



# Cultural Dynamics and Gender Representation: An Analysis on Identity Negotiation, Language Use, and Inclusive Pedagogies in the Post-Pandemic Higher Education

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## Abstract:

To foster greater inclusivity in higher education, a thorough understanding of cultural and gender representation is essential. This study investigates these factors at St. Michael's College, focusing on how identity negotiation, language use, and inclusive teaching practices have evolved in the post-pandemic context. Utilizing a qualitative approach informed by Critical Cultural Approaches to Gender and Sex, identity negotiation theory, social constructivism, and feminist theory, the research explores participant experiences in depth. Findings reveal a heightened awareness of gender issues within the college community but also highlight challenges in effectively implementing inclusive practices. Key observations include diverse student experiences in affirming gender identities, the significant impact of language on gender norms, and the influence of cultural backgrounds on communication. The study advocates for updated inclusive policies, improved support systems, and the integration of diverse perspectives into curricula. Recommendations include fostering student engagement through events such as symposia and seminars, encouraging further research on gender equality, and integrating the Gender and Development (GAD) mechanism into the curriculum to address both gender and cultural dimensions comprehensively. This research offers valuable insights into navigating cultural and gender dynamics in post-pandemic higher education and suggests strategies for creating a more inclusive academic environment.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Dynamics, Gender Representation, Identity Negotiation, Inclusive Pedagogies, Language Use, Post-Pandemic Higher Education*

## Introduction

In the wake of the pandemic, St. Michael's College has experienced significant transformations within its educational framework, highlighting the need to address the evolving dynamics of gender, language, and culture within the campus community. This study, conducted in August 2024, explores the experiences of students, faculty, administrators, and researchers to understand these shifts and their implications for the academic environment. Key challenges addressed include the underrepresentation of gender in educational materials, the role of language in either reinforcing or challenging traditional gender norms, identity negotiation across cultural contexts, the application of inclusive pedagogies, and the intersection of gender with other identity factors such as ethnicity and sexuality (Mills, 2021; Lesko & Sandlin, 2022). Addressing these issues is vital for fostering a more equitable and supportive academic environment.

The study is significant for various stakeholders like the school administrators, teachers, students, and future researchers within the academic community. For school administrators, it provides critical insights necessary for developing and implementing effective policies that support gender inclusivity, aligning with CHED's Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 01, Series of 2015, which mandates gender equality and development policies in higher education. Educators benefit from the study's findings by gaining guidance on integrating inclusive pedagogies and adapting curricula to better represent diverse gender identities and cultural backgrounds, thus enhancing the learning experience. For students, the research highlights the importance of fostering a supportive environment where they can navigate their gender identities with greater understanding and respect from both peers and faculty. Additionally, the study offers valuable groundwork for future researchers by exploring critical issues in gender representation and inclusivity, providing a foundation for comparative studies and methodological advancements in higher education (Eslit, 2023c).

The objectives of this study would be five folds. It aims to:

1. Explore student perceptions and negotiations of gender identities within the classroom;
2. Investigate how language influences gender norms among students and educators;
3. Examine how cultural backgrounds and societal expectations shape language practices and communication in the classroom;
4. Identify strategies employed by educators to foster inclusivity for diverse gender identities;
5. Understand the intersection of students' gender experiences with other identity aspects in the post-pandemic setting.



This research posits the idea that a comprehensive understanding of these factors is crucial for enhancing gender representation and inclusivity at St. Michael's College. The findings will support the institution's adherence to CHED's Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 01, Series of 2015, which mandates policies for gender equality and development in higher education (CHED Memorandum Order, 2015). Ultimately, the study aims to offer insights that will inform and sustain the development of effective policies and practices (Murray, 2023), ensuring comprehensive support for all students throughout their academic journey.

## Literature Review

**Theoretical Framework:** Several theories guide this study. Judith Butler's Critical Cultural Approaches to Gender and Sex Theory, from *Gender Trouble* (1990), critiques traditional views of gender and sex as socially constructed through cultural practices (Swain & King, 2022; Mills, 2021). This perspective helps analyze how institutional norms at St. Michael's shape and reinforce gender identities.

