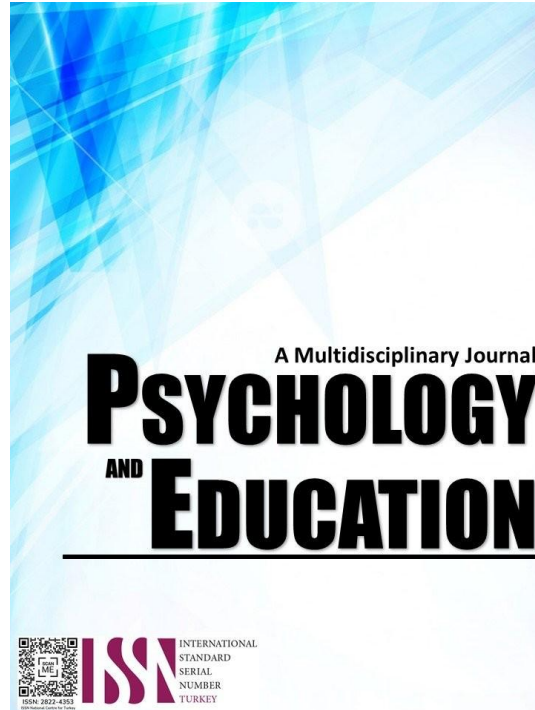


# **SAFE LEARNING PRACTICES IN SHAPING GENDER SENSITIVITY AMONG LEARNERS IN PITOGO, QUEZON**



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## Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity among Learners in Pitogo, Quezon

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### Abstract

This study explored how safe learning practices shape gender sensitivity among senior high school learners in Pitogo, Quezon. Among the 130 respondents from Amontay National High School and Pitogo Community High School, most were aged 17 to 18 years, with 55% female, 40% male, and 5% identifying as LGBTQA++. The findings showed that gender-responsive teaching and learning, inclusive education policies, and peer acceptance positively influence gender sensitivity, with respondents generally agreeing on their effectiveness. While these practices promote respect, understanding, and safe gender expression, challenges such as bullying, stereotyping, and peer pressure remain. The lived experiences highlighted the importance of inclusive policies and peer support in fostering self-esteem and belonging. Statistical analysis revealed no significant differences in perceptions based on age, gender, or grade level, indicating consistent experiences among students. The study emphasizes the need for continuous, inclusive, and gender-sensitive approaches to create a supportive learning environment for all.

**Keywords:** *age, gender sensitivity, inclusive education, LGBTQA++, peer acceptance, senior high school, safe learning practices, stereotyping, teaching and learning*

### Introduction

In the changing field of education, safe learning practices have become essential in tackling significant social issues, such as gender sensitivity. The Philippines, known for its cultural diversity and established traditional gender norms, has acknowledged the importance of fostering inclusive and fair learning environments. Since 2015, several reforms have been implemented to incorporate gender perspectives into educational contexts and to promote the development of students who appreciate respect, equality, and diversity.

In the Philippines, the publication of DepEd Order No. 32, s. was one significant turning point. The Department of Education highlighted the need to integrate gender equality and non-discrimination in schools through the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy. This strategy aimed to ensure that basic education establishments became secure, supportive environments where all students, regardless of gender, could thrive. The significance of developing curricula, educating teachers, and establishing support networks that acknowledge the individual needs of students of various gender identities was emphasized. (Department of Education. (2017). DO 32, s. 2017)

By 2018, civil society campaigns like #BabaeAko were well-known and directly contested sexism in Philippine leadership and public discourse. These campaigns raised awareness among the general public and increased pressure on organizations, notably educational institutions, to create gender-sensitive environments. Such lobbying resulted in more robust grassroots campaigns that demanded a review of instructional resources and methods that perpetuated gender stereotypes. (Time, 2018)

In 2020, in response to global changes, the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the significance of educational inclusion. The 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report by UNESCO recognized how crises increase gender inequality and suggested that countries, including the Philippines, step up their efforts to implement gender-responsive education policies. During this time, there was a rise in online gender sensitivity training for teachers. For example, the Department of Finance offered virtual workshops to promote safe and fair learning even in virtual environments. (UNESCO, 2020; DOF, 2020).

The importance of gender-responsive education was once more highlighted in 2021 by former Education Secretary Leonor Briones, who pushed for curriculum revision and the addition of gender-sensitive material in disciplines like science and health. Her remarks highlighted the duty of educational institutions to foster attitudes and values that promote gender equality in addition to imparting academic knowledge. (Department of Education, 2021)

Local initiatives were started to assist national policies in a number of locations. To help educators handle gender issues in schools, DepEd Mandaluyong, for instance, introduced "KABARO: Gender Awareness and Sensitivity Training" in 2022. Likewise, DepEd Quezon has been actively holding training seminars that emphasize the usefulness of gender sensitivity in curriculum delivery, classroom management, and student interaction. Pitogo in Quezon and other municipalities might follow the examples set by these local initiatives. (DepEd Mandaluyong, 2022; DepEd Quezon, 2022)

