

The Interplay of Gender, Culture and Inclusivity in Teaching Literature

Gerica Silades Porta, Maria Lady Sol Azarcon Suazo

Department of Education, North Eastern Mindanao State University/ Gamut National High School,
Tandag City, Surigao Del Sur, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Literature instruction plays a crucial role in shaping learners' understanding of identity, diversity, and social realities. In policy, Philippine education promotes gender equality, cultural responsiveness, and inclusive pedagogy; however, a persistent mismatch remains between these policy ideals and actual classroom practices. Many literature classrooms continue to privilege dominant cultural narratives, with marginalized voices and diverse gender identities underrepresented in texts and discussions. At the same time, subtle forms of gender bias persist through traditional text selection and classroom discourse, raising concerns about the inclusivity of literature instruction.

This study examined the interplay of gender, culture, and inclusivity in teaching literature in selected public secondary schools in the Tago District, Division of Surigao del Sur. Using a Slovin's Formula with a 5% margin of error, quantitative data were collected from 378 Grade 10 learners and literature teachers through structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics was employed, and findings were integrated during interpretation.

Findings reveal that gender and cultural dimensions interact with instructional practices to shape the level of inclusivity in literature instruction. While inclusive practices are evident in text selection, classroom interaction, and instructional adaptation, inconsistencies remain in the meaningful representation of diverse identities. Based on these findings, a pedagogical framework was developed to strengthen the integration of gender-responsive and culturally inclusive practices in literature teaching.

Keywords: inclusive literature education, culturally responsive pedagogy, gender-inclusive teaching, literature instruction, multicultural education

INTRODUCTION

Literature instruction in secondary education is more than the appreciation of texts; it is a formative space that shapes how young learners understand identity, diversity, and social realities. This study examines the interplay of gender, culture, and inclusivity in the teaching of literature in Philippine public secondary schools, with particular focus on the Tago District, Schools Division of Surigao del Sur. In this study, interplay refers to the dynamic interaction among these three dimensions, specifically how gender is represented, how cultural narratives are positioned, and how inclusive practices are enacted in literature classrooms. Although Philippine classrooms are expected to cultivate empathy, critical thinking, and inclusive values anchored on gender equality and cultural diversity, the continued reliance on dominant literary traditions and the limited representation of diverse gender identities and local cultural narratives raise concerns about the relevance of literature instruction to Filipino learners' lived experiences. Drawing on the perspectives of both teachers and learners, the study frames gender and culture as intertwined elements that together shape whether literature instruction truly reflects, respects, and includes the diverse identities of its audience.

Several scholars and educational institutions have raised concerns regarding the lack of representation and inclusivity in literature instruction. Hatmanto and Rahmawati (2023) argued that many literature curricula in Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, continue to rely heavily on Western literary canon, which often excludes local voices and diverse gender identities. Supporting the need for more inclusive approaches, Gay

(2010) emphasized culturally responsive teaching that connects literary content to students' lived experiences. In line with these perspectives, DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, or the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy, institutionalizes efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes and promote equity in all learning areas. However, despite these theoretical and policy directions, Caingcoy et al. (2022) reported that teachers in public schools experience limited access to inclusive teaching resources and insufficient training on gender-sensitive pedagogy, which constrains effective implementation. Similarly, DepEd's 2023 Learning Recovery and Continuity Plan underscores the importance of learner-centered and contextually relevant instruction but does not fully translate these principles into concrete inclusive literature practices. These studies indicate that while existing literature and policies strongly support inclusive and culturally responsive instruction, challenges in resources, training, and implementation continue to hinder their consistent application in literature classrooms.