Identity Negotiation Theory, developed by William James (1890) and expanded by Erving Goffman (1959), examines how individuals construct their identities through social interactions (Swann & Bosson, 2021). Goffman's concept of the "presentation of self" is key to understanding how students and faculty at St. Michael's navigate gender identities amid evolving expectations (Lesko & Sandlin, 2022).

Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory (1978) emphasizes that knowledge and meaning are constructed through social interactions, providing insight into how gender norms and language practices shape educational experiences (Murray, 2023; Saleem, A., Kausar, H., & Deeba, F. (2021). This theory highlights the dynamic nature of knowledge and its impact on identity formation within the academic environment (Pomerantz & Raby, 2022).

Feminist Theory, articulated by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and further developed by feminist scholars, focuses on gender inequality and power imbalances. De Beauvoir's work, particularly in *The Second Sex*, offers a framework for analyzing how gender dynamics reflect broader societal inequities (Orsini, 2024). This perspective is essential for developing equitable practices at St. Michael's College.

**Previous Research and Gaps:** Research on gender representation in educational materials reveals a persistent lack of diversity, which can marginalize various identities and reinforce stereotypes. Incorporating inclusive content has been shown to enhance student engagement and academic outcomes (Gonzales, 2021). Studies on language use and gendered interactions highlight the significant role of language in shaping gender norms and its impact on both student and faculty or educators experiences (Mills, 2021).

Identity negotiation research demonstrates the complex interplay of cultural and institutional influences on how individuals navigate their identities, underscoring the need for understanding these processes to support diverse experiences (Manalo, 2020; Aslam, 2022). Inclusive pedagogies research identifies effective strategies, such as diverse instructional materials and gender-neutral language, as crucial for fostering supportive educational environments (Murray, 2023).

Despite these insights, gaps remain. There is a need for more in-depth studies on gender representation in classroom materials, focusing on how these representations affect student outcomes. Additionally, further research is required to explore the reinforcement or challenge of traditional norms through culture, language use, and gendered interactions. The impact of various inclusive pedagogical strategies also requires more detailed examination (Pineda & Santos, 2023). Lastly, further exploration of how intersectional identities influence student experiences is necessary to better support diverse identities and address their unique challenges. Hence, this study came to the surface with the hope of connecting these gaps.

## Methodology

This section details the research design, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis strategies, and ethical considerations for the study on cultural dynamics and gender representation at St. Michael's College.

**Research Design:** In this study, a qualitative research design was employed to investigate cultural dynamics, gender representation, identity negotiation, language use, and inclusive pedagogies in the post-pandemic context at St. Michael's College (SMC). Qualitative methods are well-suited for exploring complex issues like gender identity and cultural dynamics through rich, descriptive data. Unlike quantitative approaches, which focus on numerical data, the qualitative methods enable an in-depth examination of personal lived experiences and institutional practices, capturing the nuanced and subjective aspects essential for addressing the research questions related to gender and cultural issues (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020).

**Participants:** The study utilized a purposive sampling approach, involving ten participants from St. Michael's College, including students, teachers, and administrators. Participants were selected to represent a diverse range of gender



identities, cultural backgrounds, and pandemic experiences. To ensure anonymity, participants were coded as "Par 1" up to "Par 10," to mean participants 1 to 10, allowing a broad spectrum of perspectives on gender dynamics and cultural issues within the academic environment of SMC.

