

An Analysis of the Perceptions and Practices of Senior High School Students on the Linguistic Construct of Gender

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ABSTRACT: This study analyzed senior high school students' perceptions and practices regarding gender as a linguistic construct through a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, combining surveys, vignettes, and focus group discussions to examine gender awareness, attitudes, and language use. Conducted at a prominent secondary school, the research considered contextual factors such as socioeconomic status, technology access, and cultural background. Instruments like the Gender Awareness Scale and rigorous statistical and qualitative analyses ensured validity, reliability, and ethical integrity, supported by informed consent and ethics board approval. Findings underscore the school's role in fostering gender-sensitive language and highlight the need for interventions to address cultural and social barriers influencing students' use of gender-inclusive language.

KEYWORDS: Gender-fair Language, Gender Awareness, Linguistic Construct of Gender, Mixed-Methods, Convergent Parallel

1. INTRODUCTION

The perceptions and practices of senior high school students regarding gender-inclusive language (GIL) are crucial for fostering equality and respect in educational settings (McGregor, 2020; Jones & Brown, 2022). Inclusive language acknowledges diversity and promotes sensitivity to individual differences, helping create supportive learning environments (Smith, 2019). As schools strive to become more inclusive, understanding students' engagement with GIL is increasingly important.

Language is not neutral; it reflects and reinforces social and cultural norms (Baker & Cornelson, 2018). Gender, as a social construct, shapes linguistic patterns, with masculine generics often perpetuating stereotypes and influencing perceptions (Gygax et al., 2019; Sczesny et al., 2016). Globally, there is growing attention to inclusive language, including in the Philippines, where the Civil Service Commission (2005) encourages eliminating discriminatory language.

Despite increased awareness, many students—especially in traditional or conservative communities—struggle to adopt GIL (UNESCO, 2017). Socialization from family, community, and religious institutions often upholds binary gender norms, reinforcing language that marginalizes non-binary and gender-nonconforming individuals (Kessler & Kuiken, 2017; Levon, 2015). Peer dynamics also play a critical role; students may avoid inclusive language due to fear of ridicule or non-acceptance among their peers (GLSEN, 2020). Moreover, limited exposure to diverse gender identities in both formal curricula and everyday interactions further constrains students' awareness and use of inclusive terms.

While prior studies highlight the importance of gender-sensitive language, few have explored how senior high school students in diverse, localized contexts perceive and use GIL (Rrustemi et al., 2020). Research by Terogo et al. (2018) suggests students may grasp technical linguistic aspects yet lack awareness of the social implications, particularly in conservative settings where inclusive language may clash with cultural values.

In the Philippines, there is growing institutional recognition of inclusive education (Department of Education, 2018). However, implementation gaps remain, and many schools still operate within frameworks that prioritize traditional norms (Roces, 2019). This is particularly significant given the Philippines' strong cultural ties to family, religion, and community expectations, which often influence language practices (Roces, 2019). The school examined in this study serves a diverse student body with various gender identities, making it an ideal site to investigate how students perceive and practice GIL. By focusing on this localized context, the study seeks to provide nuanced insights into how national policies and broader advocacy efforts translate into everyday linguistic experiences for students.

This study aims to (a) assess senior high school students' perceptions of GIL, (b) evaluate the frequency of its use, and (c) identify influencing factors. Grounded in Linguistic Relativity, Discourse Analysis, and Speech Act theories (Ochs, 2015), it examines how cultural norms and social contexts shape students' linguistic practices.

An Analysis of the Perceptions and Practices of Senior High School Students on the Linguistic Construct of Gender

By addressing a localized research gap, this study seeks to inform educators and policymakers in designing gender-sensitive programs. Such initiatives can cultivate positive attitudes toward diversity and inclusivity (Brustolon & Rellini, 2016), promoting an educational environment where all identities are acknowledged and respected.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of this chapter was to set out the methodological approach undertaken to analyze the perceptions and practices of senior high school students on the linguistic construct of gender. This chapter presented the aim of this research and the methodological approach adopted.