Views from throughout the world provide support to these initiatives. Gender sensitization in schools is essential for altering cultural attitudes and stopping gender-based violence. They emphasize how crucial it is to incorporate gender education into programs that prepare teachers. Furthermore, some studies highlight that instructors play a vital role in influencing classroom dynamics and fostering a gender-sensitive culture that encourages students—particularly girls—to take the initiative and lead. (Kalra and Sharma, 2019; Kohri, 2019)

The "Teach for Gender Equality" campaign highlighted the need to modify instructional strategies and curricular materials to promote equality. The project's goals were to help Philippine teachers understand how unconscious prejudice affects students' learning experiences and identities and to connect their instruction with the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy. (Laro's, 2024)

According to a 2023 Marinduque State College research, English teachers who used gender-sensitive teaching techniques promoted more inclusive classroom discussions and decreased occurrences of bullying and exclusion based on gender. In a similar vein, researchers from Mindanao State University's Iligan Institute of Technology found that gender awareness training significantly increased students' respect and good attitudes about gender diversity in 2024. (Madriaga, 2023; Casas et al., 2024)

The municipality of Pitogo, Quezon, offers an unusual environment for assessing how well safe learning practices foster gender sensitivity because of its blend of rural and semi-urban learning communities. Although it has started to include gender-responsive policies, further research is required to determine how these practices are used in classrooms and if students actually see schools as respectful, secure environments free from gender bias.

This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the practical strategies employed in Pitogo, Quezon, schools and assessing their impact on students' perceptions of gender equality. Through this study, educators and policymakers may learn more about the obstacles and achievements schools have had in achieving international and national requirements for gender-sensitive education.

This chapter lays the foundation for understanding how safe learning practices shape gender sensitivity among learners. The subsequent chapters will build on this framework, providing a deeper analysis of how schools can become key agents in promoting gender equality.

## Research Questions

The problem addressed by this study is the practices to which the safe learning shape gender sensitivity among learners in Pitogo. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following:

1. What is the profile of respondents in terms of:
  - 1.1. age;
  - 1.2. sex; and
  - 1.3. grade level?
2. What are the safe learning practices in shaping gender sensitivity of learners with respect to:
  - 2.1. gender-responsive teaching and learning;
  - 2.2. inclusive education policies and practices; and
  - 2.3. peer acceptance?
3. What are the lived experience/s of the respondents on the safe learning practices in shaping gender sensitivity?
4. Is there any significant difference on the perceived safe learning practices in shaping gender sensitivity when the respondents are grouped according to profile?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) to collect data for measuring safe learning practices that shape gender sensitivity among learners at Pitogo, Quezon. The researcher used a survey questionnaire as an instrument. Based on the survey's results, the researcher was able to determine the details of the study.

According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (Eds.), the mixed methods is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. It involves the collection and mixing of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. This method aims to provide a snapshot of the current state without manipulating the environment or variables. It can answer what, where, when, and how questions, but not why questions.

### Respondents

The researcher selected 130 students through proportionate random sampling from Amontay National High School and Pitogo Community High School, focusing on how safe learning spaces shape gender sensitivity among learners. The respondents were composed of 44 students from grades 11-12 of Pitogo Community High School, and 86 students from grades 11-12 of Amontay National High School.

### Instrument

The researcher used a research-made questionnaire. This questionnaire is a Likert scale of; 5 – Strongly Agree (SA), 4 – Agree (A), 3 – Moderately Agree (MA), 2 – Disagree (D) and 1 – Strongly Disagree (SD) for understanding about the effects of safe learning spaces in shaping gender sensitivity among learners in Pitogo, Quezon. The researcher prepared a research-made questionnaire for the respondents, which was checked and validated by two experts. Part I presents the profile of the respondents, while Part II focuses on safe learning practices that foster gender sensitivity, including gender-responsive teaching and learning, inclusive education policies

and practices, and peer acceptance. Part III presented the lived experiences of respondents regarding safe learning practices and their impact on shaping gender sensitivity.

A pilot test was conducted on twelve (12) respondents from Eastern Quezon College, Inc., which is not a target of the study, using Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of internal consistency of the research instrument. The results for gender-responsive teaching and learning (1.06), inclusive education policies and practices (0.94), and peer acceptance (0.97) are all interpreted as acceptable. This indicates an internal consistency of the instrument.

## Procedure

Target populations were grade 11 and grade 12 students of Amontay National High School and Pitogo Community High School. In gathering the data, the researcher employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing the Likert scale to assess the safe learning practices that shape gender sensitivity. Data were gathered through "proportionate random sampling." Both male and female students of Amontay National High School and Pitogo Community High School were selected to fill out the questionnaire. For the qualitative part, a question was asked about the respondents' lived experiences with safe learning practices and their impact on shaping gender sensitivity.

In administering the questionnaire, the researcher used the allotted time to avoid the distraction of class discussion. The student responses were given enough time to answer the questions. After data gathering, the researcher collected them for tallying the scores and applied the statistical treatment used in the study.