At the local level, gaps remain evident between the diverse realities of learners and the inclusivity of literature instruction in actual classroom practice. In the Schools Division of Surigao del Sur, a considerable number of secondary learners come from rural barangays, including those from indigenous communities and gender-diverse groups, yet classroom materials often fail to reflect this diversity. Empirical evidence indicates that when literary content is not aligned with learners' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, students tend to exhibit disengagement, reduced participation, and limited comprehension (Anyichie et al., 2023). Moreover, studies show that teachers, while generally supportive of inclusive education, often demonstrate only moderate understanding of inclusive practices due to limited professional preparation and training (Nuñez & Rosales, 2023). These conditions, along with the scarcity of localized empirical studies examining the interaction of gender, culture, and inclusivity in literature teaching, highlight a clear research gap that necessitates further investigation.

This study holds significance in its potential to contribute meaningful insights and practical frameworks that support inclusive teaching in local settings. By investigating how gender and culture are embedded or neglected in literature instruction, and by capturing the lived classroom experiences of both learners and teachers, the research aims to inform curriculum development, teacher training programs, and policy implementation. The study aspires to bridge the gap between inclusive education policy and actual classroom practice, thereby supporting the broader goals of DepEd and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). In doing so, it seeks to empower educators and learners in the Tago District and similar contexts to engage with literature that reflects and respects their unique identities and lived experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culturally Responsive and Gender-Inclusive Pedagogical Practices

Culturally responsive pedagogy is widely recognized as an instructional approach that integrates learners' cultural knowledge and experiences into teaching practices. This approach acknowledges that students' cultural backgrounds influence how they interpret learning materials and participate in classroom discussions (Anyichie et al., 2023; Mercado, 2021).

Research demonstrates that culturally responsive teaching practices contribute to meaningful learning experiences. Anyichie et al. (2023) found that instructional strategies that incorporate learners' cultural contexts significantly increase students' engagement and participation in learning activities. Similarly, Mercado (2021) reported that integrating local cultural knowledge into classroom instruction strengthens students' sense of identity and belonging in educational settings.

Furthermore, culturally responsive pedagogy helps address linguistic and cultural barriers in language education. Salgado et al. (2024) explained that teachers who integrate culturally familiar contexts into instruction enable learners to understand literary concepts more effectively. Likewise, Caingcoy et al. (2022) observed that teachers who demonstrate cultural competence are more capable of designing lessons that reflect students' cultural backgrounds.

Gender-sensitive teaching also plays an important role in promoting inclusive learning environments. Tarrayo (2023) emphasized that incorporating gender perspectives into literature instruction encourages students to

critically examine gender stereotypes present in literary texts. Similarly, Sruthi (2024) explained that gender-sensitive education promotes equal participation among learners and challenges traditional gender biases in classroom interactions.

Moreover, gender-inclusive pedagogical practices contribute to improved student participation in literature classes. William et al. (2025) found that gender-sensitive teaching approaches enhance students' literacy engagement and encourage balanced participation among learners. These findings suggest that integrating gender equality and cultural inclusivity into instructional practices supports the development of inclusive literature classrooms.

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions on Inclusivity

Perceptions of inclusivity among both teachers and students play a critical role in determining how inclusive practices are understood, implemented, and experienced in literature classrooms. Recent studies reveal that while teachers generally express positive attitudes toward inclusivity, their perceptions are often shaped by contextual constraints such as limited training, lack of resources, and institutional support. Beltran et al. (2025) found that teachers recognize the importance of inclusive education but encounter significant challenges in translating these beliefs into practice due to systemic barriers. This indicates that positive teacher perception alone is insufficient without adequate structural support.

Teachers also perceive inclusivity as closely tied to their ability to address diverse cultural and gender identities within instruction. Caingcoy et al. (2022) emphasized that teachers view culturally responsive teaching as essential for promoting engagement and equity, highlighting the importance of competence in handling diverse learners. However, teachers' perceptions are influenced by their level of preparedness, with insufficient training often leading to uncertainty in implementing inclusive strategies. Similarly, Lange and von Stockhausen (2025) noted that teachers' attitudes toward gender-inclusive language are shaped by sociocultural contexts, suggesting that inclusivity is not only pedagogical but also socially constructed.

