear of rejection, bias, and embarrassment. Whereas, a space where interpersonal dynamic is present often becomes a space where academic participation springs up. Thus, students consistently identified emotional safety, inclusive instruction, and strong teacher relationships as core

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elements of culturally responsive classrooms. When these are present, they experience better engagement and fewer barriers to participation (Schachner et al., 2021).

Development of a Policy Brief Promoting a Gender-Responsive Language Assessment Design

A policy brief titled "Promoting Gender-Responsive Language Assessment Practices in Higher Education" was developed, highlighting faculty efforts to promote fairness and inclusivity through reflective, collaborative, and gender-sensitive assessment practices. While these initiatives demonstrate strong professional commitment to equity, the findings revealed that such practices remain inconsistent and individually driven, underscoring the need for institutional support and standardized policy guidelines to sustain gender-responsive assessment in higher education.

Conclusion

The findings revealed that English faculty encounter persistent challenges in designing gender-responsive language assessments despite their efforts to promote fairness and inclusivity in English language classrooms. The quantitative results showed that all identified indicators were interpreted as "Challenging," suggesting that English faculty continue to experience difficulties related to training, assessment design, institutional support, and inclusive assessment implementation. The findings further revealed that these challenges were experienced regardless of the respondents' age and gender profile. The qualitative findings demonstrated that English faculty actively employ strategies and practices such as self-directed learning, reflective feedback mechanisms, collaborative practices, gender representation in assessment content, equal participation opportunities, and the establishment of safe and inclusive classroom environments. These practices contribute to more equitable language assessment experiences and support inclusive communication and participation among learners in English language classrooms. The study contributes to English language education and language assessment research by highlighting the importance of gender-responsive assessment practices in promoting fairness, inclusivity, learner participation, and communication competence. Furthermore, the findings underscore the need for institutional support and policy-based interventions to strengthen sustainable and inclusive assessment practices in higher education institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, future researchers may consider including a wider range of participants in terms of age, gender identity, institutional affiliation, and teaching experience to obtain broader perspectives regarding gender-responsive language assessment practices. Educational institutions may provide continuous seminars, workshops, and professional development programs focusing on gender-responsive language assessment, inclusive language use, and equitable classroom communication practices. These initiatives may help strengthen teachers' competencies in designing fair and inclusive English language assessments. Schools and administrators may also strengthen collaborative professional learning communities where English faculty may exchange strategies, assessment materials, and inclusive pedagogical practices that support communication competence and learner participation. Institutional policies and classroom assessment guidelines may further integrate gender-responsive and inclusive assessment principles to sustain equitable learning environments in English language education. Lastly, educational leaders and policymakers may review, adopt, and implement the proposed policy brief to strengthen institutional support for gender-responsive language assessment practices and inclusive communication environments in higher education institutions.

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