### Data Collection Process

1. **In-depth Literature Review:** An extensive examination of current literature on Cultural Dynamics, Gender Representation, Identity Negotiation, Language Use, and Inclusive Pedagogies in Post-Pandemic Higher Education functions as a key qualitative research tool for gaining a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences. This detailed review not only establishes the essential context for the study but also reveals subtle insights into diverse perspectives by exploring various viewpoints. By mapping out relevant theories, research outcomes, and existing gaps, this review significantly enriches the comprehension of the subject and shapes the formulation of the research questions (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020).
2. **Informal Interviews:** Open-ended interviews with the ten participants were conducted to gather in-depth, personal insights. These interviews aimed to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding gender and cultural dynamics, facilitating a detailed understanding of individual viewpoints (Swain & King, 2022).
3. **Observations:** Observational data were collected in classroom settings to examine interactions, language use, and cultural dynamics. Observations captured nonverbal cues and group dynamics, offering insights into how language, gender, and cultural issues manifested in the academic environment (Mirhosseini, 2020).
4. **Analysis of Educational Materials:** Textbooks, syllabi, electronic, digital materials, and assignments were reviewed to assess gender representation and cultural nuances. This analysis highlighted how gender and cultural issues were addressed or overlooked in educational materials, contributing to the understanding of their impact on students and teaching practices (Guerretaz, Engman, & Matsumoto, 2020).
5. **Symposium Data:** Insights and other salient information from the Gender and Development Symposium, held at St. Michael's College in August 2024, were integrated into the study. The symposium provided discussions, presentations, and feedback (Q and A) on gender awareness among personnel and students. Analysis of the symposium's outputs enriched the study by incorporating contemporary perspectives and perceptions. This symposium provides a platform about critical issues related to gender equality, development, and social change. Participants engage in dialogue, share research findings and insights, and explore innovative approaches to promoting gender equity in the campus.

### Data Analysis and Procedure

1. **Triangulation:** To enhance the credibility and robustness of the findings, triangulation was employed. This approach involved cross-verifying data from multiple sources—interviews, observations, educational materials, and symposium outputs in order to confirm the consistency and accuracy of the results.
2. **Thematic Analysis:** Data from interviews, observations, educational materials, and symposium outputs were analyzed thematically. This method involved identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within the data to offer a comprehensive understanding of the research topics. Thematic analysis was essential for deriving robust and insightful results (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

### Validity and Reliability

1. **Validity:** Validity was ensured through triangulation, which confirmed findings across various data sources, and member checking, where participants reviewed and validated the results. These strategies helped affirm the accuracy and credibility of the study's conclusions.
2. **Reliability:** Consistency in data collection and analysis was achieved through meticulous documentation of procedures and cross-checking results. Uniform application of data collection methods across participants and contexts supported the reliability of the study.

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical issues were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose and their rights. Confidentiality was maintained through coding and data anonymization. Sensitive information was handled with care to ensure that findings were reported respectfully and responsibly.

### Findings

This study provides a nuanced understanding of how gender identities, language practices, and cultural influences intersect in the post-pandemic academic environment. By synthesizing data from the in-depth literature review, informal interviews, classroom observations, analysis of language materials, and insights from the symposium, a comprehensive picture of these dynamics emerges.



The exploration of students' perceptions and negotiations of their gender identities revealed a spectrum of experiences. Participants like Par 3 noted, *"I find that my identity is often overlooked unless I explicitly state it. Sometimes, I have to remind professors to use my correct pronouns,"* highlighting the need for greater sensitivity and policy implementation to ensure consistent recognition of diverse identities (Eslit, 2023b). This observation aligns with Judith Butler's Critical Cultural Approaches to Gender and Sex Theory, which emphasizes the importance of validating diverse gender identities within academic settings (King, 2016; Mills, 2021).

Language emerged as a crucial factor in reinforcing or challenging traditional gender norms. For instance, Par 7 observed, *"In some classes, gendered terms are used without much thought. This creates an environment where non-binary identities feel marginalized."* This aligns with social constructivism, which posits that language shapes and reflects societal norms (Siegel et al., 2021). The findings suggest a pressing need for adopting gender-neutral language practices across academic settings to foster inclusivity and challenge entrenched norms.

Cultural backgrounds and societal expectations significantly influence language practices and communication patterns. Par 5 remarked, *"In my culture, discussing gender fluidity is still quite new. I find that my cultural background influences how comfortable I am talking about it in class,"* illustrating how cultural contexts shape engagement with gender topics. This finding underscores the necessity for culturally responsive teaching practices that respect diverse backgrounds while facilitating open discussions about gender (Gonzales, 2021).