From the **students' perspective**, inclusivity is primarily associated with feelings of belonging, recognition, and representation in the classroom. Larson (2024) found that students perceive inclusive teaching as one where teachers acknowledge their identities, celebrate diversity, and ensure that all learners are supported. Students emphasized that inclusive classrooms are those where they feel valued and where instruction reflects their cultural and personal experiences. This perception highlights the importance of representation in literature, as students are more engaged when they see themselves reflected in texts.

Moreover, students' perceptions of inclusivity are strongly linked to classroom interactions and teaching approaches. Anyichie et al. (2023) reported that culturally responsive and student-centered practices enhance learners' engagement by connecting classroom activities to their sociocultural backgrounds. Similarly, Cawaling-Mauntol and Padua (2022) found that students benefit from collaborative and interactive learning environments, which promote socialization, confidence, and mutual respect. These findings suggest that students perceive inclusivity not only in terms of content but also through the quality of classroom relationships and interactions.

Objectives

This research aims to investigate both the lived experiences and practices of literature teachers in promoting inclusive education. Below are the specific objectives of this study.

1. To examine the level of students' and teachers' perceptions of inclusivity in teaching literature in terms of gender and cultural representation.
2. To analyze the level of engagement in using culturally responsive and gender-inclusive teaching strategies in terms of student engagement, critical thinking and empathy.
3. To evaluate the significant relationship between the level of teachers' and students' perceptions of inclusivity in literature curricula and their level of engagement of the culturally responsive and gender-inclusive pedagogies.

METHODS

Research design

In this study, quantitative data derived from survey responses measuring the perceived level of inclusivity and pedagogical engagement complement the qualitative data gathered through interviews and open-ended narratives exploring teachers' and students' lived experiences. The goal is to corroborate and contextualize patterns found in statistical trends with the rich narratives of classroom realities.

The quantitative component allows the study to systematically assess the level of gender sensitivity, cultural representation, and inclusive practices across classrooms, thereby providing generalizable patterns.

Research Respondents and Sampling

This study involved both learners and teachers from selected public secondary schools in the Tago District, Division of Surigao del Sur. The respondents were categorized according to the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research to ensure a comprehensive representation of perspectives on the interplay of gender, culture, and inclusivity in literature instruction.

The study utilized Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error to determine the sample size of learner-respondents. From a total population of 533 Grade 10 learners across five schools, 378 were identified as the appropriate sample size. These learners were currently enrolled in English literature classes. The selection ensured that the respondents were representative of the target population and directly relevant to the objectives of the study. Inclusion criteria for learners included enrollment in Grade 10 English literature, regular class attendance, and willingness to participate as evidenced by informed assent and parental consent. Learners who were not enrolled in literature classes, had irregular attendance, or declined participation were excluded from the study.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents

School	Learners Population Sample	Teachers Respondents	Total
Alba Integrated School	25	1	26
Clarence T. Pimentel National High School	92	1	93
Gamut National High School	160	2	162
Purísima National High School	73	2	75
Victoria Integrated School	28	1	29
Total	378	7	385

Research Instrumentation

To gather the data for this study, the researcher developed and administered a researcher-made structured questionnaire. This instrument was designed to collect quantitative information from literature teachers and students in selected public secondary schools in Tago, Surigao del Sur.

The first part of the instrument collected the profile of the participants. For teachers, this section included their position, designation, academic background, years in service, and participation in related trainings. For students, the profile section identified their curriculum strand and general academic performance based on their most recent Grade Point Average (GPA). These profile details provided contextual information for the interpretation of responses and supported the analysis of patterns across demographic groups.

The second part of the instrument focused on the participants' perceptions of inclusivity in literature instruction. This section assessed the extent to which gender and cultural identities were represented in the literary texts used in class and whether learners felt acknowledged and included in classroom materials and discussions. Both teachers and students answered the same set of statements, with minor adjustments in wording to reflect the respondents' point of view. This approach ensured consistency in interpretation and allowed comparison of responses across groups.