2.1. Research Design

This study utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods design to examine senior high school students' perceptions and practices regarding the linguistic construct of gender, chosen for its ability to capture both broad trends and deeper insights (Harvard Catalyst, 2025). Quantitative survey data were analyzed descriptively and correlational to explore variables like the perceptions and use of GIL among senior high school students while qualitative data from vignettes and focus groups were thematically analyzed to understand gender-inclusive language use. Following Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and integrated through side-by-side comparisons to identify convergence and divergence, consistent with Fetters et al. (2017). This approach ensured that both measurable patterns and complex social perceptions were addressed, enhancing validity and credibility (Guetterman et al., 2015) and providing a strong basis for developing a Gender Sensitivity Awareness Training program.

2.2. Respondents and Sampling Procedure

Participants were selected through stratified random sampling using the Learner Information System (LIS) to ensure fair representation across academic strands, grade levels, and gender, enhancing validity and precision (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Creswell, 2018). From a population of 2,048 senior high school students, 335 were sampled for the survey, while vignettes and focus group discussions included seven groups of five participants each ($n = 35$). Stratifying by grade, gender, and strand prevented overrepresentation of larger groups like HUMSS and ensured smaller groups such as RAC or COOKERY were adequately included, supporting more accurate and generalizable conclusions (Singh & Masuku, 2015; Taherdoost, 2016; Turner, 2020). Familiarity with interviewees was minimal, and questions avoided personal or sensitive topics, creating an open environment. This approach aligns with methodological standards emphasizing diversity and equity in sampling (Bryman, 2021; Saunders et al., 2019) and strengthened the study's credibility, offering a robust basis for developing tailored interventions that address the unique gender and linguistic dynamics within each subgroup, which can inform future school-based programs and policy initiatives.

2.3. Research Instruments

This study employed two research instruments: a 25-item questionnaire on the perceptions of gender-inclusive language adapted from Generale and Cubing (2023), and qualitative tools including vignettes and focus group discussions (FGDs). The vignettes—scenarios of classroom gender bias—prompted open-ended reflections, while FGDs explored students' definitions, experiences, and views on gender-inclusive language. Instruments were reviewed by the Gender and Development (GAD) Coordinator and Chairperson, pilot tested for clarity, and refined based on feedback. Validity and reliability were ensured through test-retest procedures (yielding Pearson's $r > .7$) and high internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$). Qualitative credibility was strengthened by expert validation, triangulation across vignettes and FGDs, and member checking. Ethical approval was obtained, and informed consent secured from students and school officials. This rigorous approach ensured that data were reliable, valid, and ethically gathered, providing robust insights into students' attitudes and practices regarding gender-inclusive language.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Before collecting data, the researcher sought approval from the school district supervisor, principal, department head, and class advisers to ensure compliance with institutional protocols (BERA, 2018). To minimize disruption to classroom activities, coordination with the senior high school department head facilitated scheduling survey distribution and focus group discussions (FGDs) during non-instructional periods. All 335 identified respondents were informed of the study's purpose and their rights, including voluntary participation, withdrawal without penalty, and confidentiality through coded responses (American Psychological Association, 2017). Following informed consent, participants completed a survey questionnaire, and selected students joined FGDs organized by academic strand, which allowed for richer discussions on gender-inclusive language (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Morgan, 2016). These efforts not only ensured ethical integrity and respect for participant autonomy but also enhanced the reliability of the data gathered.