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researcher sent a letter to the principal and advisers of grades 11 and 12 of the school. Upon approval, the researcher administered the instrument to the target respondents.

## Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher used statistical measures to treat the collected data. All the data were carefully read and examined for analysis. They were tallied and entered into a master list of the data collection sheet. Percentage and Frequency were used to interpret the profile of the respondents. To test the significant difference of three or more means, the researcher used the Kruskal-Wallis test for non-parametric tests.

## Results and Discussion

This section deals with the presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the data. All the data gathered were presented here in tabulated form with corresponding interpretation. The first part described the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, and grade level. The second part focuses on safe learning practices that shape gender sensitivity among learners in Pitogo, Quezon.

*Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents According to Age*

<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
16 years old and below	26	20
17 - 18 years old	96	74
19 years old and above	8	6
Total	130	100

Table 1 displays the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by age. A majority of the respondents (74%) are within the 17–18 year old age range, comprising the dominant age group in the study. Meanwhile, 20% of the participants are aged 16 years old and below, and only 6% are 19 years old and above.

According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, adolescents between the ages of 17 and 18 are especially impressionable and more inclined to imitate actions, which makes this an important period to introduce gender sensitive principles. This age distribution is consistent with this theory. Lifelong views on gender equality can be greatly influenced by early exposure, particularly in this age group.

*Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents According to Sex*

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Male	53	40
Female	71	55
LGBTQA++	6	5
Total	130	100

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the respondents according to sex, revealing that the majority of the respondents, with 55% identify as female, while 40% are male. A smaller portion, with 5% was identified under the LGBTQA++ category. Despite their small number, LGBTQA++ respondents show that gender identity identification in educational contexts is becoming more inclusive. Their lower representation, however, raises the possibility that additional work is required to involve and incorporate a range of gender identities in gender sensitivity initiatives.

This finding is supported by Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989), which highlights the importance of recognizing multiple and

overlapping identities in understanding social experiences. Developing comprehensive gender sensitivity efforts involves including LGBTQA++ views. Additionally, DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, regardless of gender identity or expression, highlights the necessity of gender-responsive educational practices that serve all pupils.

Table 3. *Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Respondents According to Grade Level*

<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Grade 11	55	42
Grade 12	75	58
Total	130	100

Table 3 illustrates the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents based on their grade level, indicating that the majority of the respondents belong to Grade 12, accounting for 58% with 75 respondents, while Grade 11 respondents account for 42% with 55 respondents.

This pattern is consistent with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and cultural tools in learning. It's possible that older students, like those in Grade 12, have more life experience and social interactions under their belts, which helps them comprehend and think more deeply about complex social concepts like gender sensitivity. Furthermore, senior students are better able to model and reinforce inclusive behaviors in secure learning contexts since observational learning increases with age, according to Bandura's Social Learning Theory.

Table 4. *Respondents Assessment on the Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity Among Learners in Pitogo, Quezon in terms of Gender-Responsive Teaching and Learning*

<i>Indicators</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Verbal Interpretation</i>
1. Teachers use gender-fair language and provide equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of gender.	4.23	Strongly Agree
2. Classroom discussions and activities promote gender sensitivity and challenge gender stereotypes.	3.85	Agree
3. Learning materials (books, visual aids, examples) are free from gender bias and promote inclusivity.	3.96	Agree
4. Teachers encourage students to express themselves freely, regardless of their gender identity.	4.22	Strongly Agree
5. Teachers address gender-related issues and promote respect for all gender identities.	4.12	Agree
Average Mean	4.08	Agree

**Legend:** Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.80), Disagree (1.81-2.60), Moderately Agree (2.61-3.40), Agree (3.41-4.20), Strongly Agree (4.21-5.00).

Table 4 shows an overall positive perception of gender-responsive teaching practices in the surveyed schools. The average mean score is 4.08, which corresponds to the verbal interpretation "Agree," indicating that most respondents recognize the presence of gender-responsive strategies in their learning environment. This suggests that instructors are generally using gender-responsive teaching methods in the classroom. "Teachers use gender-fair language and provide equal learning opportunities" is the most highly ranked factor, with a mean score of 4.23 (Strongly Agree), indicating a strong commitment to equality. Regardless of gender identification, teachers also encourage pupils to express themselves (Mean = 4.22).

Positive ratings were also given to other elements, including addressing gender-related issues, utilizing inclusive materials, and encouraging gender awareness in conversations. Although these findings suggest that gender awareness is actively promoted in the classroom, several aspects still require improvement.

Studies conducted locally and internationally that highlight the value of safe and gender-responsive teaching methods in fostering gender sensitivity in students corroborate the findings in Table 4. For example, Stromquist and Sanyal (2016) underlined the value of feminist pedagogy in creating inclusive and respectful learning environments, while Unterhalter (2015) stressed the need of gender-sensitive pedagogies in tackling structural disparities in education. Local research by David, Santos, and Cruz (2016) and Alampay and Dizon (2015) revealed that more respectful and equitable learning environments were created in classrooms when teachers employed gender-neutral language and inclusive resources.