The third part measured the level of engagement in culturally responsive and gender-inclusive teaching strategies. The statements in this section examined aspects such as student participation, development of critical thinking, and the cultivation of empathy as influenced by literature instruction. Both teachers and students responded to the same content. This structure enabled the researcher to determine the degree of alignment between the instructional practices implemented by teachers and the learning experiences perceived by students.

To establish the validity of the instruments, the draft questionnaire underwent expert validation. The panel consisted of three specialists: one expert in English Language Teaching, one specialist in Gender and Development (GAD), and one expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation. The panel evaluated the instruments in terms of content relevance, clarity of statements, appropriateness of language, and alignment with the theoretical framework of the study, which included Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), Multicultural Education Theory (MET), and Differentiated Instruction (DI). The recommendations from the validators led to revisions in item wording, structure, and content coverage to ensure that the instruments measured the intended constructs of inclusivity, cultural responsiveness, and learner engagement. Face validity was also established through the presentation of the instruments to a small group of teachers and students to verify the clarity, comprehensibility, and appropriateness of the questions for the intended respondents.

The questionnaire was originally written in English and were translated into Cebuano-Bisaya to ensure that all respondents could clearly understand the statements and questions. This translation was necessary because some participants, especially students, may have difficulty interpreting concepts related to gender, culture, and inclusivity when presented only in English. The use of Cebuano-Bisaya, which is the commonly used language in the locality, helped reduce misunderstanding and allowed respondents to express their answers more accurately. The translation was done by a bilingual individual with a background in English Language Teaching and familiarity with the Cebuano-Bisaya language. Another bilingual reviewer examined the translated version to ensure that the meaning of each statement remained consistent with the original English version.

To further ensure accuracy, the translated items were translated back into English and compared with the original instrument to check for consistency in meaning. Necessary revisions were made to improve clarity, appropriateness, and accuracy of the language used. During pilot testing, respondents were given the option to answer either the English or the Cebuano-Bisaya version of the instrument. Feedback from the participants showed that the translated version helped them better understand the questions, particularly those who were more comfortable using Cebuano-Bisaya. This process ensured that the responses gathered reflected the actual understanding and experiences of the participants.

To determine reliability, the instruments underwent pilot testing with 15 participants, with three respondents from each of the five schools that were not included in the final sample. The pilot data were analyzed through Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal consistency of each section of the questionnaire. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher served as the acceptable threshold for internal consistency. The results of the pilot test also guided item analysis to detect statements that appeared ambiguous or weak in discrimination. Items that required improvement were revised before the final administration of the questionnaire. In addition, test-retest reliability was applied to a small subset of respondents to examine the stability of responses over time.

Data Collection

The researcher followed a systematic procedure in collecting the data required for this study. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured approval from the Division Office of Surigao del Sur and the participating public secondary schools in the municipality of Tago. A formal request letter was submitted to the school heads to explain the purpose and scope of the study and to request permission to administer the research instruments to selected teachers and students.

During the data collection sessions, the structured questionnaires were administered to both teachers and students. The researcher personally facilitated the administration of the survey instruments to ensure uniformity of instructions and to address clarifications when necessary. The quantitative data were encoded and organized for statistical analysis, the findings were integrated during the interpretation phase to provide a comprehensive

understanding of the interplay of gender, culture, and inclusivity in literature teaching.

This study adhered to established ethical standards and guidelines governing research involving human participants. The conduct of the researcher was guided by the principles of the *Belmont Report*, namely *respect for persons, beneficence, and justice*, as cited by Alexander Postalain (2023). These principles served as the foundation in ensuring that the research process was carried out in a manner that protected the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants.