A mixed-method approach was employed to capture both breadth and depth of perspectives. Quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using frequency counts, measures of central tendency, standard deviation, and correlation tests to identify patterns and relationships (Dicle & Dicle, 2018; McClave et al., 2018). For qualitative data, thematic analysis was applied to open-ended responses and FGD transcripts, generating codes and themes that highlighted shared beliefs and social influences on gender-

An Analysis of the Perceptions and Practices of Senior High School Students on the Linguistic Construct of Gender

inclusive language (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This integration of methods, guided by ethical practices and validated tools (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Norton & Herek, 2020), ensured a rigorous exploration of students' attitudes, aligning with current educational goals for inclusivity (UNESCO, 2019). Ultimately, the study's findings offer valuable insights that can inform school policies, teacher training, and curriculum development aimed at fostering gender sensitivity and equitable learning environments.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, the researcher submitted the proposal and methodology to the university's Ethics Review Board, which ensured compliance with ethical standards for protecting human subjects; data gathering commenced only after receiving formal approval. Recognizing that it is unethical to collect information without participants' knowledge and consent (Kumar, 2005), the researcher clearly communicated that participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time. All participants signed informed consent forms guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity. They were given advance notice of the interviews, including the purpose, expected duration, types of questions, and how their data would be used, along with the opportunity to decline questions they found uncomfortable. Given the sensitivity of gender-related topics and participants' diverse experiences, the researcher exercised particular care to avoid causing distress, fostering an environment that prioritized respect, safety, and participant well-being throughout the study (American Psychological Association, 2017). These rigorous ethical safeguards not only protected participants but also strengthened the credibility, trustworthiness, and integrity of the research findings, ensuring they could meaningfully contribute to future discussions on gender sensitivity and educational practice.

3. RESULTS

This chapter presented the results and discussions of the study regarding the demographic profile of students, their perceptions, the frequency, and the factors that affected the frequency of GIL usage among senior high school students in terms of their demographic profile.

3.1. Perceptions of Senior High School Students Toward GIL

Table 1: Student-Respondents' Perceptions towards Gender Inclusive Language

Gender Perceptions	Median	Description
I encourage other to use gender inclusive language when appropriate	3	A
I actively seek to learn and improve my use of gender-inclusive language.	3	A
Boys are given more opportunities to respond and participate than girls during communication or activities.	4	SA
I think boys are "logical" than girls that is why they are given more attention.	3	A
Girls are more likely to be "praised for their appearance and neatness" while boys on their work.	3	A
Boys are offered or given more specific feedback on their work – including praise, criticism and remedial tasks.	3	A
Boys are more often called up to answer or give their answers in a mathematics class because girls are poor in Math.	2	DA
When girls are jolly, they are often reprimanded or scolded to restrain themselves and told to behave.	4	SA
Girls are given "fewer opportunities to join in sports and engage in physical activities", while boys are encouraged and better supported.	3	A
1. Boys receive harsher reprimands or punishments than girls, even when the misbehavior is identical or similar	3	A
2. Female students are most likely to lose for the position of class president because of their gender (being female).	4	SA
3. Male students are given more opportunities to respond and participate in class than girls.	2	DA
Overall Median	3	A

An Analysis of the Perceptions and Practices of Senior High School Students on the Linguistic Construct of Gender

The student-respondents generally showed a positive attitude toward gender-inclusive language, with a median rating of 3.00 (“Agree”), indicating overall support though varying by context. They readily endorsed terms like “flight attendant” over “stewardess,” yet resisted replacing entrenched expressions such as “chairman” or using “Ms.” instead of “Mrs.,” suggesting that cultural norms still shaped their views (Sczesny, Formanowicz, & Moser, 2016). Students reported consciously avoiding gendered language, aligning with findings that exposure to inclusive practices fosters such behavior (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell, & Laakso, 2021). Strong agreement emerged on gender equity in education, reflecting awareness promoted by initiatives like UNESCO (2021). However, some respondents felt outdated phrases were acceptable if no offense was intended, highlighting a gap in understanding how language perpetuates bias (Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen, & Sczesny, 2016). Overall, while students showed growing commitment to inclusive communication, the results underscored the need for continued education on the societal impacts of language, especially in shaping attitudes within schools (Merkel, Maass, & Rothermund, 2022). This suggests that integrating targeted workshops and curricula on gender-sensitive communication could deepen students’ critical awareness, fostering environments where inclusivity in language is practiced consistently and reflexively, ultimately contributing to broader efforts toward gender equality.