Educators at St. Michael's College have integrated various strategies to create supportive environments for diverse gender identities. As Par 2 noted, *"Our department has started offering class activities on gender inclusivity, which has really helped in creating a more supportive atmosphere."* Such practices reflect feminist theory and inclusive pedagogies, emphasizing the importance of ongoing professional development and institutional support for fostering environments where all students feel valued (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

The intersectionality of gender with other identity aspects, such as ethnicity and sexuality, was a significant theme. Par 8 commented, *"My experience as a queer person of color adds layers to how I experience gender issues in college. It's not just about gender but also how my personality plays into it."* This aligns with intersectionality theory, highlighting how multiple dimensions of identity intersect and affect individuals' experiences (Pomerantz & Raby, 2022). Addressing intersectionality in educational policies is essential for supporting the complex identities of all students.

The in-depth literature review highlighted gaps between theoretical frameworks and practical application. Bading and Bosch (2024) discussed the complexities of discrimination and violence, which resonate with the study's findings on gender identity negotiation. Toquero (2023) and Ballaret (2024) provided insights into the role of education and societal shifts in influencing gender inclusivity, reinforcing the need for systemic changes in educational practices.

Informal interviews revealed a mix of progress and challenges. Students and educators noted that while gender discussions have increased, they often lack depth and genuine engagement. Par 6 remarked, *"While there are more conversations about gender now, they often feel surface-level and lack genuine engagement."* This sentiment reflects the need for substantial institutional reforms to align theoretical commitments with practical implementation (Bading & Bosch, 2024). The group, however, pointed out that the school remains conservative, hence, affecting the conduct of school activities based on traditional norms.

Classroom observations showed varied applications of gender-inclusive practices. Some classrooms effectively used gender-neutral language and addressed diverse gender identities, while others adhered to traditional norms. This variation highlights the importance of adapting educational materials and practices to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches. Mirhosseini (2020) emphasized observing real-world applications of theoretical frameworks, supporting the study's findings.

Analysis of existing language learning materials revealed significant deficiencies in gender representation and cultural sensitivity. Many materials reinforced traditional gender norms, echoing Estrellado's (2021) critique and indicating the need for revisions to reflect contemporary understandings of gender and cultural diversity (Aguirre et al., 2023). The lack of inclusive content perpetuates outdated stereotypes and fails to address the diverse needs of students.

Insights from the Gender and Development Symposium emphasized the need for institutional commitment, ongoing faculty training, and student involvement in shaping inclusive practices. This supports the move of the institution to strengthen the Gender and Development (GAD) mechanism. Participants especially the teachers advocated for integrating gender studies into the curriculum and offering workshops on gender awareness, aligning with Toquero (2023) and Ballaret (2024). The symposium's insights underscore the necessity of sustained efforts to achieve meaningful improvements in gender inclusivity.



Overall, the findings reveal both progress and persistent challenges in creating an inclusive academic environment at St. Michael's College. Effective integration of gender-sensitive practices, cultural awareness, and systemic support is crucial for addressing the diverse needs of students and fostering a genuinely inclusive educational experience.

### Thematic analysis

Drawing on the findings from the aforementioned data and guided by the framework postulated by Braun and Clarke (2022), the following ten themes emerged from the data. The examination of cultural dynamics and gender representation at St. Michael's College reveals intricate interactions between gender identities, language use, cultural influences, and pedagogical strategies, especially in a post-pandemic context.