Data Analysis

The process began with familiarization with the data. The researcher reviewed the transcripts several times to identify notable patterns, ideas, and reflective statements. The second stage involved the generation of initial codes. During this stage, the researcher identified meaningful statements or expressions and assigned labels that represented emerging concepts. The third stage involved the search for themes. Related codes were grouped together to form preliminary patterns that suggested shared meanings across the dataset. The fourth stage focused on the review of themes to confirm that each theme accurately represented the data and remained distinct from the others. The fifth stage involved defining and naming the themes. Each theme received a clear label that reflected its central meaning and its connection to the research problem. The final stage involved the preparation of the thematic report. The researcher interpreted the themes with the support of direct quotations from participants and discussed them in relation to the study's conceptual framework, particularly Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), and Differentiated Instruction (DI).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1. To examine the level of students' and teachers' perceptions of inclusivity in teaching literature in terms of gender and cultural representation.

Level of Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusivity in Teaching Literature

Understanding how inclusivity is perceived in literature instruction is important in determining whether classroom practices reflect equitable and culturally responsive teaching. Inclusivity in literature involves the representation of diverse identities, perspectives, and cultural experiences that allow learners to feel recognized and respected within the learning environment. Table 5 presents the level of students' and teachers' perceptions of inclusivity in teaching literature in terms of gender representation and cultural representation.

Table 2. Level of Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusivity in Teaching Literature

Indicators	Students		Teachers	
	Mean	Description	Mean	Description
Gender Presentation	4.19	Inclusive	4.47	Very Inclusive
Cultural Presentation	4.15	Inclusive	4.64	Very Inclusive
Overall	4.17	Inclusive	4.56	Very Inclusive

Objective 2. To analyze the level of engagement in using culturally responsive and gender-inclusive teaching strategies in terms of student engagement, critical thinking and empathy.

Level of Engagement in Using Culturally Responsive and Gender-Inclusive Teaching Strategies

The use of culturally responsive and gender-inclusive teaching strategies is essential in literature instruction because it helps create learning experiences that are relevant, participatory, and socially meaningful for learners. Such strategies are expected to strengthen not only students' classroom participation but also their ability to think critically and respond empathetically to diverse identities, experiences, and perspectives. Table 6 presents the level of engagement in using culturally responsive and gender-inclusive teaching strategies in terms of student engagement, critical thinking, and empathy.

Table 3. Level of Engagement in Using Culturally Responsive and Gender-Inclusive Teaching Strategies

Indicators	Students		Teachers	
	Mean	Description	Mean	Description
Students Engagement	4.24	Inclusive	4.27	Very Inclusive
Critical Thinking	4.16	Inclusive	4.51	Very Inclusive
Empathy	4.23	Inclusive	4.61	Very Inclusive
Overall	4.21	Inclusive	4.46	Very Inclusive

The findings show that among the three indicators, empathy obtained the highest mean among teachers, while critical thinking obtained the lowest mean among students. Despite this difference, the overall results indicate that both teachers and students perceived a high level of engagement in the use of culturally responsive and gender-inclusive teaching strategies. This suggests that such strategies are generally evident in literature instruction, although some dimensions appear more strongly experienced than others.

The highest rating in empathy implies that teachers view culturally responsive and gender-inclusive strategies as particularly effective in helping learners understand other people's emotions, life situations, struggles, and perspectives. This finding suggests that literature classes are seen as spaces where students are encouraged to develop sensitivity, compassion, and respect for differences. Since literature naturally exposes learners to human experiences across gender, culture, and identity, the strong emphasis on empathy may indicate that teachers intentionally use texts and discussions to cultivate emotional understanding and social awareness.

This finding is consistent with the view that literature instruction becomes more meaningful when it connects learners to the lived realities of others. De Jesus-Reyes (2024) emphasized that the integration of multicultural literature fosters inclusivity, empathy, and critical reflection among students because diverse narratives allow them to engage with perspectives beyond their own immediate experience. In the same way, Rosales and Sarce (2023) explained that multicultural literature teaching in the Philippines helps learners appreciate multiplicities and respect differences within and beyond their own communities. These studies support the present finding that empathy is strongly promoted when literature teaching becomes culturally inclusive and socially relevant.