3.2. Frequency of GIL usage among senior high school students

Table 2: Student-Respondents’ Use of Gender Inclusive Language

Word	No. of times used	Semantic Association	Differential Language	Word Order	Salience
girls	13	Associated with weakness, domestic roles, needing protection, submissiveness	Treated as passive, restricted, emotional	Often precedes action verbs passively (e.g., "girls have to sit quietly")	Socially controlled, moral expectations, emotional fragility
boys	10	Associated with freedom, intelligence doubts, active behavior	Treated as free, excused for bad behavior	Used as subject in active voice (e.g., "boys can act out")	Independence, mischief tolerated, undervalued intelligence
language	23	Used in general commentary on gender/communication	Neutral, but embedded in gender discussions	Mostly background (e.g., “gendered language,” “using words”)	Medium for expressing or reinforcing gender norms
everyone	6	Associated with attempts at inclusivity	Inclusive but used rarely	Generalizing subject (e.g., “everyone assumes...”)	Effort toward neutrality, not dominant in discourse
gender	28	Discussed as a conceptual issue	Neutral as concept, but tied to stereotypes	Often object or subject of abstract statements	Central to framing the topic
words	9	Tools for stereotyping and framing identity	Neutral	Often object of verbs (e.g., “using words like...”)	Vehicles of gender bias
terms	3	Like "words", about labeling	Neutral	Noun phrases	Language framing of identities
people	11	Referenced in general attitudes (e.g., assumptions, sympathy)	Inclusive	Subject/agent of judgment or assumption (e.g., “people assume...”)	Collective bias or support
specifics	2	Rare and context-unclear	Neutral	Likely used abstractly	Low salience

An Analysis of the Perceptions and Practices of Senior High School Students on the Linguistic Construct of Gender

Miss	5	Reflects formal/gendered titles, often patronizing	Female-coded	Used in direct reference or naming	Embedded power dynamics
person	4	General individual reference	Neutral	Subject/object	Used for depersonalized framing
man	2	Signifier of authority, punishment, normative masculinity	Male-coded	Often used in traditional, evaluative context	Masculinity as standard
woman	2	Appears in relation to roles/expectations	Female-coded	Used passively or descriptively	Bound to gender expectations
guys	2	Casual male-coded group label	Informally male, often assumed default	Used in colloquial or normalized contexts	Normalized maleness
family	24	Site of enforcing norms, expectations	Neutral	Background context (e.g., "my family says...")	Instrument of tradition and values
actor	1	Profession once male-coded, becoming neutral	Shifting from male to neutral	Role-based noun	Highlight of evolving language
teacher	9	Authority figure that reinforces or disrupts gender norms	Neutral	Subject/judge of capability	Gatekeeper in academic bias
grandmother	2	Enforcer of moral/traditional values	Female-coded	Subject of value-laden statements	Moral tradition, conservatism
he	13	Male pronoun, signifier of active agents	Male-coded	Subject, authority (e.g., "he said...")	Male as actor/authority
sister	1	Familial female, only appears once	Female-coded	Possibly object or relational reference	Minor reference, symbolic
father	3	Enforcer of authority and morality	Male-coded	Subject of commands or judgments	Patriarchal power, rigid roles
friends	1	Social context for assumptions	Neutral	Used in relational framing	Socialization and stigma
dad	1	Similar to "father" but informal	Male-coded	Used in direct quotes or stories	Patriarchal but personal
parents	2	Authority figures, enforcing rules	Neutral	Often background or passive enforcers	Family-based reinforcement of gender roles

An Analysis of the Perceptions and Practices of Senior High School Students on the Linguistic Construct of Gender