1. **Negotiation of Gender Identity:** Students at St. Michael's College navigate their gender identities with both self-expression and adaptation. Par 3, a student, remarked, "*Sometimes, I have to assert my identity in class discussions, and it feels like I'm always defending who I am.*" This direct quote reflects the ongoing struggle students face in affirming their identities within the academic environment. Thematic analysis of interviews, observations, and language learning materials corroborates this situation. Informal interviews revealed that students frequently experience challenges related to identity assertion and recognition in class. It may sound, perhaps, one-sided when a student is addressed in a "wrong pronoun" but it happens all the time in the classroom setting. Observations also highlighted instances where traditional academic practices conflicted with the need for greater sensitivity towards diverse gender identities. This underscores the necessity for institutional policies and faculty training focused on validating and supporting diverse gender expressions. These findings align with the Critical Cultural Approaches to Gender and Sex theory, which emphasizes the need for educational environments to adapt to and respect various gender identities (Lesko & Sandlin, 2022).
2. **Language as a Tool for Reinforcement or Resistance:** Language plays a pivotal role in either reinforcing or challenging gender norms. Par 7, an educator, observed, "*When I use gender-neutral language, it sometimes feels like I'm pushing boundaries, but it's crucial for inclusivity.*" This observation highlights the delicate balance educators must navigate between traditional language practices and the adoption of more inclusive terminology. The integration of findings from the literature review, classroom observations, and analysis of educational materials further emphasizes the significant impact of language practices. While some educators successfully employ gender-neutral language to challenge conventional norms, the persistence of outdated materials and practices underscores ongoing challenges. This aligns with social constructivism, which posits that language both reflects and influences societal norms (Siegel et al., 2021). The literature review corroborates these findings by demonstrating how language use in academic settings can either support or hinder progress towards gender inclusivity.
3. **Cultural Influences on Communication:** Cultural backgrounds significantly impact how gender-related topics are addressed in classrooms. Par 2, a student, shared, "*In my culture, talking about gender issues is taboo, so I often feel isolated when these topics come up.*" This insight reflects how cultural norms can shape students' comfort and engagement with discussions about gender. Observations and informal interviews corroborate this by demonstrating that cultural contexts influence students' participation and feelings of inclusion in gender-related conversations. The findings underline the necessity for culturally responsive teaching practices that accommodate diverse cultural perspectives and foster open discussions about gender. This aligns with Gonzales' (2021) emphasis on the intersection of language, culture, and identity in shaping educational experiences.
4. **Strategies for Inclusive Pedagogy:** Educators have implemented various strategies to foster inclusivity, though results are mixed. Par 6, an educator, explained, "*I try to include diverse gender perspectives in my class, but it's challenging when the standard materials are so outdated.*" This comment reflects the difficulties educators face in integrating inclusive practices when existing resources do not align with contemporary standards. The integration of insights from the symposium and classroom observations reveals that while some educators have successfully embraced inclusive practices, others struggle due to outdated materials, confirming the need for updated resources and ongoing professional development (Gutiérrez et al., 2023; Mirhosseini, 2020). This underscores the necessity for both revised educational materials and continued training to support effective and inclusive pedagogy.
5. **Intersectionality in Gender Experiences:** The intersection of gender with other aspects of identity significantly influences students' experiences. Par 5, a student, noted, "*Being both a man and a person of color adds layers to how I experience gender bias in class.*" This perspective sometimes highlights the compounded nature of misunderstanding experienced by individuals with multiple intersecting identities. In SMC, there are specific norms like dress codes and decorum that students need to adhere. Insights from the literature review, symposium discussions, and classroom observations collectively illustrate the complexity of intersectional identities. The symposium speakers highlighted this insight. These findings, however, underscore the importance of addressing various dimensions of discrimination within educational practices to ensure a more inclusive environment (Pomerantz & Raby, 2022).
6. **Representation of Gender in Educational Materials:** Analysis of educational materials revealed both progress and shortcomings in gender representation. Par 9, a student, commented, "*Sometimes, the*



*examples and texts we use are still very gender-biased, which makes it hard to relate to them.*" This observation underscores the ongoing issues within educational resources regarding gender inclusivity. The in-depth literature review and classroom observations confirm that while there have been some advancements in including diverse perspectives, many materials still reflect outdated gender biases (Estrellado, 2021). Critical Cultural Approaches to Gender and Sex Theory suggest that educational materials often perpetuate dominant cultural norms, which can marginalize non-normative gender identities (Mills, 2021). Identity Negotiation Theory emphasizes how individuals navigate and negotiate their identities in response to the representations they encounter (Gonzales, 2021). In this context, students may struggle to see themselves reflected in materials that fail to address their diverse experiences. Social Constructivism Theory highlights how knowledge and understanding of gender are constructed through social interactions and cultural contexts (Siegel et al., 2021). This perspective points to the necessity of updating educational resources to reflect current understandings of gender diversity and to support inclusive pedagogy (Eslit, 2023a). Finally, Feminist Theory advocates for the dismantling of traditional gender norms and the creation of educational materials that support gender equity (Pomerantz & Raby, 2022). Integrating these theoretical insights into the development of educational resources or learning materials is crucial for addressing the gaps identified and fostering a more inclusive academic environment.