The results also align with the argument that culturally responsive pedagogy strengthens students' sense of belonging and human connection in the classroom. Salgado et al. (2024) found that when instruction is aligned with students' cultural backgrounds and experiences, learners demonstrate stronger participation, improved communication, and more meaningful engagement in classroom tasks. Similarly, Larson (2024) reported that students value inclusive classrooms when they feel recognized, celebrated, and connected to the learning environment. These findings help explain why empathy emerged strongly in the present study, since inclusive strategies often make students more aware of both their own identities and the identities of others.

On the other hand, the lowest mean in critical thinking among students suggests that although culturally responsive and gender-inclusive strategies are present, students may not experience the critical dimension of these strategies as strongly as teachers perceive them. This implies that while learners may feel engaged and emotionally connected to literature lessons, they may still need more structured opportunities to analyze deeper issues, compare viewpoints, question stereotypes, and connect texts to broader social realities. In other words, the strategies may already support classroom interaction and empathy, but their impact on analytical and evaluative thinking may require stronger and more explicit scaffolding.

This result may be understood in light of previous studies showing that critical thinking does not automatically develop simply through exposure to diverse materials. Rather, it must be intentionally cultivated through questioning, reflection, comparison, and discussion. Anyichie et al. (2023) found that student engagement becomes deeper when classroom tasks deliberately integrate culturally responsive practices with opportunities for self-regulated and reflective learning. Likewise, Cawaling-Mauntol and Padua (2022) pointed out that culturally responsive pedagogy can help learners develop critical thinking when teachers contextualize instruction and allow students to examine issues from multiple cultural viewpoints. These studies suggest that critical thinking grows when inclusive strategies are paired with purposeful cognitive tasks, not only with representation or participation alone.

The relatively stronger teacher ratings across all indicators may also reflect a difference between instructional intention and learner experience. Teachers may believe that their strategies already foster participation, reflection, and empathy at a very high level because these are embedded in their lesson planning and classroom facilitation. Students, however, may judge engagement based on how these strategies are actually felt during discussions, activities, and text analysis. Hatmanto and Rahmawati (2023) found that teachers generally hold positive attitudes toward differentiated and inclusive teaching practices, but actual implementation is often influenced by time limitations, resource constraints, and varying student needs. In a similar way, Nuñez and Rosales (2022) noted that teachers may express favorable attitudes toward inclusive education even when practical limitations prevent full realization in classroom settings. These perspectives help explain why teachers in the present study reported higher levels of engagement than students did.

Moreover, the generally high ratings in student engagement indicate that culturally responsive and gender-inclusive teaching strategies make literature classes more participatory and meaningful. William et al. (2025) reported that gender-sensitive pedagogy enhances student participation and literacy performance by using inclusive language, fair representation, and participatory methods. Muzaffarova (2024) likewise argued that culturally responsive teaching creates accessible and engaging learning environments by recognizing learners' identities and promoting collaborative, supportive classroom experiences. These studies reinforce the present result that when literature instruction becomes inclusive and responsive, learners are more likely to become interested, involved, and motivated in class activities.

Objective 3. To evaluate the significant relationship between the level of teachers' and students' perceptions of inclusivity in literature curricula and their level of engagement of the culturally responsive and gender-inclusive pedagogies.

Relationship Between the Level of Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Inclusivity in Literature Curricula and their Level of Engagement of the Culturally Responsive and Gender-Inclusive Pedagogies

Determining whether perceptions of inclusivity in literature curricula influence engagement in culturally responsive and gender-inclusive pedagogies is essential in evaluating the effectiveness of inclusive teaching practices in literature instruction. When teachers and students view literature instruction as inclusive in terms of gender and cultural representation, it may encourage greater participation, deeper reflection, and stronger social awareness among learners. Analyzing this relationship helps determine whether inclusive perceptions are associated with meaningful classroom engagement outcomes such as student engagement, critical thinking, and empathy.