The analysis showed that gender-inclusive language appeared far less frequently than gendered terms, reflecting broader societal norms that maintain binary and stereotypical gender roles. Abstract words like “language” and “gender” mostly served conceptual purposes without driving practical inclusivity, while general terms such as “everyone” and “people” were rare and often appeared in vague or passive constructions, aligning with findings by Merkel and Maass (2018) and Gustafsson Sendén et al. (2021) that inclusive language remains marginal in everyday speech. Gendered references, especially to “girls” and “boys,” frequently carried traditional associations: girls were framed around obedience and emotional delicacy, while boys were depicted with greater freedom and agency. This pattern mirrored the work of Stahlberg and Sczesny (2020) and Moser and Hannover (2023), who showed that grammar often assigns action and authority to male subjects. Even ostensibly neutral words like “family” often reinforced patriarchal norms, supporting conclusions by Formanowicz et al. (2021) and Gustafsson Sendén et al. (2015) that neutral language, when used in traditional contexts, can still perpetuate exclusionary narratives. Sporadic mentions of gender-neutral nouns like “person” or “friends” tended to serve more as linguistic fillers than meaningful correctives.

More notably, male-coded terms frequently appeared as subjects tied to authority and judgment, while female-coded terms were linked to modesty and moral conservatism—an imbalance also documented by Horvath and Merkel (2022) and Lindqvist et al. (2022). The scarce and low-salience use of inclusive language indicated it is still far from normalized, lacking the grammatical and narrative weight needed to disrupt entrenched biases (Sczesny, Formanowicz, & Moser, 2016; Stahlberg et al., 2020). This has significant implications: repeated gendered framing in schools and media shapes perceptions of intelligence, leadership, and belonging (Moser et al., 2022), fostering self-limiting beliefs and excluding marginalized groups. Researchers thus call for not just occasional inclusive phrasing but systematic integration into policies, curricula, and media practices to embed inclusive language in daily discourse (Horvath & Sczesny, 2023). Without such deliberate adoption, language continues to reinforce stereotypes rather than challenge them, underscoring the need for institutions to prioritize consistent, high-frequency inclusive communication as a standard for achieving genuine equity.

Qualitative results

The following was realized while presenting what the participants shared in line with their perceptions and practices toward gender-inclusive language. The vignettes and focus group discussion generated three major themes. These themes focused (1) gender inequality in classroom participation; (2) awareness and resistance to gender-inclusive language (3) social acceptance and the role of language in inclusion as presented in table 2.

Theme 1: Gender Inequality in Classroom Participation

Gender inequality in classroom participation was a central theme that emerged from the statements provided by the learners. This theme reflects the unequal opportunities given to students based on their gender, particularly in terms of who is given a chance to contribute to discussions or be acknowledged by the teacher.

Significant statements supporting the claim:

“Para po akon unfair nga waray namati an teacher ha iya. Baga po han bias an teacher ha mga boys.” [Learner Participant 6]

Another respondent added saying:

“The comment, boys will be boys, is so dismissive po. Baga po han nagawas nga pwede ta na dire asihon an usa nga tawo tungod han ira gender.” [Learner Participant 5]

Many participants expressed frustration with gendered assumptions that certain fields are better suited to one gender, emphasizing that science and technology should be inclusive and accessible to all. Similarly, comments such as “boys will be boys” reveal how lenient attitudes toward male behavior reinforce unequal classroom experiences, granting boys more tolerance while subjecting girls to stricter norms (Legewie & DiPrete, 2014). These gendered expectations also shape perceptions of competence from a young age, influencing children’s interests and confidence across subjects (Master et al., 2021). Overall, this sub-theme underscores how enduring cultural beliefs continue to impact students’ educational experiences, highlighting the need for intentional curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom practices to foster genuinely gender-inclusive learning environments.

Theme 2: Social Barriers to GIL Adoption

Despite the potential of gender inclusive language to create more equitable communication, the widespread adoption of GIL faces significant social barriers that impede its integration into everyday language. These barriers are deeply rooted in cultural, psychological, and societal factors that shape the way individuals and communities perceive gender and language.