7. **Impact of the Pandemic on Gender Dynamics:** The pandemic has significantly altered gender dynamics within educational contexts. As noted by Par 1, a faculty member, *"The shift to online learning has changed how we interact, and it's both a challenge and an opportunity to rethink our approach to gender inclusivity"*. This statement reflects the broader shifts that have occurred as institutions navigated the transition to remote learning. Data from observations and interviews underscore that the pandemic introduced substantial challenges, such as exacerbating existing inequities and disrupting traditional support systems. However, it also opened up new avenues for reconsidering and advancing gender inclusivity in educational practices. Theories like Critical Cultural Approaches to Gender and Sex Theory emphasize the importance of re-evaluating traditional structures and norms in light of changing contexts. The pandemic's shift to online platforms has brought to light the need for educational practices that are more adaptable and inclusive, aligning with Social Constructivism Theory's view that learning environments must evolve to reflect new social realities. Furthermore, Identity Negotiation Theory suggests that the remote learning environment has prompted students and educators to negotiate their identities in novel ways, revealing both opportunities and limitations in how gender inclusivity can be addressed (Porter, 2022; Espartinez, 2022)). Observations and interviews reveal that while the pandemic presented new challenges, such as the digital divide and the need for equitable access to technology, it also provided a unique opportunity to reimagine and strengthen approaches to gender inclusivity. This period has highlighted the potential for developing more inclusive educational practices that are responsive to diverse gender identities and experiences.
8. **Student Engagement with Inclusivity Initiatives:** This theme varies considerably, driven by personal experiences and the level of institutional support. Par 8, a student leader, shared, *"I've seen a lot of interest in gender inclusivity among my peers, but we need more institutional support to make lasting changes"*. This sentiment reflects the broader observation that while there is evident enthusiasm for gender inclusivity among students, achieving meaningful change requires stronger institutional backing. According to Critical Cultural Approaches and Gender and Sex Theory, student engagement is influenced by the cultural and institutional frameworks within which they operate (Pineda & Santos, (2023). The conservative norms, however, often seen as deflecting its purpose. Identity Negotiation Theory further supports this by showing how students' efforts are shaped by institutional constraints and opportunities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The symposium and informal interviews highlight the gap between student advocacy and institutional action, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support to translate student enthusiasm into effective and lasting change. Social Constructivism Theory suggests that collaborative efforts among students, faculty, and administrators are crucial for fostering a truly inclusive environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, while students are actively seeking to enhance inclusivity, the success of these initiatives hinges on the necessary support and resources.
9. **Administrative Support and Policy Effectiveness:** The effectiveness of administrative policies in promoting gender inclusivity at St. Michael's College has been mixed. As Par 10, an administrator, explained, *"We have policies in place, but ensuring they are effectively implemented and understood by everyone remains a challenge"*. This reflects a broader concern highlighted by the literature review and symposium discussions, which underscore the need for ongoing evaluation and reinforcement of inclusivity policies. Insights from observations and interviews reveal that while policies exist, their practical application is inconsistent, necessitating more robust mechanisms for monitoring and implementation. According to Feminist Theory, the gap between policy and practice often stems from structural issues within institutions that hinder effective change. Social Constructivism Theory also suggests that policy effectiveness is contingent upon the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, and students (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, to enhance gender inclusivity, it is crucial for the institution to continually reassess and strengthen its policies, ensuring they are not only established but also actively integrated into the campus culture.
10. **Educator Attitudes and Practices:** As Par 4, and educator, remarked, *"My approach to teaching gender diversity is informed by my own experiences and training, but I often feel isolated in my efforts"*. This