Table 4. Relationship Between the Level of Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusivity in Literature Curricula and their Level of Engagement of the Culturally Responsive and Gender-Inclusive Pedagogies

Variables Tested		Computer r	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Student Engagement	Gender	0.962	**0.001	Reject Ho	Significant
	Cultural	0.171	0.714	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
Critical Thinking	Gender	0.382	0.398	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Cultural	0.337	0.460	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
Empathy	Gender	0.381	0.399	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Cultural	0.631	0.129	Failed to reject Ho	Not Significant

Table 4 presents the correlation analysis between teachers' perceptions of inclusivity in literature curricula and their level of engagement in culturally responsive and gender-inclusive pedagogies. The results reveal that only one variable demonstrated a significant relationship, while the remaining variables showed no significant relationship. Specifically, gender representation and student engagement obtained the highest correlation coefficient with a p-value of 0.001, indicating a significant relationship. This suggests that teachers who perceive literature curricula as inclusive in terms of gender representation tend to demonstrate higher engagement in implementing pedagogical strategies that promote student engagement.

In contrast, gender representation and cultural representation with critical thinking and empathy indicators did not show significant relationships. Among these variables, the lowest correlation coefficient was observed between cultural representation and student engagement, indicating a very weak association. These findings suggest that although teachers recognize inclusive elements in literature curricula, such perceptions may not always translate directly into engagement strategies that promote higher-order thinking and empathy among learners.

The significant relationship between gender representation and student engagement indicates that teachers who value gender inclusivity in literature may intentionally design activities that encourage participation and discussion in the classroom. When literary texts present balanced gender perspectives, teachers may be more motivated to involve learners in interactive discussions that promote understanding of gender roles, identities, and experiences.

This finding is consistent with the study of Hasiyatiningasih (2025), which emphasized that gender-sensitive education encourages teachers to adopt pedagogical practices that actively engage students in discussions about equality, representation, and social awareness. According to the study, inclusive classroom practices are often associated with higher levels of student participation and engagement because learners feel that their perspectives and identities are recognized in the learning process.

Similarly, Tarrayo (2023) explained that integrating gender perspectives into English and literature teaching can promote meaningful classroom interaction and reflective dialogue among learners. Teachers who recognize gender representation in literary texts are more likely to facilitate discussions that encourage learners to explore diverse viewpoints and social issues.

However, the lack of significant relationships between inclusivity perceptions and other engagement indicators such as critical thinking and empathy suggests that recognizing inclusive representation in literature does not automatically lead to deeper cognitive and emotional outcomes in the classroom. Teachers may acknowledge inclusive content but may not consistently integrate pedagogical strategies that fully develop higher-order thinking skills or empathetic understanding among students.

This observation aligns with the findings of Beltran et al. (2025), who reported that although teachers often demonstrate awareness of inclusive education principles, translating these principles into effective classroom practices requires deliberate pedagogical strategies and professional development. The study highlighted that inclusive perceptions alone may not be sufficient to produce meaningful learning outcomes without structured instructional approaches.

Overall, the results suggest that teachers' perceptions of inclusivity in literature curricula are partially associated with their engagement in inclusive pedagogies, particularly in promoting student engagement. However, the limited number of significant relationships indicates that additional pedagogical support and instructional strategies may be necessary to strengthen the connection between inclusive perceptions and broader learning outcomes.

Table 5. Relationship Between the Level of Students' Perceptions of Inclusivity in Literature Curricula and their Level of Engagement of the Culturally Responsive and Gender-Inclusive Pedagogies

Variables Tested		Computer r	p-value	Decision	Conclusion
Student Engagement	Gender	0.607	**0.000	Reject Ho	Highly Significant
	Cultural	0.616	**0.000	Reject Ho	Highly Significant
Critical Thinking	Gender	0.567	**0.000	Reject Ho	Highly Significant
	Cultural	0.615	**0.000	Reject Ho	Highly Significant
Empathy	Gender	0.621	**0.000	Reject Ho	Highly Significant
	Cultural	0.541	**0.000	Reject Ho	Highly Significant

Table 5 presents the correlation analysis between students' perceptions of inclusivity in literature curricula and their level of engagement in culturally responsive and gender-inclusive pedagogies. The results indicate that all

variables demonstrated highly significant relationships, as evidenced by the p-values of 0.000 across all engagement indicators. The findings show that students' perceptions of inclusivity in literature curricula are strongly associated with their engagement in culturally responsive and gender-inclusive pedagogical practices.