Additionally, addressing gender issues in the classroom and promoting students' freedom of expression greatly increased gender sensitivity and decreased bias, according to Corpuz (2018) and Santiago and Morante (2019). These results support the notion that the table's favorable scores represent successful gender-responsive teaching techniques that follow industry best practices found in both domestic and international studies.

Table 5 presents the respondents' assessment of safe learning practices in fostering gender sensitivity among learners in Pitogo, Quezon, with a focus on Inclusive Education Policies and Practices. The overall average mean is 3.94, which falls under the verbal interpretation "Agree." This suggests that the respondents generally agree that their school promotes gender-inclusive policies and practices. Among the five indicators, the highest-rated was the presence of clear policies that promote gender equality and protect students from

discrimination, with a mean of 4.06. The lowest-rated indicator, with a mean of 3.75, was the provision of gender sensitivity training and seminars for teachers and students, which still received an "Agree" interpretation.

Table 5. *Respondents Assessment on the Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity Among Learners in Pitogo, Quezon in terms of Inclusive Education Policies and Practices*

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1. The school has clear policies that promote gender equality and protect students from gender discrimination.	4.06	Agree
2. The school implements anti-bullying policies that include protection for students that are members of LGBTQA++ community.	3.92	Agree
3. School administrators and staff actively support gender inclusivity in school events and programs.	3.98	Agree
4. The school ensures that facilities (e.g., restrooms, uniforms, sports) and learning materials are inclusive and respectful of all gender identities.	3.97	Agree
5. The school provides training and seminars on gender sensitivity for teachers and students.	3.75	Agree
Average Mean	3.94	Agree

Legend; Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.80), Disagree (1.81-2.60), Moderately Agree (2.61-3.40), Agree (3.41-4.20), Strongly Agree (4.21-5.00).

This outcome confirms Valencia's (2017) results, which highlighted the significance of institutional initiatives to advance gender awareness through training, policies, and programs. In a similar vein, Casas et al. (2024) discovered that when schools had organized seminars and hands-on learning activities, students' gender sensitivity increased. Furthermore, in order to provide safe places for all students, particularly those in the LGBTQ+ community, inclusive education policies, infrastructure, and administrative support are essential, according to Cardinal (2021) and the Scotland Learning Directorate (2021). Thus, even though Pitogo, Quezon data indicates good implementation, there is always a need for improvement, particularly in bolstering teacher and student training programs to maintain gender-responsive education.

Table 6. *Respondents Assessment on the Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity Among Learners in Pitogo, Quezon in terms of Peer Acceptance*

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
1. Students respect and accept one another, regardless of gender identity and expression.	4.09	Agree
2. Gender identity in school can be comfortably expressed without fear of judgment or discrimination.	3.98	Agree
3. Schoolmates and peers do not make offensive jokes or remarks about gender identities.	3.74	Agree
4. Students support and stand up for peers who experience gender discrimination or bullying.	3.85	Agree
5. There is a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect among students in the school.	3.92	Agree
Average Mean	3.92	Agree

Legend; Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.80), Disagree (1.81-2.60), Moderately Agree (2.61-3.40), Agree (3.41-4.20), Strongly Agree (4.21-5.00).

Table 6 shows the average mean of 3.92, which is within the "Agree" interpretation. Students usually believe that their school promotes gender sensitivity through inclusive and polite peer relationships. With the highest mean score of 4.09 among the indicators, the statement "Students respect and accept one another, regardless of gender identity and expression," indicates that there is a high level of respect between students. While still receiving a favorable rating, the item with the lowest rating, "Schoolmates and peers do not make offensive jokes or remarks about gender identities," had a rating of 3.74, suggesting that there may be room for growth in terms of eradicating discriminatory practices. The findings of Casas et al. (2024), who highlighted that systematic gender sensitivity training greatly enhances student attitudes and peer relationships, are supported by this conclusion. It also supports the findings of Lopez and Andal (2024), who pointed out that a supportive school culture fosters diversity and inclusion. Although the school has made great strides in encouraging gender-sensitive peer connections, overall data in Table 6 shows that further reinforcement of inclusive practices is still necessary to eradicate subtle forms of prejudice completely.

Table 7. *Summary Table on the Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity Among Learners*

Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Gender-Responsive Teaching and Learning	4.08	Agree
Inclusive Education Policies and Practices	3.94	Agree
Peer Acceptance	3.92	Agree
Grand Mean	3.98	Agree

Legend; Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.80), Disagree (1.81-2.60), Moderately Agree (2.61-3.40), Agree (3.41-4.20), Strongly Agree (4.21-5.00).