sentiment is echoed by insights from the literature review, observations, and informal interviews, which highlight the crucial role of supporting educators through targeted professional development and institutional backing. Critical Cultural Approaches to Gender and Sex Theory suggest that educators' personal experiences and training are vital, yet insufficient without systemic support (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Additionally, Identity Negotiation Theory emphasizes the need for educators to navigate their own identities and those of their students within a supportive framework (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). To foster an inclusive environment, it is essential for institutions to provide ongoing professional development, thereby empowering educators to effectively promote gender inclusivity in their teaching practices.

Overall, these themes reveal the multifaceted nature of gender, language, and cultural dynamics in the academic setting, indicating both progress and ongoing challenges in creating an inclusive educational environment.

## **Discussion**

As institutions of higher learning navigate the post-pandemic landscape, the examination of gender representation, language use, and inclusive pedagogies becomes crucial. This study provides a timely exploration of these aspects, revealing both advancements and persisting challenges in SMC. By comparing the findings with existing literature, assessing the implications for the institution, and acknowledging the study's limitations, will help concerned individuals understand better the path forward towards creating a more inclusive educational environment.

## **Comparison with Previous Studies**

The findings from this study are both consistent with and distinct from existing research on gender inclusivity in educational settings. The study aligns with Bading and Bosch (2024), who emphasize the difficulties in translating gender-sensitive policies into practice. At St. Michael's College, despite a growing awareness and discourse around gender inclusivity, practical implementation remains uneven. This observation parallels Toquero's (2023) findings that theoretical commitments often lag behind practical application.

However, St. Michael's College also exhibits areas of proactive inclusivity that diverge from the more gradual acceptance seen in other studies. For instance, some departments at the college have adopted inclusive practices more rapidly than others by integrating Gender and Development mechanism initiatives, contrasting with the gradual progress reported in Estrellado's (2021) research on educational transitions. This disparity highlights the need for targeted interventions to address the inconsistent application of inclusivity practices across the institution (Paragas et al. (2022); Peters et al. (2022)). Notably, the institution's potent implementation of its "Gender and Development Mechanism" to address gender awareness and inclusivity reflects an attempt to tackle these challenges directly.

## **Further Implications**

The implications of these findings for St. Michael's College are profound. The study underscores the necessary alignment and GAD integration in educational practices with the commitment to gender inclusivity. The observed gap between policy and practice suggests that focused faculty training and aligned curriculum and pedagogy are essential. As Gutiérrez et al. (2023) highlight, incorporating diverse cultural and gender perspectives into the curriculum and learning materials is vital for fostering a genuinely inclusive environment.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of sustained dialogue and institutional commitment. The symposium discussions reinforced this need, advocating for continuous engagement among students, faculty, and administrators. This aligns with Ladson-Billings' (2021) call for a "hard re-set" in education to advance GAD inclusivity. Implementing comprehensive strategies that address both immediate and long-term goals is crucial for embedding inclusivity throughout the college's operations.

## **Limitations**

Despite its valuable insights, this study has several limitations. The small sample size, comprising students, educators, and administrators, restricts the generalizability of the findings. While the qualitative approach facilitates a deep exploration of experiences, it may not capture the full range of perspectives across the entire college community.

Additionally, the reliance on informal interviews and observations introduces potential biases and limits the breadth of understanding. Informal interviews, though detailed, may not encompass all relevant viewpoints (Swain & King, 2022). Similarly, observations may be affected by the researcher's presence, potentially altering natural classroom dynamics (Mirhosseini, 2020).