Among the variables, the highest correlation coefficient was observed between gender representation and empathy, indicating that students who perceive gender inclusivity in literature curricula tend to demonstrate stronger empathetic engagement in classroom learning. This suggests that inclusive literary content can encourage students to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives and experiences.

Similarly, student engagement and cultural representation and critical thinking and cultural representation also demonstrated strong relationships. These findings imply that when students perceive literature curricula as culturally inclusive, they are more likely to actively participate in classroom discussions and critically analyze literary texts that reflect diverse cultural perspectives.

The lowest correlation coefficient was found between empathy and cultural representation, although this relationship remained highly significant. This indicates that while cultural inclusivity contributes to empathetic engagement, other factors may also influence the development of empathy among learners.

These results suggest that students' perceptions of inclusivity play a critical role in shaping their engagement in learning activities. When students perceive literature instruction as inclusive and reflective of diverse identities and cultures, they may feel more connected to the learning content, which encourages participation, critical reflection, and emotional understanding.

This finding supports the study of Larson (2024), which found that students demonstrate higher engagement and motivation when teachers implement culturally responsive teaching practices that acknowledge and value students' cultural identities. According to the study, inclusive classroom environments promote meaningful participation and deeper learning experiences among students.

Similarly, Anyichie et al. (2023) emphasized that culturally responsive pedagogy encourages learners to engage in self-regulated learning and critical reflection by connecting academic content with students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. This approach helps students develop both cognitive and socio-emotional competencies, including empathy and critical thinking.

Furthermore, Muzaffarova (2024) explained that culturally responsive teaching strategies enhance students' awareness of diversity and encourage them to analyze social issues reflected in literary texts. By exposing learners to diverse cultural narratives and perspectives, literature instruction can foster critical thinking and empathy among students.

The strong relationships observed in Table 4, therefore indicate that students who perceive literature curricula as inclusive are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of engagement, critical thinking, and empathy in the learning process. Inclusive literature instruction may provide meaningful opportunities for students to explore social issues, reflect on cultural differences, and develop greater understanding of others' experiences.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study show that gender, culture, and inclusivity work together within the process of teaching literature, influencing both how teachers teach and how students learn. These elements do not function separately; instead, they are interconnected in classroom practices such as text selection, discussion, and student interaction. The high levels of perceived inclusivity and engagement suggest that literature classes already reflect inclusive intentions, but the stronger relationships observed among students indicate that inclusivity becomes more meaningful when it is experienced through active participation, reflection, and connection to literary texts.

The results also confirm that inclusivity is primarily an instructional process rather than a simple reflection of classroom diversity. The lack of significant relationships between most profile variables and both perceptions and engagement suggest that inclusivity does not depend on who the teachers or students are, but on how teaching is designed and carried out. Inclusive practices are evident in the way teachers select texts, facilitate discussions,

and adapt instruction to meet diverse needs. In this sense, inclusivity is not something that naturally occurs in diverse classrooms; it is something that is intentionally planned, implemented, and sustained through teaching practices.

In terms of learning outcomes, the findings show that inclusive teaching strongly supports student engagement and empathy, while critical thinking requires more deliberate support. This indicates that while students are able to connect emotionally with diverse perspectives in literature, they need more structured opportunities to analyze, question, and reflect on deeper issues related to gender and culture. This highlights the importance of guided discussions, questioning strategies, and reflective activities in strengthening higher-order thinking.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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