Table 7 presents a summary of the results on Safe Learning Practices in shaping Gender Sensitivity among learners, as assessed through three main indicators. Gender-Responsive Teaching and Learning had the highest mean score, 4.08, which is read as Agree. This suggests that respondents believe that teaching and learning methods promote gender sensitivity. With a mean score of 3.94, which is likewise translated as Agree, Inclusive Education Policies and Practices come next, indicating that school policies and practices usually promote inclusion across gender identities. With a mean score of 3.92, the indication of peer acceptance likewise falls into the Agree

group, indicating that students generally feel respected and accepted by their peers. The respondents consistently agreed that safe learning techniques are being used and are favorably influencing the growth of gender sensitivity in the classroom, as indicated by the grand mean of 3.98, which is read as Agree.

Overall, the results are consistent with earlier research highlighting the value of incorporating gender sensitivity into peer relationships, school rules, and classroom instruction. Valencia (2017) asserts that institutional tools like gender-responsive policies greatly enhance instructional strategies and provide a more welcoming classroom environment. Similarly, Cagang et al. (2023) discovered that pre-service teachers who are more knowledgeable about Gender and Development (GAD) concepts use more gender-sensitive teaching strategies. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, safe learning environments that are based on inclusive teaching, policy, and peer dynamics are essential for advancing gender equality in schools. This is supported by the study's consistent agreement across all indicators.

### Qualitative Data Analysis on the lived experiences of students regarding the safe learning practices in shaping gender sensitivity

As a researcher, I discovered that the existence of a safe and welcoming learning environment had a significant impact on students' views of gender sensitivity. Their actual experiences with peer acceptance, inclusive teaching methods, and gender-responsive instruction are examined in this study. According to the statistics, students believe that safe learning environments are crucial for enabling them to openly express their gender identities, participate in civil gender discussions, and feel included in the classroom community. Their answers highlight how students are more likely to adopt favorable views about gender sensitivity when educational practices support inclusion and recognize a range of identities. This study aims to support schools' ongoing efforts to create egalitarian, inclusive, and needs-sensitive learning environments for all students, regardless of gender identity or expression, by highlighting these attitudes.

Table 8. *Lived Experiences of the Respondents on the Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity in terms of (Theme) Gender-Responsive Teaching and Learning*

Code	Description	Extracts
Supportive Teaching Practices	Teachers foster respect, openness, and discussions around gender sensitivity.	"Having studied in a safe and inclusive learning environment, I experienced firsthand how it fosters gender sensitivity. Teachers encouraged open discussions on gender equality and respect, which made me feel more confident in expressing my thoughts."
Equal Treatment and Respect	Educators teach students to treat one another equally, regardless of gender.	"The teachers teach students not to discriminate based on gender. Instead, they treat everyone equally and with respect."
Inclusivity and Awareness	Teachers promote recognition and respect for various gender identities and expressions.	"A safe learning space has helped me recognize the importance of respecting different gender identities and expressions."
Challenges In Expression	Some students still experience homophobia or bullying from peers, despite a safe space.	"I experience safety for myself but face difficulty at the same time, because some students still engage in bullying." "I think it still needs improvement, especially in how other students treat one another. Many still cannot express themselves clearly."

**Analysis:** Under the category of Gender-Responsive Teaching and Learning, Table 8 displays the respondents' actual experiences with the role that safe learning practices play in fostering gender sensitivity. Both pleasant experiences and lingering difficulties are reflected in the key codes or categories that are used to organize the replies. Many students feel empowered by professors who encourage open conversations, treat all genders equally, and recognize varied gender identities, as evidenced by three well-known codes: Inclusivity and Awareness, Equal Treatment and Respect, and Supportive Teaching Practices. Even when there are institutional or teacher-led initiatives in place, peer-level relationships still require development, as the Challenges in Expression category emphasizes persistent problems like homophobia and peer bullying.

**Interpretation:** According to the qualitative findings, students often view their classrooms as secure environments where inclusive and supportive instruction fosters gender awareness. This aligns with initiatives to provide gender-responsive teaching in classrooms, where all children, regardless of their gender identity, are valued and feel heard. However, as some respondents still experience prejudice or struggle to express their gender identity publicly, the findings also show a gap between peer behavior and teacher efforts. This dichotomy implies that even while gender-sensitive teaching methods are becoming more common, a whole-school strategy that incorporates behavior modeling and peer education is still required to guarantee the emotional and psychological well-being of every student.

These results support the findings of Lopez and Andal (2024), who pointed out that although educators can serve as role models for inclusive behaviors, peer behavior in particular and the larger school culture are crucial in maintaining gender sensitivity. Similar to this, Gutierrez (2015) recognized the necessity of constant reinforcement at all levels of the learning environment while also stressing the value of reflective and collaborative education in fostering a safe space for discussion and acceptance. This lends credence to the use of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which contends that children pick up behavior via peer observation as well as from authoritative individuals. Therefore, efforts must go beyond teaching tactics and incorporate focused peer education and intervention

initiatives in order to enhance safe learning habits.