Significant statements supporting the claim:

Dire po ako sure, pamati ko an paggamit han words nga dri waray po discrimination. [Learner Participant 3]

Depende po ha klase, may teacher nga nagamit mayda po liwat deri. [Learner Participant 6]

The data indicate that while some individuals and educational contexts actively embrace gender-inclusive language (GIL), others remain anchored in binary frameworks, reflecting broader societal divides (Sczesny et al., 2016). Participants noted inconsistencies in educators’ use of GIL, underscoring a lack of institutional standards and training. Resistance often stems from traditional gender ideologies and generational differences, with older individuals typically less receptive (Lindqvist et al., 2020). At the same time, classrooms play a pivotal role: teachers who model inclusive language foster validation of diverse identities, whereas inconsistency

An Analysis of the Perceptions and Practices of Senior High School Students on the Linguistic Construct of Gender

signals its optional nature (Gatta et al., 2023). Peer dynamics further shape uptake; supportive groups can normalize GIL, while dismissive environments discourage it (Formanowicz et al., 2017). These patterns highlight how adopting GIL involves negotiating cultural norms, requiring deliberate integration into educational policies, curricula, and public discourse to counter resistance and promote inclusivity.

Theme 3: Social Dynamics and Impact of GIL

This theme shows that students increasingly see gender-inclusive language as essential for respect, representation, and belonging. Many recognize language not just as communication, but as a reflection of values. Using inclusive terms—like affirming pronouns for a transgender teacher or acknowledging non-binary identities—signals growing social awareness and empathy.

Significant statements supporting the claim:

Pag gintatawag nak mga classmates nam transgender nga teacher “Ma’am” [Learner Participant 3]

May iba nga nagamit hine ngan na supporta han pag gamit mga inclusive terms [Learner Participant 7]

This study reveals that gender-inclusive language (GIL) is more than a tool for communication—it actively affirms diverse identities and fosters respect, visibility, and psychological safety. Participants described how using GIL, such as correct honorifics for a transgender teacher or sharing pronouns, created supportive environments and signaled acceptance. These insights echo research showing that GIL reshapes perceptions of gender, enhances belonging, and normalizes diversity (Lindqvist et al., 2019; Sczesny et al., 2016; Bradley, 2021; Gatta et al., 2023). Support for GIL often stems from personal values and education on gender diversity, which cultivate empathy and inclusive practices (Pavlova & Krämer, 2022). Altogether, these findings underscore GIL’s power to transform attitudes, affirm identities, and build inclusive institutional cultures.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings underscored a generally positive orientation toward inclusive language, suggesting that many young people today are increasingly receptive to language that moves beyond traditional gender binaries. At the same time, persistent preferences for conventional expressions revealed how deeply embedded linguistic norms continue to shape communication, even in contexts where inclusive ideals are widely recognized. By situating these results within frameworks such as linguistic relativity, discourse analysis, and speech act theory, this discussion highlights both the progress made and the challenges that remain in fostering more equitable language practices among youth.

The quantitative data revealed that most students endorsed the use of gender-neutral terms, such as “server” instead of “waiter” or “waitress” and “flight attendant” in place of “stewardess,” indicating a shift toward more inclusive professional language. Many respondents reported self-correcting gendered expressions and encouraging their peers to adopt neutral alternatives, behaviors aligned with findings by Prewitt-Freilino et al. (2021) on the internalization of inclusive norms through consistent modeling. These patterns support the idea that schools serve as critical sites for cultivating inclusive linguistic practices, reinforcing observations by Sczesny et al. (2016) that exposure to egalitarian norms in educational environments significantly shapes adolescents’ language use. However, the continued preference for phrases like “man and wife” and hesitance to use “Ms.” for married women suggest that certain traditional expressions still hold cultural weight, reflecting Stahlberg et al.’s (2016) argument that linguistic conventions often outlast broader shifts in social attitudes.