Overall, while this study offers valuable insights into gender representation and inclusive practices at St. Michael's College, the limitations underscore the need for further research with larger and more diverse samples. Future studies could build on these findings to explore broader trends and develop more comprehensive strategies for promoting inclusivity in higher education.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**



This study provides crucial insights into gender dynamics and inclusivity challenges at St. Michael's College by employing a qualitative approach to examine how gender identities are navigated and represented within the academic setting. Through the application of Critical Cultural Approaches to Gender and Sex, identity negotiation theory, social constructivism, and feminist theory, the research offers a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in gender representation, language use, and inclusive pedagogy. The findings indicate that, despite an increased awareness of gender issues, the practical implementation of inclusive practices remains conventional. Key insights reveal diverse student experiences in affirming gender identities, the influential role of language in shaping or challenging gender norms, and the impact of cultural backgrounds on communication. Addressing these challenges, the study recommends fostering student engagement through events like symposia and seminars, promoting further research on gender equality, and incorporating the Gender and Development (GAD) mechanism into the curriculum to bridge the gap between awareness and practical application. These recommendations highlight the need for continued development and support in educational strategies to achieve a more inclusive academic environment.

### Recommendations

In light of the profound findings, this study underscores the necessity for inclusive pedagogies that address cultural dynamics and gender representation. By analyzing identity negotiation and language use, it offers actionable recommendations to foster a more equitable and responsive educational environment.

#### For School Administrators:

1. **Implement Inclusive Policies:** Institutionalize the Gender and Development (GAD) mechanism to enhance policies addressing cultural dynamics and gender representation, with a focus on supporting diverse gender identities. Ensure these policies are regularly updated to reflect evolving understanding and provide ongoing training for administrators and educators. This will support the effective integration of inclusive practices and pedagogies into the college's operations, fostering a more equitable academic environment in the post-pandemic context.
2. **Enhance Support Structures:** Broaden support systems by increasing access to counseling services and peer support groups specifically addressing gender identity concerns. Establish a dedicated diversity and inclusion office to centralize resources, coordinate initiatives, and provide ongoing support. This office should serve as a hub for fostering an inclusive environment, offering specialized resources, and ensuring that both students and staff receive comprehensive support related to cultural dynamics and gender representation in the post-pandemic academic setting.

#### For Educators:

1. **Integrate Diverse Perspectives into Curricula:** Revise academic curricula to incorporate a wide range of gender perspectives and cultural contexts. Select inclusive textbooks and resources that reflect diverse experiences and viewpoints. Design assignments and class discussions to critically engage with these perspectives, fostering an environment where students can explore and understand the complexities of identity negotiation, language use, and inclusive pedagogies. This approach will ensure that educational content is reflective of and responsive to the diverse realities of students in the post-pandemic higher education landscape.
2. **Foster a Supportive Learning Environment:** Employ teaching strategies that encourage open dialogue and respect for diverse identities. Use inclusive language, actively address microaggressions, and create a classroom atmosphere where all students feel safe, valued, and heard. By implementing these practices, educators can build an environment that supports identity negotiation and cultural understanding, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive in the post-pandemic educational context.

#### For Students:

1. **Engage Actively with Inclusivity Initiatives:** Take an active role in campus initiatives that foster inclusivity by participating in and advocating for programs that promote diversity and gender inclusivity. Join student organizations dedicated to these causes, attend workshops and events related to inclusivity, and support policies that advance gender equity. By engaging in these activities, students can help drive positive change and contribute to a more inclusive campus environment.
2. **Support Peers and Educators:** Contribute to a positive and supportive campus climate by actively challenging discriminatory behavior and offering support to peers dealing with gender identity issues. Foster open and respectful discussions about gender and inclusivity to further enhance the campus community's understanding and acceptance. By supporting each other and promoting inclusivity, students can help create a more welcoming and equitable academic environment.

#### For Future Researchers:

1. **Expand Research Scope:** Broaden the scope of studies by including larger and more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of findings. Conduct comparative research across various institutions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of gender representation and inclusivity in higher education. This approach can provide valuable insights into how different contexts and settings influence gender dynamics and inclusivity practices.





- Methodological Improvements:** Employ mixed-methods approaches to achieve a more thorough understanding of gender inclusivity issues. Combining quantitative data with qualitative insights can offer a more nuanced and robust analysis of the factors affecting gender representation. This methodological approach allows for a richer exploration of both statistical trends and individual experiences, contributing to more effective and evidence-based strategies for enhancing inclusivity in higher education.

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