**Table 9. Lived Experiences of the Respondents on the Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity in terms of (Theme) Inclusive Education Policies and Practices**

Code	Description	Extracts
Welcoming School Climate	Inclusive school environments foster confidence, motivation, and identity development.	“Here at Pitogo Community High School, the environment is acceptably calm and motivating, and it does not exclude anyone.” “I feel comfortable expressing my gender. My environment encourages me to act freely.”
Encouragement and Expression	Policies and practices help students feel empowered and supported to express gender identity.	“Having experienced a safe learning space, I felt comfortable expressing my thoughts and identity without fear of discrimination.” “Growing up in an inclusive environment, I learned to appreciate and respect individuals.”
Nurturing Confidence	Policies boost self-esteem and help learners discover and affirm their gender identity.	“Dito sa aming paaralan... mismong sila ang tumutulong na i-boost ang confidence ko sa aking sarili. Dito mas lalo kong nahuhubog ang aking kasarian, nararanasan ko ang pagiging malaya ngunit ito ay may limitasyon.”

**Analysis:** Under the category of Inclusive Education Policies and methods, Table 9 details the respondents' actual experiences with safe learning methods in fostering gender sensitivity. Four major categories emerge from the qualitative data: Nurturing Confidence, Policy-Based Support, Encouragement and Expression, and Welcoming School Climate. Every topic emphasizes how inclusive policies help to establish a classroom where kids feel valued, protected, and free to express their gender identities. Students recognized the value of having school rules that protect equality and freedom of gender expression under Policy-Based Support. Students are encouraged to be themselves since the school climate is seen as peaceful, accepting, and non-discriminatory, according to the code Welcoming School Climate. The subject of Encouragement and Expression highlights how inclusive policies support children in boldly expressing who they are. Finally, Nurturing Confidence highlights how, with the assistance of school staff, gender-sensitive policies assist students in developing self-worth and identifying their gender identities.

**Interpretation:** The responses show that inclusive education policies foster a school culture that actively promotes the holistic development of all students, particularly those who are exploring or asserting multiple gender identities. They do more than just set regulations. The respondents' perception of their school environment as a secure place is confirmed by the repeated focus on acceptance, confidence, and freedom of speech. The emotional and social development of pupils is greatly impacted by inclusive policies that are not just in place on paper but are also being implemented and absorbed in day-to-day school life, according to their lived experiences.

These results support Cardinal's (2021) research, which emphasized that inclusive school policies empower children by fostering safe spaces and recognizing their identities. Similarly, the Casas et al. (2024) study supports the notion that students gain more self-assurance and appreciation for diversity when they encounter gender sensitivity in the classroom. Vygotsky's theory of social development, which emphasizes the importance of social contact in forming identity and learning, is consistent with the stories from Pitogo, Quezon. Therefore, inclusive education policies and practices foster a culture of acceptance, development, and gender equality in schools in addition to defending students' rights.

**Table 10. Lived Experiences of the Respondents on the Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity in terms of (Theme) Peer Acceptance**

Code	Description	Extracts
Peer Collaboration	Students feel accepted by classmates and collaborate regardless of gender.	“As a student, I feel more comfortable expressing myself... We collaborate regardless of gender, showing that skill matters more than stereotypes.”
Affirmation and Identity	Peer acceptance leads students to feel affirmed in their gender identity and self-worth.	“My classmates accept me for who I am, that's why I stopped pretending to be someone I'm not.” “I don't feel like I don't belong... I'm part of the LGBTQA++ community and happy to say that.”
Emotional Well-being	Supportive peers help students feel emotionally secure and reduce fear of judgment.	“Having a safe learning environment helps my friends express themselves freely without fear or discrimination.” “My schoolmates and peers do not make offensive jokes or remarks about gender identities.”
Respect and Inspiration	Peer respect becomes a motivating factor for students to continue their education and remain resilient.	“Para po sa akin, ang nakahubog po sa akin upang magpatuloy sa pag-aaral ay ang paggalang ng aking mga kaklase... ginagawa ko itong inspirasyon upang mas patatagin ko pa ang aking sarili pagdating sa paaralan.”
Persistent Stereotyping	Some students still feel judged or forced to conform to gender norms, although many also report pockets of acceptance.	“As a boy who is naturally soft in expressing emotions... I have often been expected to toughen up... but there are people who do not judge me and accept me for who I am.”

**Analysis:** Respondents' lived experiences with Safe Learning Practices in fostering gender sensitivity, particularly in relation to peer acceptance, are shown in Table 10. Based on student responses, the data were divided into five main themes: Persistent Stereotyping, Emotional Well-Being, Respect and Inspiration, Affirmation and Identity, and Peer Collaboration. Students reported feeling welcomed by their peers under the Peer cooperation category, suggesting that cooperation occurs irrespective of gender identification. During the Affirmation and Identity topic, students discussed how peer acceptance aided them in embracing their gender identity, which in turn improved their sense of value. Peer support creates a secure space, lowering fear of criticism and promoting unrestricted self-expression, according to experiences with emotional well-being. Another important topic was respect and inspiration, as students reported that peer respect encourages them to continue their education and maintain their fortitude in the face of adversity. Though these are frequently rejected by encouraging peer groups, the subject of persistent stereotyping demonstrates that certain children continue to face gender-based expectations and biases.