Students expressed their strongest agreement with statements advocating for gender equity in classrooms, particularly around ensuring equal opportunities for boys and girls to participate, respond, and take on leadership roles. This mirrors international trends identified by UNESCO (2021) and Merkel et al. (2022), which found that gender-inclusive educational practices bolster engagement and foster cultures of mutual respect. Moreover, students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds demonstrated openness to inclusive language, challenging assumptions that such attitudes are confined to more privileged groups. While prior research by OECD (2019) and Flores and Smith (2022) noted that students from lower-income households might have less exposure to progressive gender discourse, this study’s findings suggest that culturally responsive teaching can meaningfully bridge these gaps, echoing Harding and Sibley’s (2015) conclusion that exposure to egalitarian principles, rather than economic resources alone, is key to shaping inclusive attitudes.

The multilingual context of the respondents—primarily Waray-waray, Tagalog, and English speakers—added complexity to how gender-inclusive language is navigated. As Piller (2016) emphasized, inclusive language reforms in multilingual societies require more than direct translation; they must be culturally and linguistically embedded to be effective. This was evident in the challenges students faced adapting gender-neutral terms into Waray-waray, a language with limited structures for expressing neutrality, highlighting issues also raised by UNESCO (2021) in global reviews of language and gender equality. Without localized resources and teacher training that incorporate regional dialects, inclusive language efforts risk remaining confined to dominant languages like English or Tagalog, potentially excluding significant segments of the student population from fully participating in these shifts.

Qualitative data revealed that gendered language remains deeply woven into students’ communication, with frequent associations of femininity with caregiving, emotion, and submissiveness, and masculinity with strength, leadership, and intellectual dominance. Themes of gendered roles in both domestic and public spheres pointed to enduring cultural scripts that continue to shape adolescent

An Analysis of the Perceptions and Practices of Senior High School Students on the Linguistic Construct of Gender

perceptions. These observations align with studies by Sunderland (2016), Lee and Zhou (2019), and Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen (2020), who highlighted the role of classroom discourse and peer interactions in sustaining traditional gender stereotypes. Drawing on the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, these patterns underscore how language shapes thought—students' use of inclusive terms signals not only changing speech habits but evolving cognitive frameworks (Boutonnet & Lupyan, 2015; Pavlidou, 2019). Discourse analysis perspectives (Gee, 2018; Foucault, 1980) further reveal how repeated exposure to stereotypical or inclusive language reproduces or challenges social structures, while speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Ostein, 2017) underscores that students' linguistic choices function as social actions that either reinforce or disrupt gender norms.

Taken together, these findings illustrate both the promise and the limits of current efforts to promote gender-inclusive language among senior high school students. While there is clear evidence of growing openness and proactive engagement with inclusive communication, longstanding linguistic habits and cultural expectations continue to influence how gender is articulated. This highlights the need for sustained pedagogical initiatives that go beyond promoting neutral terminology to fostering critical awareness of how language shape's identity and power relations, as recommended by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2020) and Ghosh and Mehta (2021). Integrating inclusive language instruction into local dialects, providing targeted teacher training, and embedding these practices within broader frameworks of gender-responsive pedagogy are essential steps toward realizing more equitable educational environments. Only through such comprehensive and culturally attuned approaches can schools fully harness the transformative potential of language to advance gender equity.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The combined qualitative and quantitative data revealed a disconnect between students' support for gender-inclusive language and their actual communication, illustrating attitude-behavior inconsistency. While surveys showed openness to inclusive practices, interviews exposed continued use of gendered language influenced by habits, social norms, and institutional discourse. This gap, shaped by cultural and linguistic routines, persisted despite exposure to inclusive curricula. The findings highlight that awareness alone is not enough; meaningful change requires reflective teaching, institutional support, and comprehensive training. Methodological triangulation revealed tensions often missed in self-reports, underscoring the need for context-sensitive approaches.

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