**Interpretation:** Peer acceptance is crucial in creating gender-sensitive learning settings, as indicated by the qualitative responses in Table 10. Students are empowered to freely and confidently express who they are when they receive peer cooperation, affirmation, and emotional stability. These polite and safe encounters enhance their emotional fortitude and level of educational engagement. The persistence of stereotyping, however, indicates that despite the advancements, more has to be done to erase gender prejudices in school communities completely. This intricacy emphasizes the necessity of continual education and discussion to question social norms and promote sensitivity, particularly with regard to non-conforming gender presentations.

According to Souza et al. (2025) and Casas et al. (2024), peer dynamics have a major impact on gender inclusion in classrooms. These findings are consistent with their findings. While Casas et al. underlined the value of organized treatments in promoting empathy and acceptance among learners, Souza et al. stressed that inclusive peer relationships lessen the emotional toll of stereotyping. All of these lend credence to the notion that gender sensitivity and genuine peer acceptance result from safe learning methods that are implemented by students and supported by the school culture.

Table 11. *Significant Difference on the Perceived Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity of Senior High School Students when Grouped According to Age.*

Senior High School Students when Grouped According to Age.						
Groups	N	Median	df	P - value	Significant Level	Decision
16 years old below	26	3.9	2	0.294962794	0.05	Accept Ho
17-18 years old	96	4.0				
19 years old & above	8	4.0				
H	2.441812102					
chi-square	5.991464547					
p-value	0.294962794					

Table 11 examines whether there are significant differences in how Senior High School students perceive the safe learning practices on shaping gender sensitivity when grouped by age. The age groups considered were 16 years and younger (n=26, median=3.9), 17-18 years old (n=96, median=4.0), and 19 years and older (n=8, median=4.0).

To determine whether these age groups have significantly different views, a statistical test was performed, which resulted in a chi-square statistic (H) of 2.441812102 with 2 degrees of freedom. The equivalent p-value is 0.294962794.

Based on a significance level (Alpha) of 0.05, the decision rule is to reject the null hypothesis (Ho) if the p-value is below the significance level. In this case, the p-value (0.294962794) was higher than the significance level (0.05). Therefore, the decision is to accept the null hypothesis.

Accepting the null hypothesis, which suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in the accepted impact of safe learning spaces on shaping gender sensitivity across age groups in Senior High School (16 and under, 17-18, and 19 and above). This result is in line with other studies that demonstrated that institutional procedures and teacher attitudes have a greater impact on gender sensitivity in education than does the age of students (Lopez & Andal, 2024). Similarly, Tu, Dupaya, and Buenaobra (2020) stressed that demographic characteristics like age are not necessarily statistically significant in predicting students' reaction to gender-sensitive pedagogy, even though they may exhibit minor variances in perception. Additionally, Gecana et al. (2017) emphasized that teachers' methods, not the pupils' age group, have a significant role in raising awareness and integrating gender sensitivity. When taken as a whole, these results demonstrate that gender-sensitive teaching methods may be successfully applied to a range of age groups, creating inclusive learning environments for all students.

Moreover, the result is similar to studies by De Silva and Pantić (2021), who highlighted the impact of consistent gender-responsive pedagogy and stressed the significance of safe learning settings in building gender sensitivity regardless of age. In a similar vein, Lugay et al. (2019) emphasized that institutional support and teaching practices that foster gender sensitivity have a wide range of benefits on students of different ages. Furthermore, UNESCO (2019) and other international frameworks emphasize the universal need for safe, inclusive schools that promote gender awareness for all pupils.

Table 12 investigates whether there are significant differences in Senior High School students' perceptions of the safe learning practices on shaping gender sensitivity based on their gender. The groups considered were Female (n=71, median=4.03), Male (n=53, median=4.07), and LGBTQA++ (n=6, median=3.60). A statistical test was performed to evaluate this possible difference, and the result

was a chi-square statistic (H) of 2.644466839 with 2 degrees of freedom. The equivalent p-value is 0.266539343.

Table 12. *Significant Difference on the Perceived Safe Learning Practices in Shaping Gender Sensitivity of Senior High School Students when Grouped According to Gender.*

Groups	N	Median	df	P - value	Significant Level	Decision
Female	71	4.03	2	0.266539343	0.05	Accept Ho
Male	53	4.07				
LGBTQA++	6	3.60				
H	2.644466839					
chi-square	5.991464547					
p-value	0.266539343					

At a given importance level (Alpha) of 0.05, the rule of thumb is to maintain the null hypothesis (Ho) if the p-value is greater than the importance level. In this case, the p-value (0.266539343) is greater than the significance level (0.05). Thus, the decision is to accept the null hypothesis.

Acceptance of the null hypothesis suggests that there is no significant difference in how the body of existing research substantiates gender-diverse Senior High School students (Female, Male, LGBTQA++). The success of gender-responsive pedagogy, according to Lopez and Andal (2024), depends more on the teacher's dedication to inclusive instruction than on the students' gender identification. Their research in public elementary schools showed that pedagogical method has a greater impact on sensitivity in education than student demographics. According to Tu, Dupaya, and Buenaobra (2020), inclusive solutions, when consistently implemented, may guarantee that students of all genders benefit equally from gender-sensitive education, even when gender identity may lead to minor differences in student perspectives. These results provide credence to the notion that, even if students may identify as different genders, when safe and inclusive learning environments are implemented well, their general opinions of them stay consistently good.

This result also suggests that students usually view safe learning settings as having a comparable impact on promoting gender sensitivity across a range of gender identities. It implies a level of consistency in these approaches' efficacy or visibility, which can be a reflection of inclusive teaching methods already ingrained in the curriculum.

The outcome is supported by earlier research that highlights the advantages of effectively implemented inclusive education policy for all students, irrespective of gender identification. For instance, Barrett (2020) and Cardinal (2021) support polite conversation and inclusive educational practices that empower every kid. Valencia (2017) also emphasized how institutionalizing gender awareness programs helps to create safe places equitably. The slightly lower median score among LGBTQA++ respondents, however, can nonetheless indicate minor differences in representation or inclusion that are important to note. In a comparable perspective, Souza et al. (2025) pointed out that gender minorities frequently experience undercurrents of exclusion even in inclusive contexts, highlighting the necessity for ongoing changes.

Table 13. *Significant Difference on the Perceived Safe Learning Spaces in Shaping Gender Sensitivity of Senior High School Students when Grouped According to Grade Level.*

Groups	N	Median	df	P - value	Significant Level	Decision
Grade 11	55	3.93	1	0.209167799	0.05	Accept Ho
Grade 12	75	4.0				
H	1.57717696					
chi-square	5.991464547					
p-value	0.209167799					

Table 13 shows whether there is a significant difference in the perceptions of Senior High School students from Grade 11 (n=55, median=3.93) and Grade 12 (n=75, median=4.0) about the impact of safe learning spaces on shaping gender sensitivity. The statistical test performed results in a chi-square statistic (H) of 1.57717696 with 1 degree of freedom and a p-value of 0.209167799. Since the p-value is higher than the set significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating that there is no significant difference in perspective between the two grade levels. Both of these perspectives strongly suggest that the positive influence of safe learning spaces on gender sensitivity is experienced by both Grade 11 and Grade 12 students, further supported by existing research. For example, Casas et al. (2024) validate the effectiveness of gender sensitivity training within safe learning spaces at different levels of Senior High School.

Moreover, the result is in line with other studies that highlight the significance of consistent and all-encompassing approaches to gender-sensitive teaching at all educational levels. Students of all skill levels exhibit understanding and acceptance of multiple gender identities when teachers regularly implement gender-responsive tactics, claim Lugay et al. (2019) and Lualhati (2019). Madriaga (2023) also emphasized the need of institutional policies in establishing consistent gender sensitivity norms at all educational levels, guaranteeing that secure learning environments are preserved throughout students' academic careers.

In conclusion, statistical analysis across grade level, gender, and age consistently shows no significant differences in how Senior High School students assess the influence of safe learning practices in fostering gender sensitivity. The null hypothesis is accepted in each instance since the p-values for age (0.295), gender (0.267), and grade level (0.209) in each comparison are more than the 0.05 significance threshold. This suggests that students have comparable opinions and experiences on how well safe learning settings

promote gender sensitivity, irrespective of their age group, gender identity, or academic standing. These findings imply that inclusive and gender-responsive teaching methods should be used consistently to a range of student populations. According to supporting research, gender-sensitive pedagogy, institutional support, and well-designed safe learning environments all help to create fair peer relationships and respect for all gender identities (Gutierrez, 2015; Tantengco & Maramag, 2016; Lugay et al., 2019; Madriaga, 2023). Thus, the results emphasize how important it is to use inclusive, consistent teaching methods to help students develop gender awareness.

## Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are derived: Most of the Senior High School students are seventeen to eighteen years old, and majority of them are female. Most of the respondents are from Grade 12. Safe learning practices—characterized by inclusive policies, supportive peer interactions, and gender-responsive teaching—significantly contribute to shaping learners' gender sensitivity. These environments promote respect, equality, and openness to gender diversity. Despite overall positive perceptions, the presence of diverse communities (such as LGBTQA++) signals the need for more tailored and inclusive practices to fully support all learners. Respondents' perception of the effects of safe learning practices on shaping gender sensitivity does not vary by age, sex, or grade level.

As a result of the study, the researcher would like to recommend the following: To the School Administrators, they may strengthen inclusive policies and provide training for teachers to maintain safe, supportive learning environments for all students. To Parents, they may encourage open conversations about gender diversity and support inclusive values at home and in school. Teachers may use gender-responsive teaching strategies, promote respect in the classroom, and address bullying promptly. To the Students, they may show respect and support to peers of all gender identities and help create a positive, inclusive school culture. Future researchers may study the long-term impact of safe learning practices on gender sensitivity and explore the challenges faced by gender minorities in schools.

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